Jean Baudrillard

Fatal theories

Edited by
David B. Clarke,
Marcus A. Doel, **William Merrin**
and **Richard G. Smith**

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Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard was one of the most influential, radical, and visionary thinkers of our age. His ideas have had a profound bearing on countless fields, from art and politics to science and technology. Once hailed as the high priest of postmodernity, Baudrillard's sophisticated theoretical analyses far surpass such simplistic caricatures. Bringing together Baudrillard's most accomplished and perceptive commentators, this book assesses his legacy for the twenty-first century. It includes two outstanding essays by Baudrillard: a remarkable, previously unpublished work entitled 'The vanishing point of communication', and one of Baudrillard's final texts, 'On disappearance', a veritable tour de force that serves as a culmination of his theoretical trajectory and a provocation to a new generation of thinkers. Employing Baudrillard's key concepts, such as simulation, disappearance and symbolic exchange, and deploying his most radical strategies, such as escalation, seduction and fatality, the volume's contributors offer a series of thought-provoking analyses of everything from art to politics, and from laughter to terror. It will be essential reading for anyone concerned with the fate of the world in the new millennium.

David B. Clarke is Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Centre for Urban Theory at Swansea University. His research focuses on social theory and urban space. His publications include *The Consumer Society and the Postmodern City*, *The Cinematic City* and *The Consumption Reader*.

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Contributors

The late **Jean Baudrillard**, formerly Professor Emeritus at the Université de Paris X, Nanterre in France, was one of the world's most significant, provocative and influential intellectuals. A list of his most important works available in English is included in this volume.

Rex Butler teaches in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland, Australia. He has written a book on Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real* (Sage, 1999) and one on Slavoj Žižek, *Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory* (Continuum, 2004). He has co-edited two volumes of Žižek's writings, *Interrogating the Real* (Continuum, 2005) and *The Universal Exception* (Continuum, 2006). He has also written a number of books on Australian art.

David B. Clarke is Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Centre for Urban Theory at Swansea University, Wales, in the UK. His research focuses on urbanism and social theory, consumerism, the media and film. He is the author of *The Consumer Society and the Postmodern City* (Routledge, 2003), editor of *The Cinematic City* (Routledge, 1997) and co-editor of *The Consumption Reader* (Routledge, 2003). He is currently researching 'urban solutions'.

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Mike Gane is Professor of Sociology at the University of Loughborough in the UK. He has published widely on French social theory, particularly on its relation to sociology (Comte, Durkheim, Mauss, Foucault). He has published prolifically on Jean Baudrillard's work and contribution to theory. His books include *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*

(Routledge, 1991), *Baudrillard's Bestiary: Baudrillard and Culture* (Routledge, 1991) and *Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty* (Pluto, 2000). He has also edited *Jean Baudrillard* (4 volumes) (Sage, 2000), a collection of writings on Baudrillard, and a selection of interviews: *Baudrillard Live* (Routledge, 1993).

Gary Genosko is a cultural theorist working on the intersections of technology and information. He holds a Canada Research Chair in Technoculture Studies in Sociology at Lakehead University in Canada. He has published and edited several books on Jean Baudrillard: *Baudrillard and Signs* (Routledge, 1994); *McLuhan and Baudrillard* (Routledge, 1999); and *The Uncollected Baudrillard* (Sage, 2001). His recent work in this area concerns Baudrillard as a thinker of anti-surveillance.

Graeme Gilloch is Reader in Sociology at Lancaster University in the UK. His principal research interest is the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (the 'Frankfurt School'), particularly the writings of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Leo Löwenthal. His current focus is the relationship between metropolitan space, memory and film/photography. A former Alex von Humboldt Research Fellow at the Goethe University, Frankfurt, he has published two monographs on Benjamin with Polity Press (*Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, 1996; and *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*, 2002), and several articles comparing motifs and themes in Benjamin and Baudrillard. He has written on a number of contemporary authors (e.g. Paul Auster, W. G. Sebald, and Orhan Pamuk) and is presently completing an intellectual biography of Siegfried Kracauer.

Philip Hammond is Reader in Media and Communications at London South Bank University in the UK. He is the author of *Media, War and Postmodernity* (Routledge, 2007) and *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts* (Manchester University Press, 2007), and is co-editor, with Edward S. Herman, of *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis* (Pluto, 2000). He is currently researching media coverage of environmentalism.

Paul Hegarty teaches philosophy and cultural studies in the Department of French, University College Cork, Ireland. He is the author of *Georges Bataille* (Sage, 2000), *Jean Baudrillard* (Continuum, 2004) and *Noise/Music* (Continuum, 2007). Recently he has been researching noise, new musicology and theories of evolution.

Douglas Kellner is George Kneller Chair in the Philosophy of Education at UCLA in the USA and is author of many books on social theory, politics, history and culture, including *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 1989) and *The Baudrillard Reader* (Blackwell, 1994). He is also the author of works in cultural studies such as *Media Culture* (Routledge, 1994) and *Media*

Spectacle (Routledge, 2002); a trilogy of books on postmodern theory with Steve Best; a trilogy of books on the Bush administration, encompassing *Grand Theft 2000* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), *From 9/11 to Terror War* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), and *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy* (Paradigm, 2005). His latest book is *Guys and Guns Amok: Domestic Terrorism and School Shootings from the Oklahoma City Bombings to the Virginia Tech Massacre* (Paradigm, 2008).

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Geography, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Environment and Planning A* and *Progress in Human Geography*.

Chris Turner is a freelance translator and writer with more than fifty book-length translations to his name, including many by Jean Baudrillard. He was educated at the universities of Cambridge and Sussex and at the École normale supérieure de St-Cloud and currently lives in Birmingham, UK. He is a member of the Translators' Association and of the Advisory Board of the journal *Cultural Politics*.

Andrew Wernick is Professor of Cultural Studies and Sociology at Trent University, Canada. He is also a regular visiting professor in cultural studies and sociology at Ivan Franko National University, L'viv in Ukraine, and a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge in the UK. A social theorist, cultural critic, intellectual historian and sometime musician, his writings include *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (Sage, 1991), *Shadow of Spirit: Religion and Postmodernism* (co-edited with Philippa Berry) (Routledge, 1993), *Images of Aging* (co-edited with Mike Featherstone) (Routledge, 1994) and *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-theistic Project of French Social Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Works by Jean Baudrillard in English

This list of book-length works available in the English language by Jean Baudrillard is arranged in order of appearance in the original French (where applicable). It provides a key to all references to Baudrillard's works in the individual chapters of this book. These are standardized such that, in any chapter, 'Baudrillard (1993a [1976])' refers to *Symbolic Exchange and Death*: the first date refers to the publication of the English translation, the second, in square brackets, to the original French publication date. Where authors explicitly refer to the French edition, the full reference is provided within that chapter and the reference is indicated by square brackets in the text. Each work is, in addition, provided with an abbreviation (e.g. *Symbolic Exchange and Death* is designated by SED), which is used by some authors when citing heavily from particular texts. This list is pragmatic and contains works that are not solely by Baudrillard and some that are originally English-language publications. Works in French that are not available in English translation are excluded, though these may be referenced in individual chapters. Some chapters make reference to English-language translations that are excluded from this list (e.g. interviews, occasions where part of a book was published in translation in advance of a full translation, etc.).

Baudrillard, J. (1996a [1968]) *The System of Objects*. Trans. J. Benedict. London: Verso. [*SO*]

Baudrillard, J. (1998a [1970]) *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Sage. [*CS*]

Baudrillard, J. (1981 [1972]) *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. Trans. C. Levin. St Louis: Telos. [*CPS*]

Baudrillard, J. (1975 [1973]) *The Mirror of Production*. Trans. M. Poster. St Louis: Telos. [*MP*]

Baudrillard, J. (1993a [1976]) *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Trans. I. H. Grant. London: Sage. [*SED*]

Baudrillard, J. (1987a [1977]) *Forget Foucault: Forget Baudrillard*. Trans. P. Beitchman, N. Dufresne, L. Hildreth and M. Polizzotti. New York: Semiotext(e). [*FF*]

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Baudrillard, J. (1988a [1986]) *America*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso. [*A*]
Baudrillard, J. (1988b [1987a]) *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Trans. B. Schutze and C. Schutze. New York: Semiotext(e). [*EC*]
Baudrillard, J. (1990c [1987b]) *Cool Memories*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso. [*CM*]
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Baudrillard, J. (1995 [1991]) *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Trans. P. Patton. Sydney: Power Publications. [*GW*]
Baudrillard, J. (1994b [1992]) *The Illusion of the End*. Trans. C. Turner. Cambridge: Polity. [*IE*]
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Baudrillard, J. and Guillaume, M. (2008 [1994]) *Radical Alterity*. Trans. A. Hodges. New York: Semiotext(e). [*RA*]
Baudrillard, J. (1996c [1995a]) *The Perfect Crime*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso. [*PC*]
Baudrillard, J. (1997a [1995b]) *Fragments, Cool Memories III, 1991–1995*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso. [*CM3*]
Baudrillard, J. (1997b) *Art and Artefact*. Ed./trans. N. Zurbrugg. London: Sage. [*AA*]
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Introduction

The evil genius of Jean Baudrillard

David B. Clarke, Marcus A. Doel, William Merrin and Richard G. Smith

> Evil has not ceased to exist. On the contrary, it has grown, and sooner or later it explodes. Not evil as seen from a moral point of view, but something in reality itself which radically contradicts the operationalization of the world.
>
> (Jean Baudrillard[1])

Jean Baudrillard wrote and thought with the exceptional talent of a theorist amenable to numerous intellectual currents yet insistent on blazing his own trail through a world that he perceived and revealed to be infinitely more extraordinary than even the most incredible accounts supposed. He died in Paris on 6 March 2007, aged 77. Baudrillard pursued a career that was, in many ways, remarkable; which saw him, in almost equal measure, gain fame and infamy, respect and notoriety, from numerous quarters: academic, artistic, political, etc. This book, which gathers together a collection of essays from many of Baudrillard's most accomplished commentators, is above all concerned with understanding what it was that Baudrillard did when he wrote and thought – and what difference this might make to those coming after him. The book is expressly not, therefore, a detailed and sober assessment of his legacy; nor a reverential account of his life's work; nor a sycophantic exposition of his theoretical brilliance. It is, rather – in a vein that we hope Baudrillard himself would have appreciated – a largely unceremonious, immensely energetic, varied and insightful appreciation of the potency of his particular mode of theorizing. At the same time, the writings gathered here are most certainly rigorous, erudite, committed and, we hope, poised to reveal the radical import of Baudrillard's style of thought. For while one can never pronounce the final word on a theorist like Baudrillard, the essays comprising the volume have the capacity to overcome many of the misconceptions that have attached to Baudrillard's work in the past; to pave the way towards a more rounded appreciation of the difference that Baudrillard's intellectual endeavours have made and will continue to make. In addition to this wealth of appreciative – though never uncritical – commentary, the book also contains two pieces by Baudrillard himself, neither of which has been published in English before.

The first chapter of the book, 'The vanishing point of communication', dates from the early 1990s, and derives from a lecture Baudrillard delivered in English at Loughborough University. Following on from this, the second chapter, 'On disappearance', was among Baudrillard's final writings and figures as his last publicly presented work: delivered *in absentia* by Mike Gane to the 'Engaging Baudrillard' conference held at Swansea University, Wales, in September, 2006. At the risk of treading over old ground, the remainder of these introductory remarks offer a brief recapitulation not only of Baudrillard's thought but also of its reception, particularly within the English-speaking world. We then offer an overview of the chapters making up the rest of the book, by way of alerting and orientating the reader to the themes they address.

Baudrillard's thought has always defied easy categorization. He began his intellectual life while teaching German at a provincial *lycée*, writing reviews for Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps modernes* and translating a variety of German works into French. But in terms of what was to follow, this might be regarded as his intellectual pre-history – traces of which nonetheless endure throughout Baudrillard's subsequent trajectory. It was from the 1960s, when Baudrillard started to engage with sociological thought, that his eventual status as one of the most significant intellectual figures of our age began to emerge. Studying under and subsequently working alongside Henri Lefebvre at the Université de Paris X, Nanterre – although already exploring his divergence from conventional Leftist politics – Baudrillard produced the first numbers of a series of books that would ultimately see his writings achieve exit velocity, projecting his thought into a largely unexplored conceptual universe. Books such as *The System of Objects* (1996a [1968]) and *The Consumer Society* (1998a [1970]) examined the strangeness of an affluent society, drawing on but at the same time transforming the theoretical tools that were available for such an investigation (political-economic, semiotic, psychoanalytic). If Lefebvre and Roland Barthes reflected the French Fifties in seeking to demystify everyday life (Kelly, 2000), Baudrillard was not alone in the 1960s in beginning to question the whole problematic of mystification, particularly the implication that some kind of ceremonial unveiling, presided over by critical thought, was all that was needed to unmask and thence to transform the world. Yet Baudrillard was to become one of the most ardent explorers of what this dissenting position might entail. To this extent, works such as *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]) and *The Mirror of Production* (1975 [1973]) amount to rigorous theoretical attempts to surpass earlier modes of radical thought. Indeed, a good deal of this writing was first published in the pro-Situationist journal, *Utopie* (a collection of which has since been reprinted: Baudrillard, 2006b). It was *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a [1976]), however – famously described by Baudrillard, exhibiting his typically self-deprecating sense of humour, as 'the last book that inspired any confidence' (Baudrillard, 1993c: 189) – that marked a watershed in Baudrillard's thought. It would

have been fascinating to read the planned but unwritten *The Mirror of Desire*; to witness Baudrillard's erudite demolition of the mythical promises of psychoanalysis (that it could serve as an infallible instrument of demystification), alongside his virtuosic destruction, undertaken in *The Mirror of Production*, of those same promises as held out by historical materialism. But *Symbolic Exchange and Death* signalled an altered conception of theory and a changed sense of the manner in which one might engage with the world: a world very different from one simply in need of unveiling to fathom its mysteries. It is no accident that the notion of 'simulation' introduced by Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* has come to figure among his most celebrated concepts – even though its profundity has sometimes been misunderstood as implying precisely the same kind of mystification that Baudrillard's manner of theorizing has, in fact, surpassed.

In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities (1983 [1978]) already detected, in the behaviour of the masses, the new kind of theoretical strategy Baudrillard was looking for; suggesting, even given the book's anti-empiricist commitment, a kind of evidencing of an ever-present undercurrent of symbolic exchange, challenge and fatal complicity. The operation of the masses suggests a strategy no longer naïve enough to believe in mystification, deception and misrepresentation as adequate notions for engaging the world, and Baudrillard was more than happy to follow suit. Distancing himself from Foucault's theoretical strategies – in the work provocatively entitled *Forget Foucault* (Baudrillard 1987a [1977]) – and joyfully withdrawing from the strictures of French academia, Baudrillard's own work found itself envisioning and increasingly occupying a wholly different universe, where certain of the themes developed in his earliest writings – not least a preoccupation with the object – now took on a highly original (and, initially, often misunderstood) character. One way of thinking through this particular turn in Baudrillard's work is in relation to the radical alterity of the world; in terms of its stark otherness. *Seduction* (1990a [1979]), for example, initially proposes this relation in opposition to production. Baudrillard reminds us that to produce means to make appear and move forward (*pro-ducere*), while to seduce is to lead astray and make disappear (*se-ducere*). Whereas the world inaugurated by modernity was obsessed with rendering visible and making real, the world as it is secretly pursues its furtive destiny via a fatal strategy of seduction. The possibilities of understanding this; the position in which it places the theorist; and the capacity of the theorist to elucidate the ways in which the contemporary world expresses itself are, in effect, the constant themes of Baudrillard's work ever since. Where *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994a [1981]) further developed the conception of simulation introduced in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, most of Baudrillard's subsequent works are, in the same vein as is *Seduction*, attempts to conceptualize what lies beyond the limits that make the real what it is – attempts that refuse to take reality for what it purports to be, and which are progressively more cognisant of the exhaustion of the reality principle through a rapidly accelerating process of

realization and virtualization. The notion of the fatal considered in *Fatal Strategies* (1990b [1983]), which escapes the would-be all-embracing division of the world into either deterministic or random, is one such attempt to comprehend the world without committing to the reality principle. The notion of transparition and the superior logic of evil subjected to scrutiny in *The Transparency of Evil* (1993b [1990a]); the idea of illusion as developed in *The Illusion of the End* (1994b [1992]); and the idea of the *Impossible Exchange* (2001a [1999a]) reveal Baudrillard as consummate inventor and explorer of conceptual potentialities. This theoretical invention was never pursued for its own sake, but always in relation to the world, to the situation in which we find ourselves. Baudrillard's constant refinement of his ideas and his creative ability to summon new ones is, of necessity, an attempt to philosophize events – or, indeed, non-events. This emphasis on refinement, the crystallization of an idea, is, perhaps, most apparent in Baudrillard's increasingly aphoristic style, exemplified in the *Cool Memories* series of books but also permeating much of his later writing. Although Baudrillard's thought has sometimes been seen as wilfully provocative, his sense of purpose is never simply a case of *épater les bourgeois* (this being merely a fortunate by-product). Consumption, the object, communication, the media, the virtual, terrorism, art, photography, war: Baudrillard's thought is unconstrained in its topical focus precisely because nothing is, for Baudrillard, a topical focus. Theorizing and the world stand in a symbolic relation to one another, and it is the challenge this relation implies that also animates the essays comprising this volume.

In attempting to consider the difference that Baudrillard's thought makes, rather than engaging in the vain task of adumbrating its distinctive qualities or attempting to extract some woefully naïve set of axiomatic foundations where there are none, we restrict ourselves to some brief remarks on Baudrillard's reception in the English-speaking world – not least because this book necessarily forms a part of that reception, and therefore demands reflexive consideration. Baudrillard's reception in France (see, in particular, L'Yvonnet, 2004) is, perhaps unsurprisingly, less prone to misconception (though not to controversy) than it has been in the English-speaking world – where selective translation (out of sequence and of variable quality) has had something of a determinate effect on how Baudrillard's ideas have been received (the first collections of translated excerpts of Baudrillard's writings were supplied in two volumes: Poster, 1988; Foss and Pefanis, 1990). Equally, however, Baudrillard has arguably been taken less seriously as a distinctive thinker in his homeland than he has in the English-speaking world. His influence is undoubtedly most marked as a global public intellectual.

Baudrillard first rose to prominence in the English-speaking world in the early 1980s, in Australia, Canada and the United States, and slightly later in Britain, and was initially mistaken as a prophet of postmodernism – even as that movement's high priest. The earliest volume of commentary on Baudrillard (Frankovits, 1984) and Kroker's (1985) sympathetic Marxist–postmodernist

reading of Baudrillard (see also Kroker and Cook, 1988) provoked something of a backlash from the traditional Left, both against the postmodern movement as a whole (Callinicos, 1989; Harvey, 1989; Norris, 1990) and against Baudrillard in particular (Kellner, 1989). Subsequent readings went some way to counteract this reaction, the most significant being Gane's (1991a, 1991b) refutation of Baudrillard's undeserved reputation as an apologist for postmodernity and a more serious contextualization of his thought in relation to the Durkheimian–Maussian tradition of sociology and (though arguably still underappreciatively) Friedrich Nietzsche as refracted through Georges Bataille. As the postmodern controversy waned, a growing body of more serious and critically informed work on Baudrillard emerged (Gane, 2000a, 2000b; Genosko, 1994, 1999; Grace, 2000; Grace *et al.*, 2003; Hegarty, 2004; Kellner, 1994; Lane, 2000; Levin, 1996; Merrin, 2005; Pawlett, 2008; Pefanis, 1991; Rojek and Turner, 1993; Stearns and Chaloupka, 1992). Over the same period, Baudrillard's ideas gradually penetrated and began to reshape a range of disciplines: cultural studies, visual culture, design studies, human geography, photography, film studies, sociology, art history and art theory, social and cultural history, philosophy, architecture, cultural politics, media and communication studies, and cyberculture, such that, today, his work is intellectually unavoidable. The launch of the online *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, in January 2004, is a reflection of his influence. Although Baudrillard is still sometimes portrayed by his critics as a nihilistic reactionary celebrating the excesses of postmodernity, this kind of misconception is increasingly difficult to maintain. The present book, as we have already intimated, seeks to add to the scholarly appreciation of Baudrillard's work, to the power of his mode of theorizing, and to the recognition that Baudrillard's thought is not only suggestive, provocative and sophisticated, but also a major challenge to all those who feel that his work is merely a passing fad that can be easily dismissed. As the chapters we now proceed to outline make clear, such a verdict is woefully awry.

In Chapter 1, 'The vanishing point of communication', Baudrillard offers a stylish and adept analysis of the implications of communications technologies and the nature of communication itself. Noting the theoretical revolutions that were responsible for radically transforming our understanding of production and consumption – and the lack of any comparable transformation of our thinking about communications media – Baudrillard offers his own thoughts on what the prevailing technological fantasies of a world tamed by communication and information fail to grasp. Communication is, as Baudrillard points out, a peculiarly modern invention – as, indeed, is reality itself. Just as the advent of reality signals a failure of the reality principle, the vast technological edifice of communication is indexed to the failure of speech and symbolic exchange. For while speech is an act, communication is an operation. Although this essay was composed in 1992, the way in which it addresses the lack of an adequate theory of communication anticipates certain of the themes played out in Chapter 2, 'On

disappearance' – which, as previously noted, is one of Baudrillard's final works. In the 'vanishing point' essay, Baudrillard alludes to Apollinaire, suggesting that we only speak of communication because human communion has been subject to a process of disappearance, leaving in its wake only the forced circulation of meaning at a distance. As Apollinaire – and Heidegger and Hegel – point out, only when something begins to fade away is it noticed, conceptualized, named and, adds Baudrillard, eclipsed by its own simulation model. 'The vanishing point of communication' also sees Baudrillard concerned with the disappearance of the subject into the object and the collapse of the human–machine dichotomy, arguing that the sovereignty of the subject has become inexorably bound up – through institutions, programs, psychology, biology and medicine – with the operational logic of communication. For Baudrillard, subjects have become screens precisely because computer screens and our mental screens have become inseparable, assuming a Möbius-like topology. Thus, while there is no longer any alienation, there is, alas, no freedom either – just integration into the digital circuits of communication. The human has vanished onto the screen, just as human communion has disappeared into the sphere of inhuman communication.

Resonating with the 'vanishing point' essay of Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents Baudrillard's 'On disappearance' – about which we need to say very little here, not least since Chapter 3 provides a series of commentaries on this text, from Rex Butler, David Clarke, Marcus Doel, Gary Genosko, Douglas Kellner, Mark Poster, Richard Smith and Andrew Wernick. Baudrillard's 'On disappearance' is a magisterial piece, patiently and scrupulously drawing into view some of the most significant qualities of the modern world, and meticulously sounding out their consequences. Many of its implications are afforded sometimes widely divergent readings in the commentaries comprising Chapter 3 – unsurprisingly, given the range of conceptual vantage points to which Baudrillard's work speaks, and given the range of opinions encompassed by the chapter's contributors. Also unsurprisingly, such differences and divergences are further played out in the remainder of the chapters of the book – though it is also instructive to witness the sophistication of this work, which studiously avoids many of the pitfalls of misinterpretation that once characterized commentaries on Baudrillard.

In Chapter 4, for example, Rex Butler confirms his reputation as one of Baudrillard's most adept and sensitive commentators, identifying the way in which 'Baudrillard's taste' reveals itself. Like Douglas Kellner (in Chapter 7), Butler focuses particularly on *The Conspiracy of Art*. However, Butler is far more closely aligned to Baudrillard's worldview than is Kellner (who, as we shall see, regards Baudrillard as offering food for thought – but a kind of thought in strict need of tempering by critical theory). At the risk of caricaturing Butler's subtle and intricate analysis, he demonstrates that Baudrillard's theory of conspiracy is anything but a conspiracy theory – highlighting the unexpected distinction Baudrillard makes between 'true' and 'false' simulation as a means of interrogating the logic of Baudrillard's

position. Butler finds this logic to be secretly complicit in the events it elucidates, imposing a distinction that necessarily breaks down, yet which nonetheless reveals something crucial in the process. Thus, for instance, the more we know about a conspiracy, the less accurate it is to regard it as a conspiracy; but this kind of situation places the theorist in a vital position which, as Butler shows, has persistently characterized Baudrillard's thought, from his earliest writings to his last.

In 'Floral tributes, binge-drinking and the Ikea riot' (Chapter 5) William Merrin takes a different tack, considering hyperconformity as a destructive force in mass-mediated consumer culture. At a time when it is arguably easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to envision the end of capitalism, Merrin presents a pithy distillation of Baudrillard's pataphysical take on fatal strategy and radical praxis, illustrated by a series of satirical vignettes drawn from recent 'non-events' in the United Kingdom: the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, which precipitated an hysterical performance of exponential mourning; the fuel crisis of 2000, in which panic-buying by hauliers and motorists threatened to bring a post-industrial society addicted to speed to a paralytic standstill; the death of the Queen Mother, in whose wake the indifference of the silent majority stupefied an expectant mass media; the unveiling of the Diana, Princess of Wales, Memorial Fountain, whose enforced interactivity precipitated mayhem in the parks of London; the sale-of-the-century opening of an Ikea furniture store, which was stormed by impoverished consumers; and the deregulation of British licensing laws, which fanned the flames of a mass-mediated moral panic over binge drinking. On each occasion, an insatiable mass movement borne of hyperconformity threw itself into a delirious performance of what the system ostensibly demands: emotion, mobility, duty, participation, consumption and enjoyment. And on each occasion, the force of hyperconformity revealed itself to be more destructive than overt resistance, and more powerful than frontal opposition. If the consumer society is to perish, Merrin suggests, it will do so not by running up against the limits to growth, but by running out of the means to sustain an exponentially increasing mass from exuberantly joining in.

In Chapter 6, 'Better than butter', Gary Genosko engages with one of Baudrillard's seminal and much misunderstood notions: simulation. The substance of Genosko's enquiry is margarine, that humdrum manufactured product born of the nineteenth century and cultivated throughout the twentieth, which, try as it might, has singularly failed to live up to its double: butter. For no matter how much margarine aspires to be like butter – in its physical qualities, social mythology and everyday usage – this counterfeit material cannot match the qualities of butter, whose aura remains more or less undiminished. For when one turns to margarine, one turns to a substitute, and this continues to mark margarine out as a pale imitation. Genosko charts how the vanguard of margarine has striven to erase the difference between margarine and butter, through all manner of enhancements

and refinements, and how the defenders of butter have sought to thwart such ambitions, often through legal prohibition. In many respects, margarine has arguably surpassed the status of butter, particularly in terms of price and utility. Yet Genosko's key move is to transform our appreciation of both butter and margarine by demonstrating how each is brought into existence on the basis of models and formulae: agro-chemical, economic, scientific, mythological, symbolic, etc. For margarine is not simply the degraded double of butter: butter is itself an industrialized simulation of the degraded motifs of nature and tradition. Both butter and margarine are realized in an ever-shifting play of appearances and disappearances that befits a consumer culture. Held together in simulation, the transmogrification of one transforms the substance of the other: a flavourless margarine makes for a tastier butter, and a vitamin-enriched margarine makes for a more unhealthy butter, etc. Crucially, Genosko emphasizes that butter and margarine are not held together by a force of nature – least of all the force of semblance – but by a contingent encounter. Arguably, this contingent encounter has been split asunder, and margarine has become free to follow the errant path of its own autonomous potential. Here as elsewhere, the real of the simulacrum is reproduction, not resemblance.

In Chapter 7, 'Baudrillard and the art conspiracy', Douglas Kellner's long-standing ambivalent appreciation of Baudrillard's theoretical experimentation expresses itself in a valuable retrospective of Baudrillard's even more prolonged ambivalent appreciation of art and aesthetics. In contrast to commentators like Butler (Chapter 4), Kellner is less willing to be seduced by Baudrillard's dazzling reflections. Indeed, Kellner stresses the importance of contextualizing Baudrillard's conceptions as the outcome of a certain historical conjuncture, rather than allowing that they might somehow stand apart from that conjuncture. Kellner thus insists on reading Baudrillard in historicized terms, rather than on his own terms. This produces, for Kellner, a far more robust means of assessing the import of Baudrillard's writings and the opportunity of evaluating the significance of Baudrillard's own assessment of, and engagement with, art – which Kellner proceeds to do with a comprehensive appraisal that goes back to *The Consumer Society* and reaches up to *The Conspiracy of Art*. Kellner's own adjudication – which displays a remarkable continuity in his own position – is that, while Baudrillard valuably draws our attention to issues and ways of thinking that might otherwise escape us, these insights, however appealing, must nonetheless be tempered by the vantage points offered by more critical modes of thought.

Chapter 8, 'Mirror, mirror', by Graeme Gilloch, offers an eloquent and perceptive analysis of a topic that has long awaited such a treatment: Baudrillard's invocation of the film *The Student of Prague* (the 1926 version directed by Henrik Galeen) in the conclusion to *The Consumer Society*. Explicating Baudrillard's reading of the tale as the perfect allegory of alienation, Gilloch documents the complexities the story suggests, triangulating

Baudrillard's interpretation with those offered by two other exemplary thinkers of modernity: Siegfried Kracauer's assessment of the film as an allegory of the German bourgeois soul; and Friedrich Kittler's more recent view of the film as the soul of film itself (which operates self-referentially, after the fashion Foucault suggests with respect to Velázquez's painting, *Las Meninas*). Ranging over Baudrillard, Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank and others to provide an accomplished assessment of the uncanny figures of the double, the dual, and the duel, Gilloch considers their significance across Baudrillard's entire oeuvre. Baudrillard's account of *The Student of Prague* is arguably the most profound interpretation of the consequences of contemporary alienation, Gilloch maintains, insofar as it reveals that we cannot escape that which escapes us; that the object always takes its revenge; and that the faithfulness of the reflection in the mirror is always specious.

Philip Hammond's 'The Gulf War revisited' (Chapter 9) provides a considered reassessment of some of Baudrillard's most controversial writings: those on war and terrorism. Hammond ably demonstrates the foresight, pertinence and resilience of Baudrillard's analyses of the Gulf War, revealing the necessary reassessment of their potency, in the light of 'Gulf War 2', by those initially dismissive of his insights. Possessing a singular ability to point up the sophistication of Baudrillard's thinking; its political savvy; its refusal to accept the West's own self-portrait as anything other than a self-obsessive and over-inflated form of self-flattery; Hammond demonstrates his skill as a reader of Baudrillard and as a political analyst in his own right – ranging with ease over not only the Gulf but also Kosovo, the so-called War on Terror, and the post-Cold War geopolitical situation *in toto*. His appreciation of Baudrillard notwithstanding, Hammond nonetheless takes issue with certain aspects of Baudrillard's thought, doubting what he sees as certain of its more metaphysical leanings, and ruing Baudrillard's apparent preclusion of alternatives – obliquely raising the question of whether this is, in fact, a deficiency in Baudrillard's thought or a property of the world itself, a world from which such possibilities have truly been vanquished.

Paul Hegarty's 'Fate of the animal' (Chapter 10) provides a consummate exploration of the real and its relation to simulation in Baudrillard's work, focusing in detail on the animal (as category: animality); and on life, death and sacrifice in relation to simulation. Considering that which opposes the real (itself an historically inaugurated principle), Hegarty draws virtuosically on Baudrillard's conceptions of symbolic exchange, impossible exchange, seduction, the event, etc. – each of which amounts to an attempt to grasp the Other of simulation, which is forever poised to bite back. The importance of Hegarty's contribution lies in the examination he provides of the role of the animal in Baudrillard's thought, drawing on Bataille's notion of animal immanence, as well as Baudrillard's essay on animals in *Simulacra and Simulation*, and mobilizing Ruggero Deodato's (1980) 'exploitation film' *Cannibal Holocaust* (which itself seemingly receives indirect mention in *Fatal Strategies*), to demonstrate the playing out of the animal/simulation

reversible threshold. Elucidating Baudrillard's position through these means, Hegarty re-examines the distinction between animality and humanity as a way of reconsidering Baudrillard's notion of simulation. Deflecting naïve versions of the 'revenge of the animal' theme – noting some populist responses to events such as the death of the Australian naturalist Steve Irwin – Hegarty offers a compelling examination of the potency of, but also certain lacunae in, Baudrillard's thought.

In Chapter 11, 'Reality: now and then – Baudrillard and W-Bush's America', Diane Rubenstein explores how Baudrillard's concept of integral reality affords a certain insight into the 'fakery' of George W. Bush's White House. Rubenstein notes how Baudrillard's works, published both immediately before and after 9/11, chart the disappearance of reality in ways that both resonate with and anticipate the America of 'W-Bush': events are manufactured as signs; facts only conform to the speculative models that have been employed to predict them; the political spectacle has given way to the reality show; the screen has displaced the mirror; and so on. Specifically, Rubenstein illustrates Baudrillard's theorization of integral reality – where metaphor has collapsed into the real – through a detailed discussion of the much commented-upon US phenomena of 'fake news' and 'fake newsmen': a strategy that emerged with the W-Bush presidency, and which she takes as symptomatic of integral reality (i.e. a new virtual world that no longer has an imaginary) and the non-event. In short, Rubenstein's chapter is of particular interest precisely because she seeks to explain the W-Bush administration's 'fake' propaganda not as an example of spectacle, or even hyperreality/simulation/simulacrum (as Baudrillard had chosen to speak of Reagan's simulated photo-opportunities), but as an example of Baudrillard's total screen, an integral reality where the reality principle has itself been deregulated.

In Chapter 12, 'Baudrillard's sense of humour', Mike Gane brilliantly assesses the strategic role of wit in Baudrillard's work. Anyone who has read Baudrillard will appreciate the witty character of his writing, which Gane initially locates in Baudrillard's formative participation in the College of Pataphysics and his fondness for Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896), inflected by Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty. In the wake of Artaud, Bataille, Debord, Durkheim, Jarry and Mauss, many readers will be familiar with a certain style of thought that pitches symbolic playfulness against semiotic playfulness: the modest playfulness of the system – exemplified by the purported freedom of the consuming subject to manipulate the profusion of signs of satisfaction to his or her own alienated ends – is countered by an immodest toying with this very system of play – exemplified by the ardent gambler, whose wanton expenditure of the stakes of the game portends a veritable potlatch of the signs of satisfaction. And yet Gane also detects an altogether different sense of humour at work in Baudrillard's thought – a sense of humour that is graphically illustrated by the following enigmatic claim: 'Utopia is that which, by the abolition of the blade and the disappearance of the handle, gives the knife its *force de frappe*.' For Gane, this

oblique reference to the 'strike force' of a knife without a blade – dubbed the Lichtenberg knife after the eighteenth-century writer of aphorisms who coined the phrase (and which has become synonymous with the dissuasive strategy of mutually assured destruction and nuclear deterrence) – exemplifies Baudrillard's fatal strategy of resolving meaning into non-meaning in both the symbolic and semiotic registers, so that all that remains is pure *jouissance*: a catastrophic burst of laughter momentarily suspended in the void of non-sense; that self-same void out of which a semblance of sense is routinely withdrawn. This ambivalent withdrawal is both terrifying and laughable, like Lichtenberg's knife, the dissolving smile of the Cheshire Cat, the lingering judgement of an absent God or the rendezvous with Death in Samarkand. What Gane sees in Baudrillard's thought and writing is the shaft of wit that traverses the void and in so doing enables the real, the semiotic and the symbolic registers to appear and disappear as the strike force of seduction and destiny, *jouissance* and laughter. Baudrillard's sense of humour, then, is not simply juvenile, facile, comic, parodic, scatological, ironic or sarcastic. It is fatal. And he suggests that such a fatal sense of humour is shared by our world. Yet, as Gane goes on to argue, attuning ourselves to Baudrillard's fatal sense of humour might actually be the source of much joy and welcome bursts of laughter.

Finally, in Chapter 13 – 'The (un)sealing of the penultimate' – Andrew Wernick reflects on the overall trajectory of Baudrillard's thought, articulating a rather different conception than received wisdom has come to dictate. Wernick explicitly eschews certain supposed well-known tendencies in Baudrillard's work – the movement from subject to object; from critical to fatal theory; from production to seduction; etc. – precisely because, for Wernick, such conceptions have a diminished purchase when it comes to understanding Baudrillard's later work. Moreover, Wernick holds that an engagement with Baudrillard's later thought is vital for understanding the tensions that have driven the movement of his oeuvre as a whole. Thus, he highlights a number of tendencies that have hitherto been underplayed: a move from heterodox Marxism to a revised version of Nietzsche's schema for nihilism via McLuhan (a transposed McLuhanism); a political tension that spans his work between, on the one hand, a provocative activism and, on the other hand, a stoical adaptation to hypercapitalism as destiny; and the argument that while history has stopped before it has reached its end (history has not completed the dialectic of social development, but nor is it waiting for its next transformation), there remains an activist role for radical theory as objective nihilism. Finally, perhaps the most controversial aspect of Wernick's reading is the claim that Baudrillard never quite managed to shake off a certain sociological imagination; that despite his best efforts to escape sociology, Baudrillard's thought remains the product of his critical encounter with French sociology. Wernick's willingness to read what has become a certain conventionalism in so-called 'Baudrillard studies' against the grain, to open up Baudrillard to another reading, is in many ways a fitting place to

end. For it highlights the importance of maintaining a relation to Baudrillard that is itself in tune with Baudrillard's insistence on the challenge that the world (and everything in it) represents. This challenge is taken up by the book as a whole: not to settle the account and reach an amicable conclusion, but precisely to shatter any such possibility – and, as ever, to raise the stakes.

One final anecdote, purloined from Easthope (2002: 1), is in order: Marcel 'Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (begun in 1915 and "finally unfinished" eight years later) was being taken back to its owner after exhibition in 1926'. It 'was damaged, leaving a network of fine lines across the figurations: welcoming this intervention from chance, Duchamp proclaimed that his work was now "completed"' (Judovitz, 1995). More radical than Duchamp, Baudrillard's death, on 6 March 2007, means that his work is finally incomplete.

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opportunity to publish Baudrillard's previously unpublished essay, 'The vanishing point of communication', which derives from a lecture delivered by Baudrillard in English at Loughborough University on 18 November 1992. When the deterioration in Jean Baudrillard's health made a journey to the Swansea conference untenable, Mike also presented 'On disappearance' on Baudrillard's behalf – in a manner that no one else could have matched. There are occasions in academic life when everyone pulls together to achieve a common goal. This book is the materialization of just such an occasion. We would like to dedicate it to the memory of Jean Baudrillard.

Note

1 Cited in Chris Turner's 'Introduction' to Baudrillard (2005a [2004]: 14), from Baudrillard's interview with Ulrich Müller-Schöll ('Demokratie, Menschenrechte, Markt, Liberalismus – das geht mich nichts mehr an', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 November 2002).

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1 The vanishing point of communication[1]

Jean Baudrillard

There are objects about which we can speak no longer, or cannot yet speak again, because their ghosts have not been stabilized – Marxism, for example, or the dialectic. There are objects about which we cannot speak yet, or maybe no more, because their ghost is already running around in the streets, and their shadow already precedes them – for example communication and information.

Everything about communication seems to have been said, but actually nothing has been. Almost nothing except the stereotypes or the technological fantasies of the experts in the matter. Something really theoretical is lacking. Let us refer to what happened in the theoretical field of production: whereas the classical economists spoke of a natural philosophy of wealth and exchange, Marx came along and spoke of production, of productivity and mode of production – it was a theoretical revolution. The same later with the theory of consumption: whereas the ideologists of consumption spoke of human needs and pure commodities, we began to speak of consumption as a structural and differential logic of signs. This was something radically different, and initiated a totally new analysis. And now with the sphere of communication: we only hear about information, message, interaction and so on. But what is the real meaning, the real finality of all that?

At this moment we don't have the key. We didn't get the equivalent of the theoretical leap forward in the field of production and consumption, the radical viewpoint which would change the very terms of the problem, allowing us to speak of communication and information in terms other than those of evidence and apologia. If it is so difficult to abstract the logic of communication from its apologia, then this is because communication and information are first of all involved in their own operation, invested in their own effects, immersed in their own spectacle. So it is difficult to extract their reality from their simulation. The whole complex has succeeded today as a dominant system of values, and as a collective operational network at the same time. But the point is: are we really communicating or isn't it rather the problem of our whole society expanding, transcending, exhausting itself in the fiction of communication?

Other generations grew up with the myth of production. Saint-Simonian and proto-capitalistic utopias marked out a radiant future for the human

race according to this prospective conception. And a sort of political and economical mysticism continues to push us towards maximal production with the prospect [*la perspective*] of maximal wealth and social comfort – however cruelly smashed by the world crisis of 1929 and the latent crisis in all industrial countries ever since. Now we know that an excess of production may be obnoxious and fatal. Even consumption may reverse its finality. Ever-growing consumption of therapies and healthcare for example may turn out to be a catastrophe for social security and for our health itself.[2] The consumption of cultural goods, or of sexual pleasure, or of any commodity considered as a quantitative function, reveals itself to be an absurdity. The same paradoxical consequence is true for communication and information. We are at the critical limit where all effects can be reversed and communication vanishes into an excess of communication. All functions of transparency and fluidity in social relations end in a useless complexity and a collective suffocation. This vanishing point is not a prediction, it is a pure presumption, but a logical one, or rather a tautological one – describing communication and information as a great tautological operation, as a great self-fulfilling prophecy.

First of all: it isn't true that men have always communicated since they first spoke to each other and lived in society. It is not even true that there have been 'messages' and information ever since men were connected by language. This anthropological extrapolation, which tends to extend the principle of communication back through the ages and to give it an aboriginal status, is entirely misleading. It occults the very moment when communication began, in the technical sense of the word (communication is a technology), when we began to be involved and engaged in a collective need for communication. It occults the specificity of communication as a modern invention, as a new mode of production and circulation of speech, connected to the media and the technology of media. Conversely: just as it has not always existed, perhaps also communication will not exist forever; neither is information an extra-temporal notion – maybe both will last as long as the words to speak of them. The terminological point is crucial. Things exist only when there is a determination of them, a sign which testifies, a warrant of their meaning and credibility. Whoever had the idea of 'communicating' in ancient societies, in tribes, in villages, in families? Neither the word nor the concept existed, the question doesn't make any sense. People don't need to communicate, because they just speak to one another. Why communicate when it is so easy to speak to each other?

So, my presupposition is: just as the failure [*défaillance*] of the real is the basis for the reality principle, so the failure of speech and symbolic exchange is the basis for the principle of communication. So the basic status, the basic definition of communication is negative. It is just like what Apollinaire says of time: if you are talking about it, it is because it doesn't exist any more … When we speak of communication, it is because there is no communication any more. The social body is no longer conductive, relations are no longer

regulated by informal consensus, the communion of meaning [*le sens*] is lost. That is why we must produce a formal apparatus, a collective artefact, a huge network of information that assumes the circulation of meaning. A new specific function is born, reflected in a code, in numerous institutions, and then all at once emerge the techniques of communication, and then the sciences of communication, all the sophistries, all the casuistries, all the social and political complexity of communication. The simplest exchanges must transit through multiple codes and feedback, which change their sense. Everything becomes a 'message' (according to McLuhan,[3] this pompous and ridiculous term sounds like 'massage', like manipulation). With the message, language becomes a pure 'medium' of communication, according to the structuralist and functionalist analysis. Emitter, receiver, code, context, contact, message: language is altered in its substance by this system of formalization, it is reduced to a one-dimensional function, according to the one-dimensional process of life. What was an act has become an operation. Speech was an act, communication is an operation, and along with it goes the operation of social life. Language is a form, but communication is a performance. Then it becomes more and more efficient [*performant*], easier and easier, faster and faster, but at the same time the system becomes heavier and heavier, more and more institutionalized, less and less conductive. (The very term 'communication' has a bureaucratic heaviness, it has all the beauty of a prosthetic mechanism.)

We must never forget this when confronting the structure of communication: its very essence is non-communication. Its horizon is negative, and this has consequences for the future of all human relations.

Communication became this strange structure where things (and beings) do not touch each other, but exchange their kinetic, caloric, erotic and informational energy through contiguity, just like molecules. Through contiguity, but without contact, always being at a distance from each other. Take highway cloverleaves. Nothing is more beautiful than two roads crossing each other, but it is dangerous as an accident risk – so is the crossing of glances or the exchange of words, human words, as a seduction risk. So we invented traffic infrastructures where cars can move without crossing each other, we invented structures of relations where humans can communicate without passing each other, without touching each other, without looking at each other. We are all commuters, and the condition for the fluidity of information, for the fluidity of transit, will be the abduction of all senses, of looking, of touching, of smelling, of all the potential violence of exchange.

It is the same with our mediatized and computerized human relations. We interact without touching each other, interlocute without speaking to each other, interface without seeing each other. Here is something really bizarre. The strangeness of a blank attraction, of a blank interaction, the inseparability of particles at distances of light-years. They talk about this a lot in physics. It seems that our social structure too is oriented towards this model, in a form of electronic solidarity. Just by chance we are discovering this in

physics at the very moment when we are having the same experience in everyday life.

Permeability to all images, to all messages, to all networks – submission to the virality of signs, to the epidemics of value, to the multiplicity of codes – tactility, digitality, contact, contiguity, contagion, irradiation and chain reaction: what gets lost in this new ritual of transparency and interaction is both the singularity of the self, and the singularity of the other. That is, the irreducibility of the subject, and the irreducibility of the object. Interaction, communication describe the vanishing point of the subject, of its secret, of its desire, of its *Unheimlichkeit* (strangeness to itself). But it is the vanishing point of the other as well, of transfer and challenge; of strangeness and seduction – all the fascination of alterity, of the external quality of the other, all dual and dialectical forms of relationship get lost, for all these forms presuppose distance, contradiction, tension or intensity, quite the contrary of the superficial fluidity of the electronic screen of communication. Another point is the question of time, of the suspension of time as well as the suspending of words, or of activity. In an interactive field there is no place for silence, for idleness, for absence. There is no stasis, no vacation, no rest – only metastasis along the networks, ramifications of time and space. No dead time, no distraction, no dreamtime: time is no longer your enemy, nor your luxury (you cannot spend it uselessly). It is not your master or your slave: it is your partner, and it resolves itself without past or future, in exhausting instantaneity.

For it must be instantaneous in order to work. And images and messages must follow one another, without discontinuity. No break, no syncope, no silence. A text may be silent, it may absorb or produce silence in its words – images, at least media-images, cannot. Silence on television is a scandal. That is why these lapses or silences on the screen are so significant, significant of nothing maybe, except the rupture of communication, but precisely this suspense is delightful, inasmuch as it makes obvious that all these non-stop images, this intensive information, is nothing but an artificial scenario, a pure fiction that protects us from the void – the void of the screen, of course, but also the void of our mental screen. The scene of a man sitting and staring at his empty television screen, on a strike day, will be one of the most beautiful and impressive anthropological images of the end of the twentieth century.

In the interactive social life, it is prohibited to disconnect yourself; prohibited even on your deathbed to disconnect the tubes and wires. The scandal is not so much the offence against life (nobody cares) as the attack on the network, on medicine and the technological apparatus of survival, which must first take care of its own survival. The principle of communication implies the absolute moral obligation not so much to be involved as to remain connected.

This constitutes of course a possibility of being alienated by the whole system of interconnection, of being controlled even in your private life. But

much more alienating, much more destabilizing is the reciprocal control given *to you* over the external world. The first danger is well known as the Big Brother story – the common fear of total control. But the second is more sophisticated and perverse. By using all the available screens and videos and telematic possibilities (including sex [*l'amour*] by telephone), it makes the external world superfluous, it makes all human presence, physical or linguistic, superfluous. All-out communication accentuates the involution into a micro-universe, with no reason to escape any more. A carceral niche with video walls. The fact that someone knew everything about you was frightening. But today, the best way of neutralizing, of cancellating someone is not to know everything about him, it is to give him the means of knowing everything about everything – and especially about himself. You no longer neutralize him by repression and control, you neutralize him through information and communication. You paralyse him much better by excess than by deprivation of information, since you enchain him to the pure obligation of being more and more connected to himself, more and more closely connected to the screen, in restless circularity and autoreferentiality, as an integrated network.

At this point, the question of liberty doesn't make sense any more. Our sovereignty is diffracted along the technical and mental lines of parasitic ramifications. For this process happens not only externally, in the operational network of institutions and programmes, but also internally, in the labyrinth of our brain and our body. To put it another way: the exoteric complex of communication, this huge apparatus deployed on the surface of our societies, goes along with an esoteric complex that rules the intimacy of each individual. Through this complex, through all techniques of introspection, through psychology, biology and medicine, man has learned to communicate with himself, to deal with himself as a partner, to interface with himself. He passed from the stage of passion and destiny to the stage of calculating and negotiating his own life, dealing with all the information about it, just like the way a computer operates.

The sexual discourse itself is an operational one. Sexual pleasure becomes an act of communication (you receive me, I receive you), we exchange it as an interactive performance. To enjoy without communication, without reciprocal feedback, is a scandal. Maybe communications machines feel pleasure [*jouissent*] too – we don't know, and we'll probably never know. But if we imagine pleasure-machines, they can only act, or interact, as computing networks. In fact, these machines exist right now: they are our own bodies, induced to feel pleasure [*jouir*] again by all the most subtle cosmetic and exultative techniques.

Exactly as, sitting in front of his computer or word-processor, he affords himself the spectacle of his brain and his intelligence, man affords himself the spectacle of his sexual fantasies as he sits in front of his 'Minitel rose' (this term refers to a computer network, connected with the telephone system, and freely available to every home – 'rose' refers to the type of

messages, sweet ones). He exorcises sexual fantasies or intelligence in the interface with the machine. The other, the sexual or cognitive interlocutor, is never really face-to-face. Only the screen, which is the point of interface, is invested, and this interactive screen transforms the process of communication into a process of commutation that is in a process of reversibility between two identical things. Within the screen there is no transcendence as there is for the mirror (you cannot get beyond the screen as you can pass through the mirror), and then the Other is virtually the same – Otherness is virtually squatted by the machine. And so the archetype of modern communication would be this one of the 'Minitel rose': people make contact via the screen, then pass to talking on the telephone, then face-to-face, and then what? They return to the telephone 'We'll call each other' and then go back to the 'Minitel' exchange – so much more erotic, because esoteric and transparent, a pure form of communication, with the abstract presence of the screen and its electronic text, as a new Platonic cave, where one can watch the shadows of carnal pleasure passing by. Why speak to each other when it is so easy to communicate?

We used to live in the fantasy of the mirror, of the divided self and alienation. We now live in the fantasy of the screen, of the interface, of contiguity and networks. All our machines are screens. We too are going to be screens, and the interactivity of men has been turned into an interactivity of screens. We are images one to another, the only destiny of an image being the following image on the screen. And images don't have to be asked for their meaning, but to be explored instantaneously, in an immediate abreaction to meaning, in an immediate implosion of the poles of representation.

Exploring an image (or a text-image, for any text on the screen appears as an image) is quite different from reading a text. It is a digital exploration, where the eye moves in a capricious and sporadic way. The interface relation between interlocutors, or the interface relation to knowledge in information processing, is the same: tactile and exploratory. The voice, the computer voice or even the telephone voice, is a tactile one, a functional non-voice. Not really a voice, just as the screen is not really an object of vision any more. The whole paradigm of sensibility has changed. The tactility (see McLuhan) is not the organic sense of touch, it merely signifies the epidemic contiguity of eye and image, and then the vanishing of any aesthetic distance. We are coming closer and closer to the image, our eyes as if disseminated in the surface of the screen. And if we fall so easily into this cerebro-visual coma of the television, it is because of this perpetual vacuum of the screen, which we spontaneously fill up with our fantasies. Proximity of images, tactility of images, tactile pornography of images – though physically so close to us, the TV-image is paradoxically light-years away. It stays at a very special distance that can only be defined as insuperable by the body. The distance of the theatrical scene, of the mirror, is superable by the body, it can eventually surmount it, this is why this distance remains human. The distance of the screen is virtual, hyperreal, and therefore insuperable. It is

adapted to this single form, to this single abstract form of communication. Not exactly human any more, but, while using contiguity without contact, corresponding to an eccentric dimension, to a depolarization of space and a destabilization of the body.

There is no topology more beautiful than the Möbius strip to designate the contiguity of the close and the distant, of interior and exterior, of object and subject, of the computer screen and the mental screen of our brain intertwined with each other in the same spiral. In the same way, information and communication always feed back in a kind of incestuous convolution. They operate in a circular continuity, in a superficial indistinction between subject and object, interior and exterior, question and answer, event and image – a contiguity only to be solved in a loop, simulating the mathematical figure for infinity.

Exchange is reciprocity, reversibility, whereas communication means circulation and circularity. Communicational man is assigned to the network in the same way the network is assigned to him, by a refraction from one to the other. The machine does what he wants it to do, but man himself performs only what the machine is programmed to do. He is the operator of virtuality and his action is to explore all the potentialities [*virtualités*] of a programme, just as a gambler tends to explore all the potentialities of the game.

The machine confiscates alterity. When using a camera, for instance, these virtualities are no longer those of the subject framing the world according to his vision, but those of the object exploiting the virtualities of the lens. The camera is a machine that secretly distorts [*altère*] any specific will, that erases all intentionality, supporting only the pure reaction of taking pictures. The lens is substituted for vision, and then operates a reversal of it, an involution of sight. Thus the picture may be the object's insight into the subject and not, as we commonly believe, the subject's insight into the world. And what makes the magic of photography, indeed, is this involution of the subject into the black box, this devolution of his vision to the impersonal eye of the camera. In all techniques, maybe, in the entire operational world, in all these machines with integrated circuits between subject and object, the fact is that it is the object that short-circuits the subject; it is the object that imposes its own image.

That is why any image is possible today. That is why anything can be computerized, as something commutable in itself or in its own digital operation, just as any individual is self-commutable according to his genetic formula (exploring the virtualities of the genetic code will be a fundamental aspect of cognitive sciences). It means that there is no act, no event that would not be refracted on a screen or in a technical image, nor any action that would not be photographed, filmed, recorded, that would not be reproduced in the virtual eternity of the artificial memories. The compulsion is to exist potentially on all the screens and in the circumvolutions of all the programmes. That is our fantasy of communication.

What about freedom at this point? There is none any more. There is no choice, no final decision. Concerning networks, information, operating

machines, all decisions are serial, partial, fragmentary, microscopic, fractal – so to speak, quantic. Willing and acting are diffracted along the dotted lines of microscopic sequences and objects. And the fascination of all this comes from the void and the vertigo of this black box, from this progressive fading of the real world, from this approach to the vanishing point of our freedom. Am I a man, am I a machine? In the relation with traditional machines, there was no ambiguity. Man is always a stranger for the machine, and therefore alienated by it. He rescues himself as an exploited individual [*comme exploité*] (that was the golden age of alienation). Whereas new technologies, interactive machines, computer screens do not alienate me at all. I am connected with them, I am integrated with them. They are a part of me, a part of myself, like contact lenses, like transparent prostheses integrated into the body to the point of becoming a genetic part of it, like pacemakers, or the famous papula of Philip K. Dick, a small advertising implant grafted onto the body at birth, which serves as a biological alarm.

All modern forms of communication are built on the same model: that of an integrated structure, where the quality of being human, as opposed to the machine, is undecidable.

Am I a man, am I a machine? There is no answer any more to this anthropological question. In a way, this is the end of anthropology, the science of man being itself confiscated by the most recent technologies. Paradoxically, this anthropological uncertainty goes along with the growing perfectibility of networks, just as sexual uncertainty (am I a man, am I a woman, what about sexual difference?) arises from sophisticated techniques of the unconscious and of the body. Sophisticating the undecidable. Just as radical uncertainty about the status of object and subject arises from the sophistication of the microsciences.

An immense uncertainty is all that remains from the sophistication of networks of communication and information – the undecidability of knowing whether there is real knowledge in there or not, whether there is any real form of exchange or not. This again is undecidable, and I defy anyone to decide it. But, in the end, the point is: does the fantastic success of artificial intelligence arise from the fact that it makes us free from real intelligence? From the fact that by hyperrealizing the operational phenomenon of thinking it makes us free from the ambiguity and singularity of thought in relation to the world? Does not the success of all these interactive technologies come from their function of exorcism, making the eternal problem of freedom quite irrelevant? What a relief! With virtual machines, no more problems! You are neither subject nor object, neither free nor alienated, no longer one or the other: you are the same, in several commutations. We have passed from the hell of others to the ecstasy of the same, from the purgatory of otherness to the artificial paradise of identity. Might that be a way to a new type of freedom? Some would say to a new type of servitude.

Now, this is the game in which we find ourselves, our crucial game, the game of uncertainty. We cannot escape it. But we are not ready to accept it,

and even worse: we expect some sort of homeopathic salvation, we hope to reduce this uncertainty with more information, with more communication, thereby reinforcing the uncertainty of the whole system. Again this is quite fascinating: the pursuit-race [*course-poursuite*] of techniques and their perverted effects, the pursuit-race of man and his virtual clones on the reversible track of the Möbius Strip.

Notes

1 This text is based on a transcript of a lecture delivered in English by Jean Baudrillard to the Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, UK on 18 November 1992. Baudrillard's delivery appears to have been based on an English translation by an unknown translator. We have undertaken some light editing where the double displacement of the original French text rendered Baudrillard's intention unclear. We are extremely grateful to Chris Turner for the benefit of his experience in suggesting the likely original French vocabulary/turns of phrase (indicated in square brackets) and more appropriate English translations. The French phrases are of the status of best guesses and the editors take full responsibility for any inaccuracies introduced by this nonetheless necessary editing.

2 Cf. Illich, I. (1976) *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*. New York: Pantheon.

3 McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. New York: Bantam Books.

2 On disappearance[1]

Jean Baudrillard

When I speak of time, the fact is it is not yet
When I speak of a place, the fact is it has disappeared
When I speak of a man, the fact is he's already dead
When I speak of time, the fact is it already is no more[2]

Let us speak, then, of the world from which human beings have disappeared.

It's a question of disappearance, not exhaustion, extinction or extermination. The exhaustion of resources, the extinction of species – these are physical processes or natural phenomena.

And that's the whole difference. The human species is doubtless the only one to have invented a specific mode of disappearance that has nothing to do with nature's law. Perhaps even an art of disappearance.

*

Let's begin with the disappearance of the real. We have talked enough about the murder of reality in the age of the media, virtual reality and networks, without enquiring to any great degree when the real began to exist. If we look closely, we see that the real world begins, in the modern age, with the decision to transform the world, and to do so by means of science, analytical knowledge and the implementation of technology – that is to say that it begins, in Hannah Arendt's words, with the invention of an Archimedean point outside the world (on the basis of the invention of the telescope by Galileo and the discovery of modern mathematical calculation) by which the natural world is definitively alienated.[3] This is the moment when human beings, while setting about analysing and transforming the world, take their leave of it, while at the same time lending it force of reality. We may say, then, that the real world begins, paradoxically, to disappear at the very same time as it begins to exist.

By their exceptional faculty of knowledge, human beings, while giving meaning, value and reality to the world, at the same time begin a process of dissolution ('to analyse' means literally 'to dissolve').

But doubtless we have to go back even further – as far as concepts and language. By representing things to ourselves, by naming them and conceptualizing them, human beings call them into existence and at the same time hasten their doom, subtly detach them from their primal reality. For example, the class struggle exists from the moment Marx names it. But it no doubt exists in its greatest intensity only before being named. Afterwards, it merely declines. The moment a thing is named, the moment representation and concepts take hold of it, is the moment when it begins to lose its energy – with the risk that it will become a truth or impose itself as an ideology. We may say the same of the unconscious and its discovery by Freud. It is when a thing is beginning to disappear that the concept appears.

The owl, says Hegel, flies out at dusk.[4]

Take globalization. If there is so much talk of it, as obvious fact, as indisputable reality, that is perhaps because it is already no longer at its height and we are already contending with something else.

Thus the real vanishes into the concept. But what is even more paradoxical is the exactly opposite movement by which concepts and ideas (but also phantasies, utopias, dreams and desires) vanish into their very fulfilment; when everything disappears by excess of reality, when, thanks to the deployment of a limitless technology, both mental and material, human beings are capable of fulfilling all their potentialities and, as a consequence, disappear, giving way to an artificial world that expels them from it, to an integral performance that is, in a sense, the highest stage of materialism. (Marx: the idealist stage of interpretation, and the irresistible transformation that leads to a world without us.) That world is perfectly objective since there is no one left to see it. Having become purely operational, it no longer has need of our representation. Indeed, there no longer is any possible representation of it.

For, if it is characteristic of human beings not to realize all their possibilities, it is of the essence of the technical object to exhaust its possibilities and even to go quite some way beyond them, staking out in that way the definitive demarcation line between technical objects and human beings, to the point of deploying an infinite operational potential against human beings themselves and implying, sooner or later, their disappearance.

Thus, the modern world foreseen by Marx, driven on by the work of the negative, by the engine of contradiction, became, by the very excess of its fulfilment, another world in which things no longer even need their opposites in order to exist, in which light no longer needs shade, the feminine no longer needs the masculine (or vice versa?), good no longer needs evil – and the world no longer needs us.

It is here we see that the mode of disappearance of the human (and naturally of everything related to it – Günther Anders's outdatedness of human beings,[5] the eclipse of values,[6] etc.) is precisely the product of an internal logic, of a built-in obsolescence, of the human race's fulfilment of its most grandiose project: the Promethean project of mastering the universe, of

acquiring exhaustive knowledge. We see too that it is this which precipitates it towards its disappearance, much more quickly than animal species, by the acceleration it imparts to an evolution that no longer has anything natural about it.

Doing so not out of some death drive or some involutive, regressive disposition towards undifferentiated forms, but from an impulse to go as far as possible in the expression of all its power, all its faculties – to the point even of dreaming of abolishing death.

Now, what is most surprising is that this amounts to the same thing. This extreme endeavour on the part of life (or of Eros, if, by that term, one understands the deployment of all capacities, the deepening of knowledge, consciousness and *jouissance*) arrives at the same outcome: the virtual disappearance of the human species, as though that destiny were programmed somewhere and we were merely the long-term executants of the programme (which irresistibly brings to mind apoptosis, that process by which a cell is pre-programmed to die).

All this may give the impression or illusion of a fatal strategy, of an evolution at the end of which we would have passed beyond that vanishing point Canetti speaks of, where, without realizing it, the human race would have left reality and history behind, where any distinction between the true and the false would have disappeared, etc.

In which case we and our bodies would be merely the phantom limb, the weak link, the infantile malady of a technological apparatus that dominates us remotely (just as thought would be merely the infantile malady of AI or the human being the infantile malady of the machine or the real the infantile malady of the virtual).

All this remains confined still within an evolutionary perspective that sees everything in terms of a linear trajectory, from origin to end, from cause to effect, from birth to death, from appearance to disappearance.

But disappearance may be conceived differently: as a singular event and the object of a specific desire, the desire no longer to be there, which is not negative at all. Quite to the contrary, disappearance may be the desire to see what the world looks like in our absence (photography) or to see, beyond the end, beyond the subject, beyond all meaning, beyond the horizon of disappearance, if there still is an occurrence [*événement*] of the world, an unprogrammed appearance of things. A domain of pure appearance, of the world as it is (and not of the *real* world, which is only ever the world of representation), that can emerge only from the disappearance of all the added values.

There are here the first fruits of an art of disappearance, of another strategy. The dissolution of values, of the real, of ideologies, of ultimate ends, admittedly.

But there is simultaneously a game, the possibility of playing with all that; the possibility of an art, though not in any way an art in the cultural and aesthetic sense, but something closer to a martial art.

Art itself in the modern period exists only on the basis of its disappearance – not just the art of making the real disappear and supplanting it with another scene, but the art of abolishing itself in the course of its practice (Hegel). It was by doing this that it constituted an event, that it was of decisive importance. I say 'was' advisedly, for art today, though it has disappeared, doesn't know it has disappeared and – this is the worst of it – continues on its trajectory in a vegetative state.

And becomes the paradigm of everything that survives its own disappearance. There are those who play on their disappearance, make use of it as a living form, exploit it by excess, and there are those who are in a state of disappearance and who survive it by default. It is clear that the political scene, for example, merely reflects the shadows of a cave and the – disembodied – beings that move around in it, but do so quite unwittingly (it would take too long to list everything that has disappeared in this way – institutions, values, individuals). It is, unfortunately, quite possible that we ourselves, as a species, already form part – in the form of cloning, computerization and the networks, for example – of this artificial survival, of this prolongation to perpetuity of something that has disappeared, but just keeps on and on disappearing. Whereas the whole trick is to know how to disappear before dying and instead of dying.

At any rate, nothing just vanishes; of everything that disappears there remain traces. The problem is what remains when everything has disappeared. It's a bit like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat, whose grin still hovers in the air after the rest of him has vanished. Or like the judgement of God: God disappears, but he leaves behind his judgement. Now, a cat's grin is already something terrifying, but the grin without the cat is even more terrifying … And God's judgement is terrifying in itself, but the judgement of God without God …

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We may thus suppose that everything that disappears – institutions, values, prohibitions, ideologies, even ideas – continues to lead a clandestine existence and exert an occult influence, as was said of the old gods which, in the Christian era, assumed the form of demons. Everything that disappears seeps back into our lives in infinitesimal doses, often more dangerous than the visible authority that ruled over us. In our age of tolerance and transparency, prohibitions, controls and inequalities disappear one by one, but only the better to be internalized in the mental sphere. We might even suppose ourselves to be following in the tracks of our previous lives, not to speak of the Unconscious. Nothing ever disappears. But let's leave parapsychology aside. Let's stay with psychology and look a little at the disappearance of the subject, which is, more or less, the mirror image of the disappearance of the real.

And in fact the subject – the subject as agency of will, of freedom, of representation; the subject of power, of knowledge, of history – is disappearing,

but it leaves its ghost behind, its narcissistic double, more or less as the Cat left its grin hovering. The subject disappears, but giving way to a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity, an ectoplasm that envelops everything and transforms everything into an immense sounding board for a disembodied, empty consciousness – everything radiating out from a subjectivity without object; each monad, each molecule caught in the toils of a definitive narcissism, a perpetual image-playback. This is the image of an end-of-world subjectivity, a subjectivity for an end of the world from which the subject as such has disappeared, no longer having anything left to grapple with. The subject is the victim of this fateful turn of events, and, in a sense, it no longer has anything standing over against it – neither objects, nor the real, nor the Other. Our greatest adversaries now threaten us only with their disappearance.

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The Great Disappearance is not, then, simply that of the virtual transmutation of things, of the *mise en abyme* of reality, but that of the division of the subject to infinity, of a serial pulverization of consciousness into all the interstices of reality. We might say, at a pinch, that consciousness (the will, freedom) is everywhere; it merges with the course of things and, as a result, becomes superfluous. This is the analysis Cardinal Ratzinger himself made of religion: a religion which accommodates to the world, which attunes itself to the (political, social …) world, becomes superfluous. It is for the same reason – because it became increasingly merged with objective banality – that art, ceasing to be different from life, has become superfluous.

One might argue, alternatively, that there have been some positive disappearances: of violence, threats, illness or death, but we know that everything repressed or eliminated in this way results in a malign, viral infiltration of the social and individual body.

*

It is, therefore, impossible to assign disappearance – disappearance as form – to some particular end (any more than we can with appearance indeed), either in the order of good or the order of evil. Apart from all the fantasies we maintain around it – and in the entirely justified hope of seeing a certain number of things disappear once and for all – we must give disappearance back its prestige or, quite simply, its power, its impact. We must reinvest it not as a final, but as an immanent, dimension – I would even say as a vital dimension of existence. Things live only on the basis of their disappearance, and if one wishes to interpret things with entire lucidity, one must do so as a function of their disappearance. There is no better analytical grid.

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In conclusion, I shall stress the total ambiguity of our relation to the real and its disappearance. Behind every image something has disappeared. And that is the source of its fascination. Behind virtual reality in all its forms (telematics, IT, digitization, etc.), the real has disappeared. And that is what fascinates everyone. According to the official version, we worship the real and the reality principle. And this is the source of all the current suspense: is it in fact the real we worship – or its disappearance?

We may, then, take the same general situation – exactly the same – either as a curse, as the commonplace, critical version has it, or as a pleasure into which we can retreat, as a happy eventuality, so to speak.

A contradictory, two-pronged assumption, for which no resolution can be found.

Notes

1 This paper was delivered to the 'Engaging Baudrillard' conference at Swansea University, Wales, UK on 6 September 2006, where it was presented *in absentia* by Mike Gane. The translation from the French '*Sur la disparition*' is by Chris Turner.

2 This appears to be a slight deformation of the third stanza of Queneau's *L'Explication des métaphores* [*Explanation of Metaphors*] [Trans.]:

> Si je parle du temps, c'est qu'il n'est pas encore,
> Si je parle d'un lieu, c'est qu'il a disparu,
> Si je parle d'un homme, il sera bientôt mort,
> Si je parle du temps, c'est qu'il n'est déjà plus.

3 The reference is to 'The discovery of the Archimedean point' in H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 257–68. First published 1958. Arendt writes of 'the modern age's triumphal world alienation' (p. 264). [Trans.]

4 '[D]ie Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug', 'Vorrede', *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1820).

5 *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, 2 vols (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1956, 1980). [Trans.]

6 '*l'agonie des valeurs*'. The literal translation seemed unnecessarily unnatural. [Trans.]

3 Commentaries on Jean Baudrillard's 'On disappearance'

Rex Butler, David B. Clarke, Marcus A. Doel, Gary Genosko, Douglas Kellner, Mark Poster, Richard G. Smith and Andrew Wernick

Rex Butler

I would like to begin by asking, what does Baudrillard mean by 'disappearance' in his text? The answer is not so obvious, since he argues that in a way nothing disappears, or that disappearance is inseparable from appearance. Appearance and disappearance are in a reciprocal relationship, so that we cannot have one without the other or one is merely an alternative form of the other. Just as appearance implies a kind of disappearance – this is what Baudrillard means by 'the real vanishing into the concept' – so disappearance must be considered another form of appearance – this is what he means by 'concepts and ideas vanishing into their very fulfilment'.

But Baudrillard's real question is, what allows this commutativity, which of course is that of simulation? What is this 'disappearance' that allows the exchange between appearance and disappearance? In other words, what has disappeared even when nothing appears to have disappeared? Or, better, what has disappeared to *ensure* that nothing disappears, that disappearance is merely another form of appearance? It is *this* disappearance that Baudrillard describes as a 'game, the possibility of playing with [values, the real, ideology and ultimate ends – and even their dissolution]', or an 'act … like a martial [arts] act'. And it is *this* disappearance that might allow a 'domain of pure appearance, of the world as it is (and not the *real* world, which is only ever the world of representation)'.

Again, however, we might ask, what does Baudrillard mean by this second form of disappearance? What could it mean to say that it is a disappearance that takes place even though nothing has disappeared? In order to answer these questions, we might turn to the particular form of disappearance Baudrillard considers in his essay: his imagining of a world in which humans have disappeared. It is something that takes place every time we take a photograph (hence the attraction of photography for Baudrillard): 'the desire to see what the world looks like in our absence or to see … if there is still an occurrence of the world'. But, needless to say, this ambition to see the world in our absence can never be realised. We could never know what the world

would be like were we not there: our very presence on the scene would invalidate what we had come to see.

And yet, of course, this desire remains as a fantasy, perhaps as *the* primal fantasy, the one for which all the others stand in. Indeed, we see another version of this fantasy in Baudrillard's essay in something that appears initially unrelated to it: the attempt to transform the world by means of science and technology, which is only possible, as Hannah Arendt originally noted, 'with the invention of an Archimedean point outside of the world … by which the natural world is definitively alienated'. For in the same kind of way – which is why Baudrillard uses the word 'alienated' – here too is the fantasy that with the technologisation of the world those processes initially unleashed by man will eventually run by themselves. What lies at the origin of technology is the vision of a society in which machines replace man, in which humans are unnecessary. We see this vision coming true in those self-enclosed and self-perpetuating systems of simulation that Baudrillard analyses, which have no outside and no need to be explained by an other, and whose best model would be that bicycle proposed by Alfred Jarry, which still continues to pedal long after its riders have passed away with fatigue.

This would be a world from which nothing is missing – not even the subject, for if the subject as 'agent of will, of freedom, of representation' disappears, it leaves behind a 'diffuse, flowing, insubstantial subjectivity, an ectoplasm that envelops everything'. And yet, if we can put it this way, it is just at this point that something *does* go missing: human absence or the absence that humans introduce. Everything that Baudrillard says is possible, man is able to disappear from the world in realising it; but this disappearance itself could be realised only from some 'Archimedian point' outside of the world. It is for this reason that Baudrillard writes that it is 'characteristic of human beings not to realise all their possibilities': because these possibilities impose a kind of necessary limit to human beings' disappearance. The human lives on as that place from where its own disappearance is remarked. It is that 'disappearance' – the always missing place of enunciation – that allows its disappearance to appear, to exist within signification.

And it is this, to conclude, that opens up the 'two-pronged' aspect of theory, the possibility of 'disappearing before dying and instead of dying'. For in a way the aim of theory – like photography, like technology – is to imagine a state without humans, a world in which we do not exist. And yet it is just at this point that a kind of limit is reached, that we become aware of that prior 'disappearance' that allows this disappearance to be imagined: the absent point of narration or representation for which this fantasy stands in. (And for Marx, as Baudrillard says, to theorise this end without including its point of enunciation is merely the 'idealist stage of interpretation'.) It is exactly in this sense that thinking is always pushing up against its own limits, always trying to rid itself of that which makes it possible; but it is also in this

sense that it imposes an absolute limit on technology and its attempt to realise the world – for its 'advances' are only thinkable, that is, they only exist, insofar as they are not complete, have not reached the end.

What might it mean to say that in this text Baudrillard reveals himself as a kind of 'humanist', arguing for the irreducible persistence of the human, like the grin of the Cheshire Cat or indeed the judgement of God after God has disappeared? It is the human as the irreducible limit to this world realising itself or becoming real because this reality would never be able to be taken in as a whole – and here we come back to something like Kant's cosmological antinomies – without some point outside of it.

David B. Clarke

'Disappearance' has long been part of Baudrillard's conceptual universe. Aside from being unable to resist the delicious irony of sending a paper entitled 'On disappearance' to delegate for its author at an international conference when a rapid deterioration in health prevented appearance in person – and aside from the tremendous poignancy of feeling that Baudrillard had himself become prey to a mortal mode of disappearance and was rapidly fading – this text is a virtuosic explication of that term. Like many of Baudrillard's final writings, it displays an intense force of subtlety and subtlety of force. It is not unreasonable simply to outline its structure and to consider its *raison d'être*. This at least helps us to grasp its significance.

The notion of 'disappearance' presents us with a challenge. It is worthy of our attention since it is not entirely obvious what 'disappearance' is. Elsewhere, Baudrillard (1990c [1987b]: 92) has marked a contrast between disappearance and the finality of death: 'what dies is annihilated in linear time, but what disappears passes into a state of constellation. It becomes an event in a cycle that may bring it back many times.' Then again, Baudrillard (1993b [1990a]: 4) acknowledges death as 'a mortal mode of disappearance', even while maintaining its contrast with an increasingly predominant 'fractal mode of dispersal', whereby whatever disappears 'disappears into the void along a crooked path that only rarely happens to intersect with other such paths' (Baudrillard, 1993b [1990a]: 6). The secret of disappearance relates to its departure from the notion of an irreversible and irrevocable end, which itself accords to a conception of linear time. 'What has disappeared has every chance of reappearing', as Baudrillard (1990c, [1987b]: 92) notes. Our habit of thinking of 'origins' as representing reversible events, and 'ends' as marking irreversible events, is a habit that Baudrillard would have us break. For in a cyclical universe, what seem like births are no longer reversible, marked by the certainty of their transitoriness and impermanence. Once they arrive, things are here to stay. Their absence may occasionally be noted but there is little reason, if any, to assume that this is anything but a temporary disappearance, holding all the likelihood of imminent or eventual return.

Likewise, what seem like deaths are no longer final, irrevocable and marked by the weight of certainty (Bauman, 1993). Borges (1998 [1949]: 192):

> Everything in the world of mortals has the value of the irrecoverable and contingent. Among the Immortals, on the other hand, every act (every thought) is the echo of others that preceded it in the past, with no visible beginning, and the faithful presage of others that will repeat it in the future, *ad vertiginem*.

Disappearance is, however, caught up in a tangled skein of relations, of which a basic contrast between two conceptions deserves highlighting. On the one hand, disappearance has become a predominant trope as a consequence of the trajectory initiated by the forced realization of the world, by modernity's attempt to implement a final solution to the enigma of the world – which ultimately rebounds in a kind of fatal reversibility: the end meets its own end, plunging us into a state where disappearance once more holds sway. To invoke another image of thought, what begins with the inauguration of reason, and develops with the word becoming flesh, ultimately results in that flesh turning cancerous: disappearance by means of a viral or fractal process of proliferation (*Steigerung*). On the other hand, however, this outcome cannot but reveal to us what linear time, with its clear-cut sense of origins and ends, had always attempted to repress. The scrambling of terms we now experience discloses that disappearance has always accorded to a superior logic. And this, perhaps, is our chance.

In order to explore our species' relation to disappearance – which, as Baudrillard says, 'has nothing to do with nature's law'; which relates to an art or an artifice of disappearance – Baudrillard begins 'On disappearance' with the universe instated by modernity. The very hypothesis of reality, the principle of reality, paradoxically depends on a process of disappearance: we take our leave from the world in order to lend it the force of reality. This separation, instigated by the invention of an Archimedean point, is critical. But it is merely the intensification of our species' proclivity for representation. As Hegel put it, the word is the murder of the thing – which has the most dramatic of consequences. It is only when things are no longer what they used to be that we become aware of what they were all along (Baudrillard's wonderful throwaway line on 'globalization' stands out here). In other words, the crepuscular habits of the Owl of Minerva dictate that 'the real vanishes into the concept'. And yet, as Baudrillard points out, the opposite is also true. An excess of reality issues from the way in which concepts tend towards the exhaustion of their possibilities, leading to a situation of total, operational objectivity – in the same movement surpassing that definitive human trait of failing to realize our possibilities. At which point we would step out of the world, as if we had never been there. Or at least we would only remain as something other than what we once were, our status retroactively relegated by everything we once imagined ourselves to have

instigated or caused. All this, however, still follows a linear trajectory, a movement from appearance to disappearance. It marks the end of a first analytical mo(ve)ment in Baudrillard's text. If this is the situation that arises from the forced realization of the world, how might that situation be read or rendered otherwise?

Disappearance may also be read as a form, rather than something assigned to a particular end. The situation in which we find ourselves entails that we must give back to disappearance its power. This amounts to acknowledging it as a gift or as a challenge, thus obligating us to respond to it as such. There is, in other words, an art of disappearance, but we should be more than wary of gleaning an insight into this art from what currently presents itself as art. For what we term art has been subject to an asymptotic process of disappearance, such that it now persists in a state of hysteresis without – and this is the worst of it – recognizing its own posthumous state. The particular sense of art that Baudrillard has in mind is akin to a martial art, where each move responds to another, drawing on (if you will, seducing) its energy. Art in the conventional sense, in contrast, has become 'a paradigm of everything that survives its own disappearance', and we must add subjectivity to this list. The subject disappears in direct proportion to, and in tandem with, the disappearance of the real. If the real disappears as a result of its proliferation, to the extent that its totalization no longer permits that contrast that once afforded it its specificity (i.e. if it assumes the status of hyperreality), so the subject loses its specificity, merging with its narcissistic double: becoming, as Freud pointed out, a 'harbinger of death'. Just as, when everything is equally real, everything is equally irreal, when 'consciousness (the will, freedom) is everywhere', it 'merges with the course of things and, as a result, becomes superfluous'. And so Baudrillard simply, elegantly and matter-of-factly points out to us the necessity of understanding the power of disappearance; of separating its superior logic from the disappearance that equates to history's vanishing act and continues to maintain a 'clandestine existence' and exert an 'occult influence'. There is, as Baudrillard states in closing, no resolution to any of this. But there is at least the possibility, for those willing to look, of an assessment that spells out the situation and simultaneously points out the fallaciousness of certain courses of action. 'On disappearance' is, therefore, a paean to disappearance itself; an aid to the recovery of its form.

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Marcus A. Doel

It would be a mistake to regard 'On disappearance' as primarily being concerned with the fate of our world, despite its opening gambit – 'Let us speak then of the world from which human beings have disappeared' – and irrespective of its ostensible fixation on the disappearance of the real and the disappearance of the subject. My wager is that the content of 'On disappearance' – 'The Great Disappearance' – is not where the true significance of this brief text lies. As is so often the case with Jean Baudrillard, our attention should be focused on form and its destiny: not the form of the essay per se, but form qua form; form considered under the motif of disappearance. Every form takes place within the event horizon of its disappearance. This is a lesson that Baudrillard rightly drives home. And it is a lesson that I hope will register among the readership of this collection.

Suffice to say that throughout Baudrillard's tarrying with the turmoil of theoretical labour – whether critical, fatal or viral – he was especially concerned with forms that are inherently unstable, ambivalent and duplicitous: one thinks, for example, of signification, communication, consumption, production, simulation, seduction and symbolic exchange. All of these forms ineluctably undo themselves in the round: they come apart in the turns and returns within which they are inscribed. And it is out of this decomposition of forms that our world takes place. For if the world is to be given, it will be given over to decomposition.

Baudrillard was particularly fond of tarrying with forms that have been taken to be dialectical but which are in fact given over to deconstruction. I should add immediately that among social theorists deconstruction remains much misunderstood. Deconstruction should not be regarded in the constructivist sense of disassembly and dismantlement, which would only have allowed Baudrillard to shuffle – rather pointlessly – a miscellany of heterogeneous terms. Instead, deconstruction should be understood in the Derridean sense of disadjustment, disjointure, displacement and dissemination. By banking on deconstruction Baudrillard was able to strike out – *under erasure* – time and time again. Without an appreciation of Baudrillard's penchant for deconstruction one will not get very far in understanding the force and impact of his work. Everything that he wrote was composed under erasure, and so it is entirely appropriate that this text should devote itself to the matter (I use this term advisedly) of disappearance. Disappearance truly matters. Or to put it another way, materialization and realization take place under the aegis of disappearance. Consequently, the proximity of Baudrillard and Derrida should no longer be underestimated.

For Baudrillard, like Derrida, every form is swept away not so much by its antagonistic opposition to something other (e.g. production versus seduction

or use-vale versus exchange-value), but primarily by its estrangement and dissimilation from itself. On the one hand, then, every form is set in motion; given in motion. (This explains the almost absolute proximity of dialectics and deconstruction, and Baudrillard's fondness for duplicitous figures such as the double spiral and the Möbius strip.) On the other hand, however, every form dis-places itself; disseminates itself. In short, every form takes place and sweeps itself away. Form takes place here, but it takes place here *as if it were simultaneously elsewhere*; it spirits place away, via a here qua elsewhere. 'On disappearance' dramatizes all of this. Hence its peculiarity, its obscurity and its power. As one reads the text one cannot help but experience the vertiginous impression of traversing an incessantly shifting ground. The forms of disappearance multiply exponentially, and most of them seem to disappear leaving only a minimal trace. It is as if sense were drawn not from an empty space (the motif of structuralism par excellence), but from a vanishing space or a space of recession: one thinks, for example, of the errant trace of the dialectical solidus (/) and the semiotic bar (–). Even identity is doubly barred (=).

So, to cut a long story short, disappearance is regarded by Baudrillard as a form, but it is an unstable, ambivalent and duplicitous form. This form is not opposed to anything, least of all to its ostensible double: appearance. (As a parenthetical aside, and contrary to popular opinion, it is worth recalling that Baudrillard never opposed the semiotic and the symbolic. Rather, he related them through a double spiral. This was a deconstructive gesture par excellence. Very few commentators have grasped the significance of this strategic decision.) One should therefore resist the obvious temptation of conjoining and relativizing a mode of disappearance to a mode of appearance. (It should go without saying that a rendering visible is simultaneously a rendering invisible: every scene necessarily opens onto an ob-scene and an associated praxis of sciamachy into which everything plunges.) In fact, appearance only merits three mentions in Baudrillard's text, and none of them is essentially bound to disappearance. Indeed, in writing 'On disappearance', Baudrillard need not have called upon appearance at all. To put it bluntly, when it comes to considering disappearance as form, nothing hangs on appearance.

On first mention, the would-be connection between appearance and disappearance is simply renounced by Baudrillard: 'The whole remains confined still within an evolutionary perspective that sees everything in terms of a linear trajectory, from origin to end, from cause to effect, from birth to death, from appearance to disappearance.' On second mention, the reader is invited to imagine a 'domain of pure appearance' that would be 'beyond the horizon of disappearance'. One can almost hear Baudrillard chuckle at the crassness of this thought! On its third and final mention, appearance is confined to parentheses and it is merely alluded to in passing: it is 'impossible to assign disappearance – disappearance as form – to some particular end (any more than we can with appearance indeed)'. So, for Baudrillard, neither the

line (from/to), nor the threshold (within/beyond), nor the limit (means/ends) will advance our appreciation of the form of disappearance.

Baudrillard writes not of appearance *and* disappearance, or of disappearance *over and against* appearance, but of disappearance alone. And what is striking about his meditation on disappearance is the plasticity and mutability of this form. Four key mutations are highlighted in the text: a form of *natural* disappearance that is exemplified by death, and which is more or less immediately placed under erasure since it can only be evoked retrospectively; a form of *operational* disappearance that is exemplified by dissolution through forced realization and delirious virtualization, and which thereby ushers in a form of undeath that is quite simply laughable; an *art* of disappearance that dolefully withdraws from the scene and its ob-scene, leaving not so much a hole as an occlusion in the fabric of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic registers; and a *play* of disappearance that toys with this manifold mutability within the order of things. Readers familiar with deconstruction, which adds an irruptive and disruptive 'supplementary' fourth dimension to the trinity horizon of dialectics, will appreciate Baudrillard's fourfold derailment of that which takes place in our world.

Since forms mutate, deconstruct and disseminate, it is hardly surprising that Baudrillard could not but fail to maintain the distinctiveness of these four forms of disappearance. For while it should go without saying that everything is destined to disappear, it is not self-evident that our forms of disappearance will also disappear – and perhaps even vanish without trace. 'Things live only on the basis of their disappearance,' notes Baudrillard, adding that 'Our greatest adversaries now threaten us only with their disappearance.' So, he concludes, 'the whole trick is to know how to disappear before dying and instead of dying'. Disappearance, then, is far from the worst that can happen. The worst is to disappear without trace: for disappearance to disappear without trace. For in its wake, there would not be 'an unprogrammed appearance of things. A domain of pure appearance, of the world as it is.' There would only be an empty form: supremely mutable and, perhaps, sublimely beautiful. Such is Baudrillard's posthumous hope.

Gary Genosko

'On disappearance' is beguiling for more reasons than its self-fulfilling prophetic dimension. Laden with nuances of Guy Debord's attempt to evade the spectacle's rapacious need for images, and Paul Virilio's subtle posing of a variety of gaps – some political, some biophysical – Baudrillard presented in several waves human beings' self-erasure towards an art of disappearance: how to disappear symbolically before and rather than simply expiring biologically.

Baudrillard acknowledged that the notion of the survival of a subject's 'narcissistic double', not unlike the Cheshire Cat's hovering grin, without the cat or subject, is quite terrifying. Baudrillard's ghost story has a hint of

Roger Caillois's subjective detumescence in it as well, as subjectivity is pulverized and scattered everywhere, becoming superfluous, oceanic fluff. Baudrillard sought to revitalize the thought of disappearance as a 'pleasure into which we can retreat' rather than a loss to be lamented. The comfort of disappearance is itself discomforting.

A very young Baudrillard was once energized by pataphysical juvenilia, and later felt trapped by its bureaucratic games. The joy of Jarry is his insouciance, and the figure of Ubu is political incorrectness incarnate before the term even existed. Ubu is a figure of symbolic exchange far from reason and good sense, and he bears the spiral – not to mention the toilet brush, and his own green horn – as a mark against unidirectionality and irreversibility.

The question is this: although Baudrillard sometimes thinks that symbolic forms have not been truly lost, and thus one should not feel nostalgia for them, there are very few examples of radical symbolic forms upon which to draw in our managed and surveilled societies. And once found, it is better not to draw attention to them for to do so is to place them at risk. Still, at the end of the day, Ubu shines in the void as an antidote to the meanness of our times in which 'we live, then we die, and that is truly the end'.[1] And this, I think, is the lesson of disappearance: it confounds this meanness, this reduction of a life to a brutish line, and simply will not accommodate itself to it. It is one of the mysterious 'forms' that populate Baudrillard's thought. Disappearance challenges the meanness and finality of death. And this has always been the charm of symbolic exchange which stands, like theory itself, against the dictates of the real with which it cannot reconcile itself. To which Baudrillard added: 'The impossibility of reconciling theory with the real is a consequence of the impossibility of reconciling the subject with its own ends.'[2] Disappearance defies the world's death grip; it deliberately distorts finality; it is perhaps the destiny of theory to disappear. And this is Baudrillard's question the answer to which he asks us to imagine: 'If no other behaviour were possible but to learn, ironically, to disappear?'[3] If so, then how? Which behaviours?

Reality decays into the conceptual, Baudrillard claims. Objects are much better than humans at this kind of fulfilment towards minimal, brute disappearance (i.e. obsolescence). Yet the human persists, even if we have outlived our uselessness. Driven by a will to master all, human beings drive themselves towards self-cancellation. Human beings, suggests Baudrillard, may be better at this game of extinction than animals, so many of which seem ironically to be stuck on the verge no matter how much we help them with our environmental destructiveness.

This is still too evolutionary. Baudrillard wants to move into the ultimate post-evolutionary dream beyond ends: not that of holding death at bay, but of disappearing down the rabbit hole in order to find out if anything is left above ground, as it were. Self-abolition, he insists, is an art of deception, even if much of what is called art is in a permanently 'vegetative state'.

No cryogenetics here; nor valorization of the growing number of kinds of 'artificial survival'. But a certain sort of art, a 'martial art' that might permit one to sidestep, to pull a trick, on death ('before and instead of'). Perhaps the closest state would be a near-death experience in which consciousness hovers above one's body and observes the scene of dying. But readers of Baudrillard know how badly this can turn out, as in the parable of Death in Samarkand – the behaviour of fleeing death is to run into death's arms.

Baudrillard considers the disappearance of the real to be paralleled in the disappearance of the subject. This disappearance has a specific texture and molecularity that owes much to Caillois in his amateur entomological mode. In his studies of mimesis Caillois drew upon an impressive literature of naturalist, zoological and biological material in order to investigative phenomena of adaptation. Unconvinced by existing explanations, he chose instead to consider mimesis as dangerous because neither gardeners wielding pruning shears nor leaf insects browsing together can distinguish between leaves and other insects. Progressive indistinction, this assimilation of the insect to its surroundings, was Caillois's route toward the analysis of human-insect (and mineral) similarities. Caillois mapped a path of accelerated disappearance and in so doing refocused attention on resemblance as a fundamental problem. Baudrillard picks this up and pulverizes subjectivity so that it too follows the real's disappearance, with slightly different nuances. Having been rendered molecular, subjectivity rolls into the cracks, the 'interstices of reality', like balls of mercury or infestations of insects. It is everywhere and nowhere; Baudrillard's term is that subjectivity has become 'superfluous'. This is the 'immanent dimension' of disappearance through mimetic attunement to the world. Baudrillard appears to back away from the idea that disappearance requires some trickery – it is a pleasure into which one may retreat, he claims, but whether this is a 'happy eventuality' or a 'curse' is undecidable.

What is 'disappearance as form'? A form irreducible to a 'particular end' and which has no assignable value. The classic problem of form is played out here: it lives by its contents but thrives in its abstraction from them. Form's freedom is always relative to a particular end. Baudrillard simply displaces the problem of form from symbolic exchange onto disappearance, and all the same problems follow along. It is this tension that hangs in the balance, like the grin of the Cheshire Cat.

Notes

1 The final sentence of the chapter 'Symbolic exchange' in J. Baudrillard (2003b [2000b]) *Passwords*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso, p. 18.
2 Baudrillard (1988b [1987a]) *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Trans. B. Schutze and C. Schutze. New York: Semiotext(e), p. 99.
3 Ibid., p. 104.

Douglas Kellner

Baudrillard's 'On disappearance' deals with a fundamental dialectic of his work between appearance and disappearance, and alludes to some of his strongest and most distinctive ideas – the disappearance of the real, and of the subject and the human being itself in a world of simulation, hyperreality, virtual reality, networks and the system of what Baudrillard calls 'integral reality'. It would be a tremendous mistake to psychologically trivialize this important text to the event of Baudrillard taking leave of us before he disappears, although some passages reasonably allude to the disappearance of a thinker, an idea or a theory, and its occult afterlife; clearly something now happening with Baudrillard as we ponder 'On disappearance', his legacy and his difficult to penetrate, but not impenetrable, thought.

Baudrillard opens with a dramatic invocation: 'Let us speak then of the world from which human beings have disappeared.' This fatal process began, he suggests, 'with the disappearance of the real'. Citing Hannah Arendt's notion that the 'real world' began with the invention of an Archimedean point outside the world – the telescope and modern mathematical calculation – Baudrillard implies that scientific knowledge began with a subject/object dichotomy in which the subject dominates the object with concepts, scientific laws and theories.

Baudrillard paradoxically suggests that the real vanishes into a concept and that once it is named, it loses its energy, noting: 'By representing things to ourselves, by naming them and conceptualizing them, human beings call them into existence and at the same time hasten their doom, subtly detach them from their primal reality.' Marx's class struggle becomes a slogan and piece of intellectual history; Freud's Unconscious becomes a cliché and part of an intellectual and business apparatus of psychoanalysis; and globalization becomes a marketing slogan or new form of evil for its opponents. Hence, while for Heidegger and others language creates a world and brings it into being, for Baudrillard theoretical language freezes and reifies the world and begins a process of draining the real into concepts.

In *The Perfect Crime* (1996 [1995]), Baudrillard argues that 'reality', in the current media and technological society, is disappearing in a 'perfect crime', which involves the 'destruction of the real'. In a world of appearance, image, illusion, virtuality and hyperreality, where it is no longer possible to distinguish between the virtual and the real, Baudrillard suggests that reality disappears, although its traces continue to nourish an illusion of the real. Just as meaning imploded into the media in his 1970s work, so in the 1990s work reality too imploded into the worlds of the media, computers and virtuality.

The disappearance of the real through the human project of the domination of the object by the subject leads inexorably in Baudrillard's logic to the disappearance of the human and the subject itself. As human beings produce a world of astonishing objects, even attempting to clone themselves and postpone or overcome death, the inhuman object world overpowers the

subject and its agency, so that 'the subject as agency of will, of freedom, or representation; the subject of power, of knowledge, of history – is disappearing'.[1]

The 'Great Disappearance' includes the distinctive features of the modern world, its most valued activities such as Art, Politics and Religion. Baudrillard has long valorized an 'art of disappearance', referring as an example to photography capturing the singularity of the object, devoid of subjectivity, in an emptiness, grasping the delicacy of the world outside of art, ideology, reality and subjectivity (see Baudrillard, 1997b: 28–31). Yet over the past decade, he has increasingly spoken of the disappearance of art into the world, losing its realm of autonomy and specificity.[2] Likewise, he sees politics and religion as imploding into the world, citing Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) warning that a

> religion which accommodates to the world, which attunes itself to the (political, social …) world, becomes superfluous. It is for the same reason – because it became increasingly merged with objective banality – that art [and politics – DK], ceasing to be different from life, has become superfluous.

And yet, paradoxically, Baudrillard suggests that 'everything that disappears – institutions, values, prohibitions, ideologies, even ideas – continues to lead a clandestine existence and exert an occult influence'. The subject disappears, but leaves ghosts, fragments and remains behind. The 'end-of-world subjectivity' itself is a 'diffuse, floating … ectoplasm' that envelops everything, but no longer has an object, reality or world to stand over against as it has disappeared into this world.

I read 'On disappearance' as a pedagogical heuristic to reflect on what has disappeared, what is no longer and no more, such as our modern concepts of reality, meaning, the subject, the social, or those autonomous domains of modernity such as art, politics, religion or sexuality. Their disappearance, he tells us in this enigmatic meditation, is not the result of an evolutionary process, but is a 'singular event … which is not negative at all'.

Baudrillard is a theorist of break and rupture whose thought grasps fundamental changes and novelties in the contemporary era.[3] While there are sometimes overtones of a messianic and apocalyptic vision in his work, his is not a utopian one. For more conventionally utopian thinkers, an 'event' is a positive rupture in history where something new appears, where possibilities emerge, where utopia shines. For Baudrillard, by contrast, the event can signal the disappearance of something important and fundamental – like reality, the world, art, politics and the human itself. And yet he is not a nihilistic thinker as there are liberatory moments and possibilities in the leaving behind and disappearance of the old and advent of the new, so, at bottom, disappearance 'is not negative at all'.

Just as Baudrillard's early work on modernity predicates a break between modern and premodern societies, so too does his post mid-1970s work until

his death posit a break between modern societies and something new that has been called by some 'the postmodern', although many Baudrillard cadres have trouble enunciating the word and do everything possible to protect Baudrillard from contamination from this unspeakable rupture. And yet Baudrillard constantly posits epochal ruptures – between premodern and modern societies and between modern and postmodern ones, most pronouncedly perhaps in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and *The Ecstasy of Communication*. I would suggest that 'On disappearance' can be read in this register. For Baudrillard is talking of the end and disappearance of the key concepts and domains of the modern era and the entrance into a new conceptual and social space. Thus, in what appeared as his last major text before his death, Baudrillard tells us not only to pay attention to what is new and different in our contemporary moment, but to reflect on what has disappeared.

Hence, Baudrillard's Big Ideas concern rupture and disappearance.[4] The rupture between modern, premodern and postmodern animated much of his thought since the 1970s, and with rupture and novelty comes disappearance – as well as reversibility, radical uncertainty and the need for new oppositional modes of thought and writing. If the era of production has been replaced by an era of simulation and seduction, then the terrain of critique has been supplanted from the real to the symbolic and the imaginary. If the rupture has occurred or is occurring, we are in a situation of reversal and radical uncertainty.[5] Situating oneself in a terrain beyond rupture and in radical uncertainty requires reflection on what is disappearing and what has already disappeared. Thus, his text 'On disappearance' can be situated in the constellation of his key ideas and used to reflect anew on Baudrillard's legacy. Let us, then, carry on the work of mourning by thinking anew Baudrillard's key thoughts and the constellation in which they emerged and continue to live in.

Notes

1 On Baudrillard's metaphysical scenario of the triumph of the object over subject and displacing of the subject to which he is alluding here, see Kellner (1989, 2006).
2 On Baudrillard and the end of art, see my article in this volume, 'Baudrillard and the art conspiracy'.
3 On Baudrillard and rupture, see Kellner (1989, 2006).
4 Cf. Coulter (2004). I would suggest that rupture and disappearance are connected with reversibility, as in the reversal between a modern era of production and that of simulation, which Baudrillard signals with an evocative 'the end … ' (of political economy, of labour as organizing principle of society, and so on). When a rupture occurs and things disappear one enters inevitability into a scene of reversal and implosion as when alienation is reversed by the 'ecstasy of communication', the production and proliferation of meaning and information turn into non-sense and noise, the sovereignty of the subject is displaced by the object, or when the real turns out to be an illusion and illusion and the symbolic give us more

illuminating perspectives on the world. Hence, perhaps Baudrillard appears in his afterlife as a Trinitarian with Three Great Thoughts: rupture, disappearance and reversibility. Or, as I suggest in the text above, a shifting, open and complex constellation.

5 Here I tip my hat to Mike Gane (2000), who privileges 'radical uncertainty' as a key Baudrillardian idea. I am suggesting here that there is a constellation of fundamental Baudrillardian ideas and want to nominate rupture and disappearance as important parts of the mix.

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Mark Poster

Jean Baudrillard's work has been essential in understanding the media culture of the second half of the twentieth century. One might say that his works constitute the most elaborate and compelling theory of televisual culture, along with more general transformations of Western culture in general commonly referred to as 'postmodern'. He has been praised and blamed for this. Yet his readership has been broad and international in scope.

This paper, 'On disappearance', is difficult to respond to. Even when Baudrillard speaks in his conclusion about the ambiguity of the current situation, the ambiguity that he sees is one between the situation being either a curse that we suffer or a pleasure into which we may retreat. What I don't find in 'On disappearance' is any alternative to the situation Baudrillard finds himself in, any possible resistance to it or any possible renewal as an outcome to it. There is a sense in his short essay that appearance and disappearance is a dialectical process, but I don't find the appearance part of the dialectic in any way developed or explored. I don't see any new projects emerging in the situation. It's as if time has come to a halt and humanity is stuck in some morass or bog. Baudrillard mentions in passing the Promethean project of mastering the universe and acquiring exhaustive knowledge of it, and then constituting the real and a relationship to that knowledge. Perhaps that is what is disappearing in all of its elaboration, such cultural figures as the subject, for example. But what I don't find in the essay is any sense of, any possibility of a new project, of an alternative project.

When he speaks of the prominence of information technology in the world today, of the Internet and the virtual, he speaks of it as a split between information machines and the human. But it seems to me that there is a project here. One might frame the relation of information machines and humans as one of an assemblage, of an intersection, of IT and the human, and it seems to me that that is indeed a project, one that we must take on and shape in the most beneficial way possible. Our situation then – and this is so at the global level – is one confronting a possible new relation of humans to machines and attempting to shape it in a way that recognizes the life qualities of information machines and the machinic qualities of the human. Without recognition of the extraordinary task before us, 'On disappearance' leaves the reader without hope, without a counter-project, simply genuflecting to what our dangerous major institutions of the nation state and the trans-national corporation will choose to do with the situation of unprecedented information technology.

Although I admire the essay's perceptiveness about the unravelling of Modernity, as an historian I always look for something new emerging in the wreckage of the old. Then the problem becomes how to shape this emergence in a way that is conducive to and commensurate of freedom.

An additional comment: it seems to me that there is a passage in Baudrillard's paper that, as it stands, is guilty of arrogance. When he writes concerning the subject that is left after the disappearance of the Subject, he is talking about everyone on the planet, and this is so in a cultural sense. He complains that individuality is

> giving way to a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity, an ectoplasm that envelops everything and transforms everything into an immense sounding board for a disembodied, empty consciousness …; each molecule caught in the toils of a definitive narcissism, a perpetual image-playback … an end-of-world subjectivity.

It seems to me that the only way one can interpret this is as a projection, I am sorry to say. There is nothing representational about the statement. There is nothing evocative. There is nothing corresponding to anything that I see before me. If this is Baudrillard's impression of the world around him, it certainly does not take into account a myriad of phenomena that point in interesting and potentially fruitful directions. For example, a friend of mine recently gave a talk to Iranian Marxists, with the aid of a translator. But he remained in Los Angeles during the event, connecting with his audience through computer telephony, using VoIP. Some 300 people, gathered around 100 dispersed computers, were able to 'attend' the presentation. During the question period, one Iranian oil worker disputed the speaker's understanding of Marx's concept of value. Quite extraordinary. This kind of global conversation is increasing and is possible only with networked computers and digital culture. Could this be the basis for a new public sphere to begin a

popular discussion of a global politics? If so, it would represent the beginnings of integration of human with information machine that comes to terms with our 'situation' on the planet today.

Richard G. Smith

Baudrillard further clarifies a primary theme of his oeuvre, namely his interest in the fate of the object and his commitment to a form of analysis from the standpoint of the object. Baudrillard has been both long-standing and unswerving in his commitment to anti-humanism, to throwing into question the metaphysical equation of subject/object, and this essay is further testament to that insistence. Moving on from the much publicised 'death of the subject' that was announced back in the 1970s, when the subject was removed from the centre of the stage but still remained through a kind of minimal humanism, Baudrillard argues that what we are witnessing is nothing less than the disappearance of the human. There is a vanishing of will and freedom, precisely because consciousness is now everywhere, absorbed into the world of objects. And the object is now victorious over the subject because it has short-circuited it, so that now *it is the inhuman that thinks us.* In other words, the world without us, rather than a world about us, has arrived.

The real world is an invention (Arendt) that started to disappear as soon as it was named and turned into a concept (the owl of Minerva flew out). It has disappeared, precisely because all we are now left with is the real world (the apogee of materialism) where illusion has been dispelled and so all need for representation has ended. All that is left is a purely operational artificial world, where human desires, dreams, phantasies, utopias, ideas and concepts are bound up with the deployment of material and mental technologies. It is in this sense, notes Baudrillard, that the human species has managed to make itself disappear from a world that no longer needs subjects.

Now what is interesting about Baudrillard's provocation is not to read it from the perspective of the despairing subject; as a dystopian description of the latest stage of techno-capitalism, and consequently something for the Left to fret about. Rather, we should read Baudrillard's essay as an invitation to change the rules of theoretical production, a provocation, to attempt a way of doing theory that is without the human subject; an invitation to see what the world is like as it is, without all the add-ons – values, ideologies, meanings, etc. – which a theory of the subject inevitably brings. The disappearance of the subject as agency and power is what interests Baudrillard; the dissolution of consciousness, the division of the subject into things means that analyses centred on the subject are now superfluous and inconsequential. It is time to root out the subject altogether and to claim the object, not as an accursed part of the subject, as a poor relation, but as passionate. In short, an objective theory – not a theory of objects – needs to be seized. We must smash the mirror of representation. *Please Follow Me.*

Baudrillard's position is a reversal – the object strikes back against triumphant subjectivity – of the French philosophical tradition of developing subject-based philosophies, exemplified by its global icons, namely Descartes and Sartre. Furthermore, Baudrillard goes beyond structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction which declared the 'death of the subject', beyond an exposé of the untenable position of the subject in power, knowledge or history, beyond the problematic of alienation, to adopt the only position perhaps now available, that of the object. While the object has been marginalized in the discourse of other thinkers – placed behind bars – with priority being given to subject-centred theorizing, Baudrillard has been consistent in his siding with the object, offering – at different times throughout his oeuvre – a number of objective strategies: his 'silent strategies' (mass-as-object), 'seductive strategies' (femininity-as-object) and 'fatal strategies' (evil-as-object) are all variations of this theme, of his overall move towards an objective nihilism.

For many Baudrillard's resolutely anti-humanist strategy, as starkly outlined in 'On disappearance', to drop the human subject altogether (the disappearance of the human) will be a step, and a provocation, too far; treason against the royal road of subjectivity. Indeed, it is undoubtedly very hard to let go of humanism, of the illusion that the individual subject or collective subject has conscious will and agency, to accept that the techno-capitalist system can operate without meaning. So be it, but – if Baudrillard is correct – that will not stop you from disappearing! That said, perhaps it is these very illusions – undoubtedly neglected by Baudrillard in his rush to the side of the object – that we should now (after Baudrillard) be paying more attention to. After all, we all know that illusions really do matter, deserving our attention, precisely because how things seem is often more important than how they actually are.

To conclude, according to Baudrillard's particular brand of post-poststructuralism – one that is writ large in his essay – the human is disappearing, and praxis is meaningless. Baudrillard invites us to follow his strategy in siding with the object (*le cristal se venge*, please follow me, terrorism, the negativity of the object, etc.), precisely because any other revolutionary option is, for him, disappearing. However, what if things are not as Baudrillard supposes? Is Baudrillard's stance of objective nihilism the only journey now left available, the only way to challenge? After all, we could not follow him towards the side of the object; we could choose the side of illusion, and concern ourselves with how things appear to be.

Andrew Wernick

For such an enigmatic paper, it is a remarkably productive provocation. I would like to offer four comments.

First, an observation about Baudrillard himself, who isn't here (to present his paper in person, to respond to our replies).[1] That's a physical 'not here'.

And he's not well, which points to another kind of 'not here' – a disappearance which casts a shadow over our discussion, and over his words too, though not without (presumably intended) irony. Exit Baudrillard, with an essay on disappearance, delivered *in absentia*. But there is another kind of personal nothingness and disappearance wrapped up in this gesture which is also worth noting. Baudrillard is a celebrity, and he's a celebrity who doesn't like being a celebrity, as far as I can tell. To be sure, his freelance career has depended on it, as also his intellectual independence (from academia especially). But the celebrity lives the split between the living and the representation, a doubling which, for the thinker and his words, in this age of ubiquitous media, presents an especial risk and dilemma. I think this has been a conscious factor for some time. 'Who is the real Baudrillard?' he asked an audience at Leicester a few years ago. Baudrillard is concerned practically, then, as well as theoretically with (symbolic) disappearance. The writer/thinker must die – as 'Baudrillard' – to become real. Which is not to reduce the paper to (auto)biography, just to say there's a reflexivity to what he's talking about.

I was struck, second, by how much this paper echoes with phrases that Baudrillard threw around to our complete bafflement in the mid 1970s: appearing and disappearing, the art of disappearing, making the real appear again, even (my favourite, in an interview with Lotringer) 'bringing the real into a state of grace'. I think he has never ceased playing with what plays in these phrases. They are metaphysical, as he says, as well as (in the non-banal sense) sociological, but what do they mean? One key he gives us is Manicheanism. For him, this implies not just dualism (or 'duelism'). It also implies a certain ('Eastern' or neo-platonic) understanding of the world as not real, of there being a real beyond the real, and of this (not two forces) as constituting the two poles of the cosmic dual/duel. I think that he continues to wrestle with this heretical figure – hence, for example, his perverse reference, here, to Ratzinger's cautioning against the Church disappearing into being a mirror of the world.

In terms of the paper's more 'sociological' content I would note, third, how succinct a summary it presents of all that Baudrillard has been talking about for so long, and what light it throws as well on his intellectual trajectory. It is all there: from the dialectic of enlightenment to updated theses about nihilism and technology – theses that out-Heidegger Heidegger (and out-Freud Freud, and out-Marx Marx) in their vision of the evolutionary turn that has led, as the apogee of world-mastery, to the disappearance (and ghostly re-inflation) of the human, the subject, history, art, the real, and so on.

But one particular trope stands out. Things are disappearing, but they don't know that they are disappearing. Art doesn't know that it is disappearing; the subject doesn't know that it is disappearing. And things keep on disappearing, without realising that that is so: 'Whereas the whole trick is to know how to disappear before dying and instead of dying.' The 'trick' I'll come to in a minute. But note also the nihilist metaphorics that run through

his characterisation of the post-human: a world in which the will to master things has eventuated not only in things taking over, but in our whole artificial world taking over, whose verisimilitude, through a fantastic technological twist, we have learned to perfect. This is nihilism completed, with a vengeance. And no Dionysian dance. On the one hand simulation has abolished the distinction between the real and the apparent; on the other, we have made a Golem, and the stage crowds with vampires and zombies. What Baudrillard offers us, in effect, is a modified Nietzschean formula. This isn't the death of God, it's the undeath of God; not the death of the subject, but the undeath of the subject (a 'living death' in which the subject-become-zombie is enveloped in 'an ectoplasm of subjectivity'). All of which suggests, though Baudrillard doesn't go there, the paradigmatic significance of goth.

But – to come to my last point – Baudrillard's line of flight has shifted. This is no longer, he insists, a 'fatal strategy'. Here, reversibility (as the 'art of disappearance') gives itself the more cheerful image of the Cheshire Cat leaving behind its smile. But what kind of an exit is that?

We are given two clues. One is when he refers to art, and how art has been dead for a long time, to the point where the death of art is itself dead as a mode of artistic expression. And yet a different kind of art is possible, something closer, he says, to 'a martial art'. Not critical theory, then, nor yet fatal theory, nor even, quite, theory-as-art – the way of the aesthete. This is, rather, theory (meaning also a kind of writing) as judo. So the paper is performative, a move in a contest. It tries to throw the reader, or better perhaps, to throw 'the real'.

The second hint comes at the very end. The last line leaves us dangling, with 'a contradictory two-pronged assumption, for which no resolution can be found'. Either – from a critical, progressive, left-wing perspective – we can regard the world he is describing (but is it really ours?) as accursed, the very hell of dehumanisation, whence lament, outrage, nostalgia. Or we can take a certain pleasure from playing with it, in a poetics of disappearance (but where is the pleasure, or is this a Buddhist smile?). Question on question, but above all the paper leads us not to one conclusion but two, each ineluctable, but absurd and illusory from the point of view of the other. This unresolvability itself, I would say, is the paper's parting smile: at one and the same time, the sign of escape to nirvana (the exquisite pleasure of self-disappearance amid the embraced disappearance of transcendence in general), and an unsettling challenge, a judo throw within a duel, the contestative trace, within a diminished field of possibilities, of a residual activism.

Note

1 I have left these words, and ones that follow, in the present tense, just as they were spoken during the 'Engaging Baudrillard' conference in Swansea on 6 September 2006. Baudrillard's paper was read for him (by Mike Gane), and this commentary was offered immediately afterwards.

4 Baudrillard's taste

Rex Butler

> The concept … calls for a specifically philosophical *taste*.
>
> (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 8)

What is the difference between first- and second-order thought? Between thought as event and thought as commentary? Between thought as coming from outside of history and thought as existing only within history? We seek to answer these questions here with reference to Jean Baudrillard's (2005b) *The Conspiracy of Art*.[1] In this collection, Baudrillard makes a distinction between the art he likes and the art he dislikes by arguing that the art he dislikes belongs to a certain 'conspiracy of art' that extends to it a credibility (both critical and financial) it does not deserve. It is this 'conspiracy' that Baudrillard hopes to expose and bring to an end. But if we read closely the various essays and interviews that make up the book, we will see that the distinction Baudrillard wants to make cannot in fact be made, that according to the logic he sets out it is a matter not of different artists or works of art being either good or bad but of the same artist or work of art being both good and bad. Good and bad are not so much aesthetic qualities that are applied to the work as a kind of split that occurs within it. And the same goes for the notion of 'conspiracy'. It is not something according to which we can take sides or say definitively which side we are on. It is, on the contrary, something in which we are all involved, and in relation to which we cannot be sure who is inside and who is outside. Conspiracy, like 'good' and 'bad' in Baudrillard's use of these terms, is not so much a stable category as a performative action. It divides up what it speaks of, proposing two radically different and irreconcilable ways of looking at it. It *doubles* what it is applied to, ensuring that it must henceforth be looked at twice, in parallax, as it were.

Baudrillard, as we will see, gets his own logic 'wrong' in *Conspiracy of Art*, opposing good and bad art when he says he does not wish to and attempting to step outside of the 'conspiracy' he identifies when he says there is no outside of it.[2] We can see him falling short of the standard his own work sets, making the same mistakes he condemns in others. And yet – this

is the very distinction between first- and second-order thought we are trying to put our finger on here – it is just this criticism his own work produces, takes into account in advance. In disputing with his work in these terms, we are merely following a rule this work already sets. That is, it is not, as might be thought, because of its empirical correctness or internal consistency that Baudrillard's work is powerful, but precisely because it is split like this. It means that, if there is no way of properly following it (because it does not offer a repeatable rule before its examples), there is also no way of *not* following it (because even not to follow it is to follow it). And it is in this sense that we describe Baudrillard's work – and significant thought in general – as a form of conspiracy. It is split and it introduces a split into what it speaks about. It is because Baudrillard is unable to follow the rule his own work sets that he is able to put forward an explanation from which art cannot escape. It is his conspiracy that proves to be greater and more encompassing than that of contemporary art. It is his version of events that accounts for art's, provides the secret logic that it follows, even if it is unaware of it.

What, then, is the specific situation of art that Baudrillard is responding to? What are his objections to the so-called conspiracy of art? The criticisms Baudrillard makes of contemporary art in *Conspiracy of Art* take a very particular form. He does not – at least obviously – condemn it for a lack of aesthetic quality. He does not single out individual artists or works of art and say they are bad. He does not even hold contempt for those dealers, critics and curators who are the 'inside traders' of the institutionalised art world (*CA*, 26). Rather, he addresses a certain logical paradox that he finds repeated everywhere in contemporary art, and that prevents any kind of critical distance able to be taken with regard to it. It is the way in which there is no point in accusing contemporary art of being null and worthless because the work already admits this, and doing so would imply that it is not in fact null and worthless. That is, negative judgement no longer comes from outside of the work, but is already taken into account by it, is what the work is already about. Indeed, this negative judgement does not even come after the work because the work would not exist without it. The work is not so much anything in itself as the very relationship between it and its hypothetical future spectator. In a certain way, the work attempts to take up a certain meta-position with regard to its own judgement, so that this judgement is at once pre-empted and rendered redundant – and it is this, consistent with his view that in a properly seductive relationship the 'player must never be bigger than the game' (1990c [1987b]: 80), that Baudrillard objects to in contemporary art.

These are the defining characteristics of contemporary art that Baudrillard addresses in his 1996 essay 'The conspiracy of art'. In it, he seeks to analyse a particular logic of self-accusation that, for all of its specificity to art (this is why art might still function as a kind of avant-garde for Baudrillard), is also to be seen in the fields of sexuality, politics and economics. In each, we can see the same pre-empting of criticism by the system turning on itself, incorporating its own other or opposite in advance. As Baudrillard writes:

> All [pornography] can do is make a final, paradoxical wink – the wink of reality laughing at itself in its most hyperrealist form, of sex laughing at itself in its most exhibitionist form, of art laughing at itself and at its own disappearance in its most artificial form, irony. In any case, the dictatorship of images is an ironic dictatorship. Yet this irony itself is no longer part of the accursed share. It now belongs to insider trading … Of course, all of this mediocrity claims to transcend itself by moving art to a second, ironic level. But it is just as empty and insignificant on the second as the first level. The passage to the aesthetic level salvages nothing; on the contrary, it is mediocrity squared. It claims to be null – 'I am null! I am null!' – *and it truly is null* … The flip side of this duplicity is, through the bluff on nullity, to force people *a contrario* to give it all some importance and credit under the pretext that there is no way that it could be so null, that it must be hiding something. Contemporary art makes use of this uncertainty, of the impossibility of grounding aesthetic value judgements, and speculates on the guilt of those who do not understand it or who have not realized that there is nothing to understand.
>
> (*CA*, 26, 27, 28)

Our problem with what Baudrillard is saying here would not be a matter of him being caught up in what he criticises insofar as it was his writings that were the inspiration behind those artists from whom he now distances himself (*CA*, 47–8). Nor would it be a matter of Baudrillard in these later writings on art engaging in that same 'recycling' of previous material he objects to in contemporary art (*CA*, 55–6). If anything, we would criticise Baudrillard for *not* realising that he is caught up in what he criticises. Our difficulty with what he is saying would lie in the fact that he *does* think that he can propose an alternative to this 'conspiracy of art'. What he does not understand, that is, is that exactly in making his criticisms of contemporary art he is himself only repeating its logic, that his accusations of its nullity are already what it takes into account and turns to its advantage (as actually happened).[3] There is simply no way of calling contemporary art null, even nullity or mediocrity squared, without this being seen as what the art itself is already *about*. What Baudrillard does not see, in other words, is that it is not by criticising or standing outside of this conspiracy that we might go beyond it, but only by pushing its logic to the end, by demonstrating that there is nothing outside of it. It is only at this point that we might discover that this conspiracy is the effect of something else; that any named conspiracy is not the real conspiracy, or would always fall short of the real conspiracy, insofar as the real conspiracy could never be named or known.

What in fact are the terms in which Baudrillard seeks to make the distinction between the art he likes and the art he dislikes in *Conspiracy of Art*? What is it that he opposes to this 'conspiracy', in which all criticisms are recuperated in advance? Ultimately, Baudrillard does not argue for art but

for a form of 'anthropology', which does not come out of history but is a form of singularity outside of any concept of influence or filiation (*CA*, 65). That is, it is not any actual object or artefact he is interested in but the 'emptiness' it reveals (*CA*, 58). The work he advocates does not speak *about* nullity, as with so much contemporary art, but directly *embodies* it (*CA*, 27). Baudrillard opposes our current state of aesthetic disillusionment, in which there is nothing behind the image, in favour of a paradoxical illusion, which is able to show that 'nothingness' at the heart of the system of signs (*CA*, 115). It is this that Baudrillard summarises as the distinction between 'true' and 'false' simulation ('true' simulation being the somewhat surprising term he uses for the art he admires) (*CA*, 108). And Baudrillard attempts to identify in *Conspiracy of Art* that moment when art first shifts from 'true' to 'false' simulation. After admitting that Jeff Koons is not too bad – thus opening up the possibility that this decline begins after those 'simulationists' he would otherwise condemn – he locates it as occurring after the work of Andy Warhol (*CA*, 49). Then, it is said to take place in the passage between the early and the late Warhol (*CA*, 58) (although in an earlier text, 'Is pop an art of consumption?', Baudrillard already expresses doubts about Warhol).[4] Then, he points to Duchamp's readymades as marking the beginning of a generalised aesthetics that would be the end of art (*CA*, 52). Finally, it is after – or perhaps even with – Baudelaire's notion of the 'absolute commodity' that the indifferent trading of art first becomes possible (*CA*, 99).

To be seen throughout Baudrillard's argument here is what we might call a generalised logic of *nostalgia*.[5] By this we mean not merely, as other commentators have pointed out, Baudrillard's use of previous cultural forms to stand against our current circumstances (for example, his invocation of the 'primitive' conception of *kula* or potlatch as a possible model of art) (*CA*, 159–60). It is not even the way in which Baudrillard's preference for certain kinds of art can only be justified in the name of outmoded values he would otherwise contest (for example, his characterisation of the art he admires in terms of 'aura' (*CA*, 108), the 'sublime' (*CA*, 106), 'genius' (*CA*, 108), and so on). Rather, nostalgia here would be a way of indicating the necessity for Baudrillard to keep on searching for an always earlier moment when art was not yet simulation, insofar as any such moment he identified would end up being revealed as belonging to simulation. That is, if we read Baudrillard's various accounts of the fall of art into simulation in historical order, we will notice that each operates as an implicit critique and correction of the one before. Baudrillard's analysis has to keep on going back further and further in order to locate that 'omega point' (*CA*, 67) with which his analysis can begin. If Koons is not too bad, then already by Warhol simulation has become 'unoriginal' (*CA*, 117). If Warhol exposes the 'nothingness' at the heart of the image, then already by Duchamp there is only a banalised aesthetics (*CA*, 62). If Duchamp with his readymades inaugurates something radical, then already with Baudelaire art has become something vulgar and

mercantile (*CA*, 99). If Baudelaire manages to think the pure and inexchangeable fetish that would contest art's commodification …

In fact, we might go even further than this and suggest that this split does not just occur *between* the various figures in Baudrillard's history but *within* each one. That is, if we read that list above, we can see that not only is one artist being used to correct the understanding of another, but the same artist is being used on both sides of the distinction Baudrillard is attempting to make. Each both stands against the principle of simulation and is the first to introduce it into art. Each at once makes the last 'primitive' work of art as it should be and the first 'contemporary' work that is the end of art. It is this that becomes clear if we read *Conspiracy of Art* as a whole: that, for all of Baudrillard's attempt to make a distinction between good and bad art, he himself is unable to maintain this distinction with regard to the figures he uses to demonstrate it. And this is why, if in one way what Baudrillard seems to be narrating here is the irreversible history of the decline of art into simulation, in another way it is the perpetually renewed story of an aesthetic or ontological alternative. Art does not irreversibly decline, or this decline can go on forever, because the two alternatives between which Baudrillard attempts to choose cannot be separated. The distinction Baudrillard seeks to bring about could not be evidenced historically, or it is not something that emerges over time, but works in some other way (it would be a hypothesis that could never be proved in history, but opens up the very possibility of history).

This ambiguity also takes another form in Baudrillard's discourse. As we have already seen, Baudrillard makes a distinction between the art he likes and the art he dislikes by suggesting that the art he dislikes seeks to redeem its meaninglessness by speaking of it, and thus is meaningless: 'It claims to be null – "I am null! I am null!" – *and it truly is null*.' As opposed to this, the art he likes would go all the way into meaninglessness, at a certain point assuming another destiny, and thus is not meaningless: '[Warhol] turns nullity and insignificance into an event that he changes into a fatal strategy of the image' (*CA*, 28). But here, of course, in the very process of explaining the difference between the two kinds of art, these supposed opposites meet and cross over. Insofar as Baudrillard characterises the art he dislikes as truly meaningless, as ultimately containing no meaning, it would resemble the art he likes; and insofar as Baudrillard characterises the art he likes as taking on another meaning, something that would redeem it from simple meaninglessness, it would resemble the art he dislikes. It is the ironic self-reflection of simulationist art in not going all the way to the end of meaning that in the end makes it meaningless, and it is this going to the end of meaninglessness and at that point ironically turning back on itself that prevents the art Baudrillard likes from going all the way into meaninglessness. Paradoxically, it is the same term that is intended to force art to go all the way to the end that renders it incapable of doing so, while it is the lack of end or finality that Baudrillard diagnoses in contemporary art that constitutes a real end.

Of course, in all of this contemporary art is a perfect example of what Baudrillard calls the third order of simulation, in which a system works not directly but through a kind of self-criticism or self-denunciation (*CA*, 69). The point Baudrillard makes about contemporary art is exactly the one he makes about the third order of simulation, which is that at once there is nothing outside of the system because all waste or nullity is returned to it and it is this that means the system is truly waste or null. And the question that is always raised concerning Baudrillard's analysis of simulation – as we have seen with his analysis of art – is, what is Baudrillard's own relation to it? Is he inside or outside of it? We obviously do not have the space to go through Baudrillard's entire treatment of the status of the remainder within simulation, but we might select here two moments that perhaps come closest to the situation in contemporary art. In the first two chapters of *The Consumer Society*, 'The miraculous state of consumption' and 'The vicious circle of growth', Baudrillard brilliantly – and against economic common sense – defines consumption not in terms of any balanced, natural, rational satisfaction of biological needs, but as from the beginning excessive, sumptuary, artificial, caught up in a competitive battle of prestige and narcissistic self-reflection. This insight is decisive because it means that the system of consumption cannot function outside of a certain waste. It is henceforth a matter of matching not a pre-existing need with the object to satisfy it, but a desire that could never be satisfied (surplus-enjoyment) with something that is more than any object (surplus-value). We pass from what might be called a restricted to a general economy, in which there is always a certain waste or inefficiency; but this waste always reverts back to the system, ensuring not merely that it continues but that it permanently expands. As Baudrillard writes: '[T]hese compensatory expenditures, whether private or collective, which are intended to cope with dysfunctions rather than increase positive satisfaction, are *added in*, in all the accounts, *as part of the rise in the standard of living*' (*CS*, 40).

However, in the last chapter of the book, 'Anomie in the affluent society', Baudrillard speaks of the way that *this itself* (the fact that there is no waste) leads to a certain waste. Despite the fact – indeed, because of the fact – that all remainders are soaked up, a certain irreducible remainder is nevertheless produced. This would take the form of a certain 'objectless violence' and 'contagious depressiveness' (*CS*, 175). And yet, crucially, this is not a violence directed against the social or even produced by it. This kind of violence would merely be part of what Baudrillard calls the endless 'solicitude' (*CS*, 167–9) of the social, in which a remainder is produced by the social or leads only to a further expansion of the social. At the same time, therefore, as there is a waste produced by and leading to the social, there is another 'waste' that comes before this, which allows it. However – and this is the most complicated aspect of Baudrillard's argument – if in one way it is this 'waste' that allows the very relationship between waste and the social, in another way it can have no relationship to the social. For even to say that it

allows the social is ultimately only to make it part of the social, to ensure it returns to the social. Rather, if we require a word to describe how waste relates to the social, we would say that it *doubles* it. It at once completes the social, ensuring that it has no other, and is what means that the social has never begun, insofar as there are just as many remainders now as if it had never existed. What is revealed is that the social is not the ultimate principle of human organisation. It is something else that cannot be named, which catches both the social and its remainder up in a wider cycle.

These concerns return some eight years later in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, which in many ways is nothing more than an extended meditation on the last chapter of *Consumer Society*.[6] The book is perhaps best known for its three hypotheses concerning the relationship between the social and what Baudrillard calls the masses: that anonymous, undifferentiated majority of the population, to which all of us and none of us belong. The first hypothesis is that 'the social has basically never existed' (*SSM*, 70) The second is that 'the social has really existed, it exists even more and more' (*SSM*, 72). The third is that 'the social has well and truly existed, but does not exist any more' (*SSM*, 82). In a sense, what Baudrillard attempts to think through these hypotheses – not so much through any one of them as through his refusal to choose between them – is that the masses are not a simple limit to the social, but that limit produced when the social has no limit or that limit that allows the social to have no limit. The masses are what arise when, in fulfilment of the ideal of the social, all social fractions are soaked up and included within the social, and it is exactly through these masses that this soaking up is possible. As Baudrillard writes:

> Proportional to the reinforcement of social reason, it is the whole community which soon becomes residual and hence, by one more spiral, the social which piles up. When the remainders reach the dimensions of the whole of society, one has a perfect socialization.
>
> (*SSM*, 74)

But, as with waste in *Consumer Society*, the role the masses play in Baudrillard's analysis must be understood very carefully. For at the same time as the masses cannot be soaked up, it is the masses that ensure everything can be soaked up. We could no sooner name the masses as what is produced at the end of the social than the social would start up again on these masses. We could not even name the masses as what makes the social possible, without these masses secretly being determined by the social, imagined only as its complement or inversion. However, it is just *this* that the masses themselves allow. It is the very 'exclusion' of the masses that allows the exchange between the masses and the social. The true 'reversion' of the masses (*SSM*, 70) Baudrillard speaks of is that which comes before or after that named reversion of the masses into the social. The masses both make possible the social, which has no cause and no need to be explained by any

other, and for this reason have no relationship to the social, remain entirely outside of it. And it is just *this* relationship that the masses have with the social that Baudrillard attempts to think throughout *In the Shadow*. When he speaks of terrorism working by its 'non-representativity' and 'chain reaction' (*SSM*, 53) or speculates that it may be possible for the masses 'to communicate outside of the medium of meaning' (*SSM*, 36), it is fundamentally this relationship of non-relationship between the masses and the social that he is trying to elaborate.

Indeed, it is this complex problem of the relationship of the system to its remainder that runs through the entirety of Baudrillard's oeuvre. To take here one example, in *The Transparency of Evil* Baudrillard (1993b [1990a]: 102) speaks of the impression we have of New York running on an endless supply of energy: 'the city feeds on its own hubbub, its own waste, its own carbon-dioxide emissions – energy arising from the expenditure of energy, thanks to a sort of miracle of substitution.'[7] The city would thus appear to be the realisation of Alfred Jarry's fantasy of a bicycle that would continue to pedal even in the absence of its riders, or even the capitalist fantasy of a self-perpetuating and self-regulating economy. But Baudrillard's question, often overlooked by commentators dazzled by the force of his examples, is always, what is left out to produce this ceaseless recirculation? How is this seemingly inexhaustible source of energy paid for? Or, to show how these difficult questions of reversion keep coming back, we might look at the chapter 'Prophylaxis and evil', also from *Transparency of Evil*, in which Baudrillard asks: what is it that the contemporary pathology of AIDS points to? What still worse fate might it be protecting us from? Baudrillard's contentious point is that, far from representing a fatal disease, AIDS represents the turning back of our current system, of 'forced communication, programmed information and sexual promiscuity' (*TE*, 66), and better this small pathology than the unchecked effects of this interaction with the other. But, in fact, the true irony would be that any so-called worse fate AIDS is said to protect us from – even that of 'total promiscuity, a total loss of identity through the proliferation and speed-up of networks' (*TE*, 67) – could only stand in for and defer the true reversion of the system. It could only ever be imagined in terms of the system of simulation it is opposed to, just as AIDS itself today is no longer deadly to the system but a way of defending it, a form of auto-immunity with which we learn to live.[8]

Then there is the still more complicated question of how this remainder actually 'allows' the system of simulation. Here too, only a couple of examples must suffice. In *Screened Out*, Baudrillard speaks of the way that – again, typical of the third order of simulation – an enormous debt that would otherwise bankrupt the economy is able to be traded, released back into the world, via such things as futures and bonds, which take into account the possibility of the debtor defaulting. He writes of a gigantic and ever increasing debt 'circulating from one bank to another, one country to another, each buying it back from the others' (Baudrillard, 2002a [1997a]:

23). And yet Baudrillard also points to a finally unredeemable virtual debt that, existing in a parallel universe, at the same time allows the deferral of any final accounting and is already the catastrophe that is sought to be avoided. Or, again, in the chapter 'Exponential instability, exponential stability' from *The Illusion of the End*, Baudrillard (1994b [1992]: 110–14) attempts to think that this heading towards extremes of the world is possible only because of an exchange between what appears opposed (the system and its other) and that this exchange could be guaranteed only by something inexchangeable. It is everything Baudrillard means elsewhere by his notion of 'impossible exchange', which is not merely the end or impossibility of exchange but rather the necessary exchange that has already occurred between two inexchangeables (between a system that needs no other and a remainder that cannot be reverted) so that they can be inexchangeable (Baudrillard, 2001a [1999a]).

To return to *Conspiracy of Art*, the same ambivalent relationship between the system and its remainder is at stake there too. We have seen this already in the way that the exact terms in which Baudrillard seeks to make a distinction between the art he likes and the art he dislikes would always escape him. We have seen it also in the way that Baudrillard could no sooner propose 'nullity' as the reversion of the system of art than it would be merely that 'nullity' that art itself proposes and takes into account. And Baudrillard even admits this. As he says of his essay 'The conspiracy of art': 'What is nullity? … On the one hand, I use nullity as null or nothing, and on the other, I say: nullity is a tremendous singularity. This is a critique that could have been made' (*CA*, 62). But this ambiguity can be found throughout *Conspiracy of Art*, with the same term or object, insofar as it is the equivalent of this 'nullity', being understood both as the commutative other to art and as the void that precedes the very category of art. For example, Warhol like those simulationist artists Baudrillard criticises can say 'I am nothing' (*CA*, 43), and it is good, and yet like Warhol contemporary art seems to bear witness to an 'irremediable void' (*CA*, 128), and it is bad. But, more generally, Baudrillard can say of Duchamp's readymades that they inaugurate the 'deadly chiasmus' (*CA*, 80) between art and reality that leads to a generalised aesthetics, and yet that they return us to that 'womb' in which appearances are born (*CA*, 128). He can oppose the indifferent exchange of objects, which thereby 'cease to exist in their finality; they only exist in relationship to each other' (*CA*, 71), and yet approve of the idea of pure forms that 'can only be exchanged among themselves' (*CA*, 63). He can speak against the 'fetishization' of the 'aesthetic world' (*CA*, 74), and yet positively argue for the object acting like a fetish 'with no aesthetic value' (*CA*, 123). And the same ambiguity, the same simultaneously positive and negative evaluation, marks as well Baudrillard's use of the terms 'insider trading', 'irony' and 'iconoclasm'.[9]

As we say, it is just at this point that we can see Baudrillard contradicting himself in attempting to make a distinction between what cannot be

distinguished, or making a distinction when he says he is not making a distinction. In a way, the 'good' art he is arguing for would be the indistinguishability of the object and the void that allows it, while 'bad' art would be the attempt either to have the object without the void behind it or to grasp this void immediately. The 'good' art he should be arguing for would be the very indistinguishability between what he calls good and bad art. But, in another way, Baudrillard is right to make this distinction. There is a difference between the objects of this world and that 'nothingness' for which they stand in that could be said to correspond to that between good and bad art. We could never say where this distinction falls – perhaps all works of art manage to present this 'nothing', perhaps none of them do. This 'nothing' could never be grasped directly, but only as a retrospective effect of it being lost, through what stands in for it. And yet this 'nothing' *does* introduce a distinction between things. After it, we must think what is, even our inability to make a distinction between things, the fact that the simulated world is all that there is, as the effect of a prior division between the world and what it stands in for. 'Good' art here – really no different to above – would be this division, or what allows us to think this division. 'Good' art would be the very split within the same work between good and bad art.[10]

Is this not what Baudrillard means by 'conspiracy' in its most profound sense? It too introduces a void into the world, makes it seem as though what is stands in for something else. It too divides the world up into two, introduces a split between inside and outside. But, properly thought through, these two sides must remain unidentifiable. We could never in a proper conspiracy say who was part of it and who not. If the notion of conspiracy introduces a split into the world, it is also permanently split itself, unable definitively to state the distinction it introduces. For the paradox of a conspiracy is that, precisely insofar as we know about it, it cannot be the real conspiracy, but merely take its place. Henceforth, after the hypothesis of a conspiracy, it is any named plot that is the absence of conspiracy and the absence of such a plot that is the very sign of a conspiracy. As Baudrillard writes: 'You can no more identify the instigators of this plot than you can designate the victims. The conspiracy has no author and everyone is both victim and accomplice' (*CA*, 166). What this might mean is that, unlike the third order of simulation as seen in contemporary art, if Baudrillard knows he is part of what he speaks of, makes the same mistakes of which he accuses others, he does not attempt to stand outside of this, redeem the 'nullity' or 'worthlessness' of what he says. In a sense, in making a distinction between good and bad art, he is opening himself up to something bigger than himself, some rule to which he is himself subject. If he contests the conspiracy of art, it is only because it does not go far enough, and he ultimately seeks to replace it with something that has no name, of whose rules and even existence we cannot be certain.

Would not, to conclude here, this 'conspiracy' be Baudrillard's model for theory in general? As he writes in the essay 'Radical thought', reprinted in *Conspiracy of Art*, the aim of theory is to put in place a 'strange attractor

that is spontaneously fed by a seduced reality and that therefore relentlessly verifies itself' (*CA*, 168). And yet, as he admits, there is nothing less seductive than a theory that is actually verified: 'A verifiable theory is no longer a theory' (*CA*, 171). A good theory, therefore, is at once irrefutable and undemonstrable. It doubles or duplicates the world exactly as it is – it 'literalises' it (*CA*, 46), as Baudrillard says of Warhol's screenprints – but we cannot say exactly what it means. We cannot but follow it, but we cannot simply follow it, because in a way like art itself it is only an effect of its future reader or spectator. And it is just this quality that marks the work of powerful thinkers, which lives on not by being empirically correct or even theoretically self-consistent, but only insofar as it is self-splitting and introduces a split. It lives on, in Baudrillard's words, in its own unending 'suicide' (*CA*, 107), its own 'ripping of the same from the same' (*CA*, 109). But it is this that means it can only be criticised in its own terms, or – what is the same thing – will always be seen in retrospect to be saying what its critics say it should be saying. It is just this internal inconsistency, this irony, this inability to put together enunciated and enunciation, that defines major thought, thus allowing subsequent commentators to enter it and make (or think they are making) it their own.[11] By contrast, minor thought is unable to do this in being consistent, in managing to reconcile what it speaks of and that place from where it speaks. Major thought, we might say, has *taste*, and minor thought does not. It forces us to see distinctions where there are none, for example, that between good and bad art, while for minor thought everything resembles everything else, all paintings are black in an unending night.

Notes

1 All further references to this text will be indicated by the initials *CA*.
2 Let us be clear here: at two points at least in *Conspiracy of Art*, Baudrillard says that he is not attempting to make a distinction between good and bad art, that he would not be capable of making such a distinction or that this is not what interests him when he speaks of a 'conspiracy of art' (*CA*, 55, 62). But, as we try to show, the whole force of Baudrillard's argument relies on such a distinction being made; running through his text is a whole oppositional use of terms, one side of which would correspond to the art he likes and the other to the art he dislikes. It is not that Baudrillard does not make a distinction between good and bad art, but that he shows – inadvertently, unironically – we could never say how this distinction is made, where this distinction falls.
3 See on this Lotringer's 'Introduction' to *Conspiracy of Art*: 'No sooner had Baudrillard's column ["The conspiracy of art"] been published in the French leftist newspaper *Libération* in May 1996 … than Baudrillard was deluged with invitations for art events, lectures, catalogue essays' (*CA*, 10).
4 See the section 'Pop: an art of consumption?' in *The Consumer Society* (Baudrillard, 1998a [1970]: 114–21). All further references to *Consumer Society* will be indicated by the initials *CS*.
5 Baudrillard takes up (and rejects) the accusation of nostalgia in *Conspiracy of Art* (*CA*, 74). Perhaps one of the earliest analyses of this structure of nostalgia in Baudrillard's work is provided by Turner (1987).

6 See *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Baudrillard, 1983 [1978]). All further references to this text will be indicated by the initials *SSM*.
7 All further references to this text will be indicated by the initials *TE*.
8 There is a good account of Baudrillard's argument in *Transparency of Evil* concerning AIDS in Hegarty (2004: 124–6).
9 That is, Baudrillard can at once criticise the elitism of the art world's 'inside trading', and yet approve of the 'radical snobbism' (*CA*, 47) of Warhol (thank you to David Johnson for this example). He can reject the irony of contemporary art reflecting upon its own worthlessness, and yet praise irony as the 'universal and spiritual form of the disillusion of the world' (*CA*, 121). He can condemn the image 'where there is nothing to see' (*CA*, 109), and yet Warhol's 'iconolatry' (*CA*, 43) would not be anything different.
10 The same considerations would apply to Gilles Deleuze's (1990 [1969]) attempt to distinguish between the 'icon' and the 'simulacrum' in the chapter 'Plato and the simulacrum'. Deleuze finds himself making a distinction between the two as part of his project to 'overturn' Platonism, even though the simulacrum would be itself the very indistinguishability between icon and the simulacrum. And Baudrillard too in his way returns us to this Platonic thematic with his distinction between 'true' and 'false' simulation.
11 It is exactly this inability to put together enunciated and enunciation that Baudrillard is referring in the following passage from 'Radical thought':

> This confusion [of thought with reality] relies on a complete misunderstanding of language, of the fact that language is illusion in its very movement, that it carries the continuity of the void, the continuity of nothingness in the very heart of what it says, that it is, in its materiality, the deconstruction of its signification. (*CA*, 167)

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5 Floral tributes, binge-drinking and the Ikea riot considered as an up-hill bicycle race

William Merrin

> The principle is to exaggerate: that is how to destroy reality.
> (Baudrillard, 2005b: 213)

At the starting line, Jean Baudrillard, on a tandem with Alfred Jarry behind, makes a good start …

Opening postulates of Baudrillardian 'patatheory[1]

1 Jean Baudrillard has developed a critique of our contemporary western, semiotic system from the standpoint of the symbolic.
2 His work has been animated from the first by the dual project of tracing the new (semiotic) forms of social control that govern and produce us today and searching for and discovering those (symbolic) forces that oppose and reverse this perfected system.
3 Baudrillard has escalated his description of this semiotic system throughout his career but alongside it he has also escalated his hopes for symbolic resistance, motivated by his belief in the radical presence and possibility of the latter as it spirals with and irrupts within the semiotic.
4 Baudrillard identifies three sources of irruption and reversal.
5 First there is the irruption of symbolic exchange within the societies that have expelled it.
6 Second there is the external resistance to the west among the surviving symbolic cultures of the world, opposing the homogenising export of our values, goods and military force.
7 … and third there is the internal reversal of the semiotic.
8 By *Symbolic Exchange and Death* Baudrillard began to foreground 'reversibility' – the form of the symbolic itself. Combining Mauss and McLuhan he now saw this form operating through semiotic processes, escalating these to create reversive forces within the semiotic system or cause its collapse at the point of its perfection (Baudrillard, 1993a [1976]: 1–5).

9 This led him to a new strategy: not one of opposition but one of exacerbation. 'Things must be pushed to the limit where, quite naturally, they collapse and are inverted' (1993a [1976]: 4).

10 Thus Baudrillard sees a range of reversive forms emerging within the system and multiplying in response to its own movement towards perfection and control. Far from celebration or nihilistic resignation, his work actively allows, searches for, discovers and embraces reversive modes of resistance …

11 … Searching for these internally reversive forces that push the system towards its collapse Baudrillard alights upon 'the masses' …

12 These are not the masses of Marxism – *as the referential real of revolution* – or of sociology – *as the referential real of social knowledge* – but a form owing more to McLuhan, as the product of the speed of the electronic media that forms them and which they, in turn, 'earth' and nullify, and to his own theory of simulation, as an 'innumerable, unnameable anonymous group': the simulacral echo-effect of social science's methodologies and the media's own exhortations to respond (Baudrillard, 1983 [1978]; 1993c: 90–1). If these 'masses' have an historical precedent it is perhaps found in Kierkegaard's 1846 critique of 'the public' – of that 'phantom'; that 'monstrous abstraction' and 'nothing' formed by the press itself and taking on an abstract power of action and desire (1962: 59–61).

13 While contemporary audience theory rejects the concept of 'the masses' as generalised, derogatory and implicitly passive, Baudrillard's use of the concept escapes this critique by simultaneously rejecting any reality or real relationship to an actual social group, problematising audience theory's own methodological and theoretical naïveté and discovering within these simulacral masses a greater power of resistance than the minor modes of 'activity' this theory valorises. This is the power of 'hyperconformity' (Baudrillard, 1993c: 90–1; 1983 [1978]: 41–8).

14 Baudrillard points to the masses' silence as one mode of hyperconformity – their refusal of response and absorption of all meaning, neutralising 'all the electricity of the social and political' (1983 [1978]: 1–2). This is certainly interesting but the strategy of hyperconformity is a broader phenomenon: definable as the excessive, parodic embrace and use, and overly eager and immediate accession to the messages, information, demands and direction of the system itself.

15 This is a strategy of 'destructive hypersimulation'. This embrace constitutes a potentially 'victorious challenge', pushing the system forward and exerting a reversive force that transforms the masses from 'the livestock of culture' into the 'catastrophic agent' of its 'radical negation' and 'execution' (1983 [1978]: 46–7; 1994a [1981]: 66). Far from being manipulated by the media, therefore, the masses are '*a stronger medium than all the media*', enveloping and absorbing it themselves (1983 [1978]: 44).

16 They don't wait for revolution or liberatory theories, Baudrillard says.

> They know that there is no liberation and that a system is only abolished by pushing it into hyperlogic, by forcing it into an excessive practice … 'You want us to consume – OK, let's consume, always more and anything whatsoever; for any useless and absurd purpose.'
>
> (1983 [1978]: 46)

17 If Baudrillard's critical focus on the symbolic is derived from the French, radical Durkheimian tradition, the form of his work, his ideas and their expression, owe a debt to the intellectual avant-garde traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The influence of Situationism is well documented but while Baudrillard was attracted to their critique of the spectacle his work lacks the self-regarding moralism and ideological seriousness of Debord, finding affinity instead in the earlier provocations of Dadaism and in the life-work and work-of-life of Alfred Jarry (see Shattuck, 1958). Jarry's writings stand as a clear precursor to Baudrillard's own, demonstrating a similar, singular and devastating wit aimed at the disruption of the profane, code-bound everyday life of Bourgeois society. Echoing Jarry's attack on physics and science, and equally enjoying the childish assault on the order of value, Baudrillard waves his own shitty stick at the sciences of society.

18 Jarry's most famous and grotesque creation was Père Ubu: that monstrous figure, originating in schoolboy spite and puppetry, carried forward into adulthood as *Ubu Roi*, to scandalise literary society on its first, and penultimate, performance on 10 December 1896 (Jarry, 2002). Ubu is an irredeemably gross, obese figure, defined by his *gidouille* – his belly – behaving as a childish, offensive, cowardly, amoral, vulgar, destructive, murdering simpleton. He stands as the parodic, pulsional figure of raw humanity: prey to every urge of his body; in tune with the scatological condition of man and at one with his guts. Exposing later Situationist rhetoric, Ubu takes his desires for reality to gorge himself on the real in an act of intestinal terrorism.

19 By *Fatal Strategies* Baudrillard also begins to talk of 'obesity'. Escalating again his depiction of western semiotic societies, he describes the exponential growth of their systems: their proliferation and passage to the point of 'ecstasy' and 'metastasis' – the living, excrescent death of systems bound by their superfluity. Thus 'obesity' is not only a problem for western individuals but of the entire system. It is a defining hallmark of an 'operational modernity' devoted to its continuing and endless production of images, information, meaning and communication (1990b [1983]: 25–34).

20 Here, perhaps, Baudrillard and Jarry collide. Ubu – that definitive obese figure, pushing things too far, destroying everything simply by following his every urge and bodily whim – represents the masses in an obese

system, embracing its excrescence, incarnating the process of its escalation and pushing the system on towards its own reversal.

21 I want, therefore, to name this moment – this point at which the system's weight becomes too great; the limit-point of the system's logic and the point of its internal collapse – as the point of *ubesity*: as the moment when parodic hyperconformity pushes obesity into a systemic spasm; a series of escalating contractions that seize the social body and reverse the perfected order, returning its undigested waste back upon itself …

22 For more than 200 years the west has lived under the 'spectre' of radical revolution – of withdrawal, refusal, frontal opposition and violent assault. These strategies, however, are useless, operating in the order of the real and allowing the full mobilisation of the system's overwhelming forces against them (Baudrillard, 2002b [2002]: 15). This spectre of revolution has distracted us from far more powerful possibilities of transformation. Looking only for heroic resistance, the agitators of explosive opposition have all missed the implosive, simulacral forces of exacerbation – the radical potential of *joining in*: of deliriously immersing oneself in the system's own logic until the point of breakdown.

23 Baudrillard's most famous example of hyperconformity producing reversal is his discussion of the masses' attempt to make the Beaubourg Centre structure bend (1994a [1981]: 61–73). His later work moves away from this idea, becoming more interested in other forms of internal reversal: other forms that emerge out of and reverse the dominant order such as Aids, cancer and terrorism (see 1993b [1990a]).

24 The aim of this paper, therefore, is to return to and revive the idea of the masses' hyperconformity as an efficacious force. To this end it offers a survey of the contemporary landscape of reversive non-events in the UK.

25 In deference to Jarry's own provocative presentation of the 'event' of the crucifixion as 'an up-hill bicycle race', I propose a similar tour by velocipede of those spatial moments of frenzied ubesity that, for a while at least, have threatened to rent the fabric of the everyday order …

We shall abridge the story of the race itself, for it has been narrated in detail by specialised works and illustrated by sculpture and painting visible in monuments built to house such art. Suffice it to say that at the second turn Jean Baudrillard and Alfred Jarry were passed by Princess Diana speeding past. Alas, her transportation crashes soon after in the underpass …

'A sea of blossoms' (August–September 1997)

In the early hours of Sunday 31 August 1997, reports of an accident involving Princess Diana began to filter through BBC news and radio. By the morning the UK was waking up to Martyn Lewis's announcement that 'Diana, Princess of Wales, has died after a car crash in Paris'. What followed, in the week leading up to her funeral on Saturday 6 September, was a

remarkable period of public 'mourning', subjected to saturation media coverage. Most contemporary commentators agreed that this was an event of huge significance, having an unprecedented impact upon the British political landscape and public psyche. By 3 October, Diana biographer Andrew Morton could be found on ITV's *This Morning* programme declaring Diana's funeral was 'the biggest event in history' (quoted in the *Sun*, 4 October 1997: 6).

For a brief while an equally hyperbolic and uncritical academic literature flourished to venerate the event of Diana's death (Walter, 1999; Kear and Steinberg, 1999; Richards *et al.*, 1999; Davies, 2001; Merck, 1998), until more empirical texts began to debunk the myth of national mourning (Thomas, 2002; Turnock, 2000). The public, however, had long moved on, conveniently choosing to forget the excesses of that time. The first anniversary of her death passed with barely a ripple and the 'Remembrance Walk' attracted fewer than 300 people (*Observer*, 'Review', 30 August 1998: 1). If at the time it seemed important to denounce this non-event (Merrin, 1999), with hindsight it is important now to resurrect and champion this histrionic outburst. For it was precisely this escalating simulacral grief that posed an internal, reversive threat to the media and the system of power.

Real grief could not have had this effect. Real grief is debilitating: as Freud explains, the 'distinguishing mental features' of mourning include 'a profoundly painful dejection' and a 'cessation of interest in the outside world' (Freud, 1984: 252). They don't include the need to travel to London with armfuls of flowers to be interviewed on live television in streets turned into a reality-show confessional. This was not real grief, therefore, but a simulacral grief for a simulacral figure: the enjoyable and enthusiastic public production and hyperrealisation of the signs of grief for an already hyperrealised, iconic figure. This was the semio-realisation of a model of public mourning developed in the 1980s through a series of tragedies in the UK: the flowers at the railings and the shrines of teddy bears, cards, gifts, balloons, poems and hand-written tributes; a made-for-TV model that the public threw themselves into, escalating the response to Diana's death into the *event* of her death. It was this media-derived simulacral grief fed back through the echo-chamber of the media and reproduced again in response that rapidly began to push the system's logic into crisis.

This process had already begun before the accident. In Diana's life the press thought they were playing in the order of the real: in the unilateral economic terrain of increasing circulation figures and accumulating profit, exploiting the public's love of Diana to boost sales while privately denigrating the predictable tastes of a mass that would buy anything with her face on the cover. What they failed to recognise was that supply and demand is a dual relationship; that they had been seduced into a potlatch of coverage and consumption and that demand had the greater power, having the potential, as a force of sheer id, to assume a terrible, voracious form. Nor did they realise that the public had embraced the tabloid coverage, taking every

declamation of Diana's goodness and humanity to its heart. Hence their surprise at the unconditional hyper-acceptance of their thickly ladled sentiment when she died. With Diana gone the public poured this sentiment back into circulation, mouthing back the tabloid platitudes about this saint, this icon, this idol. And in doing so they forced a press whose claimed function was to speak for and to the people into an escalating exchange of respects.

The BBC announcement on 31 August had said that 'normal programmes have been suspended while we bring you the latest developments', except that there were no more developments. Diana was dead and all that was left was the public reaction. With the media not reporting those *not* mourning and *not* travelling to lay flowers, the public mourning seized and held the news's attention, dominating the newspapers for the week. Trapped by their focus on the mourners and their reflection of this simulacral mood the press were pushed into an irreversible and escalating hyperrespectfulness: an uncritical, slavish adoration that abolished all journalistic pretensions to truth, objectivity and debate. And the more they did this the more it fed the public's hunger for their special editions and photo-souvenirs, eager to consume their own feelings printed back for them, and the harder it became to break this cycle and say anything else. As Lawson later admitted, journalists were 'terrified' of misjudging the public mood. One was even rebuked for expressing scepticism on air at a report that Diana's ghost had been seen watching over the condolence-book signings (Lawson, 2002).

The 'grief' escalated rapidly. By the Sunday, Kensington Palace had been transformed into 'a sea of blossoms and a river of tears' (Paul, 1997), as 'weeping crowds gathered in their thousands' to leave flowers for Diana (Sullivan *et al.*, 1997). London was quickly overwhelmed by ad-hoc shrines at public sites and along the roads, with over a million 'floral tributes' – weighing over 10 tonnes – being left at the three palaces. The 'carpet of flowers' at Kensington Palace grew to 'phenomenal proportions', with every bus disgorging more flower-laden mourners, instantly filling the spaces cleared by officials with new tributes. Queues for the St James' Palace condolence books grew to three and a half hours by Monday afternoon and six hours by Tuesday, forcing an increase from five to 15 open books. By Wednesday, 12-hour queues led to an increase to 43 books but the 12-hour queues returned by Friday and the police began turning newcomers away (Engel, 1997; Millar, 1997).

The public mood grew increasingly volatile. Hostility to the Royal Family was taken up by a press desperate to avoid the blame being laid on the paparazzi, leading to their public defence by the Prime Minister and a series of concessions by the Palace (MacAskill *et al.*, 1997). They were forced to issue a statement on the Thursday claiming the Royal Family had been 'hurt' by accusations of indifference in that morning's newspapers (Ahmed and Arlidge, 1997). Fears of rising anti-Royal sentiment led to the Balmoral photo-opportunity in which Diana's young grieving sons were forced by the public to parade before their tributes to make *them* feel better, and to the

Queen's early return to London and the decision to make a public broadcast on the Friday. Royal walkabouts were hastily arranged for the Thursday and Friday to meet, calm and soothe the distraught throngs. The authorities were taking few chances. The London police chief warned the public that 27,000 police had been deployed for the funeral, cautioning them against doing anything 'foolish' on the day. Meanwhile, public anger was satiated on photographers, on those taking pictures of the shrines and on 'looters'. The teddy-thieves responsible were soon arrested and given prison sentences, as the judge said, 'in deference to the public mood and outrage' (Gentleman, 1997; *Guardian*, 5 September 1997: 4). By Thursday evening the first of an estimated 5 million people visiting London for the funeral began to camp on the streets while emergency services worked overnight to provide the crowd with food and drink.

While it is obvious that this grief never constituted a real revolutionary threat to power, everything changes once we realise that it was precisely its simulacral nature that gave it its real efficacy. If, for Baudrillard, May 1968 represented an outburst of symbolic violence neutralised by its media coverage (1981 [1972]: 172–7), here instead it was the public who captured the media within the imploded hyperrealised space of the studio-streets with their mourning for a media icon. Their hyperconformity to the media's messages forced a media hyperconformity to their mood that did not merely reflect this grief but doubled and redoubled it. By taking and re-imposing the media's own models back upon them, forcing them to fill their air-time and pages with equally hyperbolic and unbelievable copy, and by making them fearful of offending their apparent hypersensitivity, the public employed and reversed the media's own processes. This was not, however, a symbolic communion. The mourning represented less the raising of the individual into the collective than the raising of the processes of simulation to the *n*th power – the internal exacerbation and reversal of the semiotic system. For a few days in September 1997, there seemed the possibility that the escalating public frenzy could push this system into a spasmic crisis that no power in the country could have held out against. We can only imagine the fabulous Borgesian nation we might have become had this escalation gone unchecked, and the terrible cycles of sacrifice that Diana's astral divinity may have demanded.

What stopped this escalation was the organised, modelled and controlled public non-event of the funeral. By the Saturday the press were sick of their own copy and desperate for release from the interminable obligation of paying tribute. The funeral provided the global, semiotic spectacle necessary to captivate this public once more, to regulate their reversive force and channel their grief into a controlled expression that would also function as its signalled end. There were a few brief moments when the public might have intervened in this event more dramatically. Early screams at the sight of the coffin were quickly cut short but the possibility of an hysterical public rushing the coffin and seizing the event was momentarily present; similarly

the 'people's wreath' of flowers – one of their few spontaneous actions – had the potential to dangerously deluge and imperil the hearse.

Instead the public were domesticated, reduced once again to a spectatorial role in which even their implosive participation in the crowd scenes reinforced their position. They watched the cortege, snatched photos, watched the screens at Hyde Park, waved at the arriving celebrities, cried at the songs and applauded the coffin for its performance, literally following the script instead of scripting it themselves. 'All dissent must be of a higher logical type than that to which it is opposed,' Baudrillard had written in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a [1976]: 4), therefore so too must all recuperation of dissent. So the system responded to the excessive, simulacral grief with the even more excessive simulation of the funeral, combining – to devastating effect – the high spectacle of Church and State (Baudrillard, 1983 [1978]: 7–9) with tabloid, celebrity culture and Elton John's populist schmaltz. Simulation once more functioned as a social control, replacing the unpredictable grief with the semiotically orchestrated and modelled emotion of the pseudo-event and its radiating neutralisation and deterrence.

We rejoin the race as its numbers are swelled by thousands of new participants taking to their bicycles to combat the fuel crisis …

'There is no fuel crisis' (September 2000)

Though the dominant order managed to contain the reversive forces produced by the masses following Diana's death it could not exclude the possibility of their irruption elsewhere within the system. This irruption happened in the September 2000 'Fuel Crisis' that demonstrated again the fragility of the system when faced with hyperconformity.

The crisis began on 9 September with the blockade of an oil refinery near Ellesmere Port by a coalition of farmers and lorry drivers protesting at high fuel taxation. By the 11th there were demonstrations at 12 key fuel supply sites and hundreds of petrol stations had run dry. By the time the protests were called off on the 14th the country had seen mile-long queues for petrol with cars besieging petrol stations until they ran out; the National Health Service on red alert with restricted emergency service call-outs due to lack of petrol; and reduced public-transport services and supermarket delivery problems leading to panic-buying by customers, and bread and milk rationing by one national chain.

Despite only a tiny percentage of fuel leaving the refineries (due to civilian tanker drivers refusing to pass the protestors) the fuel crisis was not caused by the blockades but by the public panic-buying petrol. Had they retained their normal rate of consumption, topping up when needed, there would have been no immediate crisis. Instead, the fear of running out and uncertainty over the future of supplies led to queues to keep cars permanently topped up. Ultimately it wasn't the blockade that produced the crisis and nearly brought the country's communications, delivery and service infrastructure to the point of collapse, *but the public's hyperconsumption*.

This was confirmed over a week later, on 19 September, when a rumour that the protests were beginning again, broadcast on Cardiff-based radio-station Red Dragon FM, provoked queues at the forecourts the next morning. The rumour had spread across the country by noon, driven by email, fax, phone and internet, and police forces across the country were put on alert. By 3 p.m. some queues were up to a mile long. Petrol stations put out signs saying 'Don't panic. There is no fuel crisis' and rationed fuel, ran out or closed down because of dangerous traffic congestion or pumps overheating. A national police operation was launched to combat the rumours and Margaret Beckett, Leader of the House of Commons, was forced to deny the reports. Even when told that there was no blockade, people preferred not to take the chance. A driver in Huddersfield queued to buy £1.20 of petrol while a woman in Leeds was seen filling a washing-up bowl with petrol. One senior police officer described the day's events as 'simply mad' (see Morris, 2000; Ward and Gibbs, 2000; Hoot!, 2000).

Fears of a new blockade led to more panic-buying, miles of queues across the country and empty stations again on 3 November, with the public ignoring denials and pleas for calm by the Prime Minister, the oil companies and motoring organisations. A spokesman for the Petrol Retailers Association said the situation had worsened for no reason. There was a 60 per cent surge in sales: one driver queued to buy 56p of petrol; the RAC warned that drivers were damaging their cars by filling up with any available petrol; in Eastbourne a security guard at a Tesco filling station was assaulted by a driver; the panic-buying of fuel cans was reported, with one army-surplus store selling 300 jerry cans to a single customer, and people finishing filling up their cars proceeded to fill fuel cans as well, leading to government warnings as to the private storage of fuel; a Shell station in Muswell Hill, North London, was closed after cars blocked the road from all angles trying to join the queue, and Public Health Officials warned of the dangers to life of disruption to the emergency services (Perry *et al.*, 2000).

What is important is that in each of these later cases there *was* no blockade. The fuel crisis was *solely* the result of contagious, pathological panic-buying. The simultaneous, collective desire of so many people to buy petrol – and to have as much petrol as possible – tipped the system into crisis, necessitating the mobilisation of government and local authority forces to cope with the popular panic and the impact upon public and commercial services, and to preserve order. It is our western, industrial societies rather than tribal societies, Baudrillard had argued in *The Consumer Society*, that were the true societies of 'scarcity' – being marked, he said, by a 'despair at the insufficiency of human means' and a 'radical catastrophic anxiety' instilled by the market economy and generalised competition (1998a [1970]: 66–7). In the fuel crisis this competition, focused on one product, pushed our anxiety towards this catastrophic state. It only took a few days for a society not so long ago lauded as 'the end of history' to push itself towards collapse.

Recovering from their earlier loss, the Royal Family come through on the inside, their progress only temporarily stalled by the, not so sudden, loss of another member …

'The river of love' (March–April 2002)

On 30 March 2002, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyons, later Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, died aged 101. The press had ample time to prepare for her death and, spurred on by the adoration prompted by Diana, expected it to be a major historical event. The reality, however, was more ambivalent. Early claims by the newspapers (lazily printing what they thought was happening) of a 'nation united in mourning' (Goodman, 2002), as 'millions mourn for a gracious Queen' (Summerskill, 2002) were disproven by a more disinterested public response. The lack of queues for condolence books even prompted the *Mirror* to issue a front-page apology illustrated by an image of empty crash barriers: 'Sorry Ma'am … that so many of us are showing you so little respect' (3 April 2002: 1).

Indeed, a popular email being circulated that April, purporting to be real quotations from online condolence books, may be taken as one measure of the public mood. Entries included:

> I think that the Queen Mum and Princess Diana are our very own Twin Trade Towers. At last we can look the people of New York in the face. (L. Ward, Mansfield)
>
> When Diana died I swore that I would never smile again, but eventually I did. Now the Queen Mum has gone I cannot imagine that I will ever smile for the rest of my life, but I will probably break that one too. (A. Christie, Hendon)
>
> She was a marvellous woman, and a wonderful lover. (L. J. Worthington, Penrith)
>
> Her death should act as a warning to others who think it is cool to experiment with drugs. (E. Franks, Cheshire)
>
> Once again the Queen is not upset enough for my liking, the woman should have a bit more compassion, how would she feel if it was her mother? (M. Waugh, Richmond)
>
> I have been unable to masturbate for five days, and I will not do so again until her majesty is buried. (E. Gorman, Derbyshire)
>
> No matter how she felt, no matter the situation, she always wore a smile. Just like a retard. (G. Hollins, East Sussex)
>
> Whichever way you look at it, it is just not as exciting as Diana. (G. Williams, West Midlands)
>
> (Boreme, 2002)

Baudrillard has written of how it is the predictability of an event that removes from it any need to occur or sense of occurrence, and the long-

anticipated and inevitable death of the Queen Mother seemed to bear this out: few were surprised or overcome by the death of a 101-year-old, an event that the media had long expected and rehearsed for. But such public indifference and disrespect was clearly intolerable for the authorities. As if desperate to produce the sympathy and outpouring of love that was *expected* of the public, the government announced that a royal procession would take the coffin to Westminster hall for its lying in state.

Seduced by the prospect of a televised procession the public dutifully lined the streets, with 400,000 turning out to consume and participate in the pomp and spectacle. It was also announced that the coffin would be available for public viewing and the public accepted this open invitation. The queue to see the coffin began on Thursday evening, growing on Friday until it was three miles long, with 50,000 people queuing back along Lambeth Bridge down the South Bank. Public viewings were not new, but what was new was the transformation of *the queue itself* into the event, and the feedback effect of people turning up to join in this media event. Press and television became enthralled by it, filling their pages and airtime with plans, photos, interviews with queuing people and broadcasts from its lines. Few things exemplify so well Baudrillard's claims for the hyperrealisation of the real in all its banality than the news reports of that week with their real-time transmissions from a queue and aerial copter-cam shots of its snaking path.

Just as Diana's death was appropriated by the public, with their grief becoming the event of her death, so the public appropriated the Queen Mother's death, turning the non-event of the queue into the defining image and event of her death. Once encouraged to participate the public responded admirably, throwing themselves into this invitation to pay their respects. Emergency services had to be mobilised to feed, water and care for the huge numbers and keep them warm overnight. As Audrey Westcott-McGarrigle said of her four-hour wait: 'it doesn't matter, although I've got two bad knees to cope with. I want to pay my respects.' School-teacher and 'committed monarchist' Mark Jones said he wasn't surprised by the turnout. 'These are ordinary people who have gone to exceptional lengths to pay their respects, quietly and in a dignified way. We are,' he added, 'the silent majority' (Duffy, 2002).

By the Monday the silent majority's queue had become a 12-hour 'river of love'; one that, as the *Daily Mail* claimed, disproved all gainsayers, standing as powerful evidence of the public's true feelings (8 April 2002: 1; Casey, 2002). The queue, however, had a natural term, being forcibly ended after the evening's 'Royal vigil' before the next day's funeral. Billed as 'the biggest televised event in Britain since the funeral of Diana' and as 'a day that no-one will ever forget' (D. Smith, 2002), the now-forgotten non-event offered sufficient spectacle for an enjoyable reprise of public grief and sufficient public sympathy to placate the monarchy.

Although this overly produced and directed public grief never attained the reversive power it had in 1997, for a while it did contain, at least, the

possibility of escalating out of control. Had the public thrown themselves more eagerly into this patriotic duty, with millions of people overwhelming the public order and emergency services with the hyperconformity of this *hyper-queue*, divesting themselves of the burden of responsibility for their own physical well-being and welfare and responding to the demand for public sympathy by throwing themselves upon the state, forsaking everything else in order to queue, then perhaps a – uniquely British – reversive force might have been achieved.

And now, as the cyclists pass Hyde Park, they look to their left to see the Diana memorial, the people's fountain, and the happy public hurling themselves into it …

'A place for reflection … ' (July 2004)

In September 1999, Tony Blair announced the creation of a permanent fountain memorial for Princess Diana in Hyde Park. A competition was launched and on 30 July 2002 the Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, chose US architect Kathryn Gustafson's design for a football-pitch-sized, ring-shaped, stone water-feature. Work began in June 2003, and the fountain was opened by the Queen on 6 July 2004.

Gustafson described it as a contemporary fountain for 'a contemporary Princess', based around her qualities 'that were most loved and cherished': 'the principles of inclusiveness and accessibility'. It was specifically designed, she said, as 'an environment that you can walk into'; that 'you can touch and can be interactive with and that you can become part of'. This would be a place where people could get *close* to Diana, to remember her, rather than commemorate her as 'an icon that they can only look at'. It was also a reflection of her life, Gustafson said, with the path of the water – on one side gently bubbling and on the other tumbling, cascading and rocking and rolling – 'representing the turmoil in her life', with both streams converging 'into a tranquil, peaceful, calm pool' (BBC, 2002).

Blocked drains, flooding and blocked pumps caused early problems but unforeseen visitor numbers and behaviour soon caused more. On 22 July two adults and a child were taken to hospital having injured themselves 'interacting' with the fountain: slipping over at the same part on the east side of the pool. A 7-ft barrier was erected and a health and safety investigation was launched (BBC, 2004a). On 1 August, Tessa Jowell blamed the public for the continued closure of the fountain, criticising the public for littering and allowing their dogs paddle in the memorial. 'People have got to be responsible in the way they let their children play in the fountain,' she said, adding, 'I don't think any responsible member of the public would want to see people allowing their dogs in it. How can we maintain the purity of the water if some people allow their dogs to paddle?' Of the thousands of people who had enjoyed the fountain 'a small number appear to have behaved irresponsibly', she claimed. The 'critical issue' was that this was a

memorial. 'This is a place for reflection, contemplation and remembrance as well as a place for people to enjoy bringing their children.' Diana's brother, Charles Spencer, commented that although it was a memorial the essence of Diana was her approachability and 'somehow those two things have to be balanced' (BBC, 2004b).

The Royal Parks published its report the next day, recommending restricting visitor numbers, increasing attendants and introducing 'clear rules of behaviour'. Signs would be erected banning animals, litter and running and walking in the fountain. As Greg McErlean commented, balancing the memorial function with public access and safety was difficult: 'something that was "look but don't touch"' was 'discarded immediately as being counter to the point of the memorial'; while leaving it as it was 'wouldn't tackle the impact that the huge numbers of people were having. It is these numbers that we need to look at, to ensure that people are able to come and enjoy the memorial safely and happily' (BBC, 2004c). The barrier would stay, it was reported, 'to help manage the numbers of people' and six staff 'trained in crowd control and first aid' would supervise the site. From now on, McErlean said, 'people's interaction with the fountain' would be closely controlled. Only hands and feet would be allowed to be dipped in the water (BBC, 2004d).

Although the reopening on 20 August was a low-key affair (BBC, 2004e) through the summer of 2004 the fountain was receiving up to 5,000 visitors an hour. Its 'extraordinary popularity' necessitated another closure from 9 January to 6 May 2005 for £150,000 of restoration work on the turf, the path, the bridges and the drainage (BBC, 2005a; 2005b). By November the fountain – with a total cost now of £5.2m and running costs of £250,000 a year – was criticised by MPs as having become 'a muddy bog' and an 'open drain' (BBC, 2005c). By then it was one of the UK's top attractions – coming second to the London Eye in a 2004 list of icons of UK architecture (a list that also included the *Coronation Street* set, the *Big Brother* house and Robbie Williams' birthplace) – attracting over 800,000 visitors between May 2005 and March 2006 (BBC, 2004f; 2006a).

Again, it was the over-participation of the public that caused the problems. They embraced the idea that the fountain should be accessible and interactive; that it represented her life and being. She was *their* princess and she would have *wanted* them to get as close as possible, so they threw themselves into this fountain – happily splashing, paddling, playing, walking, running with their children and their dogs in this huge, free lido, littering the water, injuring themselves and destroying the grass, the paths and the plumbing. Just as they appropriated the death of Diana by force of numbers and hyper-participation, so they appropriated her memorial. Caught between the hallowed status of the monument and the need for public access and between the need to both protect it from the public and protect the public from it, the park authorities struggled to control and direct the mass of visitors and their behaviour. The public's love for the people's princess

forced the authorities to introduce security fencing and controls while imposing upon power the escalating cost of its upkeep and the burden of the public's own safety. Thus their hyperconsumption of *the people's fountain* created a reversal of the system's hopes for an ordered and controlled memorialisation. As Dame Sue Street commented with not a little bitterness, 'Coachloads of children arriving in their swimming trunks had not been envisaged' (BBC, 2005c).

Passing Edmonton, north London, the race is temporarily held up by crowds surging towards Ikea …

'We were under siege' (February 2005)

In the early hours of 10 February 2005, up to 6,000 people descended on Edmonton, North London, for the opening of a new Ikea store. Adverts had recently appeared in the deprived area offering huge discounts on furniture, promising leather sofas for £45 and bed frames for £30. Within minutes of the store opening its doors a severe crush had ensued, leading to a riot in which five people were injured.

According to eye-witnesses, trouble began when the store opened as a crowd built up near the entrance, leading to arguments with people who had been queuing since 6 p.m. on the previous evening. The Ikea staff tried to close the doors and 'people got agitated and eventually they started trying to charge the doors'. When the doors opened one woman 'pushed her way forward screaming with excitement' then hundreds of people surged through. The security guards and staff were pushed aside by the crush or attacked. One security guard said later, 'I have never felt so threatened. It was madness. A guard next to me was punched by a customer. He had his jaw dislocated. People were punching and kicking me and screaming. We were under siege.'

Video footage showed customers fighting over furniture. Kerry Christian from Edmonton said, 'People were fighting over the sofas in the back of the store … Someone pulled a wooden mallet and threatened my friend. One person had one end of a sofa and another had the other end. They were both shouting "mine, mine".' After 30 minutes the store was closed. Staff held up signs in marker pen to tell the crowds outside, though they refused to disperse and tried to smash their way back in.

Nine ambulances and 30 police attended the riot and fire-fighters had to free trapped customers. Five people were taken to hospital, one with chest pains, and up to 20 suffered heat exhaustion. The stabbing of a man nearby at 1.30 a.m. was unrelated, police said. As medics helped the injured, customers already inside tried to continue to shop. One paramedic feared a disaster: 'I thought it could be another Hillsborough. It's a miracle no one was killed.' There were severe traffic problems in the surrounding area as bargain hunters and frustrated travellers abandoned their cars on the A406 North Circular. Ikea blamed the problems on 'an unforeseen volume of

customers', with one spokeswoman complaining that 'some shoppers behaved like animals … there's not much we can do to stop that' (see BBC, 2005d; Finegold and Millar, 2005; L. Smith, 2005). However, it wasn't the first time it had happened. On 2 September 2004, two people died and 16 were injured in a stampede at a new Ikea store in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

What the Ikea riot exposed was the underlying tension within capitalism between the need to produce a euphoric desire for the commodity and the need to control and direct that desire to ensure the smooth operation of formal, contractual, market relations. Capitalism depends upon the production and mobilisation of the imaginations, aspirations, demands and desires of the consumer and the over-valuation of its products in which all these desires are promised satiation. But it also depends upon these consumers following the formal, spatio-behavioural rules of market exchange: queuing politely, waiting their turn and paying calmly for goods that will be taken home and enjoyed in private.

Marx's discussion of commodity 'fetishism' – of 'the mystical character' attained by the commodity in the sphere of consumption – remains the best description of this seemingly transcendent power of the object to captivate the consumer and eclipse them with its own demonic life (Marx, 1954: 76–87). Historically, however, capitalism not only had to train urban populations to feel this fetishistic power, it also had to train them to respond to it in ordered and socially, politically and economically acceptable ways. Cultural historians have traced this disciplining of the population in the nineteenth century, emphasising the role of exhibitions and public museums in training the working class to gaze in polite admiration at the works of industry, to regulate their own behaviour and to identify with the processes of power and production (Richards, 1990; Bennett, 1995). For the middle classes the new consumer spaces of the department store performed the same functions, allowing them to learn how to browse and interact with the commodity in an ordered way (Miller, 1981).

The Ikea riot represents the breakdown of this subtle system of behavioural control instituted in the nineteenth century. The fragile balance of desire and control broke down at the Edmonton store as a frenzied hyper-identification with the advertising and products, and a delirious hyper-response to the hierophany of their cheap availability, propelled a violent hyperconsumption and the collapse of all order. Desperate for the reduced leather sofas and click-locked bed-frames; for the pine-effect coffee tables; for home-office solutions with work-area storage; for self-assembly, glass-fronted CD–DVD storage towers; for finest laminate flooring; for flat-packed, lacquered, birch-veneered particle board and pattern-printed fibreboard modern modular storage-system solutions – they rushed to the opening, attacked the staff, rampaged through the aisles and fought, hand-to-hand, for the bargains, forcing the store's closure.

This single event reverses all the traditional modes of resistance to consumerism. Adbuster's 'Culture jamming', 'No logo' protests, 'Buy Nothing

Day' and even that 'Operation Super Market' Baudrillard discussed in 1972, where goods were given away in stores to a suspicious public (1981 [1972]: 204–12), all fail to challenge the system. The frontal resistance and withdrawal of anti-capitalism and anti-consumerism have little effect: only hyperconsumption can threaten hyper-capitalism. Only a concerted, delirious, mass hyperconformity to the exhortations of consumerism, unleashing an escalating demand tipping over into violence and disorder can cripple the profane, public, commercial order and the courteous formalities of free, individual market contracts. Six thousand people suddenly and immediately demanding a sofa was sufficient to produce a catastrophic result, closing the store. Suitably expanded across the cities of our countries, hyperconsumption could push the entire economic system into spasm within hours. Inadvertently, consumers could precipitate the collapse of that system they have been taught to value so much. As Karni Mahmood from Enfield said, surveying the devastated aftermath of the Ikea riot, 'I only came here to buy a cheap sofa.'

With the end in sight the remaining cyclists only have to pass through the centre of London, but many are brought down by drunken revellers, hen and stag parties and comatose teens …

Drives of vomit … (November 2005)

On 24 November 2005, new licensing laws governing the opening times and alcohol sales of UK clubs and pubs came into force. The legislation was intended as a radical solution to the problem of 'binge-drinking' and the associated violence and disorder that accompanied the uniform 11 p.m. 'chucking-out time'. For years the tabloid press had carried reports of the effusive festivities that had come to characterise Britain's nocturnal culture, helping turn 'binge-drinking' into a contemporary moral panic and political issue. The government hoped that their business-friendly, European-style extension of opening hours and 24-hour licences would solve the problem, but critics were horrified at the idea of extending drinking time, issuing Hieronymus Bosch-style warnings of the hell to come.

Already, they argued, happy-hour and drink company promotions, larger glasses and stronger, advertising-hyped drinks had created a culture of underage- and binge-drinking. Packs of intoxicated, out-of-control girls roamed from bar to bar; drunken yobs rampaged through the city streets fighting running battles; random violent assaults broke out; altercations erupted outside fast-food outlets; public sexual licence and immorality were rife; the streets were awash with vomit and blood and the doorways stank of piss; arrests were common, as were assaults upon police, paramedics and medical staff; the hospitals were filling up after closing time with injured, drunken youngsters, and barely dressed young women were left slumped catatonically on the pavement.

On the day the legislation became law the Conservative Party leadership contenders clashed over the issue in a Sky News debate. David Davis

attacked binge-drinking, arguing that, 'We have a situation where the centre of many cities and towns in this country are no-go areas for decent people.' David Cameron objected to the implication that the drinkers were not 'decent people' and replied that a balance of laws was needed, to which David Davis snapped, 'That doesn't help somebody who has got somebody vomiting in their front drive' (BBC, 2005e).

Just as (Baudrillard argues) individual obesity is only part of a broader 'obese' culture, so binge-drinking is only a symptom of a broader binge culture. The respectable and decent commentators discussing binge-drinking on the news and in the opinion columns were themselves part of a culture of binge-cars; binge-houses with binge-drives; binge-mortgages; binge-laminate; binge-Ikea modern, modular, storage-system solutions; binge-credit cards; binge-debt; binge-media and binge-reality. What they condemned was a hyperconformity to the exhortations of the drinks and leisure industries to go out and enjoy oneself. This demand to participate led to a hyperconsumption of alcohol whose reversive effects necessitated police intervention, medical assistance and government legislation. Through this hyperconsumption the drinkers have even managed to force the burden of responsibility for their own health and safety back upon the drinks industry, which has been forced to monitor intake, advertise 'responsible drinking' and promote 'drink awareness' (Drink Aware, 2006), in direct contravention of all its economic interests. Drinking has reached that ecstatic point defined by Baudrillard as 'the quality proper to any body that spins until all sense is lost, and then shines forth in its pure and empty form': a definition that applies rather too well to the state of alcoholic torpor (Baudrillard, 1990b [1983]: 9).

By the anniversary of the legislation some reports suggested a quieter and less violent nightlife had resulted (Lewis, 2005; Carvel, 2005), though most evidence pointed to an on-going problem with binge-drinking. Studies showed the quantities of alcohol regularly being consumed; the UK topped the west European league table for alcohol consumption; record levels of alcohol-related hospital admissions and illnesses were reported; there was a continuing increase in alcohol-related deaths and alcohol abuse was reported as becoming 'epidemic' (BBC, 2006b; 2006c; 2006d; 2006e; 2006f; 2006g). And on the city streets and on the drives of decent people, the Ubuesque, spasmic projection of vomit, urine and blood continues.

Cutting through the revellers, Alfred Jarry passes the finishing line first, closely followed by Jean Baudrillard in second place.

Skip breakfast!

> There is never any equilibrium state or state of completion that cannot suddenly be destabilised by a process of automatic reversion.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 185)

As we reach the finishing line of this race, we find in Baudrillard's theory of hyperconformity and of the escalation of the system's own logic an efficacious strategy against the dominant order and its system of consumption.

> Lines of fracture, inversions, splits, rifts: there is, as it were, a line beyond which, for every expanding system – every system which, by dint of exponential growth, passes beyond its own end – a catastrophe looms.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 191)

It is easy to overlook and to forget these non-events – these lines of fracture, inversions, splits and rifts – and to infer from their immediate disappearance their inefficacious nature. But perhaps this is wrong: perhaps it is precisely here, rather than in memorable, historic, revolutionary events, that we should be looking for the collapse of our order.

> Every exponential form leads to the critical threshold at which the process reverses its effects.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 192)

We should remember that simply consuming petrol was sufficient to bring the supply and distribution networks and emergency services of an entire country to the point of collapse within days and to highlight the intense fragility of a system devoted to its own operationality: of a system so perfect that, as Baudrillard reminds us, 'you only have to be deprived of breakfast to become unpredictable' (1996b [1990b]: 19). If, to date, only partial reversals have been achieved, Baudrillard's work nevertheless holds out the possibility of a greater reversal to come.

> Nothing escapes the law of sudden, violent deflation through excess … one single element more and the whole system tips over into excess or exclusion.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 195)

Our view of Baudrillard changes once we realise this: 'push what is collapsing' comes to define a strategy of resistance through hyperconformity, escalation and reversal. Baudrillard the nihilist, the pessimist, the apologist for and quietist celebrant of postmodernity vanishes here to be replaced by a much more avant-garde figure: one pushing for the escalation of an excrescent, metastatic system, for the fabulous inflation of its Ubuesque gidouille to the point of its unbearable ridiculousness and collapse.

> For the maleficent spirit of pataphysics everything is already excessive. The world itself is *de trop*. The world, having become integral, absorbs everything into its fullness and, in so doing, expels itself. In its very

> totality, which is at once, like Ubu, naïve and ridiculous, it demonstrates irrational behaviour.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 195)

Pataphysics is already at play in this world. Like Ubu we only have to join in, *to push it further*, to blow up its gidouille.

> In our current situation, where we are everywhere on the verge of this critical density, if not indeed beyond it, the wise thing would be to act generally in irrational ways.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 196)

And, like Pa Ubu, we shouldn't be satisfied until we have destroyed even the ruins of this order:

> Hornstrumpot! We shall not have succeeded in demolishing everything unless we demolish the ruins as well. But the only way I can see of doing that is to use them to put up a lot of fine, well-designed buildings.
>
> (Jarry, 2002: 106)

Notes

1 There are as many Baudrillards as there are Baudrillard commentators. Following Jarry's definition of 'pataphysics in *Exploits and Opinions of Dr Faustroll, Pataphysician*, as 'the science of imaginary solutions' (Jarry, 1996: 22), then we hereby define a Baudrillardian 'patatheory as 'the academic science of imaginary Baudrillards'. What follows is a summary of my own imagined Baudrillard outlined in more detail in *Baudrillard and the Media* (Merrin, 2005).

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6 Better than butter

Margarine and simulation

Gary Genosko

Roland Barthes decoded the mythology of margarine as a rhetorical species of inoculation. He described the promotional demonstration of margarine's blemishes as a carefully cultivated virtue in a cultural vaccine that selected contingent over essential evil. Inoculation is one of seven principal rhetorical figures that Barthes develops to analyse the duplicity of bourgeois myths. Margarine's commercial valorization takes place on the grounds of its imperfections, as well as its secondariness in relation to butter. That is, margarine's resemblance to butter entails that its simulacral features themselves become the foundation of its advantages, and of its delights in the mouths of sceptics, despite their traditional dairy allegiances. The homeopathic vaccine of inoculation against greater evils that clears the way for its widespread acceptance is not limited to margarine. Striptease, too, thinks Barthes, absorbs and familiarizes the fires of eroticism and in the process creates a reassuring ritual accorded the status of a sport (dancing), a good workout (aerobic or cardio striptease), and even a career option.

Readers of Barthes (1957: 44) on this point may wonder about the terms of reference of his analysis since the English translation exposes far too little of the original essay's focus on a specific French brand: 'Astra'. Barthes's margarine was the leading French brand (a product of Dutch agribusiness giant Unilever's French subsidiary Astra, after which the product was named) and not a generic substance in a plastic tub. Indeed, the mythological strategy of inoculation was also found to apply to plastic. Plastic has more in common with margarine as a mythologized substance – triumphantly chemical, smooth and shiny – than striptease, even if they share the same rhetoric. In Barthes mythologies are nestled within mythologies – the essay's title is translated non-specifically ('Operation Margarine' and not 'Astra'; Barthes, 1972: 45), within the general rhetoric of an emerging promotional demonstration applicable to a variety of substances. One searches in vain for a 'no logo' moment in Barthes's mythologies. Instead, it is left to his English translators to add a further layer of myth in the brand's erasure.

In typical fashion, Barthes revealed little about his specimens. 'Astra' is no different in this respect. The dialogue he quotes is lifted from a print campaign for the margarine in circulation in the early to mid-1950s and it

featured black and white full-page advertisements heavy on mock dialogue about resistance to margarine. The promotional campaigns for Astra were complex and involved efforts to insert margarine into bread-and-butter snacks ('*tartines*'), the invention of a fictive cook, a kind of Franco-Swiss Betty Crocker named Betty Bossi, author of a full range of cuisine-related objects from newsletters and cookbooks to sponsored contests. By the late 1950s this strategy had shifted to a full-colour print and poster campaign featuring Black Africans and the virtues of the product's 'tropical riches'. Barthes's focus remained on an earlier, more overtly endocolonial rather than exocolonial, form of commercial solicitude.

Make no mistake, however, it was Barthes who put margarine on the table. Like a good Barthesean mythologist I am prepared to admit that plastic, not margarine, was his 'stucco', the miracle of which later impressed Baudrillard as an 'eternal substance' (Baudrillard, 1993a: 53). Margarine's shelf life is impressive, but is no match for plastic. In this paper I want to lift the lid on margarine so that, in another promotional discourse, its relational cultural calculus, to borrow Baudrillard's (1998a: 27) felicitous term, may be heard. For Barthes taught us that margarine is before all else a relational substance that speaks another name: 'butter'. This is precisely what you can hear, if you listen closely, when the lid on a tub of margarine is lifted: 'butter'. And of course for Canadians and Americans of a certain vintage this is also the promotional discourse of Parkay margarine of ConAgra whose 'Talking Tub' muttered 'butter' as an act of provocation, and has been nattering since 1973. Of course, today margarine speaks butter's name with a 'not' – 'I Can't Believe It's Not Butter'!

In order to follow this trajectory beyond these specificities I want to add Baudrillard to Barthes towards the product of a calculus of simulation that animates margarine's history and carries its mythologies into the present. This is why a cultural analysis of margarine must involve an analysis of butter within a critical application of the concept of simulation. Margarine is simulacral and its history and destiny plays out this role in degrees of 'likeness' to the natural, original reference point of butter. But this paper does not simply rehearse this trajectory.

Rather, what I want to argue is that butter – simplifying a materially complex polycultural substance to be sure – is destabilized as margarine's status as a counterfeit or fake is superseded. Margarine turns the tables on butter not as it achieves perfection in the erasure of difference with butter, nor through butter's exhaustion, for example, of legal means that prevent margarine's drive for similarity, but as simulation perfuses the relational calculus of these objects. The game of appearances, if you will, of the unstable separability of margarine and butter, which both have played out since margarine's creation as '*beurre économique*' in 1870 in France by Hippolyte Mège Mouriès, becomes undecidable. This is a non-specific process of contamination. I do not want to attribute this mutual metabolization to butter's waning mystique nor to margarine's triumphal technological prowess of

reproduction. Neither am I adopting an explanation based on fatigue produced by legislative differentiation in conjunction with the lifting of codes protecting butter's integrity, and hence opening onto a profligate indifferentiation; and I am not playing the health card of shifting analyses of nutritional value (margarine's surging Mediterranean profile and butter's sinking fattiness) that contribute to the pair's implosion. To put this slightly differently: what if margarine is no longer obviously secondary to butter? And, what if butter is not longer primary in relation to its pretenders? That is, if simulation destabilizes hierarchy, what is the destiny of margarine and butter?

Both margarine and butter issue from models. Only a critical dredging operation in the histories of these substances can reveal the extent of butter's strategies for 'real-ization' (Hegarty, 2004: 51) that situates it in simulation. Still, the great chain of modelling is so long and intrusive as to go unnoticed as models are produced from market research, changing production processes, trends in artificial and natural additives, right into the mouth of the consumer with the idea of 'mouthfeel aroma', a point made about bread, but one equally relevant here, by Victoria Grace (2002: 107). Butter is realer than real, yet it remains resistant to this claim because it carries with it nostalgic obligatory symbolic attachments to traditional activities like dairying, to the necessity of milk, if you will, under the 'sign of the cow' (Rynne, 1998). All of butter's attributes are gathered under this rapidly eroding sign: nature, farming, processes like milking, creaming and churning; richness, purity and uniqueness. Let's listen to Margaret Visser (1986: 101–2) describe butter's superiority. Writing of French *crémeries*, she observes:

> Butter appears packaged in the now-usual silver or gold foil, but often the very best of it is still served from the motte – a huge shameless tower of unwrapped voluptuousness, with gleaming facets where chunks of butter have been cut with a wire to the specifications of the customer. … Butter in a motte is not squared-off, brand-named, labeled, and 'industrialized': it constitutes a monumental snub to the concept of margarine.

As beautiful as it is surely false, Visser's effort at contrast does not acknowledge that butter has been packed in various ways for hundreds of years – cut in pats at home; buried in the bogs in basket-kegs; and exported in firkins, not to mention coloured golden (Visser, 1986: 89). By the time the proto-global butter trade emerged during the mid-eighteenth century, Irish butter was standardized in regulated barrels, its salt content legislated, prices set, and its grading (from mere grease unfit for human consumption to the finest product) soon thereafter enshrined as a brand burned into all the made-to-specifications wooden firkins in the famous Cork Butter Exchange (Rynne, 1998: 62). Visser's point is, however, well-taken as the manner of butter's presentation is a social sign of status and its inherently desirable qualities (the naked motte, mound of unwrapped desire, is progressively

packaged and cut down to size). Recall the words of Thomas Mann (1996 [1924]: 30) in describing young Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*: 'Only reluctantly would he have eaten butter served in pats rather than in fluted little balls'. Bourgeois gastronomic signification hasn't changed much as fluted little balls of butter, delicately curled and chiselled, resting in shaved ice, are a signifier of gentility in what Barthes called ornamental cookery. This distinction marks the common country pat of the farmhouse from urban bourgeois gastronomic aesthetics. Those fluted butter curls circulate widely in dairy advertising as table decorations and signify against standardized restaurant pats and other less decorative presentations.

The problem of counterfeit butter begins before the invention of margarine in the time of butter's standardization at the Cork market. Rogue butter is no match for what would be margarine's decisive intervention. The intervention is slow. The original '*beurre économique*' was, as historians of the substance admit, not very much like butter at all except in name. The name was forcibly changed to margarine or oleo-margarine because of the legal protection enjoyed by butter and the political influence of the dairy industry. Oleo-margarine was made from animal tallow – rendered animal fat from cows or sheep. As one historian mused: 'Little imagination is needed to conjure up an impression of how Mège Mouriès' first margarine must have tasted … no efforts were spared to improve the taste' (Boldingh, 1969: 183).

Almost all definitions of margarine claim that it resembles butter and may be substituted for it. It is an alternative to butter as far as delivering fat is concerned. But at first aroma was a challenge unmet; instead, the production process of creaming directly imitated butter technology (Feron, 1969: 113). Aroma is tackled gradually, as is appearance and nutritive equivalence. Margarine plays with the obligatory bond of butter and milk fat by substituting suitably neutralized vegetable or animal fats and oils. This manipulation of a key bond involves the use of soured milk in order to give to margarine a familiar butter-like and less fatty taste. It is not completely successful because not all the requisite components of butter's aroma can be achieved this way (Boldingh, 1969: 109). Still, margarine strives for equivalence in a variety of ways – through the use of natural or artificial colours and flavours, where they are not subject to specific taxation or disallowed altogether; and by means of advertising campaigns that promote various sorts of comparisons with butter, within the bounds of typical restrictions on permissible terms. For much of its history margarine has remained in the orbit of butter, recalling Barthes's cosmic brand. It is only when the gravitational pull of approximation gives way and the original reference is obliterated that margarine can pursue the pure potentiality of its generation by formulae and models. It is in an exalted simulation that margarine begins to turn the tables on butter. It is in simulation that margarine comes to truly know on which side its bread is buttered, as it were.

Margarine has struggled against its technological-industrial history in which it is linked with meat-rendering plants; it simply lacks 'class', as Visser

notes, due to its low cost, mass production, mass appeal, and service rendered to fat-deprived populations (Visser, 1986: 112). Perhaps this prejudice is a veiled form of anti-Communism since the USSR was a great friend of the margarine industry (Van Stuyvenberg, 1969: 308–10). Even here care must be taken to note how the lowly East German product, 'Romi' margarine, was enshrined in the personal aesthetic of Joseph Beuys. For Beuys 'Romi' was one among many products used in his *Economic Values* series of related works from the late 1970s (*Wirtschaftswert Apollo*, 1977, consisted of a signed margarine container). The package was valorized by Beuys in a pop-art gesture and integrated into his personal mythology as a fat source, thus taking pride of place in his personal pantheon of substances that provide energy and warmth and creativity. On the whole, however, margarine has genuinely suffered from a remarkable variety of legal prejudices and 'nuisance legislation' (Van Stuyvenberg, 1969: 292) that frame it as fake, fraudulent and even criminal (Levenson, 2001).

Enthusiasm for margarine certainly gets us thinking creatively. Cleverly 'vitaminized' for the life cycle, aromatically enhanced, flexibly flavoured for market niches (cheesy, meaty or nutty), with ethnic nods (ghee, shea), margarine comes into its own. Released from the indignities of legislation that once controlled its colour and threatened stigmatization – make it the colour of the wainscoting in the Reichstag! (Van Stuyvenberg, 1969: 291) – margarine achieves a measure of freedom for self-invention. But this freedom is simultaneously revealed to have been butter's secret.

To admit that margarine is 'not inferior' to butter fails to break from the original reference's pull. It is merely a negative assessment of potentiality. That it is 'much yellower than coloured butter' (Visser, 1986: 109) reveals a secret. Writing in the 1950s, chemical engineer A. J. C. Andersen (1954: 106) observed:

> Most countries now permit the colouring of margarine to the traditional butter yellow colour by means of added colourings and dyes. Butter is often similarly coloured artificially to ensure uniformity of colour, which if not thus standardized varies with the season and the feeding of the cows.

Butter, too, is standardized and artificially enhanced, a product of agribusiness. Its appearance is modulated in accordance with the principles of uniformity that mask its alleged naturalness and vicissitudes beyond high-tech production processes. Butter's own strategy of the real, that is, its mediated nature, might seem to be no more than a mere dripping; yet it, too, is a real 'always already reproduced' (Baudrillard, 1993a: 73). This inkling of equivalence by means of simulation – margarine in relation to butter and butter in relation to margarine's simulation of it – does not get us very far. Beyond a reference to a natural substance, beyond this substance's dimension of chemical enhancement, is margarine's reference to formulae that give

to it an unrivalled adaptability. As the former scientific director of the Margarine Department of the Société Astra put it: 'In appearance, colour, lustre, and plasticity, margarine is superior to butter' (Feron, 1969: 118). This statement of faith in simulation is perhaps not surprising for a margarine scientist. But he continues: 'The plasticity of the product can be adjusted at will … '; it can be 'tailor made' (Feron, 1969: 119). And there's more: 'the nutritional qualities of margarine, too, can be modified with comparative ease … when the formula is worked out, the newest development in the field of nutrition can be taken into account' (Feron, 1969: 118).

The Dutch organic chemist and fat researcher Jan Boldingh (1969: 203) adds: 'By making a correct choice of fat composition the modern producer can now adjust his products to meet current consumer habits by giving a wide spreadability range.' This is industry chatter at the altar of modulated difference, a kind of giddy optimism of a product generated through formulae. When the tables are turned there is no choice between margarine and butter for we have passed beyond the counterfeit and industrial seriality: 'only affiliation to the model has any meaning', as Baudrillard (1993a: 56–7) explained, as modulation surpasses seriality and subsumes it, catching up butter in the process.

Butter's secret is that it, too, issues from models. Butter's natural reference turns out to be artifactual and manipulable. Butter's many so-called 'faults' are contingent upon the milk source (which breed of cow), what they ate (feed and additives), when it was produced (season), degree of exposure of the milk to daylight, etc. The colour of butter is adjustable and creameries use a device called a Hansen's Butter Colour Scale to fix the 'exact shade' (Harvey and Hill, 1948: 157) adequate for the market at issue. Butter is coloured to look more like itself, and by entering into the play of marginal differentiation and combinatory possibilities becomes more like margarine.

In the era of butter-blends spreadable straight from the refrigerator (Gay Lea's Spreadable Butter Blend with Canola Oil is described as a kind of a *dream* solution to an age-old problem), coupled with the promotional insistence of dairy producers that butter is realer than ever, knows no substitute, and is pure and natural, perhaps Baudrillard's (2003a: 115) advice should be heeded: 'The charm … of the simulacrum is that it allows us not to choose between illusion and reality.' Julia Child may still signify butter for a generation overexposed to Martha and the Naked Chef (Wurgaft, 2005: 123), and local farm-based butter production may be a 'thing of the past', even in Ireland (Crowley, 2003: 184), but today's butter has taken on margarine's vaunted adaptability in a deregulated environment that permits hybrid modelling. The consequence is that choice is relaxed as not only margarine gets to be 'better' than butter, but butter, too, is 'realer' than ever before: that is, more openly simulacral and margarine-like in plasticity; a bit wilder, if you like, notwithstanding psychedelic dreams of 'Wild Butter'. The US psychedelic rock band Wild Butter put out a self-titled album in 1970 on the cover of which a massive oblong block of butter soared through a clear sky

at dawn over a dappled landscape. The photo within the gatefold featured the band sitting on a butter wrapper. Barbra Streisand's famous *ButterFly* album from 1974 had a cover shot of a partially unwrapped block of butter with a very plastic fly sitting on one corner.

Some day soon the cyborgs (Morse, 1994: 177–8) among us may, fondly recalling Barthes's analysis of the mythological process of denial – 'acknowledge and ignore' – crave fully simulacral foodceuticals like fat-free fats (Olestra). Nobody is, as yet, uttering 'I Can't Believe It's Not Margarine' but it is this substance and not butter that fires the science fictional imaginary. Indeed, in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* android Pris Stratton is presented with a cube of margarine by John Isidore as a gift of welcome; for him it is a remnant of pre-war ritual, but she doesn't know what it is (Dick, 1968: 55–6). We are not, for better and for worse, there just yet in a universe perfused with simulation.

After all, butter still commands attention because of its exquisite slipperiness as a lubricant and its northern hemispheric history. Consider, for instance, Indonesian performance artist Melati Suryodarmo's 'Exergie – Butter Dance'. Dressed in a disco dress, she dances barefoot on slabs of butter and attempts to manage her falls. Trained in Europe, she became a butter eater and changed her body shape as a result. Indeed, when she performs the butter dance in Indonesia, the butter itself is exotic and, in addition, smells bad for audiences unfamiliar with it. Both butter and margarine are integrated into personal aesthetics in a line running from Beuys to Suryodarmo (Creagh, 2006). There is no sense in this aesthetic context that they are indistinguishable. Still, the direction in which simulation directs us with regard to the destiny of the undecidability of butter and margarine may not yet be realized, but Baudrillard has moved us along this way considerably further than Barthes.

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7 Baudrillard and the art conspiracy[1]

Douglas Kellner

Reflections on art and aesthetics have been an important, if not central, aspect of Baudrillard's work since the 1960s. Although his writings exhibit many twists, turns and surprising developments as he moved from synthesizing Marxism and semiotics to developing highly idiosyncratic forms of writing and theory, interest in art remains a constant of his theoretical investigations and cultural reflections, and generated artistic experiments in writing and photography of his own. I will engage Baudrillard's recent work on the 'conspiracy of art', situating it within his earlier work on art and aesthetics, and will appraise the importance of art for Baudrillard's work as a whole.

I begin with some reflections on literature and literary analysis in Baudrillard's work and later focus on his analyses of visual art, which are at the centre of *The Conspiracy of Art* collection (2005b). However, it is important not to forget his literary beginnings and the literary dimensions of his work. While Baudrillard was trained as a Germanist and translated German literary works, including ones by Bertolt Brecht and Peter Weiss, he has not really engaged in literary criticism or theorized literature as a specific cultural form, although, in *Seduction*, he discusses writers like Kafka, Kierkegaard and Borges, and there are literary references and asides throughout his work.

Moreover, much of Baudrillard's own work is highly literary and especially since the 1980s he has produced an increasingly literary and philosophical mode of thought and writing. Throughout his work, Georges Bataille was a privileged source, although in his earlier stages Baudrillard appeared to be more influenced by Bataille's theoretical writings than his literary ones. During the period of his intense focus on simulations, simulacra and hyperreality, which I take as his postmodern period (Kellner, 1989, 1994), there were frequent references to Jorge Luis Borges, J. G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick and science fiction (SF) as a genre. For Baudrillard, the world was becoming increasingly fictionalized and the great SF writers anticipated the radical changes brought about by science, technology and capital. Borges, in particular, developed a genre of creating alternative literary worlds that Baudrillard adapted to present the alterity and novelty of the contemporary world.

As many have argued, Alfred Jarry and pataphysics have long influenced Baudrillard.[2] Like the universe in Jarry's *Ubu Roi, The Gestures and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll* and other literary texts – as well as in Jarry's more theoretical explications of pataphysics – Baudrillard's is an often absurd universe where objects rule in mysterious ways, and people and events are governed by obscure and ultimately unknowable interconnections and predestination. (The French playwright Eugène Ionesco is another good source of entry to this universe.) Like Jarry's pataphysics, Baudrillard's post-1980s universe is ruled by fatality, contingency, chance, reversal, obscenity and a desire to shock and outrage.

Baudrillard's concept of obscenity is different than the standard notion applied to Jarry, and it is interesting that in *The Conspiracy of Art* there is an article on pataphysics where Baudrillard sharply criticizes the church of pataphysics and what it had become (2005b: 213ff). In addition, there is an interview with Sylvère Lotringer (2005b: 217ff) where Baudrillard indicates he was part of a pataphysics group in the late 1940s, but broke away because of various problematic tendencies within the movement – a typical French propensity to group and splinter that we find in surrealism, situationism and a number of other circles that Baudrillard was influenced by.

This episode suggests a pattern of Baudrillard's involvement in avant-garde art groups, joining, participating, parting and then going his own way, an *Einzelgänger* or Lone Ranger, blazing his own pathways. Yet in retrospect, there are three key references for Baudrillard as writer, and they are Bataille, although perhaps more his theoretical works than literary ones, Borges and SF inventors of imaginary worlds like J. G. Ballard, and Jarry and pataphysics. In conclusion, I'll also note some key visual artists who deeply influenced his reflections on art, aesthetic practices and theoretical positions.

In his increasingly literary and philosophical writings from the 1980s until his death, Baudrillard developed what he terms 'theory-fiction', or what he also calls 'simulation theory' and 'anticipatory theory'. Such 'theory' intends to simulate, grasp and anticipate historical events that he believes are continually outstripping all contemporary theory. The current situation, he claims, is more fantastic than the most fanciful science-fiction or theoretical projections of a futurist society. Thus, theory can only attempt to grasp the present on the run and try to anticipate the future. As I've often argued (Kellner, 1989, 1995), Baudrillard's later work can thus be read as science-fiction that anticipates the future by exaggerating present tendencies, and provides early warnings about what might happen if present trends continue.

In this article, I argue that Baudrillard's post-1980s writings on art can be provocatively read as theory-fiction or anticipatory theory that imagines the end of art. First, however, I want to analyse earlier stages of his analyses of art in contemporary society.

Art, the system of objects and consumer society

A professor of sociology at the University of Nanterre from 1966 to 1987, Baudrillard has paid attention to art as an important and distinctive mode of objects since the beginning of his work in the 1960s. In his early studies of *The System of Objects* (1996a [1968]) and *The Consumer Society* (1998a [1970]) Baudrillard analysed art objects as important artefacts in the system of objects that constitute everyday life.

For Baudrillard, Pop Art represents the dramatic transformations of art objects in the early twentieth century. Whereas previously art was invested with psychological and moral values that endowed its artefacts with a spiritualistic–anthropomorphic aura, by the twentieth century art objects had 'ceased to live by proxy in the shadow of man and have begun to take on extraordinary importance as autonomous elements in an analysis of space (Cubism, etc.)' (1998a [1970]: 115). Soon after the moment of Cubism, art objects exploded to the point of abstraction, were ironically resurrected in Dada and Surrealism, were destructured and volatilized by subsequent movements toward abstract art, yet today 'they are apparently now reconciled again with their image in neo-figuration and pop art' (ibid.).

Pop Art is of essential significance for Baudrillard in that it exemplifies the reduction of art to flat, non-signifying images, thus replicating what he sees as the logic of contemporary (postmodern) society:

> Whereas all art up to pop was based on a 'depth' vision of the world, pop regards itself as homogeneous with this *immanent order of signs*: homogeneous with their industrial, mass production and hence with the artificial, manufactured character of the whole environment, homogeneous with the spatial saturation and simultaneous culturalized abstraction of this new order of things.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1998a [1970]: 115)

Pop therefore signifies the end of depth, perspective, evocation, testimony and the concept of the artist as active creator of meaning and iconoclastic critic.

Pop Art thus constitutes a turning point in the history of art for Baudrillard whereby art becomes quite simply the reproduction of signs of the world and in particular the signs of the consumer society which itself is primarily a system of signs for Baudrillard. Pop thus represents in Baudrillard's optic the triumph of the sign over its referent, the end of representational art, the beginning of a new form of art which he will soon privilege with his term 'simulation'. From this perspective, art henceforth becomes mere simulation of the images and objects of the contemporary world. Baudrillard thus insists that it is wrong to criticize Pop Art for its naïve Americanism, for its crass commercialism, for its flatness and banality, for precisely thereby it reproduces the very logic of contemporary culture.

Developing a more general semiotic perspective on art in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]), Baudrillard takes the painting as a signed object (signature) and as a gestural object, the product of artistic gestures or practices. In particular, he sees art as exemplary of how objects in the consumer society are organized as a system of signs. The painting for Baudrillard only becomes an art object in today's art world with the signature of the painter, with the sign of its origin which situates it as a '*differential* value' within the system of signs, the series of works, which is that of the oeuvre of the painter (Baudrillard, 1981 [1972]: 102). Baudrillard argues that copies or even forgeries previously were not as denigrated as in the contemporary world in part because art was more the collective product of artists' studios and because today art is supposed to be the 'authentic' product of an individual creator as part of her or his oeuvre, signs in a series of works differentially hierarchized and valued by the art market (Baudrillard will later reverse this thesis, as we shall see).

For Baudrillard, 'modernity' in painting begins when the work of art is not seen as a syntax of fragments of a general tableau of the universe, but as a succession of moments in the painter's career, as part of a series of its works: 'We are no longer in space but in time, in the realm of difference and no longer of resemblance, in the series and no longer in the order [of things]' (Baudrillard, 1981 [1972]: 104). It is the act of painting, the collection of the painter's gestures in the individuality of the oeuvre, that is established with the painter's signature which produces the sign value of the work as a differential item in the series whereby the work is inserted into the system of art and receives its place (and value).

Painters like Rauschenberg and Warhol who produce seemingly identical series of works present

> something like a truth of modern art: it is no longer the literality of the world, but the literality of the gestural elaboration of creation – spots, lines, dribbles. At the same time, that which was representation – redoubling the world in space – becomes repetition – an indefinable redoubling of the act in time.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1981 [1972]: 106)

In other words, precisely the seemingly peculiar gestures of repeating almost identical works in series points to the very nature of modern art which establishes itself not as a presentation of the world, but as a series of gestures, as the production of signs in the series of an oeuvre. This practice also reveals the naïveté, Baudrillard claims, of believing that the function of art is to (re)grasp the world, to refresh ways of seeing, to provide access to the real, for such art, all art, is merely a set of signs, the product of 'the subject in its self-indexing' within a series (Baudrillard, 1981 [1972]: 107).

Thus, Baudrillard interprets painting as emblematic of sign culture, of the reduction of culture to a system of signs within which 'art' often plays a

privileged role. Art is subject to the same rules and system of signification as other commodities and follows as well the codes of fashion, determination of value by the market and commodification, thus subverting its critical vocation. Modern art is thus for Baudrillard an '*art of collusion vis-à-vis* the contemporary world. It plays with it and is included in the game. It can parody this world, illustrate it, simulate it, alter it; it never disturbs the order, which is also its own' (Baudrillard, 1981 [1972]: 110).

The triumph of the simulacra

Pop Art and ultra-realist *trompe l'oeil* paintings for Baudrillard illustrate the ways that simulacra came to replicate reality and the process whereby it became increasingly difficult to tell the difference between simulacra and reality, in which hyperreal models came to dominate and determine art and social life. These theories of art as simulation and hyperreality developed in studies in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, collected in the volume *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994a [1981]), and came to influence new avant-garde movements in the art world. Consequently, Baudrillard himself was taken as a major theoretical guru in the world of contemporary art, becoming an icon increasingly referred to and cited in discussions of the art world.

In addition, Baudrillard's theories of stages of representation and simulacra were applied to art history and his analyses of simulations to art works, providing him a certain currency in avant-garde art scenes and periodicals. In particular, the trend of simulation art seemed to embody his theory of simulations, while hyperrealist art movements illustrated his theory of hyperreality. The hyperrealist, simulationist, or neo-geo, artists such as Jeff Halley do not attempt to represent any objects or social reality, but simply reproduce hyperreal models or simulations through abstract representations of signs that simulate/pastiche former paintings – abstract and representational. Or, they attempt to represent scientific paradigms or models, or those of cybernetic languages, or simulate commodity and image production. Baudrillard distanced himself from such movements, but was nonetheless frequently proclaimed as a prophet of such postmodern simulation art.

Speaking later of his appropriation by the American art scene,[3] Baudrillard noted:

> There are those who cultivate the connection to Warhol and those who distance themselves from him because it is too dangerous. They claim that Warhol was a primitive in the art of simulation since they are the 'true simulators'.
>
> This marking of distance culminated in an exhibit at the Whitney in New York, of which I became involved in spite of myself. True, some artists refer to me through my writings and my ideas on simulation. In fact it was a strange trap that forced me to reestablish my bearings. Simulation has been all the rage in the art world in recent years. I see it

> as a phenomenon totally ancillary of events that preceded it, including Warhol …
>
> At the Whitney event, these artists tried to categorize me as a precursor without engaging in any discussion or debate with me. This has led, among other things, to the 'Neo-Geo' school, a very marginalized and confused group. There is nothing to add to this nullity caused by authors, otherwise oftentimes very intelligent, incapable of putting up with their own nullity. In spite of myself, I served as an alibi and reference, and by taking what I said and wrote literally, they missed simulation.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005b: 47–8)

The embrace and celebration of Baudrillard by sectors of the art world was somewhat ironic, for as he turned to cultural metaphysics in the 1980s, he soured on art, believing that it had exhausted itself and he became associated with the 'end of art' theory. In the interview 'Game with vestiges' (1984), Baudrillard claims that in the sphere of art every possible artistic form and every possible function of art has been exhausted. Furthermore, against Benjamin, Adorno and other cultural revolutionaries, Baudrillard argues that art has lost its critical and negative function. Art and theory for Baudrillard became a 'playing with the pieces' of the tradition, a 'game with vestiges' of the past, through recombining and playing with the forms already produced.

Moving through the 1980s into the 1990s, Baudrillard sharpened his critique of the institution of art and contemporary art. In *The Transparency of Evil* (1993b [1990a]), he continued his speculations on the end of art, projecting a vision somewhat different from traditional theories that posit the exhaustion of artistic creativity, or a situation where everything has been done and there is nothing new to do. Baudrillard maintains both of these points, to be sure, but the weight of his argument rests rather on a metaphysical vision of the contemporary era in which art has penetrated all spheres of existence, in which the dreams of the artistic avant-garde for art to inform life have been realized. Yet, in Baudrillard's vision, with the (ironical) realization of art in everyday life, art itself as a separate and transcendent phenomenon has disappeared.

Baudrillard calls this situation 'transaesthetics', which he relates to similar phenomena of 'transpolitics', 'transsexuality' and 'transeconomics', in which everything becomes political, sexual and economic, so that these domains, like art, lose their specificity, their boundaries, their distinctness. The result is a confused and imploded condition where there are no more criteria of value, of judgement, of taste, and the function of the normative thus collapses in a morass of indifference and inertia. And so, although Baudrillard sees art proliferating everywhere, and writes in *The Transparency of Evil* that 'talk about Art is increasing even more rapidly' (Baudrillard, 1993b [1990a]: 14), the power of art – of art as adventure, art as negation of reality, art as redeeming illusion, art as another dimension and so on – has disappeared.

Art is everywhere but there 'are no more fundamental rules' to differentiate art from other objects and 'no more criteria of judgment or of pleasure' (1993b [1990a]: 14). For Baudrillard, contemporary individuals are indifferent toward taste and manifest only distaste: 'tastes are determinate no longer' (1993b [1990a]: 72).

And yet as a proliferation of images, of form, of line, of colour, of design, art is more fundamental then ever to the contemporary social order: 'our society has given rise to a general aestheticization: all forms of culture – not excluding anti-cultural ones – are promoted and all models of representation and anti-representation are taken on board' (1993b [1990a]: 16). Thus Baudrillard concludes that:

> It is often said that the West's great undertaking is the commercialization of the whole world, the hitching of the fate of everything to the fate of the commodity. That great undertaking will turn out rather to have been the aestheticization of the whole world – its cosmopolitan spectacularization, its transformation into images, its semiological organization.
>
> (1993b [1990a]: 16)

In the postmodern media and consumer society, everything becomes an image, a sign, a spectacle and a transaesthetic object. This '*materialization* of aesthetics' is accompanied by a desperate attempt to simulate art, to replicate and mix previous artistic forms and styles, and to produce ever more images and artistic objects. But this 'dizzying eclecticism' of forms and pleasures produces a situation in which art is no longer art in classical or modernist senses, but is merely image, artefact, object, simulation or commodity. Baudrillard is aware of increasingly exorbitant prices for art works, but takes this as evidence that art has become something else in the orbital hyperspace of value, an ecstasy of skyrocketing values in 'a kind of space opera' (1993b [1990a]: 19).

The art conspiracy

Perhaps as a result of negative experiences with people exploiting his ideas for their own aesthetic practices and his own increasingly negative views of contemporary art, Baudrillard penned a sharp critique of the art world in an article 'The conspiracy of art', published in the French journal *Libération* (20 May 1996), which is the centrepiece of his (2005b) book of the same name that collects in translation his most significant writings on art, and interviews concerning art, from the 1990s to the present, including a couple of early texts.[4]

His radical critique was signalled in a 1987 Whitney Museum lecture (2005b: 98ff) where Baudrillard confessed that he was always an 'iconoclast' who 'has always been wary of art and culture in general', and thus his

'relationship with art and aesthetics has always, in a way, remained clandestine, intermittent, ambivalent' (2005b: 98).

In the 1996 text, 'The conspiracy of art', however, he blasts away in his most iconoclastic assault on the entire contemporary art scene. Baudrillard argues that, just as pornography exhibits the loss of desire in sex, and sexuality becomes 'transsexuality' where everything is transparent and exhibited, so too has art 'lost the desire for illusion and instead raises everything to aesthetic banality, becoming *transaesthetic*' (2005b: 25). Just as pornography 'permeates all visual and televisual techniques' (ibid.), so too does art appear everywhere and everything can be seen and exhibited as art: 'Raising originality, banality and nullity to the level of values or even perverse aesthetic pleasure … Therein lies all the duplicity of contemporary art: asserting *nullity*, insignificance, meaninglessness, striving for nullity when already null and void' (Baudrillard, 2005b: 27).

Saying that art today is null can mean several things. Nullity describes an absence of value and Baudrillard could argue that because artistic value today is ruled by commercial value art nullifies itself. That is, commercial value nullifies aesthetic value by reducing value to the cash nexus, thus aesthetic value is really ruled by the market, and aesthetic values are collapsed into commercial ones.

But Baudrillard also wants to argue that art historically has nullified itself as a transcendent aesthetic object, as something different from everyday life, by becoming part of everyday life whether as found object in a museum, or by being ornamentation, or prestige value, in a home, corporation, or public space. Art could also be null because if aesthetic value is everywhere, it is nowhere, and has leaked out of its own aesthetic realm which, of course, museums, galleries and the art establishment try to re-establish, creating the illusion that art does exist as a separate and especially valuable realm. Thus, for Baudrillard contemporary art does not really create another world, it becomes part of this world, and thus is null in the sense of not producing aesthetic transcendence. In a later text 'Art … contemporary of itself', Baudrillard writes:

> The adventure of modern art is over. Contemporary art is only contemporary of itself. It no longer transcends itself into the past or the future. Its only reality is its operation in real time and its confusion with this reality.
>
> Nothing differentiates it from technical, advertising, media and digital operations. There is no more transcendence, no more divergence, nothing from another scene: it is a reflective game with the contemporary world as it happens. This is why contemporary art is null and void: it and the world form a zero sum equation.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005b: 89)

Baudrillard's critique of the contemporary art world is thus highly radical, asserting that promoters of the art scene today are involved in 'insider

trading, the shameful and hidden complicity binding the artist who uses his or her aura of derision against the bewildered and doubtful masses' (2005b: 26–7). Baudrillard appears especially put off by the discourses of the art world that continue to hype new artists, exhibits, retrospectives, as fundamental events of cultural importance. There is a 'conspiracy of art' because at the moment of its disappearance, when art has simply disappeared into the existing world and everyday life, the art establishment conspires to hype it more and more with spectacular museum and gallery exhibits, record prices for art works at auctions, and a growing apparatus of publicity and discourse. Critics and the art audience are part of this conspiracy, because they play along, exhibiting interest in every new banality, insignificant new work or artist and repetition of the past, thus participating in the fraud.

Now obviously, to make these claims, Baudrillard is operating with a very extravagant notion of what art should be, and in his very assaults on art collected in *The Conspiracy of Art*, there are hints concerning his normative ideal of art. Some of his utterances seem to relate his ideal of art to traditional concepts of avant-garde revolutionary art, in which art is supposed to create another world, providing entry to an aesthetic dimension that transcends everyday life, and could even be an event which is a life-altering phenomenon, as in the passage cited above, from 'Art … contemporary of itself'.

Further, for Baudrillard, exceptional art could be 'an initiatory form of Nothingness, or an initiatory form of Evil' (2005b: 27). By this, he means that certain works can negate the being of the world, emptying it of illusory meaning and value, and can subvert dominant values of Good, in Nietzschean fashion, enabling individuals to free themselves from conventional views and values and create anew. But in the contemporary art world, Baudrillard rails against: 'the inside traders, the counterfeiters of nullity, the snobs of nullity, of all those who prostitute Nothingness to value, who prostitute Evil for useful ends' (2005b: 27). That is, Baudrillard attacks an art world that prostitutes the subversive and emancipatory potential of art for commerce, in which art becomes a mere commodity valorized by its exchange value, or a useful ornament to a debased world. This iconoclastic critique is at the bottom of his rage against the art world.

In a similar fashion, Baudrillard attacks politicians who have debased and turned politics into a game of manipulation, power and politics, attacking alike political and aesthetic elites:

> Like politicians, who relieve us of the bothersome responsibility of power, contemporary art, with its incoherent artifice, relieves us of the grasp of meaning through the spectacle of nonsense. This explains its proliferation: independent of any aesthetic value, it is ensured of prospering in function of its insignificance and vanity. Just as politicians persist despite the absence of any representation or credibility.
>
> (2005b: 96–7)

Thus Baudrillard's attack on contemporary art as nullity points to his view of the complete nullity of contemporary culture and society. In some interviews collected in *The Conspiracy of Art*, Baudrillard presents himself as a 'peasant' or 'primitive', naïvely looking from outside at a strange cultural world of art, and claims he is carrying out an 'indocile' form of diagnostic, with the 'in-docile … in the original meaning of the word, [as] someone who refuses to be educated, instructed, trapped by signs' (2005b: 66–7). Yet he confesses that as soon as he denounces a system, from whatever position, he is complicit in it (2005b: 67), and in fact Baudrillard has strong theoretical positions on art and society, including, as I am suggesting, a normative ideal of art. In a 1996 interview, he points to complex connections between art and form, noting: 'I have no illusion, no belief, except in forms – reversibility, seduction or metamorphosis – but these forms are indestructible. This is not a vague belief, it is an act of faith, without which I would not do anything myself' (p. 59). For Baudrillard, his notion of form goes beyond Clive Bell and the Bloomsbury notion of significant form – which encodes aesthetic value, meaning, taste. Rather, for Baudrillard:

> Art is a form. A form is something that does not exactly have a history, but a destiny. Art had a destiny. Today, art has fallen into value … values can be negotiated, bought and sold, exchanged. Forms, as forms, cannot be exchanged for something else, they can only be exchanged among themselves.
>
> (2005b: 63)

Indeed, Baudrillard's work on art in the (2005b) collection reveals a primacy and mysticism of form, seeing truly life-altering art as: 'Something that is beyond value and that I attempt to reach using a sort of emptiness in which the object or the event has a chance to circulate with maximum intensity' (2005b: 71). The object or event 'in its secret form' (ibid.) are also described by him as surprising and unpredictable 'singularities', forming an alterity and also serving as what he calls in another interview a 'strange attractor' (Baudrillard 2005b: 79).

This could explain Baudrillard's attraction to photography where the subject disappears and the object emerges in its strangeness as pure form, at least in Baudrillard's ideal and imaginary of the photo.[5] Yet Baudrillard claims that he is not interested in art as such, but 'as an object, from an anthropological point of view: the object, before any promotion of its aesthetic value, and what happens after' (2005b: 61). This notion of the singularity of the object or event might explain why Baudrillard was so taken with the 9/11 terror attacks on the Twin Towers, since this was obviously a world historical event, but it was also an astounding aesthetic and media spectacle. Yet while Karlheinz Stockhausen was vilified by claiming that the 9/11 spectacle of terror was one of the greatest acts of performance art of modern times, Baudrillard reposted:

> why does it have to be a 'work of art'? Why must the sanction for the sublime and the exceptional always come from art? It's a scandalous misconception to attach the same high-class label of 'art' and performance to September 11th and the Palais de Tokyo, for example. Let us retain for events the power of the event.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2006a [2005]: 34)

I have argued previously that the terror spectacle of 2001 provided an event that shocked Baudrillard out of his world-weariness and cynicism and that has given much of his post-2001 work a compelling political immediacy, sharp edge and originality (Kellner, 2005). Yet, quite frankly, the magnitude of the 9/11 event might have been so great that it confirmed his view that theory and art had no possibility of significantly capturing contemporary reality that was now going beyond any expectations, concepts or representations. As Adorno asked, how can there be poetry after Auschwitz, Baudrillard might ask, how can there be art after 9/11?

Concluding comments

The Conspiracy of Art enables us to strive for an overview of Baudrillard's insights on art and what now appears as his *anti-aesthetics*.[6] In his collection of key essays on art, Baudrillard is more of a critic of art and a cultural metaphysician than an aesthetic theorist. He uses art to theorize general trends of contemporary society and culture, and to illustrate his metaphysical views and positions on the contemporary world, rather than analysing art on its own terms or formulating aesthetic theory à la Adorno or Marcuse.

While writing this chapter I did the final copy-editing of a volume, *Herbert Marcuse: Art and Liberation*, which valorizes the aesthetic dimension (2007), and with Adorno (1984) could be read as the antipode to Baudrillard. I often find it useful to play off opposites against each other to see if I can construct yet another position, or to test who I really believe and agree with, in this case concerning the position of art in the contemporary world. In my aesthetic moments, I want to go with Marcuse and Adorno on this one, but in my darker theoretical moments I wonder if Baudrillard is not right, or is at least a needed antidote to excessive aestheticism.

Baudrillard thus emerges in my reading of his writings of the past decade on art as deeply anti-aesthetics, and a powerful critic of the contemporary art scene. Baudrillard is deadly serious, albeit ironic and sometimes playful, in condemning the contemporary art scene, appearing as what Nicholas Zurbrugg termed the 'angel of extermination', yet he also appears as Zurbrugg's 'angel of annunciation', blessing the perhaps hopeless attempt to find alternatives in art and theory in a fallen (i.e. imploded) world.[7] While Baudrillard sometimes appears as elitist, rejecting or eviscerating distinctive cultural phenomena of the present age, yet he emerges at the same time as highly radical, criticizing the very roots of contemporary cultural, political

and theoretical pretension and malaise. He is at once a strong theorist and an anti-theorist, making reading and interpreting him a challenging enterprise (see Kellner, 1989 and 2006).

I would argue that Baudrillard is his contradictions and anyone who tries to pin him down and offer one-sided interpretations fails. While there are, arguably, some threads and themes running through his work (the Object), there are certainly different stages of his work which Baudrillard sometimes lays out himself, but they are often hard to delineate, characterize, pin down, and are always subject to reversal.

Baudrillard is a provocateur who often presents radical negations to his readers, as with his end of art and art conspiracy analysis, or his analysis of the disappearance of reality, the perfect crime, to which he alluded at the 2006 Swansea conference in his address 'On disappearance' (this volume).

As I've argued, Baudrillard's work on art is especially challenging and provocative, quite original and hard to sum up. But since references to Duchamp and Warhol run through the texts of *The Conspiracy of Art*, and have long been Baudrillardian reference points, I'll conclude by suggesting that Baudrillard is the Duchamp and Warhol of theory, mocking it by emptying it of messy content, deconstructing its problematic aspects by simulating it, putting on the audience by enigmatically repeating previous gestures and positions, but then making new ones that confound the critics. Although Duchamp, Warhol and Baudrillard can often appear banal and repetitive, they often create something original and compelling, often with unpredictable effects. And so I conclude by evoking the triad of Duchamp, Warhol and Baudrillard as objects, or strange attractors, of profound irony and provocation that continue to challenge our views of art, culture and reality itself today.

Notes

1 This paper was written for the conference 'Engaging Baudrillard' held at Swansea University in September 2006. I would like to thank William Merrin for exceptional hospitality during the conference and its aftermath, and to the organizers and participants for stimulating discussion, and to the editors for cracker-jack editing of my article.

2 Baudrillard's literary roots, his immersion in a tradition of French literature, and his connections to pataphysics, is signalled in 'Pataphysics' and an interview with Sylvère Lotringer 'Forget Artaud' (in Baudrillard, 2005b: 213–37).

3 For a commentary on Baudrillard's relation to the art world and the emergence of his radical critique of contemporary art, see Lotringer, 2005; for further radical critique of the contemporary art scene, see Lotringer and Virilio, 2005. In an obituary on Baudrillard in the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Lotringer concluded, however, that Baudrillard's 'brutal attack on *The Conspiracy of Art*, which didn't shake the art world as much as it should have, actually vindicating his main argument' at http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/obituaries_slotringer.html.

4 After it was first published in *Libération* in May 1996, the text appeared the next year as a pamphlet, *Le Complot de l'Arte* (Paris: Sens and Tonka, 1997). It was collected in *Screened Out* (2002a [1997a]) and became the centrepiece and title of Baudrillard's (2005b) collection of writings on art.

5 On Baudrillard's analyses and practices of photography, which go beyond the parameters of this analysis, see the material in Zurbrugg (1997). Lotringer notes in 'The piracy of art', his introduction to Baudrillard's *The Conspiracy of Art*, that Baudrillard's own photographs and their display confirmed to him the correctness of his view of the nullity of art:

> Actually that he, who admittedly had no artistic claim or pedigree, would be invited to exhibit his work, amply proved his point: there was nothing special anymore about art. Groucho Marx once said that he would never join a club that accepted him as a member. Baudrillard did worse: he joined a group whose reasons to exist he publicly denied.
>
> (Lotringer, 2005: 16)

6 Hal Foster (1983) entitled his collection of writing on postmodern culture, one of the first and most influential in the postmodern debates of the 1980s, *The Anti-Aesthetic*. The collection included Baudrillard's 'Ecstasy of communication' (1983: 126–34), which I always took as signalling a radical postmodern break and rupture in history, signalled by his discourse of 'No longer', 'no more', 'Now, however', evoking throughout 'this new state of things'. While I would agree with Mike Gane (2000: 31f) that Baudrillard did not want to be seen as a postmodern theorist, he was associated with the discourse of the postmodern and analysis of a radical postmodern break in history. In a keynote panel session in a conference celebrating his 75th birthday in Mannheim, Baudrillard spoke of a 'fundamental anthropological rupture', indicating a kinship of his thought with discourses of the 'post' and rupture, and in a commentary in this volume on 'On disappearance', I read this enigmatic late text as pointing to the rupture that is a key signature of Baudrillard's work from the mid-1970s until his death. On the relation between Baudrillard and postmodern theory and analyses of postmodernity, see Kellner (1989), and Best and Kellner (2001).

7 See Nicholas Zurbrugg, 'Introduction: "Just what is it that makes Baudrillard's ideas so different, so appealing?"' in *Art and Artefact* (Zurbrugg, 1997: 1ff).

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8 'Mirror, mirror'

The Student of Prague in Baudrillard, Kracauer and Kittler

Graeme Gilloch

Introduction

Of all the films fleetingly invoked by Jean Baudrillard to elucidate and exemplify his dazzling theoretical and conceptual repertoire,[1] few, if any, attract his attention more than – one might say, none seem to haunt him so persistently as – the early German silent film *The Student of Prague*. Rather improbably, not only does he devote the entire Conclusion – characteristically, of course, anything but an actual conclusion – of his (1998a [1970]) study *The Consumer Society* (hereafter *CS*) to a consideration of this arcane film, but its key motif – of the human subject's mirror-image stepping out of the frame and into the world as a demonic, and ultimately fatal, doppelgänger – refuses to leave Baudrillard in peace, making repeated, usually unannounced, appearances in, for instance, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994a [1981]: 95), in *Seduction* (1990a [1979]: 168) and, more recently, *Cool Memories III* (1997a [1995b]: 11) and *The Perfect Crime* (1996c [1995a]: 148–9), the last of these concluding with a fragment unmistakably entitled 'The revenge of the mirror people'.

Given that so many of Baudrillard's preoccupations – mirrors, reflections and shadows; doubling, the demonic image and the precession of simulacra; seduction, duels and pacts; the *trompe d'oeil*, fractals and fragments; haunting, disappearance and death – might potentially be traced back in some way to his encounter with *The Student of Prague*, it is rather surprising that his discussion of this film has received so little consideration. The film seemingly escapes the attention of key commentators such as Kellner (1989), Gane (1991), Genosko (1994) and Merrin (2005), and even in Butler's (1999) study the chapter promisingly entitled 'Doubling' contains no mention.

Such an omission is even more curious when one considers that Baudrillard is not the only writer to highlight the film's significance and offer a distinctive reading of its themes and imagery: the Critical Theorist Siegfried Kracauer opens his famous pioneering 1947 'psychological history' of Weimar cinema *From Caligari to Hitler* with a detailed consideration of this film, and the contemporary German theorist Friedrich Kittler (1986/1999) revisits it at length in his seminal genealogical exploration of modern

media technologies *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.[2] How might their divergent historical discussions, the first involving a kind of socio-psychoanalysis of film and its audiences, the latter tracing the startling affinities between psychiatric and cinematic imaginations, provide a frame for, or counterpoint to, Baudrillard's own account so that one may tease out the film's wider significance for his 'fatal theory'? It is this question that concerns me in this chapter.

The Student of Prague

But one should begin with a word of caution. These two other writers are actually discussing another film – there are indeed no fewer than three versions of *The Student of Prague*, though the outline of the plot seems essentially the same, cobbling together various elements from Goethe's *Faust*, Poe's *William Wilson*, Dostoevsky's *The Double* and the stories of E. T. A. Hoffman into a nineteenth-century Gothic romance.

The first version of the film, discussed by Kracauer and Kittler, was directed in 1913 by Stellan Rye, and features Paul Wegener in the principal role of Balduin, 'Prague's finest swordsman and wildest student' as the intertitle puts it, who is tricked by the sinister sorcerer Scapinelli into accepting 100,000 pieces of gold in exchange for whatever he, the illusionist, cares to take with him from the poor student's humble lodging. Surveying his few miserable possessions, scarcely able to contain his laughter at the old man's folly, Balduin readily agrees, only to be dumbstruck with horror when Scapinelli coaxes the student's image from the mirror and gleefully departs in the company of the apparition. With his newfound wealth, Balduin begins to court the beautiful Countess Margrit von Schwarzenberg, who is inconveniently already betrothed in a loveless match to her cousin. Learning of Balduin and Margrit's secret trysts, her effete suitor challenges the student to a duel, the outcome of which would be all too obvious. Margrit's father intervenes so as to win from Balduin the promise that he will spare the rash relative, 'the last living bearer of my name'. But this assurance is eventually to no avail. The malevolent mirror-image has already begun to appear before Balduin, pursuing him wherever he ventures, haunting him. And it is this ghostly double who arrives first at the appointed place for the duel and mercilessly kills his opponent, bringing shame and disgrace upon the tardy Balduin who is debarred from the Countess's house. Eventually gaining secret entry, and convincing Margrit of his integrity and love, Balduin's wooing is once more interrupted by the appearance of his doppelgänger and he is forced to flee. The student resolves to bring an end to this intolerable state of affairs. Back in his lodgings, he confronts the impostor and shoots him with a duelling pistol, only to discover that in so doing he has actually shot himself. In the shattered fragments of the looking-glass, Balduin finally sees his mirror-image properly restored, thereby saving his soul, but only through death. Scapinelli reappears momentarily to tear up the pact, its

pieces falling like confetti upon Balduin's corpse lying among the scattered shards of glass.

As Chris Turner, the translator of *The Consumer Society*, rightly points out in a footnote (*CS*, 203), Baudrillard's own account does not refer to this first version of the film but rather to its 1926 remake directed by Henrik Galeen.[3] On the basis of Baudrillard's description of the plot, the narrative exhibits only a few minor differences: for example, the opening scenes are slightly different; the trickster Scapinelli is replaced unambiguously by the figure of the Devil himself and the demonic bargain struck with the student does not involve Scapinelli's cunning ploy; instead of the doppelgänger walking out of the mirror, as in the 1913 version, here the image is peeled from the mirror 'as though it were an etching or a sheet of carbon paper' (*CS*, 187), rolled up and pocketed by the Devil. The fundamentals, though, clearly remain: the infernal pact, money, the mirror-image as doppelgänger, seduction, the duel, death, suicide and redemption. Whether first or second version, what is most important is that, in combining these motifs, *The Student of Prague* constitutes for Baudrillard, Kracauer and Kittler an allegory of a particular historical moment of crisis and alienation of the subject. And allegory itself is, of course, nothing other than a duplication of narrative such that one story is accompanied at every moment by another, its parallel or double. Allegory is the doppelgänger haunting the text.

Schizophrenia and the soul of cinema

Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* seeks to identify and explore how Weimar cinema gave repeated expression to, and continually fostered, the authoritarian predispositions and predilections of German cinemagoers, inwardly preparing them for the tyranny of National Socialism, not by way of specific anti-Semitic propaganda, but rather, for example, through dramatising the conflict between the perils and chaos of rebellion, and the virtues of patriarchal control and order. Kracauer takes *The Student of Prague* as a key point of departure for his study because it:

> introduced to the screen a theme that was to become an obsession of the German cinema: a deep and fearful concern with the foundations of the self. By separating Baldwin [sic] from his reflection and making both face each other, Wegener's film symbolizes a specific kind of split personality.
>
> (Kracauer, 1947: 30)

While an 'old motif' (1947: 30), this schizophrenia had a special significance at the time, giving expression to the prevailing contradictions, experiences and frustrations of the politically impotent, but increasingly economically and socially powerful, German bourgeoisie during the last days of Empire. Resentful of the power of the imperial caste and military elite, but wholly complicit in their free market economic policies, demanding

liberalisation but fearful of working-class agitation, the middle classes finally 'had to admit that they identified themselves with the very ruling class they opposed' (1947: 30). Kracauer contends that the film successfully dramatises this structural, political conflict in terms of individual psychology. External, material, social circumstances are introjected into the individual subject such that 'outer duplicities' become 'inner dualities' (1947: 31) though not without a sense of dread. Kracauer observes that although:

> they preferred such psychological complications to issues involving a loss of their own privileges. Nevertheless they seem to have sometimes doubted whether their retreat into the depths of the soul would save them from a catastrophic breakthrough of social reality. Baldwin's ultimate suicide mirrors their premonitions.
>
> (Kracauer, 1947: 31)

Later and in passing, Kracauer comments upon Galeen's 'beautiful if in some respects questionable' (1947: 153) 1926 remake in similar terms, regarding it as something of a hangover or 'straggler' from 'a bygone era' (ibid.). With its markedly 'increased emphasis on the psychological significance of the plot' (ibid.) and changed social context, the 1926 version now reflected the tensions between the increasingly authoritarian leanings of the German middle classes and the fragile republican institutions which governed them, presenting the acute ambiguities and ambivalence of the Weimar citizen just as the first film 'had mirrored the duality of any liberal under the Kaiser' (1947: 123).

For Kracauer, Baldwin's conflict with his own reflection is but an interiorisation, a subjectivisation and then, by way of film, a mass mediation of the anxiety, agonistics and alienation of bourgeois life. In screening the inner life or 'soul' of the bourgeoisie in this way, the film not only *screens* a disturbing mirror-image, *it is itself a kind of distorting mirror-image of the crisis of the contemporary subject*, a film that haunts the imagination of its viewers as their double, so to speak. *The Student of Prague* reflects the torn and tortured identities of its viewers through the depiction of reflection itself. The mirror is the message. Indeed, the film might be seen a kind of two-way mirror: viewing it then, the German middle classes saw themselves and their circumstances *reflected in it*; viewing it subsequently, the Critical Theorist sees these conditions and collective sentiments *through it*.

And this brings us to Kittler. Kittler, who is dismissive of Kracauer's 'simplified sociological reading' (Kittler, 1999: 146) – though *contra* Kittler, it is, as we have seen, far from simple. Kittler is preoccupied with *The Student of Prague* not as an instance of cinematic reflection but as a paradigmatic instance of filmic reflexivity. It is not so much the 'soul' of the German bourgeoisie that appears before us on screen, but rather the very essence of cinema itself. In his discussion of the 1913 version, Kittler argues that the film brings together two intimately related aspects. On the one hand,

it serves as a projection of the schizophrenic character of the modern psychological subject and all the baggage of binary oppositions that psychoanalysis and psychiatry bring with them: id and ego; the rational and the instinctual; *heimlich* and *unheimlich*; adult and child; self and other; patient and analyst; experimenter and test subject; fort, da.[4]

On the other hand, the film presents us with the spectacle of the subject, Balduin, as spectator of his own image: this image, though, not a mere reflection as in a mirror, but a double moving and acting independently as if on a screen. To be filmed, to see oneself on film, to become subject/object of the film medium and the gaze – this possibility of self-spectatorship, and of a new and, for Kittler, profoundly disturbing self-scrutiny, this is the uncanny promise of the cinematic medium. In capturing the moving image of the actor, film records and preserves for posterity an apparently living double of the actor, an actor now free to study this image of the self, now free to be elsewhere. With this in mind, Kittler writes: 'Film doppelgängers film filming itself. They demonstrate what happens to people who are in the line of fire of technological media. A motorized mirror-image travels into the data banks of power' (1999: 149). In *The Student of Prague* the 'mirror stage' has not merely gone catastrophically awry, it has given way to a new mobile form, a nomadic narcissism, the 'screen stage'.

On the one hand, the psychiatric; on the other, the cinematic – and just as surely as our hands are mirror-images of one another, so, too, for Kittler are these seemingly incongruous domains, with the screen double as their common figure. Kittler stresses how early film – Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* is exemplary, but also the first pioneering scientific films recording psychological experiments – challenges and disconcerts viewers with the constant reversibility of subjects, roles and dispositions: the experimenter experiments upon himself; the harmless doctor is the murderous madman; the hero is the deluded asylum inmate; the sinister Caligari is the benevolent psychiatrist; the double is a negative, the double negative is a positive. The double is the cinematic figure par excellence, Kittler argues, because it is film that captures the visual physiological and physiognomical identity of subjects, subjects which can then – because of their invisible psychological disparity – confront each other on screen through the trickery, not of Scapinelli, but of the camera-operator and the editor who cuts and splices.[5]

Indeed, the cunning of the sorcerer is no match for the technical manipulations of the film-maker. In *The Student of Prague*, we witness 'The film trick to end all film tricks' (Kittler, 1999: 154), or rather, to end them and begin them at one and the same moment: the mirror-image steps out of the frame on the wall and apparently into the world, but symbolically into a new frame, that of the cinematic image. This moment of the incarnation of the doppelgänger is, then, simultaneously the inception of the filmic. Doppelgänger films involve nothing less than 'the filming of filming' (1999: 155) and 'they double doubling' (1999: 155). The doppelgänger film involves the cinematic representation of the act of cinematic representation. In this

sense, one is tempted to say that *The Student of Prague* becomes for Kittler akin to what *Las Meninas* is for Foucault in *The Order of Things* – the very image of image-making, the work presenting the very workings of depiction. Which would make Paul Wegener surely the most unlikely heir of Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velásquez!

The mirror and production: duplication and alienation

This idea of the production of production brings us finally to Baudrillard. Following Kracauer (and Rank), preceding Kittler, Baudrillard, too, reads this film as an allegorical tale of the modern schizophrenic subject, of self-estrangement at a specific historical moment: the bygone era of production. Baudrillard's conclusion to *The Consumer Society* unexpectedly invokes *The Student of Prague* as a cinematic dramatisation of the Marxist critique of human alienation under the conditions of capitalist industrial production. Balduin sells his self for money, turns himself or an aspect of himself into an object which is then pocketed by the Devil and taken away from him, just as the capitalist takes possession of the commodity, the product of the worker's life-activity as coerced labour, in exchange for the wage. Baudrillard notes: 'The image is not lost or abolished by chance: it is sold. It falls into the commodity sphere, we might say, and this is indeed the sense of concrete social alienation' (*CS*, 188). He emphasises: the film unmistakably puts 'Gold, and Gold alone – that is to say, commodity logic and exchange-value – at the centre of alienation' (*CS*, 188).

Once separated, detached from the self, the self secretly contained in the commodity, allegorically understood here as the mirror-image of the self, does not disappear, vanish into the marketplace never to be seen again, leaving the remainder reduced but undisturbed. Rather, the commodity returns in the marketplace as a phantasm, as a phantasmagoria (literally: a ghost in the marketplace) to be bought and consumed by its original producer, the wage-labourer. The worker buys what he has made, diminished by the extraction of surplus value at each moment in the duplicitous process of exchange. The commodity, like the mirror-image, returns to us in distorted, malicious form. Alienation is not, then, merely the subject become object, nor just the loss of this reified self: it is above all the continual visitation of the subject by the self-same subject become object, the inescapable haunting of oneself by oneself. Baudrillard observes:

> Alienation goes much deeper than that. There is a part of us which gets away from us in this process, but we do not get away from it. The object (the soul, the shadow, the product of our labour become object) takes its revenge. All we are dispossessed of remains attached to us, but negatively. In other words, it *haunts* us. That part of us sold and forgotten is still us, or rather it is a caricature of us, the ghost, the spectre which follows us; it is our continuation and takes its revenge.
>
> (*CS*, 189)

Our hopes, aspirations and desires are thwarted by this avenging apparition, which always stands between us and fulfilment. Baudrillard sums this up when he writes:

> Now there is a part of ourselves by which, when living, we are collectively haunted: social labour power, which once sold, returns, through the whole social cycle of the commodity, to dispossess us of the meaning of labour itself; labour power which has become – by a social, not a diabolical operation, of course – the materialized obstacle to the fruits of our labours. It is all this which is symbolized in *The Student of Prague*.
>
> (*CS*, 190)

Indeed, the film 'develops the objective logic of alienation in all its rigour and shows that there is no way out but death. Every ideal solution for overcoming alienation is cut off' (*CS*, 190).

The Student of Prague constitutes a faithful mirror of production in that it screens the mirror *as* a form of production (reflection involves duplication and 'produces' the double) and production as a mirror (creating the other who is the self, the alienated subject). Above all, the film presents this mirror-image as one who comes after us, pesters us, targets us, stalks us, proves ultimately fatal for us. The objectified subject (the doppelgänger, the commodity) transforms the subject (the student, the worker) into its object, its prey, its victim. It kills us. And the doppelgänger is indeed a ruthless killer.[6] The apparition arrives at the appointed place for the duel before Balduin and callously slays the cousin of the Countess. The double, then, does not just come after the student to exact revenge: it goes before him, precedes him, to satisfy vengeance. Taking on a life of its own, the independent image comes first. Here are two motifs which point beyond the Marxist understanding of alienation and come instead to underpin Baudrillard's conception of a fatal, rather than simply critical, theory: the privileging of the claims of the object over the subject; the precession of image, of simulacra.

The Student of Prague provides for Baudrillard 'a remarkable illustration of the processes of alienation, that is to say, of the generalised pattern of individual and social life governed by commodity logic' (*CS*, 190–1) and, as such, the film serves as an epitaph for the age of production, an epoch itself now dead, replaced by a wholly new logic, that of the consumer society: no more demonic duplication but endless proliferation; no longer the good subject versus the evil image but the banality of their implosion and identity; not the doppelgänger conjured by the sorcerer but the clone manipulated by the lab technician; not the mirror but the screen of the ATM; not the mystical, medieval pact with the Devil but the cool conspiracy of the credit card; not gold, just the Goldcard.

Baudrillard notes:

> There is no longer any mirror or looking-glass in the modern order in which the human being would be confronted with his image for better or for worse; there is only the shop window – the site of consumption, in which the individual no longer produces his own reflection, but is absorbed in the contemplation of multiple signs/objects, is absorbed into the order of signifiers of social status etc. He is not reflected in that order, but absorbed and abolished.
>
> (*CS*, 192)

The devilish trickery of the mirror has gone and in its place we have the shop window, the evil of transparency.

The mirror and seduction: the duel and the pact

In *The Consumer Society* Baudrillard limits his consideration of *The Student of Prague* to this role of historical-materialist allegory presenting the experience of commodification and alienation. But in doing so, Baudrillard unintentionally leads us astray, seduces us (*se-ducere*: literally to lead astray), for later invocations of the film's motifs clearly suggest a much wider significance, no longer in relation to the logic of the capitalist production, but rather in terms of its antithesis, seduction. Baudrillard seduces us from seduction – and we should not let him. For while, it is true, there are no explicit references to the film in *Seduction* itself, its figures are unmistakable: deceptive mirrors, doubles, sorcery, haunting, duels and the pact. All these now involve a very different economy from that of money, calculation, commodities and the laws of exchange. Baudrillard writes, for example, of the significance of mirrors no longer merely in terms of their dutiful role as 'humble servants' or 'the watchdogs of appearance' (*S*, 105), but rather as surfaces we must guard against, as cunning and lethal instruments of combat:

> their faithfulness is specious, for they are waiting for someone to catch himself in their reflection. One does easily forget their sidelong gaze. They recognize you, and when they surprise you when you least expect it, your time has come. / Such is the seducer's strategy: he gives himself the humility of the mirror, but a skilful mirror, like Perseus' shield, in which Medusa found herself petrified.
>
> (*S*, 105–6)

Accordingly, '"I'll be your mirror,"' Baudrillard warns, 'does not signify "I'll be your reflection" but "I'll be your deception"' (*S*, 69). And such tricky mirrors lead on, inevitably, to treacherous mirror-images: 'The double,' Baudrillard writes:

> is an imaginary figure that, like the soul or one's shadow, or one's image in a mirror, haunts the subject with a faint death that has to be

> constantly warded off. If it materializes, death is imminent. This fantastic proposition is now literally realized in cloning. The clone is the very image of death, but without the symbolic illusion that once gave it its charm.
>
> (*S*, 168)

Unlike the charmless clone, to which I will return, the double is an uncanny figure of seduction. For it is not just a question of warding off, avoiding or fleeing before the double as perpetual pursuant. If the doppelgänger can be said to haunt the subject, so the reverse is equally true: the subject haunts, and is equally lethal for, the double. The student is, to be sure, followed by his doppelgänger but it is also the case that the student, albeit unwittingly, *follows* the double.[7] By the time Balduin arrives at the duelling ground, the deed is already done and the apparition has left. Who exactly is haunting or hunting whom? (Interestingly, Baudrillard notes that the 1926 film version opens with a hunting scene.) In this game of mutual pursuit we see not so much the work of the Devil but the convoluted play of seduction. The conflict between Balduin and his mirror-image is precisely of the order of the duel, a duel between the dual, so to speak. Indeed, the film narrative involves not just one but two deadly duels: one unseen fencing contest between the doppelgänger and the Countess's cousin (and is not fencing a combat of mirroring?); the other, between the student and his double, decided by the discharging of a single duelling pistol – one presumes, as is usual with such things, one of a pair of identical weapons.

For Baudrillard, the challenge, which instigates the duel, and the duel itself are elements of a ritual order wholly prior to, or at least other than, that of capitalist market relations. 'What could be more seductive than a challenge?' he asks rhetorically: why is it that when set a challenge 'one cannot but respond to it' (*S*, 82)? The irresistible character of the challenge resides not in its compelling rational logic, but rather in its conventional, ludic obligation. The challenge:

> inaugurates a kind of insane relation, quite unlike relations of communication or exchange: a duel relation transacted by meaningless signs, but held together by a fundamental rule and its secret observance. A challenge terminates all contracts and exchanges regulated by the law … substituting a highly conventional ritualized pact, with an unceasing obligation to respond, and respond in spades – an obligation that is governed by a fundamental game rule, and proceeds in accord with its own rhythm.
>
> (*S*, 82)

Balduin's bargain with the Devil also partakes of this order for: 'It is never an investment but a risk; never a contract but a pact; never individual but duel; never psychological but ritual; never natural but artificial. It is no one's strategy, but a destiny' (*S*, 83), indeed, it is the paradigmatic pact with death.

For Baudrillard, *The Student of Prague* is schizophrenic, or perhaps better, Janus-faced. In envisioning the film as an allegory of alienation, he seems to share some of Kracauer's concerns. The film captures the historical moment of production at which 'the world is becoming opaque, that our acts are getting out of our control and, at that point, we have no perspective on ourselves' (*CS*, 188). For Kracauer, this crisis of the self leads to the embrace of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. For Baudrillard, it is a forerunner of the radical banality and hyperconformity of contemporary consumerism.

Later, in unfolding figures and motifs of the film as elements of seduction, Baudrillard's comes surprisingly close to Kittler, a proximity perhaps not immediately obvious. But for Baudrillard, seduction is the very source and force of cinematic attraction and fascination: 'The cinema has never shone except by pure seduction' (*S*, 96). And it is, above all, the seductive power of the modern-day screen idol (a face, a body inseparable from its image) that forms the very essence of the cinematic:

> The cinema's power lies in its myth. Its stories, its psychological portraits, its imagination or realism, the meaningful impression it leaves – these are all secondary. Only the myth is powerful, and at the heart of the cinematographic myth lies seduction – that of the renowned seductive figure, a man or woman (but above all a woman) linked to the ravishing but specious power of the cinematographic image itself. A miraculous conjunction.
>
> (*S*, 95)

In its screening of the imagery of seduction, *The Student of Prague* screens the 'heart of the cinematographic' (*S*, 95).

The Student of Prague is not only a filmic epitaph for the former world of production and alienation, it is also that of an archaic domain of seduction, too, a realm whose last residues are today to be found, appropriately, only in cinema. 'The cinema has never shone except by pure seduction' (*S*, 96): and it still does so, albeit more faintly now the heyday of the screen idol is past, the era of the silver screen and the silent star. It shone most intensely amid, for example, the gloomy mists and shadows of the Prague cityscape.

The shattered subject

Wherever Baudrillard's thought leads, one can be sure the image of the double, *The Student of Prague*, is not far behind. It continues to haunt him. In *Cool Memories III*, for instance, he writes: 'Just as the *Student of Prague* rediscovered his image in the scattered fragments of the mirror, so the various singularities rediscover theirs in the broken mirror of the universal' (*CM3*, 11). Baudrillard draws our attention here to the film's final scene. The doppelgänger vanishes with Balduin's pistol shot, but though the illusion is broken and the mirror-image finally restored, it is now only to be seen in the

tiny shards of glass that litter the floor. This shattering of the mirror, of the subject, clearly unites Kracauer, Kittler and Baudrillard, for they all see in the film the catastrophic and irrevocable fragmentation of the modern self. But this scene has a significance beyond this for Baudrillard, as a scene of the end of the illusion, of disappearance, and death. The mirror-image has gone and what is left are the manifold reflections of the subject in the innumerable pieces of glass. Infinite reflections, infinite copies. The fully formed double has gone, to be replaced by the miniaturised multiplicity, each particle bearing the code of the totality within it, like cells. In shattering the mirror, we banish the doppelgänger only to generate the clone. In its final scene, *The Student of Prague* presents us with the primal scene, not of restoration and redemption, but of a new era of genetic engineering and the code. What use have we now of mirrors? Let them be shattered, let them stay shattered. Their shards – fractals, monads from which totality winks at us – will endure as melancholy reminders of what and who we once were, of what we once hoped and lived for. And what is left now? Only the corpse, and these broken images and these scraps of paper.

The student kills himself unintentionally; but it is the double who actually commits suicide, for it is he who pursues Balduin to his room for the inevitable end. The doppelgänger seeks out his executioner, goes knowingly to his death, commits suicide. Why? Because he cannot, will not, remain part of this world. It is a world into which even our shadows will refuse to accompany us.

Notes

1 These include: avant-garde films (Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*, *SO*: 100; Pasolini's *Salo or 120 days*, *S*: 20–1), comedies (Jacques Tati's, *Playtime*, *CS*: 164; Woody Allen's, *Zelig ED*: 15–16), obscure films (*The Collector*, *S*: 122), prophetic films (*Capricorn One*, *FS*: 87; *The China Syndrome*, *SS*: 53–7: *Blade Runner*, *SC*: 200; *Jurassic Park*, *CM3*: 138–9), films of gilded eroticism (*Goldfinger*, *SED*: 105), of sexual unintelligibility (*In the Realm of the Senses*, *S*: 44), and banalities of cancerous uncriticisability (*Basic Instinct*, *AA*: 8).

2 Other scholars have also found themselves preoccupied with the film, most notably perhaps, the psychoanalyst Otto Rank. His pioneering 1914 study *Der Doppelgänger* takes the film – 'a romantic drama which not long ago made the rounds of our cinemas' (Rank, 1971: 3) – as his key point of departure (see ibid.: 3–7). Drawing subsequently on literary (E. T. A. Hoffman, Jean Paul, Edgar Allen Poe, Oscar Wilde and Fyodor Dostoevsky) and (dubious) anthropological material, Rank understands the figure of the double in terms of, as Tucker puts it in his Introduction 'a universal human problem – the relation of the self to the self' (1971: xiv). Rank distinguishes between different notions of the double: (1) the physical double (different individuals, twins for instance, who resemble each other and who, in comic drama, for example, may cause all kinds of farcical confusion); (2) the detached likeness (shadows, mirror-images, portraits who escape their owners or come to lead independent existences); and (3) the double-consciousness in one individual such that the ego suspects an invisible, omnipresent other. Rank identifies some common characteristics of the literary double which clearly apply to *The Student of Prague*: there is a likeness in all respects; the double works against the interests of the person, who in turn becomes a victim of

persecution; the double intervenes to obstruct love and prevent the realisation of erotic interests; the killing of the double is a form of suicide. Rank accounts for the intense literary preoccupation with the double in terms of the peculiar biographies of the writers themselves, all of whom exhibited mental disturbances, psychical abnormalities and addictions (see Rank, 1971: 35). For Rank, the double is, above all, a manifestation of an intense and pathological narcissism. An exaggerated love of the self constantly interposes itself between the person and the other as an object of desire. Craving love, the self is unable to love another. Rank's investigation of the double develops a number of themes with the double figuring as: the twin who is a rival for the love of the mother (1971: 75); as the counterpart of the ego who secretly carries out one's repressed desires, thereby relieving the self of the burden of guilt (1971: 76); as the thanatophobe whose fear of the coming of death leads paradoxically to suicide (1971: 77); as the immortal soul who lives on after death (1971: 84). Much more recently, W. G. Sebald (2005: 164–5) ponders the film's possible significance for Franz Kafka in his 1997 review 'Kafka goes to the movies'.

3 The third version appeared ten years later under the auspices of the Third Reich, though Kracauer – curiously, given the theme of his work – pays this version scant attention, falling as it does outside the specific time-frame of his study.

4 Sigmund Freud's famous 1919 essay 'The uncanny' refers explicitly both to the film and to Rank's earlier study (see Freud, 1955: 234–6). For Freud, the uncanny (*unheimlich*) aspect of the double is connected with the notion of repetition, the return of the repressed. For Freud, that which has been repressed ('infantile complexes') or 'surmounted' ('primitive beliefs') are 'once more revived by some impression' (1955: 249) or confirmed by some inexplicable coincidence. The once-familiar (*heimlich*) reappears as a source of disquiet and disturbance. In a footnote, Freud himself recalls the uncanny experience of mistaking his own mirror-image for another person/his double (1955: 248).

5 Kittler writes: 'On-screen … doppelgängers or their iterations celebrate the theory of the unconscious as the technology of cinematic cutting, and vice-versa' (1999: 153).

6 In that the doppelgänger is also later responsible for the death of Balduin, this figure is appropriately a double murderer.

7 The seductive character of pursuit and following is best exemplified by Baudrillard in his 1988 essay 'Please follow me', an intriguing analysis of Sophie Calle's playful photographic project *Suite vénitienne*. For a discussion of this see Gilloch (2002).

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9 The Gulf War revisited

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Jean Baudrillard's (in)famous essays on the 1991 Gulf War – in which he predicted that the war would not take place; asked, once it had started, if itwas 'really' taking place; and maintained afterwards that it did not take place – convinced many commentators of his irrelevance (Norris, 1992). Equally, however, America's second Iraq war a little over a decade later prompted many to revise that judgement (Appleton, 2003; Brown, 2003; Kampmark, 2003). This chapter offers a re-reading of Baudrillard's Gulf War commentaries in light of more recent events – not just the 'war on terror' but also the 'humanitarian military interventions' of the 1990s – and reassesses their strengths and limitations as political critique.

What tended to annoy people about Baudrillard in 1991 was his denial of the 'reality' of a war which at the time struck many as all too real. Other writers also highlighted the way that the sanitised media coverage – featuring much footage of 'surgical' strikes taken from the missiles' perspective but little visual evidence of their deadly impact – made the war feel somehow 'unreal', or 'like a video game' (Chomsky, 1992; Knightley, 2000). But whereas, for most critics, the point was to contrast the misleading imagery with the reality of war's effects, Baudrillard's assertion that the war 'did not take place' appeared to lack critical purchase.

Where writers have taken up and elaborated Baudrillard's Gulf War commentaries, the focus has tended to be on relatively superficial, technical factors, particularly the use of high-tech weapons to kill weaker opponents from a distance while keeping Western troops out of harm's way; and the production of spectacular media coverage which only *seems* to show us what is going on (Hassan, 2004: 70–3; Hegarty, 2004: 98–9; Robins and Webster, 1999: 155–6). There is a tendency towards technological determinism in this discussion, whereby developments in military and/or media technology are understood as transforming the nature of warfare (Der Derian, 2003). The best treatments of the issue, however, by James Combs (1993) and Richard Keeble (1997), suggest that we should look at it the other way round: that the striking features of the 1991 war and its media treatment flowed from, and were designed to solve, a political problem.

The 1991 Gulf War

Baudrillard's argument about the Gulf War's lack of 'reality' is best understood as a political proposition: that war is no longer politically meaningful. However real the destruction and death, war has become a political non-event in the West.

Although some Baudrillard scholars object to his subsumption into the category of postmodernist writing, his essays about the Gulf War do seem recognisably postmodernist in Jean-François Lyotard's (1984: xxiv) sense of 'incredulity toward metanarratives'. Baudrillard could not see, in the Gulf War, any possibility of an alternative grand narrative to challenge the hegemony of the West: his essays are littered with allusions to the decline of Arab nationalism, the containment of radical Islam, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and the defeat of the 'revolutionary potential' (1995 [1991]: 85) of the Algerian uprising against colonial rule in the 1950s. From such past disappointments, postmodernists had drawn the conclusion that Enlightenment humanism was inherently flawed: this was the spirit in which Baudrillard wrote of 'All these events, from Eastern Europe or from the Gulf, which under the colours of war and liberation led only to political and historical disillusionment' (1995 [1991]: 77). His attempted critique entailed a rejection of 'the Enlightenment, the Rights of Man, the Left in power … and sentimental humanism' (1995 [1991]: 79).

From this perspective of disillusionment, the only option seemed to be the 'ironic' postmodern attitude, refusing to get excited by the propaganda, dismissing it all as only images. Hence Baudrillard's seemingly nonsensical insistence that the war 'did not take place': it was meant as a refusal of the common ground of the debate about the war; the assumption that it was a significant historical event in that either supporting or opposing it could be tied to some grand narrative of liberation. 'To be for or against the war is idiotic,' he argued, 'if the question of the very probability of this war, its credibility or degree of reality has not been raised even for a moment' (1995 [1991]: 67). In the absence, as he saw it, of any clear vantage point from which to oppose the war, Baudrillard's advice was to 'Resist the probability of any image or information whatever. Be more virtual than events themselves, do not seek to re-establish the truth, we do not have the means, but do not be duped' (Baudrillard, 1995 [1991]: 66). This indicates the limits of the critique: without any means to establish the truth, not being duped can only mean disbelieving everything.

However, the valuable insight of Baudrillard's analysis is that the collapse of grand narratives is a problem, not only for would-be opponents of the war, but for the Western elite. Whereas, in the past, 'incredulity toward metanarratives' had been the relatively marginal outlook of disillusioned French leftists, the end of the Cold War precipitated a more general collapse of belief in narratives claiming to make sense of history, leaving us, as Zaki Laïdi (1998) puts it, in 'a world without meaning'. As the first major conflict

of the post-Cold War era, the Gulf crisis both exposed the fact that the old rules of international politics did not apply, and offered an opportunity to forge some new sense of purpose. Hence, President George Bush Sr seized on the Gulf War as a new source of meaning, a way to redefine what America stood for, declaring grandly: 'In the life of a nation, we're called upon to define who we are and what we believe' (quoted in Campbell, 1992: 3). This was the president who famously had difficulties articulating what he clumsily called 'the vision thing', but the war seemed to offer moral clarity: 'It's black and white … The choice is unambiguous. Right vs Wrong' (quoted in Chesterman, 1998). This claim to have rediscovered a sense of political purpose and vision was the target of Baudrillard's attack.

When Baudrillard wrote sardonically of the Gulf as a 'non-war', a war that 'never began', the outcome of which was 'decided in advance', he was pointing to what Laïdi (1998: 14) calls the 'divorce of meaning and power'. Despite having the most powerful military machine ever, there was no framework of meaning within which to use it, no metanarrative to allow the projection of power. Instead, the West had become 'paralysed by its own power, in which it does not believe' (Baudrillard, 1995 [1991]: 80). He emphasised this point repeatedly in his Gulf War essays, writing of 'the profound self-deterrence of American power and of Western power in general, paralysed by its own strength and incapable of assuming it in the form of relations of force' (1995 [1991]: 24). Without a grand narrative to make sense of the enterprise, war cannot inspire belief or enthusiasm. Instead, it becomes meaningless and empty, a mere image, fought 'against a backdrop of spontaneous indifference' (1995 [1991]: 50).

The affected moral indignation of political leaders rang false, given America's support for Saddam Hussein in the recent past (Knightley, 2000: 485–6; Keeble, 1997: 84–5). The sudden attempt to recast the situation as a replay of World War II – with the US-led coalition commonly referred to as 'the allies' and Saddam assigned the role of the 'new Hitler' – was plainly an effort to invoke the moral certainties of a past era (Dorman and Livingston, 1994). As Baudrillard (1995 [1991]: 65) observed, the exaggeration of the threat allegedly posed by Saddam was necessary in order to make the war seem meaningful in grand historical terms. The Americans, he said, were

> hallucinating those opposite to be a threat of comparable size to themselves: otherwise they would not even have been able to believe in their own victory … They see Saddam as he should be, a modernist hero, worth defeating (the fourth biggest army in the world!).

The assertion that Iraq had the 'fourth biggest army in the world' was a frequent theme of propaganda at the time, as was the entirely false story that Iraqi troops were 'massing' on the border of Saudi Arabia, poised for an invasion (MacArthur, 1993: 172–8; Keeble, 1997: 81–4). Saddam was, as Baudrillard (1995 [1991]: 38) pointed out, a 'fake enemy'.

The fakery was necessary, not as a disguise for some hidden interest or purpose, but to try to produce some sense of purpose. Whereas propaganda has traditionally been understood in terms of *dissimulation*, the point now was to produce the *simulation* of 'real', 'meaningful' war:

> Unlike earlier wars, in which there were political aims either of conquest or domination, what is at stake in this one is war itself: its status, its meaning, its future. It is beholden not to have an objective but to prove its very existence … In effect, it has lost much of its credibility.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1995 [1991]: 32)

The lack of credibility derived from the absence of a shared framework of meaning that would make the war politically 'real' and historically important. In this sense, Baudrillard suggested, the Gulf War was less a battle with Saddam than a struggle to make sense of the West's role in the post-Cold War world:

> It is not an important match which is being played out in the Gulf, between Western hegemony and the challenge from the rest of the world. It is the West in conflict with itself, by means of an interposed Saddam.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1995 [1991]: 38)

Unlike in the past, he argued, war 'no longer proceeds from a political will to dominate or from a vital impulsion or an antagonistic violence'. Rather than being a means to realise definite political aims or interests, this 'non-war' was 'the absence of politics pursued by other means' (1995 [1991]: 83). It was their lack of any future-oriented purpose, in other words, which drove Western leaders to attempt to use war as a way to rediscover a sense of mission for themselves and to galvanise their disengaged societies. As Laïdi (1998: 95) remarks in another context, 'War becomes not the ultimate means to achieve an objective, but the most "efficient" way of finding one.'

It is the lack of political purpose and vision which gives rise to those phenomena that have been the focus of attention for most subsequent commentators: the use of hi-tech weapons against weak opponents and the importance of media spectacle. When war is not 'born of an antagonistic, destructive but dual relation between two adversaries', Baudrillard contended, it becomes bloodless: 'an asexual surgical war, a matter of war-processing in which the enemy only appears as a computerised target' (1995 [1991]: 62). In the propaganda, the emphasis is on the West's 'humane' approach to killing people, using 'smart' weapons to minimise 'collateral damage', but the more important aim is to eliminate the risk to Western troops themselves. As Baudrillard noted mockingly in 1991, American soldiers were actually safer in the war zone than at home: the casualties were lower than the rate of deaths from traffic accidents in the US (1995 [1991]: 69). The fear of 'another Vietnam', which surfaces whenever the US military goes

into action, is a fear that deaths cannot be justified when the political rationale for war is threadbare. As Baudrillard observed, Western forces now practise 'the bellicose equivalent of safe sex: make war like love with a condom!' (1995 [1991]: 26).

For similar reasons, the media presentation of war has assumed a disproportionate importance, as staging the spectacle of war has became a substitute for an inspiring cause to rally public support. As Baudrillard wrote in 1991, 'The war … watches itself in a mirror: am I pretty enough, am I operational enough, am I spectacular enough … to make an entry onto the historical stage?' (1995 [1991]: 31–2). Yet the attention to presentation was self-defeating. The emphasis on creating the spectacular image of war heightened the sense that it was somehow inauthentic. Indeed, this was bound to be the case, since the prominence of presentation and propaganda was driven by the absence of meaning. As Baudrillard put it: 'The media mix has become the prerequisite to any orgasmic event. We need it precisely because the event escapes us, because conviction escapes us' (1995 [1991]: 75).

Narcissistic war and the search for meaning

Since 1991, the 'crisis of meaning' described by Laïdi has led time and again to attempts on the part of Western leaders to reconstitute some sense of purpose through foreign wars and interventions. Two main frameworks of meaning have been offered to make sense of this activism: humanitarian military intervention and war on terror. Although the various missions on which the Western military has been deployed since 1991 have differed in many respects, they have all been symptomatic of the disconnection between power and meaning. All, in a sense, have been *narcissistic*, in that the goal of military action has been the creation of an image of purposefulness.

War on terror

Baudrillard (2002b [2002]: 34) also characterised the war on terror in terms of the pursuit of the 'absence of politics' by other means. Indeed, his descriptions of the first 'non-war' on Iraq sound even more applicable to the 2003 sequel. He observed, for example, that Saddam's military strength was exaggerated in 1991 by:

> brandishing the threat of a chemical war, a bloody war, a world war – everyone had their say – as though it were necessary to give ourselves a fright, to maintain everyone in a state of erection for fear of seeing the flaccid member of war fall down.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1995 [1991]: 74)

His account of this 'futile masturbation' could just as well have been written about the talking up of Iraq's non-existent WMD capability in 2003, or

about the West's exaggerated fear of al-Qaeda. Similarly, Baudrillard's remark that 'the war ended in general boredom, or worse in the feeling of being duped … It is as though there were a virus infecting this war from the beginning which emptied it of all credibility' (1995 [1991]: 62) now calls to mind the efforts to build public support for the 2003 invasion with dubious dossiers of 'evidence', and the seemingly endless enquires and post-mortems which followed.

As in 1991, the conduct of the war was both risk-averse and image-conscious. As Philip Hensher remarked in the *Independent* (26 March 2003), 'the plan is to stage a war that will look good on television'. The US announced that it would use 'shock and awe' bombing and 'effects-based' warfare, designed to win by demoralising, rather than by simply killing, the enemy. It was as if Pentagon planners had read their Baudrillard and resolved that this time it really would be a 'bloodless' war-show. In a triumph of media–military synergy, the military campaign was propaganda and the propaganda was part of the military strategy. So, for example, reporters were embedded with the coalition forces in order to produce dramatic footage of the front-line advance which, it was hoped, would cheer domestic audiences while intimidating Iraqi leaders, who were known to be watching the same images. Senior Iraqi figures were then contacted directly by US officials via phone and email to reinforce the message that they should give up. Similarly, the widely publicised MOAB – Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb or 'Mother Of All Bombs' – was deployed, but only propagandistically. The US released footage of a test drop and briefed journalists about its possible use in Iraq. As Stuart Millar reported in the *Guardian* (11 April 2003) its utility was primarily psychological, in that it was hoped that the MOAB would 'terrify enemy forces into submission by its presence alone'. The weapon, or rather the publicity surrounding it, was also directed at Western audiences: it was claimed that the MOAB might be needed to deal with underground bunkers containing bio-chemical weapons. It was, in other words, a propaganda weapon, not used in combat but ostensibly available to take out a target which did not exist. No wonder that film-maker Michael Moore used his acceptance speech at the 2003 Oscars ceremony to denounce George Bush Jr as a 'fictitious president' who was 'sending us to war for fictitious reasons' (*Times*, 29 March 2003).

The effectiveness of the propaganda was undermined by the way that the news media self-consciously drew attention to its deliberately manufactured quality. Rather than simply reporting events, journalists often discussed them in terms of news management and image projection, such as when one BBC presenter contrasted pictures of angry Iraqis protesting against the shooting of demonstrators with the day's 'intended message' delivered by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (*Newsnight*, BBC2, 29 April 2003). On a day when the most significant weapons find was a factory making bullets, another BBC journalist noted that 'the Americans very deliberately drove captured Iraqi missiles past the media hotel in Baghdad' (*10 O'Clock News*,

BBC1, 17 April 2003). 'The day's big message was Saddam's neglect of the Iraqi people,' said Quentin Letts in the *Mail* (26 March 2003), subverting the impact of the message by noting how Blair's delivery of it seemed stagy and contrived: 'At this point, to accentuate his sincerity, he put on his reading glasses.' Bush received similar treatment: the President's 'public appearances are choreographed to make him look like the commander in chief without placing [him] in harm's way', noted Alex Brummer in the *Mail*, for example, reporting Bush's most recent speech as a 'stage-managed event' (4 April 2003). These sorts of comments rarely implied opposition to the war. Rather, they indicated that the media often had trouble taking it entirely seriously.

The high point of media cynicism was coverage of Bush's 1 May 2003 speech announcing the 'end of major combat operations'. In what the *New York Times* (15 May 2003) called 'one of the most audacious moments of presidential theater in American history', Bush co-piloted a fighter jet (renamed 'Navy One' for the occasion), which landed on an aircraft carrier returning from the Gulf. He then strode around the deck wearing a military flight suit before making the speech in front of an enormous banner bearing the slogan 'Mission Accomplished'. The elaborate performance, which reportedly cost around $1 million, was trailed for 24 hours in advance and positively invited a cynical response. BBC reporters described it as 'carefully choreographed', 'stage-managed', 'made for American TV' and 'pure Hollywood'. The BBC's diplomatic correspondent even suggested that the war itself had merely provided a 'useful prop' for Bush's re-election campaign (*From Our Own Correspondent*, BBC Radio Four, 3 May; *10 O'Clock News*, BBC1, 2 May 2003). The cynicism deepened when it was revealed that the official rationale for the flying stunt – that the carrier was too far out to sea for Bush to travel there in his helicopter – was bogus. As the *Times* later reported, in order for the President to stage his 'Top Gun moment' the ship actually had to slow down 'lest views of the shoreline spoilt pictures of Mr Bush at sea' (3 May 2003). Yet, strikingly, the tone of press coverage was similar even before Bush made the speech. It would be 'staged with rich symbolism', predicted Roland Watson in the *Times*, while the *Independent*'s Rupert Cornwell described it in advance as 'a production the White House might have borrowed from Hollywood' and as a 'media spectacular' which was being 'scheduled for … prime time' (both 1 May 2003).

The obvious intention to generate good PR simply confirmed the perception that the war's presentation was carefully calculated and manipulative. The coalition announced in advance, for instance, that it was planning to fly journalists into Iraq to film the desired 'scenes of liberation' because, as one US Marines spokesman put it: 'The first image of this war will define the conflict' (*Independent*, 19 March 2003). It was therefore hardly surprising that a few days later, when the first shipment of humanitarian aid was delivered with a fanfare of publicity, reporters noted the fact that it was part of a deliberate propaganda effort. The ship had been met by a 'reception party of journalists' who had been 'bussed in … by the military's press

handlers', said one BBC reporter, commenting that 'like many of the events of recent days laid on by the coalition, there was a very clear message they wanted to get across' (*Newsnight*, BBC2, 28 March 2003). The event was 'choreographed', and designed to 'send a message to the world', wrote the *Independent*'s correspondent Andrew Buncombe (29 March 2003). He quoted a British officer as saying, 'This is a story we are trying to direct to the international media and the regional media', and noted that the British and American authorities were 'desperate' to see the image 'beam around the world'. In the *Times* (28 March 2003), David Sharrock observed that while the quantity of aid was 'negligible in real terms', the coalition had 'invested heavily in its symbolism'. In confirmation, he quoted a British soldier explaining: 'The sooner we help the Iraqis the better, so the message spreads that we are the good guys.' The very fact that a delivery of aid was treated by the coalition as a media opportunity led to it being reported in this self-conscious fashion, reinforcing a view of political leaders as calculating and image-obsessed.

In the longer term, the non-existent WMD probably did most damage to coalition credibility: trumpeting dossiers of 'evidence' which turn out to be phoney hardly helps to inspire public confidence. Yet, in itself, this was a secondary issue; a symptom of the fact that the war was devoid of purpose and meaning. Despite all the effort that went into constructing the 'right' image of victory, the result was incoherent. Today, traditional ideological standbys – celebrating a martial, national or Western identity – seem to cause disquiet instead of rallying support. This was why news audiences witnessed the Stars and Stripes being proudly hoisted in Iraq one minute only to see it hauled down in embarrassment the next. When US Marines raised the flag at Umm Qasr at the start of the war, British MPs condemned it as 'crass', and the Defence Secretary promised to raise British 'concerns' with his American counterparts. UK troops had been instructed not to 'wave the union flag' because of Britain's 'determination to respect Iraqi sovereignty' (*Guardian*, 22 March 2003). For their part, US military officials were reportedly 'stunned' by flag-related incidents involving their troops. One US spokesperson said that commanders had been told not even to fly the American flag from their own vehicles: to do so would be 'inappropriate' and might 'send the wrong message', since it could 'give the impression of conquering the Iraqi people' (*Times*, 22 March 2003). The absurdity of invading and occupying a country while professing respect for its sovereignty and denying any desire to conquer it illustrated the difficulties the coalition encountered in trying to craft an inspiring image of victory. When the Stars and Stripes was draped over the face of Saddam's falling statue on 9 April 2003 it seemed in danger of ruining the occasion – the image reportedly caused 'a moment of concern' in Washington before the flag was hastily removed (BBC News 24, 9 April 2003).

Similar worries about appearing too militaristic were voiced in the British debate about whether to hold a victory parade, a 'cavalcade' or a church

service after the Iraq campaign. In the event, a 'multi-faith service of remembrance' was held at St Paul's Cathedral in London, designed to be 'sensitive to other traditions, other experiences and other faiths', including Islam. The service commemorated Iraqi military and civilian dead as well as British losses. As the Dean of St Paul's explained: 'I don't believe in today's world we can have a national service behaving like little Brits' (*Independent*, 11 October 2003). Similar considerations applied beforehand, one journalist revealed:

> We were not allowed to take any pictures or describe British soldiers carrying guns. I was told that there was … a decision made by Downing Street that the military minders of the journalists down there were to go to any lengths … to not portray … the British fighting man and women [*sic*] as fighters.
>
> (*Correspondent*, BBC2, 18 May 2003)

An inability to celebrate victory or to portray soldiers as fighters is symptomatic of elite incoherence; of the very 'absence of politics' that the war was supposed to address.

The arguments about war's lack of credibility that seemed so outlandish in 1991 have now become mainstream, even if they are often discussed relatively superficially, in terms of the absence of WMD or the dubious value of fighting a conventional war against an unconventional and elusive target. The more profound point, however, concerns war's lack of political 'reality': the attempt to use war to offset the West's 'crisis of meaning'. For many commentators, the problems and divisions over the Iraq war, the incoherence of the trumped up 'justifications' and the media's cynical or self-conscious attitude towards the propaganda, are directly attributable to the simple fact that Bush's neoconservative administration was running the show. Yet a similar dynamic can also be seen in the other major attempt to restore a sense of meaning and purpose to post-Cold War international politics: humanitarian intervention.

Humanitarian intervention

Baudrillard's (1995 [1991]: 84) description of the US-led Gulf War coalition as 'missionary people bearing electro-shocks which will shepherd everybody towards democracy' nicely captures the regulatory impulse of humanitarian military intervention, as exemplified by Mary Kaldor's (1999: 124) advocacy of 'cosmopolitan law-enforcement', or by Martin Shaw's (2005: 142) support for global 'armed policing'. 'This consensual violence', Baudrillard argued:

> operates today on a global level which is conceived as an immense democracy governed by a homogeneous order which has as its emblem the UN and the Rights of Man. The Gulf War is the first consensual

> war, the first war conducted legally and globally with a view to putting an end to war and liquidating any confrontation likely to threaten the henceforward unified system of control.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1995 [1991]: 83–4)

The cosmopolitan ideal is of a regulated global space in which the Western military mobilises not for war in the Clausewitzian sense but for 'values'. The aim is to overcome the crisis of meaning through, as Kaldor (1999: 10) puts it, a 'cosmopolitan political project which would … reconstruct legitimacy around an inclusive, democratic set of values'.

Where this has been attempted, however, the results have been far from convincing. Perhaps the most obvious problem has been that the values-talk has usually been much braver than the limited and *ad hoc* actions which have supposedly put it into practice. The US was criticised for intervening in Somalia as a safer alternative to the Balkans in 1992, for example, and was then derided because it cut and ran from its 'humanitarian mission' after 18 of its soldiers were killed there in 1993. Even worse, as far as many critics were concerned, was that this led to the codification of new restrictions on the future use of US military force, thereby preventing intervention to avert genocide in Rwanda the following year. Paradoxically, in the 1990s there was little external constraint on the global projection of Western power and virtually no domestic opposition to its use, and yet the humanitarian cause seized on by political leaders and advocates of cosmopolitan policing did not speak of a confident and positive West. Rather, the overwhelming impression was of a weak and fearful society which failed to live up to its proclaimed principles, bold in its talk but unwilling to die for its 'values'.

The main focus of complaint was Bosnia where, contemporary commentators argued, fear of losing out with the electorate made Western governments reluctant to risk their own troops: this 'lack of will' meant that the Western military was emasculated and unable to take effective action. Critics urged that such action should be taken against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević – another 'new Hitler' whose defeat could provide a sense of historic mission. On this point too, Baudrillard was a perceptive critic. Reacting to the way that Bosnia became a *cause célèbre* for Western liberals, he ridiculed the 'false apostles and voluntary martyrs' who went to the war zone for a spot of 'cultural soul-boosting'. Commenting on a December 1993 Strasbourg–Sarajevo television broadcast titled 'A corridor for free speech', and on recent visits to Bosnia by intellectuals such as Susan Sontag, he offered a typical inversion:

> It is us who are weak and who go there to make good for our loss of strength and sense of reality. … [We] feel the need to salvage the reality of war in our own eyes …
>
> Susan Sontag … must know better than them what reality is, since she has chosen them to incarnate it. Or maybe it is simply because reality is

> what she, and with her all the Western world, is lacking the most … All these 'corridors', opened by us to funnel our foodstuffs and our 'culture', are in fact our lifelines along which we suck their moral strength and the energy of their distress … Susan Sontag comes to convince them of the 'reality' of their suffering, by making something cultural and something theatrical out of it, so that it can be useful as a referent within the theatre of Western values, including 'solidarity'.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1994)

Characteristically, Baudrillard couched his argument in terms of a loss of 'reality', but this should be understood in the same way as his doubts about the reality of the Gulf War. That is to say, Bosnia was interesting to the Western intelligentsia because it seemed to offer a source of political meaning. Its attraction lay in what it could be made to mean in the 'theatre of Western values'.

One such intellectual, Michael Ignatieff, later acknowledged that 'when policy was driven by moral motives, it was often driven by narcissism':

> We intervened not only to save others, but to save ourselves, or rather an image of ourselves as defenders of universal decencies. We wanted to know that the West 'meant' something. This imaginary West, this narcissistic image of ourselves, we believed was incarnated in the myth of a multiethnic, multiconfessional Bosnia … Bosnia became the latest *bel espoir* of a generation that had tried ecology, socialism, and civil rights only to watch all these lose their romantic momentum.
>
> (Ignatieff, 1998: 95)

The interest in 'saving' Bosnia was an attempt to restore 'reality' or meaning to Western societies which had ceased to believe in grand narratives. Yet, as Ignatieff's comments indicate, the attempt was ultimately unsuccessful.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this was the highpoint of humanitarian militarism: the 1999 Kosovo conflict. This was to be the all-out 'war for values' that Western liberals had longed for throughout the 1990s. In the end, however, it demonstrated the futility of the cosmopolitan project. A widespread disappointment with the outcome of this 'successful' war was sometimes expressed in terms which recalled Baudrillard's doubts about the 'reality' of the Gulf conflict. The *Independent*, for example, asked 'was it a "war" at all?' (editorial, 10 June 1999), and Ignatieff (2000) described it as only a 'virtual war'. The victory was soured by the fact that, for the time being, Milošević was still in power and Kosovo's future status remained uncertain, but the main reason the war was thought to lack 'reality' was that no Western troops were killed. Complaining that the war left a 'bitter taste', the *Independent* said there was 'no sense of triumph, or of virtue rewarded', though there 'might have been, had NATO suffered some casualties'

(editorial, 10 June 1999). Similarly, in the *Guardian* Isabel Hilton objected that 'we are in a war that has no storyline we can believe in':

> Like the Gulf war, it is described as a war of good against evil, of the nations of the light against the forces of darkness, an affirmation of civilisation against barbarism. But we are not convinced enough by abstract notions of civilisation and internationalism to die for them … In the absence of the hero-warrior and the shared values he would embody, television, the consumer society's storyteller supreme, has been floundering in the attempt to construct a narrative that makes sense to us.
>
> (*Guardian*, 5 April 1999)

As with Baudrillard's comments on the Gulf, so too in Kosovo the war's lack of 'reality' was essentially a lack of meaning. The grand values proclaimed by political leaders seemed to be undermined by their unwillingness to risk the lives of their own troops to defend them. Since the Bosnian war had already been understood in the same way, in 1999 this problem was highlighted by some right from the start. On the day the bombing began, Kaldor was already bemoaning the fact that 'Western leaders still privilege the lives of their own nationals', arguing that 'What went wrong in Bosnia was the reluctance to risk the lives of peace-keepers' and identifying 'the same syndrome in Kosovo' (*Guardian*, 25 March 1999). Similarly, Hugo Young wondered whether, if NATO forces were 'not prepared to match their enemy's risk with their own', they 'cannot expect to win, and maybe don't deserve to?' (*Guardian*, 1 April 1999). In part, such arguments were about how best to safeguard the lives of Kosovo Albanians: high-altitude bombing seemed less effective than ground troops and inevitably involved 'collateral damage' – though a full-scale ground invasion would undoubtedly have been much more bloody. But the underlying concern was not so much the facts on the ground in Kosovo as the self-image of the West. Kaldor was worried about 'NATO credibility'; while Young feared that without ground troops risking their lives 'all this passionate rhetoric of human solidarity will turn to ashes, and NATO, quite possibly, will be ruined'.

That some Western commentators supported the war while wishing for more casualties on their own side seems perverse. What bothered them was the nagging suspicion that the framework of cosmopolitan policing and humanitarian military intervention had failed to offer a new source of meaning for the post-Cold War world. This, after all, was always the point. Ignatieff, for example, complains that with the collapse of the Cold War framework 'the absence of narratives of explanation is eroding the ethics of engagement':

> If we could see a pattern in the chaos, or a chance of bringing some order here or there, the rationale for intervention and long-term ethical

> engagement would become plausible again. We forget that the Cold War made sense of the world for us: it gave an apparent rationale to the wars of the Third World; it explained the sides; it identified whose side we should be on. We have lost our narrative, and with it, the rationale for engagement.
>
> (Ignatieff, 1998: 98)

People dying for the cause would prove it was 'real'; that it was viable as a new basis for political engagement. Instead, NATO's 'virtual war' showed the triumph of the rhetoric but with no wider significance. As Ignatieff (2000: 3) explained, 'citizens of NATO countries … were mobilized, not as combatants but as spectators … [The war] aroused emotions in the intense but shallow way that sports do.' Like the Gulf, politically it was only the spectacle of war, not the real thing.

The underlying problem revealed by Kosovo has little to do with the fact that the Western military now has such high-tech hardware at its disposal that it can wage 'risk-free' wars against weaker states, nor with the distancing effect of experiencing war via television and other media. Nineteenth-century wars of empire were fought with an even greater disparity in military technology, and today's electronic media surely make war closer, more vivid and more immediate than a newspaper dispatch. The problem lay with the project of humanitarian militarism itself. As Baudrillard observed, the ideology of humanitarianism holds out no greater prospect than mere survival:

> This is the difference between humanitarianism and humanism. The latter was a system of strong values, related to the concept of humankind, with its philosophy and its morals, and characteristic of a history in the making. Humanitarianism, on the other hand, is a system of weak values, linked to salvaging a threatened human species, and characteristic of an unravelling history.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1996: 89)

Baudrillard's (1994) remark at the time of the Bosnian war that the West was 'merely expressing its own disappointment and longing for an impossible violence against itself' was borne out by the Kosovo conflict when commentators explicitly wished that their own soldiers would die in order to make the war 'real'.

Concluding assessment

Western elites continue to look for some 'mission' that could help to restore a sense of purpose to societies which have lost their narratives of engagement. Contemplating the damage done to US credibility by the Bush administration, former State Department spokesman James Rubin wondered what it would take to restore America's 'moral authority':

> Frankly, I don't think we'll be able to do it until some new event happens, some new humanitarian crisis, [like] Bosnia, or Kosovo or Somalia, and then we can come in and help. And that, that's the kind of thing that can help.
>
> (*Start the Week*, BBC Radio Four, 3 December 2007)

The idea that another Bosnia or a new Kosovo would help to restore authority and purpose to US foreign policy is not dissimilar to the view of neoconservatives. Rubin's remarks recall the way that neocons at the Project for the New American Century argued that their ambitions for military reform and enhanced US 'global leadership' were unlikely to be realised quickly, 'absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbor' (Project for the New American Century, 2000: 51). Both sides of the discussion hope to overcome internal problems through confronting an external threat or disaster which could be thought to embody them. It is particularly telling that such responses are envisaged in advance, before the wished-for threat or catastrophe has actually materialised.

Although contemporary public discussion of war is sometimes heated, it is also thin and insubstantial. In the debate about whether to invade Iraq in 2003, for example, where coalition governments emphasised the risks of inaction, their critics gave greater weight to the risks of action; where leaders' consciences told them that they could not disappoint the suffering Iraqi people, the protestors called back 'not in my name'. There is no political content to debates about war when pragmatic risk-assessment or personal conscience are the only basis for disagreement. In this context, it is assertions of the 'reality' of war that tend to lack critical purchase. Highlighting the literally real effects of war (as, for example, in body-counting projects) is related to an attempt to assert its political 'reality': there tends to be an assumption that 'real' interests (such as oil, or imperial dominance) drive intervention and war, and that Western governments are engaged in an act of dissimulation. This chapter has suggested that, on the contrary, they are actually engaged in simulation; in trying to work up a sense of purpose and mission out of perceived emergencies and crises.

The key insight of Baudrillard's critique is that contemporary war and intervention are both driven, and simultaneously undermined, by a narcissistic search for meaning and purpose. From the 1991 Gulf War, through the pursuit of armed humanitarianism in the Balkans and elsewhere, to the latest 'non-events' of the war on terror, the Western military has been sent into action against fake enemies whose defeat, it was hoped, could prove that the West must be engaged in a meaningful and important mission. Ultimately, as suggested above, these attempts have been unsuccessful: even their supporters have been unable to convince themselves that such wars are fully 'real'. Instead what is revealed is the West's own internal conflict, sense of vulnerability and self-doubt. The point was well made in Baudrillard's response to 9/11, when, he suggested:

> The symbolic collapse of a whole system came about by an unpredictable complicity, as though the towers, by collapsing on their own, by committing suicide, had joined in to round off the event. In a sense, the entire system, by its internal fragility, lent the initial action a helping hand.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2002b [2002]: 8)

In arguing that 'The West … has become suicidal, and declared war on itself', Baudrillard (2002b [2002]: 7) pointed up the lack of unifying values in Western societies in a way that more conventional critiques did not.

Baudrillard, however, can only take us so far, and his reaction to 9/11 also revealed the limits of his critique. In particular, he appeared to give too much importance to the attacks themselves as an act of 'symbolic exchange' which challenged the 'semiotic' logic of global capitalism. The model for this idea of 'symbolic exchange' is *potlatch*, the Native American custom of giving away wealth in order to enhance one's status rather than in accordance with any rational economic logic. The 9/11 conspirators, Baudrillard argued, gave the capitalist West the 'gift' of their own death, challenging their enemies to match it. They thereby issued an 'impossible challenge', as summed up in the oft-repeated slogan that 'we love death more than you love life'. Critics who accused Baudrillard of sympathising with the terrorists were mistaken: as William Merrin (2005: 112–13) notes, while the logic of Baudrillard's position certainly suggested this, in fact he pulled back from this conclusion, maintaining that it would be 'idiotic' to 'praise murderous attacks' (Baudrillard, 2004). He pulled back not only because of the murderousness of the attack on the Twin Towers, but also because he had the good sense to recognise that it 'was not "real"' (Baudrillard, 2002b [2002]: 29). That is to say, the terrorist attacks held out no greater prospect of restoring a grand narrative of history than did the 'non-war' in Afghanistan that quickly followed them. Yet Baudrillard's reluctance to follow through the logic of his own ideas did not derive, as Merrin suggests, from too close an attachment to the Western Enlightenment tradition. Rather, this dramatic act of symbolic exchange pointed up the limitations of the critique.

It was in the circumstances of the post-war consumer boom that Baudrillard and others became disillusioned with the grand narrative of Marxism and looked for an alternative source of challenge in the idea of symbolic exchange. It is ironic that his counter to the 'semiotic' logic of the consumer society was premised on what James Heartfield (1998: 29) calls the 'naturalisation' of the surplus. In other words, it was only by taking capitalism's surplus product for granted, by treating it as a given, that theorists could then devote their energies not to analysing the production of the surplus but rather to its disposal. The critique that they developed was less interested in exploitation in the sphere of production than it was in the cultural impoverishment of consumerism. As Douglas Kellner (2007) notes, this was an 'aristocratic critique' of capitalism, fascinated with ideas of excess, desire and

jouissance. Hence, in his interpretation of 9/11, Baudrillard (2002b [2002]: 9) argued that the terrorist act 'restores an irreducible singularity' against the homogeneity of globalisation. Similarly, in a 2002 interview he argued that:

> The universal values, as the Enlightenment defined them, constitute a transcendental ideal. They confront the subject with its own freedom, which is a permanent task and responsibility, not simply a right. This is completely absent in the global, which is an operational system of total trade and exchange.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2004)

Despite maintaining a sharp distinction between the global and the universal here, it is not as if Baudrillard was defending universalism. Rather, having rejected such ideas, his concern was to defend 'everything that is unique, every singularity'.

Baudrillard's insights derive from the fact that, like other writers usually classified as 'postmodernist', he disdained traditional political responses. Postmodernist critics often seem to offer the most accurate accounts of a period in which incredulity towards grand narratives of progress and liberation is not just a theoretical proposition but a fact of everyday life. At the same time, this thoroughgoing scepticism also precludes the articulation of alternatives.

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10 Fate of the animal

Paul Hegarty

For Baudrillard, we must consider the real as historicised, a category. Instead of being an actual existing reality, beyond description, epistemology or conceptualisation, it comes from those things, and it does this differently in different periods, or, as he calls them, 'eras of simulation'. And yet, the promise of something that many would call real, and Baudrillard thinks of as being against the real, is there. It can be thought of as symbolic exchange, impossible exchange, the event, seduction, or take other forms. Simulation can never be total, even when we have 'integral reality' (where the question of simulation as question no longer arises), as it carries within it the possibility of its non-existence, or destruction, even if this moment would be brief (like the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001). Critics have pondered whether symbolic exchange lies outside simulation altogether, and if so, whether it represents a truer real than the one produced for and by us. For me, symbolic (or impossible) exchange is neither inside nor outside of simulacra, rather it is simulation's Other, with which it is always intertwined, often as that which is lost, or fails to come to be. But the question of the position of the animal in Baudrillard's thought (which is to be both domesticated and capable of symbolic revenge) seems to suggest a limit to symbolic exchange, which now seems to be predicated on the primacy of humanity over all existence. The animal becomes an other that is both carrier of symbolic exchange and that which lies at its border, the border of animal and human which Baudrillard barely touches on, as the key frontier for him is between simulated and unsimulated humanity.

1

The animal, like the physical human, belongs somewhere outside, before or beyond simulation. Both the human animal and other animals, have, however, been drawn within succeeding orders of simulacra, and lose whatever reality they may once have had. Animals are removed from symbolic exchange as they are domesticated, becoming a resource, and then a homogenised product in factory farming, and ultimately, are turned fractal, as they are genetically analysed, altered, 'biologically assisted' or become components in wider systems.

Baudrillard does not insist that there was an actual real that got lost (calling this notion a 'nostalgia' that is specific to simulation), only versions of thinking the real that moved further away from such a possibility, and as this went on, the notion of a real behind, before or outside simulacra *appeared* as if it had really been there (at least from *Symbolic Exchange* on). In the case of the human body, it has a non-simulated state – symbolic exchange, where it is part of a system of exchanges with death, ancestors, animals, the community as sacrificial whole. As for animals, their inclusion in symbolic exchange is surely an inclusion in simulation *for them*. Prior to this, they are literally nothing to Baudrillard and symbolic exchange represents a move away from the kind of animality signalled by Bataille – a savage flatness of immersion or immanence (or nothing). In Bataille's (1992 [1948]: 23–4) view,

> the animal world is that of immanence and immediacy, for that world, which is closed to us, is so to the extent that we cannot discern in it an ability to transcend itself … The animal is in the world like water in water.

Animals are immanent *for humans*, since human culture, or humanity in general, set itself apart through notions of transcendence and exclusion of what it now is not. Animal immanence is even less than being other to human, it is implacable, and only still fully immanent outside even of sacrifice (as this brings the animal into signification, even if the sacrifice itself indicates the animal has value): 'the apathy that the gaze of the animal expresses after the combat is the sign of an existence that is essentially on a level with the world in which it moves like water in water' (Bataille, 1992 [1948]: 25). This 'water in water' idea should not be taken as indicating smoothness, but a morass of killing, arbitrariness and interactions that resist human understanding. This is the animal that now and then breaks the surface of the simulation. When it breaks this patina, it does not reveal depth, but depth as absence of depth.

Christopher Norris (1990: 166) is on the right track in identifying Baudrillard's theory of simulation as an 'inverted Platonism' – with Baudrillard, we are always drawn further into a space where we have a notion of the real, even against the real posited as the 'real world' – and this real is ever further, ever distant, but it is always both present (as distant, or withheld, presence) and missing (that which was there some other time, some other place). It would perhaps be more accurate to think of Baudrillard as a neo-Platonist, though, but instead of the real sun that we cannot look at as the 'outside', the threshold of perception, for Baudrillard, is marked by human intervention – anything beyond is even beyond symbolic exchange, and, despite Baudrillard's intention to leave no space for reality, there, there is some sort of implied real, or more oddly, an implied, because absented, real.[1] This real is an inversion of all models we have had hitherto: this real is the animal, the plant, the disaster. Symbolic exchange seems to be outside

'the real', but is caught up with models of it. Writers, artists and performers took symbolic exchange as the offer of a potential outside of the universe of simulation, generally not realising that such an outside was fatally compromised (this would not stop it being interesting to act 'as if' escaping simulation). 'The body' would be a way out, through violence, sex or sexuality, discipline, danger, vulnerability, critique. There is no body, though, either for Baudrillard, or in simulation, or outside: only markers with different ontological functions (e.g. initiation tattoos do something different to tattoos in or on the market). The human body's failings, or accidental pushing of the limits (like obesity in *Fatal Strategies*, or rushing the Pompidou Centre) are how Baudrillard (1990b [1983]) sees the body playing out. In any case, the body has been subsumed into its prosthesis – DNA – with the body now becoming the prosthesis of the genes (Baudrillard's argument mirroring Richard Dawkins' (1989 [1976]) thoughts of about the same time in *The Selfish Gene*). The fate of bodies is to meet their limits continually, and no amount of pushing will make it any better (Stelarc, Orlan).

Symbolic exchange suggests simulatedness is not all, when it comes to the physical, social or mental 'realities' humans can encounter, but humans have always been separated off from the animal, and simulation as a model permeates symbolic exchange more than Baudrillard or we might care to imagine. Simulation offers a parodic Cartesian world – there is no more subject, but there is a world or real that is constructed not only as if subjects existed independently, autonomously, but on the model of subjectness. Baudrillard's world is like Foucault's – we are subjected, in order to exist as subjects. But Baudrillard's claims about the status of simulated reality as reality mean he has to presume that the world of representations, of mentation, is capable of overwhelming all else, and this applies even in symbolic exchange.

His answer is that the orders of simulacra, and particularly the third, of simulation, exist precisely to combat the dangers of untrammelled nature, hence his interest in the 'impossible exchange' in terrorist events, or in natural disasters, but the dualism is still there.[2] The fourth order, or fractalisation of the third, offers something of a return of the not-real, the catastrophic, the disastrous or monstrous, as the separation between event deterrence as an 'integral reality' and events becomes unclear (integral reality is a term Baudrillard uses to define the complete victory of 'the real', such that simulation does not even seem to be making a real, the real just is, as if it were actually real). The idea is present earlier in his writing – for example in *Fatal Strategies* of 1983 (see below for quotation). Although Baudrillard has talked less of 'strange attractors' than in the 1990s, I think we can still see that 'integral reality' is not flat, but spiralled, fractured – or, as the French word has it, *accidenté*. So we could argue that Baudrillard sees the privileging of representations, mental processes and, latterly, artificial intelligence, as strategies or ruses of simulation. But Baudrillard rarely indicates any other possibility or state – if he does, it is as something missing.

It would be worse to do as Foucault (1978 [1976]) does, in concluding the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, and mildly assert that we can just return to bodies, but as Baudrillard is so keen on reversibility, and sees that any simulacrum contains the possibility of its destruction and/or non-existence, it is odd that this does not apply to the hypermind of humanity. To get a sense of this reversibility, I think we need to go back to how animals are caught within simulation. If we were 'before' all simulatedness (although I'm not sure this is possible in Baudrillard's schema), humans and animals would have the same value, with all tied in through systems of sacrifice (as Baudrillard (1994a [1981]: 134) notes in the essay 'Animals: territory and metamorphoses',[3] writing that 'those who used to sacrifice animals did not take them for beasts'). The separation of human from animal (human is this separation) would occur at the same time as the rise of simulatedness (with the origin undecided – i.e. whether humans separated from the animal first, or whether representational systems came first).

2

Having excluded the animal as other, then as object, orders of simulacra progressively re-incorporate the animal – as Baudrillard notes, animals participated in the symbolic, through sacrifice and hunting, to the point where 'even murder by hunting is still a symbolic relation' ('Animals', 134). This would translate into more representational 'symbolic' forms, as gods, totems or bearers of particular spirits. The secularising (non-sacred) religion of Christianity brought animals into the world of justice. In feudal (first-order) systems, with values self-contained (or self-evident), a hierarchical view of animals (there as material for humans) does not preclude them from being subjected to law (as serfs would be). Increasingly, animals mirror the changes humanity does to itself ('everything that has happened to them has happened to us' ('Animals', 133)), while still being positioned as different – 'different and less'. Experimentation on animals must remove the animal – either to simulate the human, or to remove animality as such. Genetic similarities offer a double threshold of acceptability – i.e. it is worth experimenting on mammals because they share 90 per cent of their genes with humans, while being far enough away to allow experimentation that would not be allowed on humans. At some stage, this percentage could get smaller, and humans genetically different enough could become suitable test subjects … In any case, as Baudrillard has pointed on many occasions (1994b [1992]: 83; 2001), humans are already being experimented on. The loss of animality of the animal is part of humanity's loss of immanence, that which simulations of identity, subjectivity, etc., excludes, exists against.

Both animals and humans are getting ill, the technologisation of bodies and perpetual medical deterrence creating new disease. Intensively farmed animals develop odd behaviours: Baudrillard gives us a list, including rabbits eating shit, chickens becoming hysterical and then going cataleptic, cannibal

pigs ('Animals', 130). Instead of bemoaning farming and lab practices, Baudrillard writes of the expulsion and 'revenge' of the symbolic against its expulsion. Chickens lose their 'symbolic order' as access to food is democratised and the 'pecking order' displaced (130–1). So animals' illnesses and unusual behaviour are not just them being victims but are forms of symbolic violence – turning on the symbolic violence they have been subject to. The same occurs with BSE, as cows – 'simulations of cows' – react to enforced carnivore diets through an illness that threatens humans (Baudrillard [1997a]: 194) – a countergift that illustrates the viral, fractal form the symbolic works through within simulation (195).

Exploitation of animals is balanced by concern, and this sentimentalising shows how far animals have fallen (that we can be so unidirectionally 'generous') and so, in turn, have we ('Animals', 135). In *The Illusion of the End*, Baudrillard (1994b [1992]) deals with (Western capitalist) humanity's attempts to appropriate the impending ecological disaster – far easier to claim 'we' have made it happen, when other times or places might imagine a relation of fate, or interaction with the universe. This is not just hubris, but the world as we inhabit it. Baudrillard is not claiming these are mistaken ideas, but that we can still imagine other ways of viewing that are not commonly accepted as true or real, or that stand as some sort of symbolic violence to the simulated world. This does not mean, for example, climate-change denial: rather, we should question the ontological status of any 'event' (or 'non-event') that is consensually accepted as being true, and therefore becomes real. We should also adopt anachronistic viewpoints (and these not just from the past), views from other cultural perspectives, but without believing these to be truer.

Animals, and nature as a whole, are drawn into the ever-spreading map of the hyperreal, and this needs some sort of humanisation. The humanisation particular to late(?)/advanced(?)/monopoly(?) simulation is that of deterrence, of hygiene and niceness. But shepherding/husbanding/protecting Nature is no different to complete exploitation, as it still relies on the centrality (and superior position) of humanity. Biosphere 2 is the pinnacle of this hygiene, claims Baudrillard (1994b [1992]: 74) – no predators, no illness, no contaminations of any sort. Earth becomes Biosphere 1, but the true model is the improved, covered dome in the desert, with its pristine habitats. What's more, germs and predators must be kept out. As with Disneyland's relation to America, Biosphere 2 seems so artificial, even in its detail, that we accept the 'real habitat' outside it as an actual, natural one. Nature too can be made into habitats – so that, against nature, species can be preserved, kept in survival mode, like humans (1994b [1992]: 87). A habitat does not literally have to be a space – a 'preserved species' is already being kept in a micro-biosphere, of observation, preservation, deterrence.

The ultimate 'achievement' will be to end evolution – humanity has variously seen itself as part of animality, less than it (see Bataille (1980 [1955]: 115 and *passim*) on formless faces of humans in the cave paintings at Lascaux) or above it, and constructed mythical systems around this.

Evolution is proper to the second order of representation, of the *discovery* of truth. Baudrillard is not always convincing about evolution, seemingly unaware of the detail of what Darwin argued, or that many others have proposed further developments, refinements or even different models since then, but he is on to something when talking about cloning as a terminal attempt at evolution – it can only be a last step … It is not a moral concern he has, but an awareness of the chance and fatal elements of evolution that will be lost that lead him to this position (Baudrillard [1997a]: 223).[4] But, using Baudrillard's logic, as nature is ultimately neither fully caught within a simulation that flattens all, nor is it outside, nature will be able to supersede scientific 'interactivity' with nature and offer a virulent, fractal return of enforced evolution.

3

The fate of the animal is to be lost, or literally (simulatedly) killed, in as sanitised a way as possible. One way to fight back is through illness and contagion, the other, equally viral, is through mass media, the privileged spawning ground of simulation. The 1980 film *Cannibal Holocaust* demonstrates the playing out of the animal/simulation reversible threshold. I have picked this example partly due to its notoriety as being thought of as a snuff film, but also because it is contemporaneous with Baudrillard's 'Animals' essay.[5] At a basic level, the film shows the 'descent' of American explorers into 'savagery', while encountering the casual brutality of the 'primitive' 'cannibals' living in the Amazon rain forest. The film ends with a cheap moral, with one of the main characters musing 'I wonder who the real cannibals are', but it also has a hypermoral (a sort of a-moral) which is the punishment of those (the American explorers) who come from outside and bring their own symbolic violence, i.e. *real* violence outside of symbolic exchange and sacrifice.

The story is that a group gets lost in the jungle, and Professor Harold Monroe, with some gritty and doomed guides, goes to find them. After witnessing some violence themselves, they survive and bring back the film shot by the original party (having conducted a potlatch exchange of tape recorder for film canisters).[6] The original film is highly gruesome, with rapes, sacrificial killings and cannibalism. All of this would be bad enough, but the film also includes the actual killing of animals and executions. While clearly being an 'exploitation' film, intent on violence for its own sake, the film consists of a series of framings that add to the gratuitous violence, so that gratuitousness moves to arbitrariness, fatality. The executions, for example, feature in a film made by two of the characters, and are described as faked, even though they mostly are genuine documentary footage.[7] This is not to reassure us, but to illustrate the uncertainty around which is the real and which the fake violence. In the story itself (i.e. the film of the first Americans to go into the forest), much of the violence is incredibly unconvincing, surely

even in 1979. Nonetheless, some believed that one of the central characters ('Jack Anders') had really been killed, even though he was in the sequel. The director Ruggero Deodato was obliged to find all the cast and display them, to show that none had been killed. But above all, the assurance of realism is in the actual killing of animals, including a turtle, a pig, two monkeys, a spider and a snake. These have generally been cut from most versions of the film, except for the spider and snake – presumably because they don't count – their threateningness puts them into the realm of the formless, an immanent animality that must be crushed.[8] Even in the censored versions then, the animal, through the form of actual animals, is the realm of real violence, violence of the real. This action is both within simulation (which of course is all about realness) *and* against it, or trying to be, as violence stands as the last and desperate thing last-ditch defenders of the unimpeachable reality of the real resort to, against Baudrillard ('How can you say that the war didn't happen, when people died?'). It is also against simulation in a different direction, in that it initiates a symbolic exchange through complicity, something that the statement 'no animals were harmed in the making of this film' of recent years tries to absolve the viewer of. The prevention of cruelty to animals in films has more than its moralistic element – it also highlights the lack of value animals have, in a repetition of their no longer being worth sacrificing.

Cannibal Holocaust plays out a strange deconstructive exchange between simulation and symbolic exchange, using the notion of hypersimulation Baudrillard hints at in 'Precession of simulacra' with the simulated hold-up. It is a film of alternations: between New York and the Amazon, apparent documentary and fiction, and between layers of documentary. In terms of the content of those 'films', there is alternation between civilised and primitive, animal and human, human and inhuman – where the inhuman is a kind of immanent humanity, not yet brought in even to symbolic exchange (these are the tree people and swamp people, set apart from the Yacumo tribe, who can be reasoned with). The term 'cannibal' is used in terms of eating other humans, but also as a catch-all, like primitive or savage, and, like the equally fictional Tasaday, must both be left alone, and talked of as those that are left alone, beyond civilisation.[9] It also signals, or is, the faultline between humans from within simulatedness in general, and those beyond. This is not to say that cannibalism is not cultural, but that there is a different line for law to begin working from.[10] Arguably, it is only the outsiders who cannot see the significance of cannibalism – it is not for lack of food (but is central to nearly everything else …). But this is a film framing those Westerners as outsiders, being viewed by other Westerners within the film, and then largely Westerners (or inhabitants of the third and fourth orders of simulation) watching the film as a whole. Not being a cannibal is the problem, is what creates fascination and complicity at all levels (as the first 'explorers' keep filming as they are all killed) from the first exploration group to the viewers of this 'film that can never be shown' – within the film the original footage is

to be burned. This is supposed to be an expression of disgust at the violence and the sensationalism the producers originally sought when wanting to show the original footage on TV. In reality [?] it is a rejection, a sanitisation (that is also supposed to highlight the realness of *Cannibal Holocaust* as a documentary about another documentary) that prefigures the destruction of the rain forest – thought of as a harbinger of ecological destruction, but just as much the end of the possible reversibility of humanity within simulatedness (not into 'realness' of nature's violence – it is the civilised that are stuck with 'the real'). If the 1970s is an archetypal moment in terms of showing violence, this is part of the spread of the hyperreal: Baudrillard has constantly griped about the 'obscenity' of having all on show. Graphic depiction of violence is as clear a marker as you could wish for, in terms of transparency, fascination, realness to the point of exhausting the real – I am almost certain he even refers to the film, in *Fatal Strategies*, writing that

> Murderous prostitution, like certain hyperreal films from South America, where the sadistic violence on the screen is perpetrated for real during the filming. A murderous aberration? This is not so certain, for it is consistent with fantasy of the integral restitution of the real.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1990b [1983]: 58)

Clearly, Baudrillard does not seem to have seen the levels of reality attainable in the special effects of the late 1970s – i.e. not very real (although, he might be aware enough to know that probably only actual violence would look real), and shows a limited understanding of the film – if not, more importantly, a fervent desire to limit the film to an over-explicit, obscene attempt to force a heightened reality.

4

Contemporary films are more realistic, but believability ceases to be an issue, and the same goes for news footage. Once an image can be produced with no referent, then all referentiality is lessened. This is not all bad – oddly, it is one of those things that prevents the 'perfect crime' of the real becoming total. *Cannibal Holocaust* was at the forefront not of heightening depiction, representation, our jaded senses, etc., but of a *lessening* or lowering of simulation. As a consequence, a film like Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005) with its promise of a grisly death withheld (the death but not the promise) shows that the revenge of the animal (in this case, even more directly) prevents humanity incorporating animality and/or ecosystems through understanding, even if this resistance can only puncture rather than grind down encroaching simulation. The protagonists of this film, Timothy Treadwell (who the documentary concentrates on) and Amie Huguenard, were killed and eaten by grizzly bears, after having spent long periods living 'amongst' them. Treadwell began to see himself as bear, as outside simulation and becoming-

animal. The bears didn't see it that way, but the killing is not a punishment, rather it is the seduction of another animal beyond any symbolic exchange-style relation of ritual interaction.

Perhaps it is more of an impossible exchange that is at stake, as a small step beyond or further into symbolic exchange. TV wildlife presenter Steve Irwin, famous for his 'hands-on' interaction with dangerous animals in series such as *Crocodile Hunter*, was killed by the barb of a stingray's tail (on 4 September 2006) while filming. Opinions divide as to his career, with most thinking of him as an amiable promoter of wildlife, and some regarding him as almost cruel to animals, provoking them. This side, including PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), patronising to the last to the animal, argued that he had it coming, that somehow the stingray was standing up for abused and traumatised animals. Instead, we should not forget the 'intrusion' of the camera – defining the event, shaping it. At one level, we could imagine this as being the relentless drive for action, for 'the real', and that the killing is a resurgence of the real, denting the simulation, however briefly. But the animal is not interested in the real, in righting wrongs or of sending a message from which humans can learn. Neither is the reaction instinctive: Irwin's friends and supporters were keen to remove blame from the stingray. Instead of instinct, we have to see Irwin and the ray as in a spiral of impossible exchange, with the ray being brought in to a symbolic exchange of '*défi*', and also having a residue which cannot be exchange – this is the Bataillean animal (not just because it is violent, but because it is water in water and so are humans in its reach). Irwin does provoke animals, does set up risky situations, and finally this one ray broke out from objectness into immanence, and not only accepted a symbolic exchange, but pushed it to the impossible. The impossible exchange can be seen like trails of smoke or blood away from Irwin's body: like the twin towers, Irwin completes his destruction through removing the barb, which had entered his heart, almost certainly increasing the chances of quick death (in a similar incident in Florida the same year, the barb was kept in until reaching hospital, and the victim survived). Beyond this, fans of Steve Irwin reacted like the US government after 9/11 and sought vengeance – killing several stingrays which were found washed up on Queensland beaches, but just as Baudrillard (2002) notes in *Power Inferno*, the impossible exchange is only being converted into the impossibility of continuing the exchange, as it targets the real.

Cynical defenders of the real will argue that the real death of people documenting wildlife is different from a horror film. That they are right does not end the argument, because the bleeding of real into hyperreal is not just them becoming the same but is the mutual supplement between the cases. In other words, they add to each other to form their own hyperreal reading, spiralling around 'the document'. In all these cases, 'the animal' is breached, fights back, breaches the real. In *Cannibal Holocaust*, the endless framing, the actual violence and the display of fictional violence collude and cross into each

other, and the animal crosses over into the human, not in the shape of 'the cannibals' themselves, but through them and their interaction with the documentarists, such that the simulation becomes watery, wet with the skin of its outside, an impossible outside. In the case of Treadwell, the vengeance of the bears he imagined himself protecting from hunters turns into a recording of his own death, but he was attacked as he began to leave the human behind – he did not transgress into animal terrain, but began inhabiting a newly liquid zone of transgression, where impossible exchange between him and the bears led to a becoming-bear only through being eaten. In the case of Irwin, he was furthest along a conscious 'potlatch'-style relation, and did not, least of all, 'pay the price' but forfeited as a strange reply to 'the animal', from within the animal impossible.

Notes

1 Baudrillard, like many, seems to have a simplistic notion of the Platonic schema of layers of reality outlined in *The Republic*'s famous cave allegory. Speaking of the film *The Matrix*, he argues that 'the most embarrassing part of the film is that the new problem posed by simulation is confused with its classical, Platonic treatment' (Jean Baudrillard, 2004). What Baudrillard could have said is that the film has a naïve idea of Platonism, and thus ignores the problem of simulation.
2 Incidentally, neither Descartes nor Baudrillard has the simplistic model attributed to Descartes, where the mind propels itself around an object world, with the body as mediator – this is what links them, but they are also linked in thinking that the mediation works in an inward direction as well.
3 Hereafter referred to as 'Animals'.
4 Cloning is of course not restricted to biological cloning. Simulation has many other models of it, and the modelling itself is a form of cloning.
5 There is an abundant non-academic literature on this film, mostly concerned with questions of morality and reality, with occasional references to it being 'post-modern'. As none of these interest Baudrillard, such ideas are not particularly relevant to the present discussion.
6 Potlatch because the use of the tape recorder illustrates a greater power on the part of Monroe. The chief of the Yanamono retrieves the film canisters from a shrine made of body parts and equipment.
7 Mediatised real death is increasingly common, whether on TV channels or via the Internet. The thrall the West is in to the real is exploited over and over by those who seek to undermine it.
8 'What [formless] designates has no rights, in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm' (Bataille, 1985: 31).
9 Prof. Harold Monroe is told by an army sergeant that if people like the forest dwellers didn't exist, he would have had to invent them (10.40).
10 Jacques Derrida (1994: 43) argues that one of the defining borderlines of humanity is established through who or what you can eat, and calls this 'carno-phallogocentrism'.

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11 Reality: now and then

Baudrillard and W-Bush's America

Diane Rubenstein

> Media coverage is to the event what political economy is to the realm of the drives and the phantasm.
>
> (Jean Baudrillard, 2001a [1999a]: 132)[1]

On 26 January 2005, Jeff Gannon, a member of the White House press corps, asked President George W. Bush a question which addressed the ambient anxieties and excessive preoccupations concerning the real's indistinction from the virtual: 'President Bush, how are you going to work with people who seem to have divorced themselves from reality?'[2] This utterance did not refer to the President's fellow cabinet members such as Donald Rumsfeld or Vice President Cheney who had glaringly inaccurate predictions on the war's trajectory, but targeted the Democratic 'opposition' (Senators Hillary Clinton and Majority Leader Harry Reid). Gannon's pandering utterance conformed to the well-established pattern of the highly edited press conference where even the President on the eve of announcing the invasion (6 March 2003) referred to his own discourse as 'scripted' while it was still in process, thus depriving the public of one of its last remaining rights as citizens, 'the right not to believe a single word they are told' (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]: 171).[3] They are deprived, in Baudrillard's words, of a counter-gift of vengeance. Indeed, the televisual event of a Bush press conference is one of the better examples of what Baudrillard calls 'information at the meteorological stage' (Baudrillard, 2002a [1997a]: 85–90).[4] Jeff Gannon's 'soft-ball' questions facilitate 'the secondary undecidability, arising from the very perfection of calculation and information'. This is further underscored by the superlative casting of an attractive weather-surnamed spokesman (Tony) 'Snow'.

The reporter's question serves as an alibi, allowing Bush, like the clever meteorologist, to find the right formula: 'words that will satisfy the public without being too wide of the actual events'. Today the political easily resonates with the meteorological: 'caught between the instability of atmospheric flows and the instability of collective expectations' (*SC*, 86). Both partake of the logic exposed by Mandelbrot: whether news, information or history,

assertions of truth or claims of objectivity accede to scales of probability. Plausible information is simply that which is not denied in real time. 'Truth' gives way to 'Truthiness' – that neologism coined by (television fake right-wing pundit) Stephen Colbert is defined as a 'slick patina of plausibility' (*GSES*, 2, 218). Or, 'truth' now designates a fractal truth that resists a binary (relational) demarcation into true or false but hovers in a 'space of random distribution' (*SC*, 86).

Many of the Bush administration camera-ready narratives (supplementing the rare press conference) such as 'Saving Jessica Lynch', 'Mission Accomplished', 'Shock and Awe', 'The Pat Tillman Story',[5] or what was long seen as the administration image high point – the pseudo beer-ad *bon homie* of bullhorns at Ground Zero – evince the Baudrillardian logic of the non-event: the manufacturing of the event as sign, 'as value exchangeable on the universal market of ideology, of the star system, of catastrophe, and so on' (*IEx*, 132). But now they are inscribed within a system of *réalité intégrale*, where virtual (and irrefutable) criteria such as credibility rule and the facts just have to conform to the models 'predicting' them. Meteorology becomes *the* 'reference scenario': 'For if meteorology is becoming in a way, political, politics is becoming meteorological' (*SC*, 88). Meteorology becomes an emblem of the hegemony of the uncertainty principle in all areas that were formerly colonized by rational thought and calculation. No longer an incoherent 'outlier' like the stock-market report (which, in the French newscast, follows upon the weather forecast), now other simulative forms such as opinion polls too have 'wearily come around to complying with the models … and become as incoherent as the weather itself'. Baudrillard sings a familiar refrain of the trouble that happens when reality is brought into contact with models, echoing that of his earlier ironic depictions of the results of anthropologists studying 'primitive peoples' or when the statistically perfect American family (the Louds) imploded in its brush with PBS documentary television: 'It is as though the forecasts had finally unsettled the weather' (*SC*, 88).

When Baudrillard first wrote this op-ed piece for *Libération* (18 September 1995), he saw an up-side to the generalization of speculative models and the incursion of weather-tempered uncertainty into all areas of social and political life. This permitted possible surprises into the tiresome *petit bourgeois* debilities of Chiraquian France: the chance for counter-statistical, counter-political (or historical) events, such as the reversal on the 1992 referendum on Europe or the 1995 Metro strike. 'And the only pleasure, the only hope – sometimes fulfilled – is to prove pollsters wrong, to have one's choices and acts produce some other outcome than the one anticipated. A collective evil genius is at work here' (*SC*, 89). The evil genie or the principle of evil (*le mal*, as opposed to *le malheur*, unhappiness) as well as the possibility of singularity (or an event) is presented in a more extreme version in W-Bush's America and in the Baudrillardian works that 'shadow' it: *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact* (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]), *Cool Memories V*

(2000–2005) (Baudrillard, 2006a [2005]) and *Exiles from Dialogue* (Baudrillard with Noailles, 2007 [2005]).[6] These works foreground a concept of *réalité intégrale* (or integral reality) which is, according to some of Baudrillard's most astute readers such as Butler (1999), Gane (2000) and Merrin (2005), part of his larger project of a semiotic critique of the real. Baudrillard defines *réalité intégrale* as 'perpetuating on the world an unlimited operational project whereby everything becomes real, everything becomes visible and transparent, everything is liberated; everything comes to fruition and has a meaning' (*LP*, 17). For Merrin, integral reality derives from a second (Christian iconoclastic) genealogy of the simulacrum that is also Nietzschean in its inspiration. The focus, as recounted in 'The precession of simulacra', is on the sign's *dissimulation*, or, as developed in *Séduction* [1979], upon the 'enchantment' which comes from turning the 'evil forces' (*le malin génie*) of appearance against truth itself.

In a later text such as *The Perfect Crime* (1996), a 'disenchanted' simulacrum is set against the 'enchanted' one. Reality is excessively realized in a virtual order that has become so technically perfect and absolute in its semio-realization of 'reality'. This is not about a flight from or overcoming of reality/realism as it concerns a veritable orgy of realism. To distinguish this moment from an earlier stage of simulation, denoted as hyperrealism, I refer to this acceleration/radicalization of Baudrillard's model as 'ultra-reality' or virtual or digital reality. 'High fidelity' is here the trope of the real's relation to itself in time and dimension. *The Perfect Crime* alludes to the murder of (objective) 'reality' by virtual reality or describes how the real becomes an extreme phenomenon when it is expelled from its own principle. The political spectacle now gives way to the reality show. The screen displaces the mirror. In ultra-reality, we no longer fight shadows, but transparency itself.

'Terrorists never stop thinking of ways to hurt the American people and neither do we'[7]

Baudrillard's works, both immediately prior to and post 9/11, have tracked the metaphysical disappearance of reality in ways that anticipate and disturbingly resonate with W-Bush's America. For it is not that the real no longer exists but rather that its *principle* has faltered (or, perhaps, reality has overwhelmed its principle). In *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact*, Baudrillard designates *réalité intégrale* (complete or integral reality, although the French also conveys the militancy of fundamentalism – '*intégriste*') as a specific form of virtual reality that is predicated upon the deregulation of the reality principle: 'a reality that is integral – having absorbed everything that denied, exceeded or transformed it' (*LP*, 106). It is the virtual that has become reality's ultimate predator: 'The differential of time having disappeared, it is the integral function that wins out' (*LP*, 31). Baudrillard relentlessly tracks 'immaterial' technologies of immanence, immersion and immediacy as operational fetishes that absorb exteriority, reabsorb interiority,

and no longer allow for adequate representation. The mirror gives way to the 'cold epilepsy and overcharged inertia' of screens. And irony is no longer ours to exercise, as it now resides in the object.

Baudrillard states clearly that hyperreality is the simulacrum's last stage (Reagan was its 'perfect' presidential avatar). And virtual reality is decidedly not a simulacrum. For computer-generated equivalents and images are not signs. Moreover, even the sign is not what it used to be, 'since there is no longer any "real" for it to be the sign of … This is the era of the digital, where the technologies of the virtual accomplish this miracle of abolishing both the sign and the thing' (*IEx*, 127). *Impossible Exchange* and *Télémorphose* (Baudrillard's short response to the first French reality show, *Loft Story* and Catherine Millet's published accounts of her serial sexuality) elaborate upon the idea of *téléprésence* (how the collapsing of time and distance short-circuits 'real' life and how the media, and especially television, now inhabit real life from the inside, on the model of a cell and virus); *high definition* (real time is hi-def time; the human genome is hi-def body; porn is hi-def sex). The world described in *Impossible Exchange* is that of speculative capital, but it retains its pertinence for the present of sub-prime mortgages:

> As for the sign, it is passing into the pure speculation and simulation of the virtual world, the world of the total screen, where the same uncertainty hovers over the real and virtual reality. *Once they go their separate ways, the real no longer has any force as sign and signs no longer have any force of meaning*.
>
> (*IEx*, 5; emphasis mine)

This also changes the very nature of the object. 'In all areas it evades us. It now appears only as a fleeting trace on computer screens. At the ends of their experimenting, the most advanced societies can only register its disappearance' (*IEx*, 22). Reality has become simulative in ways that have unmoored semiotics and the possibility of a critical approach to presidents and to events.

In simulation, the real object is taken for a sign.

> But in a subsequent stage the sign becomes an object again, but not now a real object; an object much further removed from the real than the sign itself – an object off camera, outside representation, a fetish. *No longer an object to the power of the sign but an object to the power of the object* – a pure, unrepresentable, unexchangeable object, yet a non-descript one.
>
> (*IEx*, 129; emphasis mine)

While Baudrillard references Giorgio Agamben here and says that one can deploy either the language of perversion or fetishism, he marks this process otherwise. The transmutation of a sign into an object (a redoubled

simulation) redoubles the abstraction (as it does in Marx's analysis of commodities), rendering the fetish even more vulnerable and immunizing the subject from his object of desire. The metaphysics of fetishistic investment is at work in W-Bush's presidency, which places him in a different relation to the real (and to truth) than Reagan, who also seemed at times untouchable by history or fact (e.g. his 'Teflon' quality). Fetishistic investment is an extreme form of singularity and literality. (Singularity, in Pierre Klossowski's definition, is 'a sign without content'; *IEx*, 130.)

With integral reality we observe several semiotic shifts congruent with fetishism: a movement from 'the becoming-sign of the object' to the 'becoming-object of the sign' (*LP*, 71). At the same time, events (e.g. 9/11, Katrina) increasingly displace the object as opposed to the non-events of the news/information/media. It is important to underscore that the 'non-event' is not the absence or lack of events. It is decidedly not when nothing occurs, but, rather, a 'non-event' is that which needs perpetual spin, an endless drip-feed (*perfusion*) of 'Breaking News' bulletins: 'It is, rather, the realm of perpetual change, of a ceaseless updating, of an incessant succession in real time, which produces this general equivalence, this banality that characterizes the zero degree of the event' (*LP*, 122).

The event resists or is resistant to the non-event of news/information. These theoretically nuanced mutations of the sign and the object into the figures of the fetish and the event are missed even by Bush's sharpest media critics such as Frank Rich (2006), David Corn (2004) and John Dean (2005), who focus on critical hermeneutic gestures of exposure of presidential lies. From the standpoint of *réalité intégrale*, this critical strategy is either forgetful (i.e. it forgets that a screen is not a mirror: 'there is no "through" to the screen the way there is to a … mirror'; *LP*, 80) or arrested, remaining trapped in an earlier semiotic critique of simulation. Critical thought thinks the problem is the conflation of fact and media fiction: that politics/war is still on a simulation model and the problem is Jerry Bruckheimer or a James Frey. A correct and vigilant policing of the territorial borders of the real and the fictitious would remedy the situation.

But could there be other alternatives more in keeping with the requisites of a virtual age? The former Baudrillardian figure for simulation was the Borgesian map that was consubstantial with its territory. In the current regime of integral reality this motif was replaced by an internet joke. As the administration's 'Plan for Victory' signs became exponentially larger and increasingly were forced to share split screens with tankers in flames during the third year after 'Mission Accomplished', humorist Andrew Borowitz sent satirical reports of the White House plan to have a (Halliburton subcontracted and financed) $13.8 billion 'Plan for Victory' sign 'as big as the entire land mass of Iraq'. Borowitz quipped with the Strangelovian black humour of a Rumsfeld: 'Sure it might crush the Iraqi people … But it would put an end to all this talk of civil war' (*GSES*, 210). Borowitz represents an updated alternative to Rich (or the critical thought he represents here): both upping

the ante of the original Borgesian stakes of the simulacrum in his literalism (he is talking about an actual map that would physically crush a people, not a metaphorical model) and in his real time (ludic) internet interventions.

' … it was all over with reality when the virtual came on the scene'[8]

In 'The mental diaspora of the networks', Baudrillard offers a way to read the effect of *réalité intégrale* in rendering impotent media exposure of presidential misdeeds and incompetence as well as providing insight into some of the current regime's most symptomatic pop-cultural moments. Baudrillard names the virtual's specificity in constituting '*an event in the real against the real*' (*LP*, 83; emphasis mine) and he links the end of aesthetic illusion to the new integral reality of war. He asks an urgent question: 'What are we to do with an interactive world in which the demarcation line between subject and object is virtually abolished?' In integral reality, that which was formerly *reflected* in the mirror (or 'mirrored' in collective representations) is now a '*refracted* or diffracted' operation of an undifferentiated unit of 'brain and screen'. Everything operates along the line of an integrated circuit: convolution, image-feedback looping: 'Perfect reality in the sense that everything is verified by adherence to, by confusion with its own image' (*LP*, 79). While this assumes greatest importance in the world of visual arts and the media, 'automatic refraction' (or an immediate aesthetic apprehension of everyday life) occurs in the rest of us who have traded in our mirrors (the former playground of self-differentiation and alienation) for the interactivity of screens. And yet while we are 'ectoplasms of the screen' (*LP*, 82), we retain an 'illusory' idea of the virtual (like a phantom limb that 'haunts' us.) '[A]t the same time as we plunge into this machinery and its superficial abysses, *it is as though we viewed it as theatre*. Just as we view news coverage as theatre' (*LP*, 84; italics in original).

It should not be surprising, then, that one of the strongest critics of the W-Bush presidency would be a former theatre critic and he performs his reading in ways that symptomatically underline the specificity of integral reality, demarcating it from both simulation/hyper-reality as well as 'objective reality'. Frank Rich organizes his sublime account of the lead-up to the Iraq War (*The Greatest Story Ever* Sold) on the terrain of the real. It is framed as a counter-argument to a remark of one Bush aide (informing another former aide, Ron Suskind) that

> a judicious study of discernable reality is not the way the world works anymore … We're an empire now and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you are studying that reality – judiciously as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities which you can study too, and that is how things will sort out. We're history's actors … and you, all of you, will be left to study what we do.
>
> (*GSES*, 4)

Baudrillard might read this aide's obvious condescension ('judiciously as you will') as a *défi* or challenge to see just where a 'critical' strategy fails the self-proclaimed (as opposed to clandestine) dissidents of reality.[9] Or, Rich should have doubled the Republican 'Diceman's' bet.[10] After all, should all the 'evil genies' reside in the West Wing or be found on Rove's Rolodex? Unfortunately, Rich refuses to see that the strategies now open in an era of virtual reality are either orthodox or paradoxical ones and thus remains in an eloquent tutelary relation: 'What follows is a reality based study – judicious I hope – of how these *fictional realities* were created and how they became undone when *actual reality*, written in Iraq or at home, became just too blatant to be ignored' (*GSES*, 4).

Rich is brilliantly media savvy – for example, he thinks that a White House screening of *Lawrence of Arabia* might have had a dissuasive effect on Iraqi War hubris; he is a superbly literate reader of images. His righteous indignation is combined with a sharply ironic wit and he remains, along with Gore Vidal, free of piety or, rather, a superb critic of the symptom of piety in American political culture. His book is thus deeply symptomatic for me of the problems that the W-Bush administration poses for intelligent critical unmasking strategies, especially those who take performance and image culture seriously.

For Rich's 'objective reality'-based version of events does not take the American empirical real at face value. His remarks on the news non-events that proceeded 11 September are quite harsh on the 'appearances' or performances of 'authenticity' that television solicits of its political actors or celebrities. Real-ness doesn't always suffice. Conservative Democratic Congressman Gary Condit's *authentic* sleaziness was *real*, Rich says.[11] What the American spectator craved was *false* contrition (*Conditrition*, as Stephen Colbert might neologize it). Condit's crime was terrible PR judgement, not that he was a poor excuse for a Representative (or for a human being). According to pundits, he should have cried or at least done 'that lip biting thing' (*GSES*, 8). Rich also looks to one of Baudrillard's early American influences, Daniel Boorstin's (1961) *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, and uses a Baudrillardian inflected phrasing to account for the increasing importance of *telegenity* in American presidential politics since Kennedy: 'Four decades later this cultural strain had *metastasized*' (*GSES*, 8–9; emphasis mine). Rich reads the patriotism of (anchorman) Tom Brokaw-like artefacts as a '*virtual*' patriotism: 'Seeing *Pearl Harbor* or giving *The Greatest Generation* as a Father's Day present could become the cost-free moral equivalent of going to war.' Rich's semiotic reading of the re-visiting of World War II in popular culture as a *brand* (*GSES*, 10) is reminiscent of Baudrillard's *The System of Objects*, as is its depiction of the ideology of advertising, now applied to war: 'You don't roll out a new product in August' (*GSES*, 57).

In this account, Rich correctly situates W-Bush as a '*digital* facsimile of Reagan', not a re-Ron; Bush's Crawford 'ranch' was less Reagan's 'rustic

get-away' in the hills above Santa Barbara (nor a real working ranch despite its few head of photogenic cattle) but a 'stage set', a 'Potemkin-village[12] façade of [George Steven's film] *Giant's* Reata' (*GSES*, 16). Bush's contribution was not doctrinal – he offered an 'unexceptional Republicanism', albeit a highly alliterative one: Compassionate Conservatism, a Reformer with Results. It reposed in his enthusiasm for public relations, which like the baseball franchise that he achieved some success with, he saw as all about marketing. Bush's stage manager Rove took over the Reagan photo-op playbook where Michael Deaver left off (*GSES*, 57). Indeed, Bush and Rove 'then upped the ante' (*GSES*, 18).[13] Reagan's use of the photo-op as well as Michael Deaver's subtending slogan, 'You can write the words if we can take the pictures', was deployed as part of a persuasive and at times demonstrative logic. Bush's over-the-top use (e.g. the Riefenstahlian minstrel show at the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia) was dissuasive and dissembling, used to 'disguise' or camouflage his policies. 'Now a smiling Bush appearance to bless any cause, program or habitat was tantamount to a visit from the angel of death' (*GSES*, 19). The disproportion or divergence between the virtual (televisual or photographic images or digitalization of presidential antecedents) and objective reality in pre-9/11 America is extreme ('an ongoing festival of audiovisual cognitive dissonance') taken to a hyperbolic degree that is described as 'almost farcical'.

Rich's 'reality'-based account shifts after the events of 9/11 to discern signs of a new realism, where words once emptied of their meanings when previously hijacked by popular reality-television shows (*Fear Factor*; *Survivor*) are now reverse-'telemorphosed' back into their conventional meanings. The new realism is no more truthful, however, as fake accounts of where the President or Air Force One was on 11 September are recycled in the Jerry Bruckheimer-produced cable docudrama (*DC 9/11: The Time of Crisis*; Showtime) starring the same Bush impersonator, Timothy Bottoms, as the ill-fated *That's My Bush* on cable's Comedy Central. Although this new reality regime is un-ironic and humourless (shadowing Bottoms' trajectory from silly to obdurately false) it does increasingly read as the replay of the old Marx Brothers' joke: 'Who are you going to believe – me or your own eyes?' Photos from Abu Ghraib and the revised account of Pat Tillman's death threaten to expose 'the movie block-buster theatrical realism' (*GSES*, 89, 104) of Bush's flight-suit credible imitation of Tom Cruise in the *nec plus ultra* of photo-ops, the 'Mission Accomplished' landing on the *Abraham Lincoln*. Like the Bush operatives he so ably describes, Rich understands the visual bases upon which (political) objective reality is premised. He offers a particularly hilarious reading of the 2004 Republican Convention's giant new Madison Square Garden runway as an enormous phallus thrusting him into the nation's lap (*GSES*, 141)![14] He is less able to see this as an instance of integral reality that has shifted the relation between the sign and the object. Rich's account remains aligned with the notion of 'objective reality' (that Baudrillard opposes to integral reality) which works according to the model

of a photographic lens: bringing into focus, adjusting to models of representation (*LP*, 96–7).

As stated previously, regimes of integral reality address the 'becoming-object of the sign' and not the 'becoming-sign of the object' (*LP*, 71). Either in spite of or because of the hypervisuality of the event, it is no longer representable (*LP*, 77). In integral reality, there is accelerated circulation, but low sign value. It is an enforced regime of compulsory readability at every moment. Thus, neither attempts to turn the Afghanistan war into another Bruckheimer reality-television series about 'fighting men and women' nor enthusiastic 'embeds' momentarily offering an ultimate reality show or training video (*GSES*, 32, 77) will suffice. For in integral reality, even war is no longer representable. Once the digitality of images is added to the technical virtuality of war, each dimension cancels out the preceding one (i.e. the third cancelling out the second) with the virtual/fourth dimension cancelling out all the others (*LP*, 98). Integral reality is characterized by: 'immersion and umbilical relation, not a scene and a gaze'. It is the 'embed' and not the 'hostage' that becomes the figure of this new interactive world of 'immersion, immanence and immediacy' (*LP*, 31).

'Events in this mirror may be closer than they appear'[15]

The chapter in Rich's account that is most apposite to Baudrillard's 'The mental diaspora of the networks' is 'When we act we create our own reality', with its focused account of the Bush war effort in fake news. The fake newsman or the embedded reporter stands as the figure of the mediatic 'umbilical' relation. My opening Gannon anecdote has a peculiar twist that makes it uncannily resonant with Baudrillard's depiction of integral reality. Frank Rich concurs, 'If we did not live in a time when the news culture is itself divorced from reality, Jeff Gannon would have had his fifteen minutes of ass-kissing fame'. The twist which makes this an object(al) lesson for Baudrillard's theory of integral reality is that, of course, Jeff Gannon is a fake reporter (or a fake reporter with a real security clearance). He is no more real than those 'Senior White House Correspondents' on the *Daily Show* such as Stephen Colbert (who did get to host and 'roast' President Bush at the Press Corps dinner, playing the fake right-wing pundit version of himself who now hosts *The Colbert Report*) or Steve Carell, who is enjoying such a splendid post-*Daily Show* career after playing another fake reporter in *Bruce Almighty*. Jeff Gannon's real name is James Guckert and he is a paid propagandist or 'infogandist' (this is fake *Daily Show* reporter Rob Coudrry's neologism), employed by a website (Talon News) that is mostly staffed by Republican activists and that overlaps with another partisan site GOPUSA (*GSES*, 171). Talon News is itself a phony media company using recycled Republican National Committee (RNC) and White House press releases – in *Washington Post*'s (real) presidential reporter Dana Milibank's words, 'a phony [virtual would be a better word]

media company that doesn't really have any such thing as circulation or readership'.[16]

What I would like to consider is what makes this fake news event illustrative of integral reality – how it differs from the earlier 'simulated' photo-ops of President Reagan (his conflation of the cinematic signifier with the signified, as documented by Michael Rogin, Frances FitzGerald and others), or how it differs from the *trompe l'oeil* fakery of his father, President George H. W. Bush's false 'crack' cocaine bust in Lafayette Park across from the White House. Both of these would still be moments of the simulacrum – either in its hyperreal or in its seductive moment.[17] The above examples have been argued to work (paradoxically) according to a dissuasive logic that shored up the referential illusion even as they (temporarily) rendered (some) media critics speechless. What can fake and virtual news events tell us about W-Bush or about integral reality?

Like 'Tanner', the fake 1984 presidential candidate of Gary Trudeau and Robert Altman's eponymous mockumentary (brought back in the 2004 campaign), 'Jeff' does have exchanges with the 'real' Presidential Press Secretary Scott McClellan and the 'real' President Bush. Could the difference reside in Jeff Gannon's 'virtually' dense CV? Not only does he work for a phoney (virtual) news organization with no circulation, but he was also an X-rated $200/hour escort, with considerable porn-site experience better known as hotmilitstud9.com, workingboys.net, meetlocalmen.com or milit. escortsM4M.com. (After his exposure, 'Jeff' made the usual round of talk shows and joked about his unusual career trajectory, remarking that it is typical to 'prostitute' oneself only *after* one is already an established reporter!)

Jeff Gannon's outing appeared as a 'poetic resolution' of a Baudrillardian temper: a sort of 'live by the virtual, die by the virtual' revision of that first reality-television family described in *Simulations and Simulacra*, the Louds, of *An American Family*, 'the liturgical drama of a mass society' (Baudrillard, 1994a [1981]: 28). Keith Olberman of MSNBC's *Countdown* did a *Daily Show* montage of clips, mimicking 'real-fake' reporters – to expose his 'real' non-virtual identity (as James Guckert or as hotmilit.stud.9.com wanting to meetlocalmen.com go face2facew/Prez). This 'exposure' of the 'real' identity was discovered by a blog and then *verified* (verification is a key step) in what we might call the 'real' news of fake news in a critical–banal strategy and it was neatly resuméed by Rich and Olberman. Maureen Dowd was too busy seething with *ressentiment* over how 'Jeff' – with an alias and a significant IRS delinquency – can get a post-9/11 security clearance while she (a former *New York Times* presidential reporter for President G. H. W. Bush and an editorialist) cannot. (Paradoxically, it is Dowd's affect that often enables her to situate the *objet a* or what Klossowski calls the 'living coin' that establishes the 'singularity' which removes these events from the banal.)

Gannon is the sixth paid Bush propagandist to appear in either print or broadcast forums that appear to be about real news. Two of these (Karen

Ryan and Alberto Garcia, analogized as model investigative Watergate journalists, the 'Woodward and Bernstein of fake news') came directly from the Department of Health and Human Services in order to promote the administration's 'marriage initiative' as well as the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit, which was promoted using *Dateline*-style reportage on the plan. It was then distributed via CNN to over fifty local news outlets (*GSES*, 166–7). Rich describes the tremendous scope of the Bush fake news operation to *literally* create its own reality that began with the Office of Strategic Information (OSI) to plant helpful news items and to do psych-ops with 'false' press releases. When discovered, the OSI was not closed down as a matter of principle, but rather on grounds that its clandestine operations were damaged by exposure (*GSES*, 32). In addition to disseminating 'misleading' or inaccurate news, the Bush administration had a highly funded propaganda operation that hired *fake* reporters at taxpayers' expense.

Armstrong Williams was a 'real' conservative columnist (*Washington Times*, *Detroit Free Press*) and talk show host, who was also a 'fake' commentator – a paid front man for the Administration's educational policy of 'Leave No Child Behind'. More than $240,000 of taxpayer funds (as of 2005) was re-routed through the Education Department and a public relations firm to allow Williams to comment in many news venues during the election. He also appeared in other guises to support other administration policies; my favourite of his 'fake' identities is that of a media *ethicist* weighing in on CBS' 'memo-gate' (the false blog info accusing Bush of real National Guard absences).

Rich's favourite Armstrong example is his interview with Dick Cheney on the Sinclair news stations that refused to play Ted Koppel's reading of the names of the Army war dead in Iraq:

> Thus the Williams interview with the vice president, implicitly presented as an example of the kind of objective news Cheney endorsed was *in reality* a completely subjective bought-and-paid-for fake news event for a broadcast company that barely bothered to *fake objectivity* and whose chief executives were major contributors to the Bush–Cheney campaign. The Soviets couldn't have constructed a more ingenious ploy to bamboozle the citizenry. It was a plot twist worthy of *The Manchurian Candidate* – only *The Manchurian Candidate*, at least, was clearly fictitious.
>
> (*GSES*, 168; emphasis mine)

Rich's response to Williams demonstrates his implicit recognition that only a poetic transference, a 'fictive' or cinematic resolution can be fully adequate to the involuted and contorted reality of the Bush administration, but then only if it can be clearly marked as fiction. This is a refrain reprised in his Epilogue:

> Only fiction can truly deal with a White House that lived and died by fiction. And only a novelist – a new Joseph Heller – could improve on a character like John Ashcroft, who would stand as the most farcical embodiment of the Administration's ethos.
>
> (*GSES*, 208)

We should note that Rich wrote this before Alberto Gonzales set new standards for 'farcical'. What Rich misses in his dead-on recitation (and what is present in Baudrillard's concept of integral reality) is that if the paradigm or model for W-Bush political reality is fiction, it is not due to the 'falsity' or 'virtuality' of that politics/ethos, but rather an effect of the virtual which is no longer a metaphor but a '*literal* passage from reality to a fiction, or rather the *immediate metamorphosis* of the real into fiction' (*LP*, 124; emphasis mine).

As is the case with reality-television programming, cost effectiveness is often the (functional) reason or utilitarian alibi for what the French call *publiréportage*: money is siphoned through a public relations firm and then filtered through subcontractors.[18] Out of the administration's $250 million budget for public relations, $7 million dollars went to 'fake news'. Jon Stewart won his Emmy awards probably spending quite a lot less, which not only confirms the lessons of sub-contracting that we have witnessed in the Iraq War, but demonstrates what Baudrillard (2006a: 66 [2005: 90]) noted in *Cool Memories V*, apropos of a contrast between budgets for the attack on the World Trade Center and disaster films like *Titanic*, '*La fiction est beaucoup plus chère que la réalité*' ('Fiction is far more expensive than reality').

Is it the unprecedented scale of the administration's propaganda effort (like its ridiculous censorship effort in the case of Janet Jackson's 'wardrobe malfunction' with its Kleinian bad breast exposure) combined with its incursion into the news that distinguishes it? Does this inflect any differently the many books that focus on Bush's mendacity (and increasingly how that mendacity/denial of reality led to failure/Iraqi fiasco)? Both Maureen Dowd and John Dean (former Nixon lawyer and Watergate defendant), among others, see Bush as worse than Nixon when it comes to relations of media transparency. For Dowd, he is worse because he is not only more secretive and dishonest and harbours greater hatred, but because he *reinvents* the press. In Baudrillard's formulation,

> the invention of reality [here the press] is a substitute for the absence of truth, then, when the self-evidence of this 'real' world becomes generally problematic, does this not mean that we are closer to the absence of truth – that is to say, to the world as it is?
>
> (*LP*, 34)

I want to take quite seriously Frank Rich's provocative query whether today it is only fake reporters who can do 'real' work. For Rich, either fake

reporters (Jon Stewart) or real reporters (Keith Olberman) hijacking the techniques of fake reporters (*Daily Show* montage) can effectively operate in what is the Bush administration's reality. But is this something to be mourned nostalgically or is it rather a symptom that we are now living in an era of integral reality, beyond the spectacle and the simulacrum? I would also concur with Rich's selection of objects, but for Baudrillardian reasons. In the case of Jon Stewart, it is his *objective* irony that allows the fatality of the objects to speak for themselves; he is not performing a hermeneutical or otherwise critical exposure. His objective – not subjective – irony allows for the 'revenge of the mirror people'.

CNN's Wolf Blitzer is ripe for a case study of how one can learn little from stand-point epistemologies, having forgotten the hyper-real media lessons of the Gulf War. In an interview with 'Jeff' he accepted the most implausible of answers, such as the assumption of an alias 'Jeff' as it was easier to pronounce than 'Jim'! It would also appear that there is a distributive justice problem when it comes to 'fake' and 'real' media events and stories. Frank Rich decries the case of CNN's Earl Jordan, who is a 'real' journalist who was forced to resign after saying that perhaps American troops deliberately target reporters in a 'bloviation conference in Switzerland' (i.e. a real, yearly non-event) or that Dan Rather was chastised and encouraged to take an early retirement because he aired a 'false document' that nonetheless told a 'true story' about President Bush's service in the National Guard. Frank Rich concludes on a note of cynical resignation, 'the only road back to reality may be to fight fake with fake'.

Surenchère

But the road back to reality – or rather its principle – like the road to Damascus – throws up some obstacles in the form of *signs made objects.* As we consider how integral reality has murdered the sign and its attendant consequences, it might be instructive to follow a different strategy, upping the ante by situating 'Jeff Gannon' (aka hotmilit.stud.com.) within the trope of the fake reporter in W-era comedies, foregrounding the fake reporter against both documentarist and 'Swift-boater' as two other symptoms of the desire to re-suture reality back to a principle (or, like Terry Schiavo, put it back on its feeding tube or respirator). I do not know if each generation gets the news anchors (or presidents) it deserves, but one can situate two distinct W-era film genres – the *literal* comedy (films such as *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, *Knocked-Up*, *Superbad*) and the documentary;[19] both are characterized by an absence of metaphor.

Let us compare the 'real-life' fake reporter with two cinematic counterparts, Ron Burgundy in *Anchorman* and Jim Carrey and Steve Carell in *Bruce Almighty.* Carrey, having already established his cinematic credentials as someone in tension with the real (presented as truth – *Liar* – mask – *Mask* – or virtual reality – *The Truman Show*, *Eternal Sunshine of the*

Spotless Mind) here plays a sort of replacement worker God for a burnt-out Morgan Freeman. He is also an anchorman on the local news and is dogged by another reporter, Evan Baxter (Carell), who finally becomes his on-air replacement. Carrey first fulfils desires that are easy for audiences to identify with: making a sea of traffic part, enlarging his girlfriend's breasts, and literally toilet training his dog, including teaching him how to flush and put down the seat. But what is most phantasmatically resonant to an American audience is the sequence where Carrey (who now is God) finally gets his job back by finding the exact location of (Union of Teamsters leader) Jimmy Hoffa's body. Circumventing precisely that uncertainty that haunts us in an era of integral reality, Hoffa is discovered with the absolute verification of the real supplied by the *nec plus ultra* of the forensic object: his full dental records in addition to his birth certificate! Elsewhere I have noted that W-Bush-era films trade on information that is derived from an impossible position of certainty; here it is God, in *Frequency*, it is the perfect position of insider information, the (time-travelled) future.[20] This can be read as an end-run around Oedipus, but I would prefer to situate it in relation to questions of the real and the fake.

Yet these verification procedures, whether it is the verification of the blog reports concerning Gannon or verification of Hoffa's dental records (or the verification of WMDs) paradoxically attests to *the loss of the imaginary of the true*. Baudrillard states:

> Just as verification puts an end to the workings of truth (for truth, if it exists, is something to be fought over, whereas verification transforms it into a *fait accompli*), so we have moved from reality as principle and concept to the technical realization of the real and its performance.
>
> (*LP*, 18–19)

If *Bruce Almighty* plays a contemporary anchor, *Ron Burgundy* lovingly recreates the cheerfully literal sexist *bonhomie* at the dawn of the infotainment eyewitness/action news era: '*This* is what is happening in your world tonight.' Here Steve Carell plays Brick Tamland, the hyperbolization of the local weatherman as an idiot (or Lacanian absolute dummy). Weathermen are literal *front* men. His literalism is so extreme that in a scene discussing being in love, he discusses inanimate objects on a par with the subjective loves of his peer reporters. Will Ferrell is Ron Burgundy. Ferrell's career trajectory parallels that of President Bush. He played W-Bush in the fake parodies of the presidential debates on *Saturday Night Live* before achieving great success in playing objectively unearned but (subjectively) resolutely entitled masculine leads in the literal comedies such as *Blades of Glory* and *Taledega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*. Part of the obvious charm of this earlier news era is that the 'worst' eco disaster or damage that can be done to the real of truth is the exaggeration of a panda's pregnancy at the San Diego Zoo. But most of its appeal goes deeper and is underscored in the

indexical tag line, '*This* is what is happening … ' which signals a faith in the existence of the referent as well as its distinction/differentiation as a medium (analogue, negative) and not as a digital image. The film's other tag line: 'If Ron Burgundy says it, it is the truth' similarly targets the anxieties of an age when veridiction is not so easily located in an enunciating subject.

Here we get at the crux of the difference between the critical and the fatal or between the non-event and eventful/singular readers of media/news: has the 'real' succumbed to the hegemony of the sign/image/simulacrum? Has reality succumbed to artifice? Or rather, have we lost the sign and artifice and are left with absolute reality? It is the sign now and not the real that has been de-regulated (just like market de-regulation or what is at work in the sub-prime crisis, where the ratings of investment products have lost their meaning).[21] 'What becomes of the arbitrary nature of the sign when the referent ceases to be the referent?' Without the arbitrary nature of the sign, without its differential function, there is no symbolic dimension, no language. 'The sign, ceasing to be a sign, becomes once again a thing among things' (*LP*, 68). We witness the collapse of metaphor into the real. For the sign was a scene, Baudrillard tells us, the scene of representation, of language's seduction. 'Signs seduce one another beyond meaning and in their very architecture, signifier and signified are in a dual relation of seduction' (*LP*, 69). With the disappearance of this scene of representation, comes another scene – the (ob)scenity of a 'pornographic materialization of everything'.

There is neither seduction nor representation in the photographs from Abu Ghraib, but an 'integral coding of the body in the visible'. What Baudrillard describes as 'a direct spectacle of sexual acts that have become a visible performance and an acting-out of the body' not only serves as a description of the collapse of metaphor due to their realization, but retrospectively reads both as an allegory of what happens to a nation that has lost the shelter of the signifier/sign and as an apt depiction of the administration's torture policies. There is a certain poetic justice (which may be the only kind we get with the Bush administration) that this collapse of metaphor into the real and the extreme literalization concomitant to it should find its perfect avatar in George W. Bush, a man described by psychologist Justin Frank (2004) as incapable of metaphor.

'Oh, happy days, when the simulacrum still was what it was'[22]

What I have been arguing is that 'fake news/newsmen', like the fake event, is but a symptom of the collapse of metaphor into the real. It is a story of an informational non-event. It was Baudrillard's genius in his last works to theoretically shadow a world of virtual information that no longer left the possibility of a determinate negation. He fearlessly described this new world as a 'state where relations of force and social relations have more or less yielded their *vitality* to a virtual interface and a diffuse collective

performance'. And he paradoxically conjured for us this new virtual world that no longer has an imaginary. It was his last gift to us, one final stunning Nietzschean dare. How shall we return it?

Quitte ou double …

Notes

1 All subsequent references to Baudrillard's (2001a [1999a]) *Impossible Exchange* will be given as *IEx* parenthetically in the text.
2 Rich (2006) recounts that the news conference at which Gannon posed his question was a relatively rare occurrence in the W-Bush administration. Until the beginning of 2004, there were only 11 solo presidential news conferences as compared with 23 for the 'secretive' Nixon and 77 with his father at the same moment in his term (Rich, 2006: 160–1). Subsequent references to this text will be given as *GSES*. The Gannon story was first recounted as an op-ed piece, 'When real news debunks fake news', *International Herald Tribune*, Saturday–Sunday 19–20 February 2005: 7. Maureen Dowd's article on Gannon is entitled 'Invasion of the reporter snatchers', *International Herald Tribune*, 18 February 2005: 7.
3 Subsequent references to *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact* will be denoted as *LP*.
4 Subsequent references to *Screened Out* will be given as *SC*.
5 Pat Tillman was a major league NFL (football) star for the Arizona Cardinals who walked away from a $3.6 million contract to enlist after 9/11 and was sent to Afghanistan. He was used as a poster boy for the war by the Bush administration and was killed by friendly fire. His death was at first covered up by the administration and was never sufficiently investigated to the satisfaction of his family.
6 This title, originally *Les Exilés du dialogue*, can be seen as an allusion to Bertolt Brecht's *Dialogue d'exilés* where the famous line: 'This isn't a beer, but that is compensated for by the fact that this cigar isn't a cigar either. If this beer wasn't a beer and this cigar really was a cigar then there really would be a problem.' This is quoted in Baudrillard (1995 [1991]): 81: 'In the same manner, this war is not a war, but this is compensated for by the fact that information is not information either.'
7 G. W. Bush, 11 August 2004, cited in Frank (2004, 211).
8 Baudrillard (*LP*, 83).
9 According to Baudrillard, today we are all dissidents of reality, but *clandestine* ones for the most part. See *LP*, 36.
10 Luke Rhinehart's (1999 [1971]) *The Dice Man* is discussed in *Impossible Exchange* (58–66), where it refigures the idea of a society governed by chance as a sort of absolute democracy which dissolves the inequality of actual conditions to an objective equality before a set of *rules* – or in this case, rolls. This democracy involved in gaming – or other sumptuary activities – is seen as a more radical kind than mere democracy before the *law*. As such, it addresses the same themes that Baudrillard earlier used Borges' short story of the 'Lottery in Babylon' to illustrate:

> gaming does not liberate us from constraints … but it delivers us from freedom. We lose our freedom if we live it merely as reality. *The miracle of gaming is to make us live our freedom not as reality but as illusion* – a higher illusion, an aristocratic challenge to reality.
>
> (*IEx*, 66; emphasis mine)

Gaming is one possible solution to what Baudrillard calls 'the impossible exchange of one's life'.

11 Gary Condit was a conservative Democrat (e.g. in favour of posting the Ten Commandments in public venues) Congressman from Modesto, California, who may or may not have had an affair with a 24-year-old Washington intern (Chandra Levy), who disappeared in the summer of 2001. The Condit affair was noteworthy as a cultural marker of *fin-de*-Clinton-era sexual media (and OJ) circuses before the fall of the twin towers. Condit's photographed return to Ground Zero (put on his website) could not help his 2002 re-election campaign.

12 'Potemkin village' has been applied, in campaign 2008, to Hillary Clinton's 'faux Victory' celebration in the Florida primary held in defiance of the primary rules set out by the Democratic Party 'involving no campaigning and awarding no delegates'. Frank Rich calls this her 'Mission Accomplished' media airlift moment and cites NBC news analyst Andrea Mitchell, who called it 'the Potemkin village of victory celebrations'. Frank Rich, 'Next up for the Democrats: civil war', *New York Times*, 10 February 2008, wk: 13.

13 This *surenchère*, or upping of the ante, was made possible in part through Bush's Yale classmate and pal, who also served as an investor in Touchstone films – the felicitously surnamed Roland Betts. A combination of the Diceman and Lacan: Role/roll and bet(t)s!

14 This abolishing of distance would put the American electorate in the immersed relation characteristic of Japanese vaginal cyclorama patrons. See Jean Baudrillard (1990a [1979]: 31).

15 Baudrillard (*IEx*, 135).

16 Frank Rich, 'When real news debunks fake news', *International Herald Tribune*, Saturday–Sunday 19–20 February 2005: 7.

17 For a further elaboration of both of these presidential avatars of the simulacrum see my *This Is Not a President* (Rubenstein 2008), Chapters 2 and 4.

18 Fabrice Rousselot, 'Pub cachée pour Bush à la télé', *Libération*, 15 mars 2005: 19; Daniel Schneiderman, 'La victoire ambigue des blogs', *Libération*, 18 fevrier 2005: 33. More recently, *Libération* discussed the case of a fake 'French' expert, Alexis Débat: Philippe Grangereau, 'Débat, indiscutable expert en bobards', *Libération*, 21 septembre 2007: 8.

19 One might also contrast the increased degree of literalism to be found in W-Bush-era horror films such as *Saw*. On the fake news coverage see also Frank Rich, 'Happy talk news covers a war', *New York Times*, 18 July 2004, arts: 7.

20 See my *This Is Not a President* (Rubenstein 2008), Chapter 8.

21 I thank Philip Protter for discussions on the subject of sub-primes and financial bubbles.

22 Baudrillard (*LP*, 69).

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12 Baudrillard's sense of humour

Mike Gane

> A table outside a café. A young woman is waiting. She has placed an advert and has an assignation with one of the respondents. In fact, she has a quite other objective: she is researching into the kind of men who reply to this type of advert. To avoid any misunderstanding, she will tell him as soon as he comes. The man arrives, and she talks to him. He replies that he himself is researching into the type of women who place this type of advert.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1997a [1995b]: 29)

Just how wicked is Baudrillard's wit, and sense of humour? We know about the false quote from Ecclesiastes – 'The simulacrum is true' – at the head of the essay 'The precession of simulacra' (1994a [1981]: 1). How many people have searched for that?! In an interview (with Hegarty), Baudrillard gleefully reports someone from Switzerland contacting him about it, having been taken in. No one should be in any doubt about the playful character of his writings. Even his photographs can be humorous in a similar way – take the photo called 'Saint Beuve, 1996' (Baudrillard [1998]) chosen by Nicholas Zurbrugg to represent the best of his photographs offering 'a startling visual realization of extra-theoretical "theoretical" aspirations, allowing the author to transcend theoretical discourse' (Zurbrugg, 1999: 77). But if you turn the photo upside down, you see the man's shadow is clearly 'taking a piss'![1]

Sylvère Lotringer's recent edited collection called *The Conspiracy of Art* (2005b) includes a very early piece written by Baudrillard in 1952 called *Pataphysics*, and an interview called *Forget Artaud* (which has remained unpublished since 1996). The interview picks up the significance of this very early text, and we find that Baudrillard admits to have 'been involved with the College of Pataphysics from the very beginning' (2005b: 235) – it had been started in the late 1940s in Rheims by Baudrillard's philosophy teacher 'Emmanuel P.' (Baudrillard, 2004 [2001]: 4). There is something immensely juvenile about Jarry's Ubu and the view of culture as constituted by hot air. Pataphysics – as the 'science of imaginary solutions' – appealed because of its brilliant absurdity. But as Baudrillard remarked, pataphysics was put to one side in favour of Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty, of bloody, savage, raw

cruelty' which had a much more important role in his development (Baudrillard, 2004 [2001]: 5). The text of 1952, Baudrillard notes, is the text of his break with pataphysics. He says 'it didn't take me long to realize that the pataphysical entourage was adopting the same conformism, the same institutional infatuation that Ubu himself had' (2005b: 235–6). Yet it is clear from biographical information that Baudrillard continued to flirt with pataphysics right to the end of his life – even being promoted to 'Satrape Transcendental' by the Collège de Pataphysique (see L'Yvonnet, 2004: 320)

What then of Baudrillard's formation, and how important is it in understanding his relation to humour? Richard J. Lane in his *Jean Baudrillard* says simply that he 'was born in Rheims on the 27th July 1929. He had a fairly conventional upbringing and education' (Lane, 2000: 1). This is questionable. Not much is known about Baudrillard's youth, but something happened which has never been elucidated. He says in one interview that during his period of preparation for the ENS he abandoned his studies and ran away! He had his 'youthful Rimbaud moment. Making the *sacrificio de intelletto* – that was the impact of pataphysics on my existence' (Baudrillard, 2004 [2001]: 4). He has emphasized particularly his break with his parents: 'this break-up played an important part in my life, [it] established a mode of rupture which then by a process of transposition influenced other things'. He didn't get into the ENS. He took the *agrégation* examination but failed (Baudrillard, 1993c: 19). He did military service but nothing is known of this. He taught German in provincial schools for a number of years before his entry into higher education, as an outsider. In many key respects he has remained one.[2]

I

When he converted to sociology and semiology under the guidance of Lefebvre and Barthes, it would be expected that he align himself with the Situationists as he began to lecture in sociology at Nanterre (from 1966). Baudrillard's Marxism seems more to have been a radicalism responsive not to cultural revolution (though he had for a time aligned himself with Félix Guattari in a Maoist 'Franco-Chinese People's Association'), but to the sharp change of capitalism into a new consumerist form. His first two books on consumer culture, the *System of Objects* (1996a [1968]), and *Consumer Society* (1998a [1970]), influenced, he says, by an essay by Debray, analysed the switch from a society of alienation to a society that absorbed its elements in a 'total immersion', thus destroying critical spaces and distance (Baudrillard, 2004 [2001]: 19). He became active on the journal *Utopie* for which he wrote in 1969 a key theoretical text called 'Le ludique et le policier' (trans as 'Police and play', 2001b: 61–9; and as 'Play and the police' in 2006: 36–50) that charts, following the theoretical initiatives of Adorno and Horkheimer, and Marcuse (and for a recent continuation see Billig, 2005), the new ambiance of the cultures of modern affluence: from physical

repression and policing (the illusion of May 1968) to a new kind of social integration through consumption, play, fun and pleasure. In the consumer society

> everything becomes a sign to be played with and consumed, including the most radical critique of this society. Nor does repression escape. While fighting on the barricades, the students enlivened themselves with their acoustic image being played on transistors. Everywhere this society regards itself, but the humour with which it sees itself is not at all critical: it is the humour of *LUI* magazine, Godard films; a complacent lucidity.
>
> (Baudrillard, 2001b: 65–6)

From this point, Baudrillard begins to move *from* Marxism and critical sociology to what might be called a radical anthropology (the literature of Mauss and Bataille). *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]) is the transitional text. It outlines a programme of research that Baudrillard has in fact has now completed. At the end of this collection there is a chapter which promises something of Baudrillard's later style. In 'situationist' vein, it notes the case of a crowd of consumers in a supermarket who are suddenly told they can have whatever they want. Instead of an immediate elation and consuming spree, they seem totally confused and paralysed. Is there, as Marxists more or less assume, he asked, really an oppressed and latent mass demanding a complete freedom to consume?

In his critique of Marxism, *The Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard (1975 [1973] – with an introduction by Mark Poster) poses theoretically, via Marcuse, the problem Marxists have of conceiving a society that is not based on use-value and the work ethic. He is scathing:

> This realm beyond political economy called play, non-work, or non-alienated labour is defined as the reign of finality without end. In this sense it remains an aesthetic … with all the bourgeois ideological connotations which that implies. Although Marx's thought settled accounts with bourgeois morality, it remains defenceless before its aesthetic, whose ambiguity is more subtle but whose complicity with the general system of political economy is just as profound … Here stands the defect of all notions of play, freedom, transparence, or dis-alienation: it is the defect of the revolutionary imagination since, in the ideal types of play and the free play of human faculties, we are still in a process of repressive desublimation.
>
> (1975 [1973]: 39–40)

This text ends with an assertion of the revolutionary totality itself against the theory of a de-alienation. Baudrillard's conclusion at that time was that 'He is truly a revolutionary who speaks of the world as *non-separated*' (1975

[1973]: 166). Baudrillard cannot have been very satisfied with such a weak position, as Mark Poster noted in his introduction to the English edition. But by then, 1973, Baudrillard had a good idea of the direction he was going to take. If Baudrillard was about to lift off from his shoulders the great struggles against injustice and poverty in the world that Marxism stood for (and one can sense the relief), was he not just about to assume another burden? The question: what burden – since one also senses that Baudrillard is still angry, driven by a sense that something is very wrong in the world – perhaps even in the way it laughs. Gary Genosko has translated the brief editorial from the journal *Utopie* written by Baudrillard in October 1971. It contains the strange and unexplained line: 'Utopia is that which, by the abolition of the blade and disappearance of the handle, gives the knife its *force de frappe*' (2001b: 59).

No footnote, no comment. What does this mean? Actually for Baudrillard it is highly significant; indeed, it appears to suggest that radical politics and radical humour are intimately linked together in the symbolic.

By the mid-1970s Baudrillard had gone some way to outlining and defining the rules of the symbolic order, and how humour and wit could be theorized in connection with it. He developed a number of terms, particularly around gift exchange, reversibility, but also around destiny, fate, seduction and evil. All these derive from his reading of anthropology which from now on displaces the sociological position he had embraced in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. But his earlier readings of Jarry, Artaud, Nietzsche and Hölderlin are still there; the intellectual configuration is more or less set. Marx was not radical enough since his thought was still trapped in the framework of bourgeois political economy and, importantly, aesthetics. Baudrillard's main intellectual objective therefore can be seen to radicalize Marx and the Marxist tradition by developing a very specific alternative to capitalism – not a new mode of production, but *a new cultural strategy in the symbolic order*. Studies in this period then include his political critiques of the socialists and communists in France (in the journals *Utopie* and *Traverses*), the 'end of the social thesis', his critique of Foucault, and his critique of the architecture of the Pompidou Centre (Baudrillard, 1983 [1978]; 1987a [1977]). But it is in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a [1976]) that he rounded out what he had in mind by a critique of Marxism from the position of symbolic exchange. In developing the theory of Orders of Simulacra, what other writer would have the wit to ask the question: 'Why has the World Trade Center in New York got *two* towers?' (1993a [1976]: 69).

Baudrillard, through this period, tried to avoid in the main the current vocabulary of the social sciences. In dealing with modern societies, he certainly draws on terms from Marx for the analysis of capitalism, from Nietszche for modern cultures, a range of sociologists for terms like 'anomie' and 'simulacra', and modern science for chaos theory, relativity, singularity, etc. He does draw on the modern vocabulary of anthropology, terms such as

'*la part maudite*', 'ritual' and 'symbolic exchange'. What makes this into a new radical theory is that the cultural analysis is also framed in a critical appropriation of Freud and Lacan, where the symbolic is conceived as 'an act of exchange and social relation which puts an end to the real, and in the same stroke the opposition between the real and the imaginary' (1993a [1976]: 204). Baudrillard's intervention here is to reject all attempts to analyse symbolic cultures as if they had the same triadic sign structures as modern European cultures. Thus while the terminology puts the discussion firmly on the ground of Lacanian theory, it introduces a critical variation: that the real (and reality principle) is not a primary or a fundamental term. The category of the real becomes problematic: it is what remains from a disjunction of the two basic terms life and death, 'this reality principle is never anything but the imaginary of the other term' (1993a [1976]: 205).

This terminology does not amount to a systematic anthropology but it does suggest that the basic forms of 'primitive' cultures, or symbolic exchange, have been or can be eliminated from any society, and that certain forms and metamorphic processes remain essential to any culture. And crucially, included in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* there is a discussion of Freud and *Witz*. It is here that one finds the key reference to the knife without a blade: known as the Lichtenberg knife (after the eighteenth-century writer of aphorisms who invented it). Clearly there is a 'joke' here – but what is it? Baudrillard has found the joke in Freud, and presents it intriguingly as follows:

> Lichtenberg's definition of the knife (or non-knife: an inspired and radically poetic witticism) retraces this explosion of meaning with no ulterior motive. A knife exists insofar as a blade and a handle exist and can be named separately. If the separation between the two is removed (and the blade and handle can only be reunited in their disappearance, as in Lichtenberg's joke [*le mot de Lichtenberg*]) then, there is no longer anything but enjoyment [*jouissance*].
>
> (Baudrillard, 1993a [1976]: 230)

Yes, but what precisely is the joke? Freud gives a brief reference to 'Lichtenberg's knife without a blade which has no handle' (Freud, 1960: 61). Freud comments on the technique of this joke: it 'seeks to maintain a connection which seems to be excluded by the special conditions implied in its content'. But, not too helpfully, he gives another example: '"Is this the place where the Duke of Wellington spoke those words?" – "Yes, it is the place; but he never spoke those words."' For Baudrillard, this is a paradigm of the way in which meaning is resolved into nothing, and this resolution is '*jouissance totale*'. For Freud, for whom this type of joke was clearly a mystery, it is an example of 'stupidity'.

During the early 1970s Baudrillard was close to the position of Roland Barthes, who made the distinction between *jouissance* and *plaisir* a central

analytical tool. But Barthes' key essay is decisively prefaced with a disclaimer: the opposition pleasure/*jouissance* 'will not be the source of absolute distinctions' and commented 'the meaning will be precarious, revocable, reversible, the discourse incomplete' (Barthes, 1975: 4). Baudrillard was more categorical:

> Pleasure, satisfaction and the fulfillment of desire belong to the economic order; *la jouissance* belongs to the symbolic order. We must make a radical distinction between the two … The economic is always accumulative and repetitive. The symbolic is reversible, the resolution of accumulation and repetition; the resolution of the phantasm [*est réversif, resolution de l'accumulation et de la repletion – resolution du phantasm*].
>
> (Baudrillard, 1993a [1976]: 241, trans. modified)

Plaisir/jouissance – this opposition is used brilliantly in Roland Barthes's *Le Plaisir de texte* (of 1973) and it presented translators with a huge problem. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, *jouissance* is translated by 'enjoyment'; in *The Pleasure of the Text* it is translated by 'bliss'. None of this appears in Barthes or Baudrillard. For Barthes *jouissance* is absolutely intransitive, defined by extreme perversion, unpredictable, mobile, extreme void (1975: 83) – it does not 'ripen', 'in every sense everything *comes – at first glance*' (1975: 53). Barthes presents two rules. The first: criticism is always aimed at a text of pleasure, never towards a text of *jouissance*. The second:

> This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, *unless it is reached through another text of jouissance*: you cannot speak 'on' such a text; you can only speak 'in' it, *in its fashion*, enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss (and no longer obsessively repeat the letter of pleasure).
>
> (Barthes, 1975: 22, trans. modified)

Barthes notes '[t]he asocial character of bliss [*jouissance*]: it is the abrupt loss of sociality, and yet there follows no recurrence to the subject (subjectivity), the person, solitude: *everything* is lost, integrally' (1975: 39). This led Barthes to a contradiction (quite absent in Baudrillard): he wanted both to develop the idea, but also to suggest that the historical moment of *jouissance* had been lost for ever:

> No significance (no *jouissance*) can occur … in a mass culture … It is characteristic of our (historical) contradiction that significance (*jouissance*) has taken refuge in an excessive alternative: either a mandarin *practice* (result of and *extenuation* of bourgeois culture), or else in a utopian idea (the idea of a future culture, resulting from a *radical, unheard-of, unpredictable* revolution, about which anyone writing today knows only one thing: that like Moses, he will not cross over into it).
>
> (1975: 38–9, trans. modified)

Can we say here, then, that what Baudrillard has done in effect in the early 1970s is to have moved in a different direction from that taken by Barthes: that is, to have taken the raw materials for jokes and wit from Freud and Lacan and articulated them onto the symbolic/simulacra cultural opposition via Barthes' distinction between pleasure and *jouissance* in order to solve the problem posed by Marcuse?

II

But then something happened in Baudrillard's life. What it was is not quite clear. No one has followed up the remarks in Lotringer's interview with Baudrillard:

> For a long time I was very 'cool' about producing theories … I didn't think it had very much to do with anything … Several years ago, all that changed. Somewhere along the line I stopped living, in Canetti's sense … I stopped working on simulation. I felt I was going totally nuts. Finally, by various paths, all this came to have extremely direct consequences on my life.
>
> (Baudrillard, 1993c: 105)

The works from the end of the 1980s have a completely different feel. *Seduction* (1990a [1979]), *Fatal Strategies* (1990b [1983]), *The Divine Left* [*La Gauche divine*] ([1985]), *America* (1988a [1986]), *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1988b; [1987a]) and the *Cool Memories* series: these works start to integrate Baudrillard's own experiences and reflections directly into the analyses and in so doing they (and the numerous interviews he has given) allow us to engage with his style of wit, and sense of humour, as it emerges in this new form of writing.

This is radical anthropology and philosophy (with a wild raiding of a range of other writing, film, etc.) in which Baudrillard is still in search of the basic rules of the symbolic order in which he turns his anthropology on the advanced societies. Significantly, and of course famously, he analyses these societies not simply as flat, dull, grey and monotonous (the desert of the real, the hell of the same, cloning), but rather in a phase of 'hypertelia' – societies no longer in the grip of poverty and privation, but in the catastrophe of saturation (all the highways) and the paradise of the hyperreal; this ecstasy also produces the obese, the obscene, and terrorism – culture having burst through the systems of constraints, and the (revolutionary) dialectical struggle of forces. In his writing on America he notes:

> Laughter on American television has taken the place of the chorus in Greek tragedy. It is unrelenting … so obsessive is it that you go on hearing it behind the voice of Reagan or the Marines disaster in Beirut. Even behind the adverts. It is the monster from *Alien* prowling around in

> all the corridors of the spaceship. It is the sarcastic exhilaration of a puritan culture … Here laughter is put on the screen, integrated into the show. It is the screen that is laughing and having a good time.
>
> (1988a [1986]: 49)

Reality 'swallows' its own hype.

With this change of terrain all analysis is turned upside down: all method must follow this inversion, from dialectical to an exponential logic, from alienation and anomie to total absorption by the code and the anomalies which it suffers. Very few sociologists can cope with the idea that poverty itself might now have become part of the ludic order, and has become a lifestyle choice. Few analysts can accept that the role of theory henceforth should be 'to defy the world to be more: more objective, more ironic, more seductive, more real or unreal' (1988b [1987a]: 100). This doesn't introduce a generalized irresponsibility in theorizing, in fact theorizing becomes in some respects radically conservative, related as it is to a new anthropology.[3] Even here Baudrillard's impish humour breaks through:

> The enunciation of the fatal is also fatal, or it is not at all. In this sense it is indeed a discourse where truth has been withdrawn (just as one pulls a chair out from under a person about to sit down).
>
> (1988b [1987a]: 101)

With *Seduction*, Baudrillard returns (1990a [1979]: 157ff) to the question of games, and the 'ludic' outlined in his earlier essay on 'Police and play'. There is a new attempt to map this in terms of two developments whereby enchantment disappears to be replaced by fascination and 'zapping' (1990a [1979]: 158). The first phase is the subjection of play to the law of value (commodity consumption). The second phase sees the 'cybernetic absorption of play into the general category of the ludic' (1990a [1979]: 159). Characteristically now:

> [t]he ludic is everywhere, even in the 'choice' of a brand of laundry detergent in the supermarket. Without too much effort one sees similarities with the world of psychotropic drugs … Electronic games are a soft drug – one plays them with the same somnambular absence and tactile euphoria.

Indeed, consider the difference with respect to a soccer match:

> one is hot, the other cool – one is a game, with its emotional charge, its bravado and choreography, the other is tactile, modulated (playbacks, close-ups, sweeps, slow motion shots, different angles of vision, etc.) … it is a cold seduction that governs the spheres of information and communication.
>
> (1990a [1979]: 159)

Baudrillard's analysis leads first to the suggestion that this new form of ludic seduction corresponds to a new type of desire, and ever deepening ironic shifts:

> This figure [desire] does not belong to the masters, but was historically produced by the oppressed under the sign of their liberation, and has deepened by the failure of successive revolutions. As a form, desire marks the passage from their status as objects to that of subjects, but this passage is itself only a more refined, interiorized perpetuation of their servitude.
>
> (1990a [1979]: 174)

And then, second, a shift to a new type of sovereignty: the mass takes the position of the nineteenth-century dandy Beau Brummell. 'Before a splendid landscape dotted with beautiful lakes, he turns towards his valet to ask him: "Which lake do I prefer?"' (Baudrillard, 1985: 587).[4] Third, later, in *Impossible Exchange*, it is suggested that the modern situation is an uncertain one in which it is not sure who is master and who is slave. 'Only the serfs and servility remain' (2001a [1999a]: 55).

But what, then, is a seduction, challenge, secret, a fate that Baudrillard contrasts with this cool media seduction? The key example, I suggest, is the analysis of the story 'Death in Samarkand', an example that appears countless times in Baudrillard's subsequent writings. It is certainly paradigmatic of Baudrillard's sense of wicked humour:

> Consider the story of the soldier who meets Death at a crossing in the marketplace, and believes he saw him make a menacing gesture in his direction. He rushes to the king's palace and asks the king for his best horse in order that he might flee during the night far from Death, as far as Samarkand. Upon which the king summons Death to the palace and reproaches him for having frightened one of his best servants. But Death, astonished, replies: 'I didn't mean to frighten him. It was just that I was surprised to see this soldier here, when we had a rendez-vous tomorrow in Samarkand.'
>
> (1990a [1979]: 72)

Baudrillard's analysis makes two points. First, it is the chance encounter and the gesture itself which produce seduction; the sign itself 'moves laterally' and 'advances a deadly command'. Both actors were 'following a rule of which neither was aware' – which is that death is not a biological event, but 'only occurs through seduction, that is by way of an instantaneous, indecipherable complicity, by a sign or signs that will not be deciphered in time. Death is a rendez-vous, not an objective destiny' (1990a [1979]: 73). Second, the charm of the story lies in the fact that the gesture of Death was given a meaning it did not have: the seduction hinges on the fact that the 'man was caught in spite of himself in a web of stray signs', not in a dense

communication of meaning. It 'has all the characteristics of a *witticism*' (1990a [1979]: 75). It is through fragments like this that Baudrillard builds a theory of the rules of the game of the symbolic order. And it is evident that *witz*, the shaft of wit, is crucial to it. Paradoxically seduction occurs because of a void: 'something had the time, prior to its completion, to make its absence felt' (1990a [1979]: 84).

The paradigm text here is *Fatal Strategies* (of 1983) which introduced the opposition banal/fatal strategy, within an attempt to define basic rules of the symbolic order. Baudrillard formulates one rule as: 'all that has been produced must be seduced,' only in this way can an existence have a destiny (1990b [1983]: 133). Another rule, which Baudrillard calls 'fundamental,' is that all seduction arrives from sources outside the subject: only the other knows who you are, only the other 'obliges you to exist' (1990b [1983]: 132), one's 'secret is elsewhere'. Baudrillard gives a strange example:

> The young and beautiful A. is courted by a prince, who, not being able to see her, writes her every day. She knows nothing of this, for these letters come to her mother, who responds faithfully for her and so maintains an amorous correspondence with the prince. A. will find out the truth, along with all the letters and answers, later, after her mother's death, among her papers. *And she will not hate her for this.* This betrayal, on the contrary, absolutely dazzles her posthumously.

Baudrillard comments:

> This story is beautiful for the incestuous shadow it projects … Seducing what one has engendered is, in its banal version, crime *par excellence*. But in the deeper order of things, incest is natural and required. One must seduce what one has produced and engendered. On the contrary, it is perhaps the fact of being engendered and engendering that is the crime … and that which must be resolved, redeemed, expiated by the initiatory fact of seducing and being seduced. And this seduction is always more or less incestuous because, like incest, it is an esoteric form: it consists in having you enter into the secret, and not only into life; it consists in giving you a destiny, and not only an existence.
>
> (1990b [1983]: 132–3)

Thus for Baudrillard:

> The fatal power, the one which holds the secret, the symbolic power (aesthetic, Kierkegaard would say) of seduction, the true seducer, is the mother … [T]he mother redeems, in a way, this secret intervention, the fact of having brought her daughter into the world. That is why the story

> of the secret destiny that the mother had given her is so beautiful, like another life she might have given in addition to the first.
>
> (1990b [1983]: 132–33)

In analysing this story, one which obviously appeals to his sense of humour, Baudrillard contrasts the requirement of the law, production, which appears primary, with that of seduction, which is in fact imposed from behind production and initiates it 'into disappearance'.

He provides another story in which two lovers each receive secret messages about the infidelity of the other. The message to the woman says if she wants proof she has only to go to the masked ball to find her partner disguised as Harlequin. The message to the man says the woman will be disguised as a Congolese boatman. They each go to the ball, two people meet in a private room 'where they throw themselves upon each other. And … to their stupefaction, *it was neither the one nor the other!*' (1990b [1983]: 134). This appeals to Baudrillard, who immediately poses the question of the 'illogical charm' of the story. It is, he says, pure *Witz*: 'fragments of language unknown to each other, without causal links, meet as if by enchantment and discover with delight that they were "neither one nor the other". The terms tear off each other's masks, but do not recognize each other' (1990b [1983]: 135). It introduces the basic enigma: 'how can one be in the secret without knowing it?' Baudrillard's answer is: 'only the other knows … destiny alone knows … language itself knows'. So, 'for there to be seduction, signs or words must thus function without knowing it, as in the *Witz*. Things must be absent from themselves' (1990b [1983]: 136).

Conclusions: beyond an aesthetic point of view?

The recent collection edited by Sylvère Lotringer, *The Conspiracy of Art*, reveals just how important thinking about the trajectory of Western art has been to Baudrillard's project as a whole. But the collection contains interviews in which appear phrases such as the very strange 'the only things I said about art that excited me were on Warhol, Pop Art and Hyperrealism' (2005b: 43). But then perhaps Baudrillard has been trying to be a kind of philosophical Warhol, for later in the same interview he says,

> I have always more or less done the same thing: reaching a certain emptiness, attaining a zero-level capable of bringing out singularity and style. And be brilliant! [Warhol] achieved just that by asserting that everything is brilliant, art, every-one … It's a wonderful statement!
>
> (Baudrillard, 2005b: 45)

On the other hand there is the artist Jeff Koons, whose work 'is not even a regression: it's just mush! You see it and then forget it. Maybe it's made for that' (2005b: 49). Such judgments do seem to imply that there is an aesthetic

here despite the disavowals. These statements raise the question of what might constitute the nature of Baudrillard's position if this is not, as he insists, an aesthetic.

The question therefore is: how does Baudrillard pass from the principles of radical theory to an analysis which draws such a strong demarcation between Warhol and Koons without passing through aesthetics?

Two possible answers are, first, that radical theory *already contains an aesthetic*, and second, that the analysis goes *from the theory to the dynamics of the artists' strategy thus making an aesthetics irrelevant.*

If we take the first possibility, it certainly does appear that in Baudrillard's idea of theory, especially when considering that his aim is to '[c]ipher, not decipher. Work on illusion' – even, he says, to 'accentuate the false transparency of the world in order to spread terrorist confusion, the germs of the virus of radical illusion, in other words the radical disillusion of reality' (2005b: 176). Much of his very passionate objection to 'reality', and the power it now has in our culture, seems to be based on the view that radical illusion is of much higher aesthetic power. Reality itself is a category of our culture which we take as bedrock, but which is in fact a barren desert ('the desert of the real') against which a theoretical terrorism is justified (Gane, 2004).

Thus when he refers to what a 'culture' is, and conceives culture as universal, he always appears to be able to say exactly what it is: a system of symbolic exchanges that are ritually enacted about certain fundamental, even archetypal, reversible and cyclic dualities (masculine–feminine, good–evil), in a predestined grip of fatal strategies. The aesthetic moment in this theory is its conception of symbolic exchange as drama, characterized by the working of play, symbolic distance, the action of evil, the 'accursed share'. But Baudrillard also adds something from Nietzsche, Baudelaire (2005b: 99–103) and Jarry (2005b: 213–16): symbolic exchange is fatal, not critical; it tends to excess, not resentment; to reversibility, not to repetition. Here, then, there is a fundamental aesthetic. The modern obsession with a critical exposure of the real (as oppressive, as limiting) is simply a trap: no human culture could in any case possibly be based on its correlates, reason and utility. All vital culture is based on quite other considerations.

If we look at the second possibility – that Baudrillard can evaluate modern art directly without requiring an aesthetic – this also looks to be the case, since he does not seem interested at all in what might be called aesthetic values of beauty, sublimity, and so forth. What interests him is form and those works or projects which seem to challenge, to push boundaries or transgress them, and thereby categories like the real, accumulation, even death, become important. Once degeneration sets in, for example, by repetition, trivialization or realization, Baudrillard is quick to condemn such a change, as he did with the later works of Warhol. Thus we find a theorist always alert to challenging forms and their decline, not to the evaluation of an aesthetic programme and its products. This means his positions are rarely

dogmatic. He does not 'oppose' capitalism in a simplistic manner, since the commodity can amount to a form which has the power to produce primitive symbolic effects (2005b: 98–110). And this is why Duchamp is so important:

> the event of the readymade indicates a suspension of subjectivity where the artistic act is just the transposition of an object into an art object. Art is then only an almost magical operation: the object is transferred in its banality into an aesthetics that turns the entire world into a readymade. (2005b: 52)

Baudrillard is actually interested not in creating an aesthetic to make judgements about art, but in how aesthetics are created by modern art in an act of self-justification, one that – however 'critical' – collapses into a strange positivity.

But how radical is Baudrillard's anti-'trans-aesthetic'? Nicholas Zurbrugg argued that it was not radical at all but 'drifts between symbolist and surrealist frames of reference', and indeed: 'At best, *America* offers a sparkling account of American mass culture as seen by a postmodern descendent of the surrealist poet Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant*' (Zurbrugg, 2000: 137). Curiously Baudrillard has admitted taking up the peasant position, not that of Aragon, but 'the Danube peasant' (*The Fables of La Fontaine*, from Marcus Aurelius) – the peasant who goes to Rome to confront avarice:

> I play the role of the Danube peasant: someone who knows nothing but suspects something is wrong. I claim the right to be 'in-docile'. The 'in-docile' person, in the original meaning of the word, is someone who refuses to be educated, instructed, trapped by signs … I like being in the position of the primitive.
>
> (2005b: 66)

In this respect it is probably wrong to think that Baudrillard was ever looking to establish a doctrine which could function as an aesthetic (and a politics): 'there is simultaneously a game, the possibility of playing with all that; the possibility of an art, though not in any way an art in the cultural and aesthetic sense, but something closer to a martial art' (Baudrillard, 'On disappearance', this volume).

So is Baudrillard's resistance simply a form of schadenfreude, sadism, *ressentiment*? Baudrillard insists there is a difference. The collapse of a system because of a computer virus:

> something in us leaps with joy when we hear of an event of this kind. It is not that we have a perverse love of catastrophe – this is not the glee of the doomsayer proved right. No, it is that there is a suggestion of fatality here – and fatality always provokes a certain elation in us.
>
> (1993b [1990a]: 40)

Is there then something we can say about this 'joy' that is characteristic of the response to fatality? In this 'elation' has Baudrillard really succeeded in finding a response to the questions posed for example by Marcuse? It certainly appears that this joy is *not* a form of repressive de-sublimation. It is not a response to play in the 'ludic'. It is not an aggressive form of ridicule that figures as a weapon in social struggle and control. Is there a name for this kind of laughter?

If we return back to the crucial discussion in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, we find a theory of laughter that takes us beyond Freud and all *ressentiment*:

> When we laugh … it is because in one way or another, a twisting or distortion of the signifier or energy has managed to create a void. Thus the story of someone who loses his key in a dark alley and is looking for it under the street light, because this is the only chance he has of finding it … the void of logical reason is reduplicated exactly in order to be destroyed, and it is in the void thus created that the laugh and *jouissance* burst out.
> (1993a [1976]: 232, trans. modified)

> [But as well] to keep a funny story to oneself is absurd, not to laugh is offensive, but to laugh at one's own story also shatters the subtle laws of exchange … There must, therefore, have been something other than unconscious economic mechanisms to compel reciprocity … It is because terms are symbolically exchanged, that is to say become reversible and are cancelled in their own operations, that the poetic and the *Witz* institute a social relation of the same type. Only subjects dispossessed of their identity, like words, are devoted to social reciprocity in laughter and *jouissance*.
> (1993a [1976]: 233, trans. modified)

While we know that Georges Bataille, for example, gave laughter a very significant religious place, suggesting that the comical was simply profane while laughter initiated us into sacred revelation (Surya, 2002: 37), Baudrillard suggests that the flash of wit, the joke that initiates us into reversal, into nothing, initiates us into the fatal, symbolic order. Then comes a problem particular to teaching this mastery in the symbolic, since this world 'opposes any attempt to make it signify anything whatever. To inflict truth on it is like explaining a joke' (2005a [2004]: 211). What is required is a new conception of lucidity (Baudrillard, 2005a [2004]; Gane, 2007).

Notes

1 I pointed this out to Nicholas Zurbrugg after he had used this photo in a lecture in Leicester, England, and we had a good laugh. I suggested that it was Baudrillard who was taking the piss! Nicholas Zurbrugg later asked Baudrillard

about this, and was indeed assured that he was not 'taking the piss'! (Actually this expression is unknown in the French – but then Baudrillard does speak English.) The photo in question is used as a frontispiece in Baudrillard (2008 [1994]).

2 I was with Baudrillard on a small lecture tour in the early 1990s, and we arrived at Oxford, England, where he was due to speak at the Maison Française. When we got there, Baudrillard said to me, 'I recognize this place. I've spoken here before!' Something to remember about Baudrillard: becoming world famous, he has been almost everywhere. The Director had phoned up Nanterre to find out what precisely was Baudrillard's status. Baudrillard asked him what it was. It turned out that he was a Professor Emeritus: this unexpected elevation amused him considerably.

3 We should note the role Baudrillard gives to theory: 'Theory is just like ceremony … both are produced to prevent things and concepts from touching indiscriminately, to create discrimination, and remake emptiness, to re-distinguish what has been confused' (*Fatal Strategies*, 178).

4 Actually Baudrillard has slightly altered the story: Brummell was talking with an acquaintance after a tour, and was bored with insistent questioning, then turned to the valet: 'Which of the lakes do I prefer?' (etc.) (in Moers, 1960: 18).

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13 The (un)sealing of the penultimate

Andrew Wernick

Andrew Wernick: What did you mean when you said that you wanted to bring theory into a state of grace?
Jean Baudrillard: Oh, I don't talk like that any more.

More fascinating (even) than any single work of Baudrillard's has been the trajectory of his thought. In *L'Autre par lui-même* (see Baudrillard, 1988b [1987a]) he described the change between his early writings on consumer society and his gnomic utterances of the late 1970s and early 1980s as a movement 'from the side of the subject to the side of the object'. He had already spoken of the need for theory and practice to move from the real to the symbolic, from production to seduction, from critical theory to fatal theory. Later, as he engaged more with technological themes, he would speak also of fourth-order simulation, the screen and the embrace of uncertainty.

None of these formulations, though, will quite do. For one thing, Baudrillard's terminology (including for his own position) is always on the move. This is partly a tactic to avoid encapsulation. It also reflects a conceptual dynamism that arises from the fact that, for all its self-avowed swerve towards 'metaphysics', particularly that of good and evil, Baudrillard's thinking has remained in a crucial sense sociological. It has not ceased, that is, to take as its object the moving front of the present, interpreted in terms of the metamorphoses of the system, capital, etc. – an object whose movement, at the same time, he has sought to mime and exaggerate (rather than analyse) while also staying ahead of the curve.

In any case, we should be wary of deciphering Baudrillardian thought in terms only of its initial transformation. Such formulae as 'from subject to object' do not throw much light on what came later. Nor, more importantly, do they enable us to see the movement of his thought in terms of the overall tension driving it, or in terms of the wider assemblage within, or with respect to, which each new turn has occurred.

Of course, in seeking to raise such questions, one is not helped by Baudrillard's own insistence that radical theory – a term he has never dropped – should eschew participation in that glaciation of interpretation that

besets criticality of the traditional sort. But as my aim is not to make Baudrillard more mysterious, I will set this advice aside.

From Marx to Nietzsche via McLuhan

A prominent element in the mix – so prominent it is often taken for the whole – is a transposed McLuhanism. I mean by this something fairly precise: namely that, from early on, Baudrillard comes to posit a paradigm shift in the constitution of the real that has made obsolete the entire mode of conceptualization associated with 'perspectival space'. The trope, to be sure, is reframed. The break defining our epoch has the character of a catastrophe rather than a parousia. Its causes have less to do with media *per se* than with general exchange, simulation, speeded-up circulation, and metastatic growth – that is, with the structural dynamics of advanced capitalism. And in so far as there *is* a media narrative it is indexed to Walter Benjamin's regarding technical reproduction rather than McLuhan's regarding senses and sense ratios. The cognitive element is also made extreme. With the disappearance of the distinction between the real and its copy, the schema of representation fails and the real itself disappears. Nevertheless, as with McLuhan, a deep and implosive historical change has occurred, with respect to whose comprehension there is a baffling slide from the ontic to the epistemological, and a similar slipperiness in the status of insights uttered as truths yet presented as jokes or fictions.

This is the Baudrillard of pataphysics, for whom the Gulf War did not happen, the Baudrillard vulgarized in *The Matrix*; it is also the Baudrillard who speaks of the code, the design revolution, cloning, the digital, orbitality. One could readily construct a theoretical genealogy by taking his cumulating account of a mind-bending turning point as its central thread. But there is more to the Baudrillardian assemblage than this. McLuhan's own discourse on media was hardly self-contained. It was linked to a crypto-theology of a Catholic sort, which veered from Joyce and Pound to conservative *kultur kritik*, to an evolutionary anthropologism that owed much to Teilhard de Chardin (see McLuhan, 2003; Theall, 2005; Cooper, 2006). In similar terms, to understand Baudrillard, to understand, indeed, the use he made of what he extracted from McLuhan, we must relate his thought to its larger commitments and schematics.

A kind of faith, we should add, is in play here too – though one that is markedly different, in structure, never mind its premises, from the one subtending the thought-world of McLuhan. Not only is it emphatically this-worldly, and under erasure. Against the pieties of any merely secularized Christianity, and in the spirit of Bataille, it is pro-heterogeneity, and Manichean. It is, finally, *active* – and not just (or even) as a moral imperative, but constitutively; that is, in the deeper sense articulated in the theses on Feuerbach – a sense which in Baudrillard's hands becomes ever more abstract – according to which the foundational not-yet on which one puts

one's chips (social humanity or human society, in Marx's parlance) can only be validated by being realized.[1]

That at least – in a structuralized synthesis of *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1987 [1967]), *One-Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1964) and *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen, 1994 [1899]) – is where the early work starts off, though it rapidly deviates from anything recognizably related to the gods of the Left. There is, for example, little talk of oppression or justice. With the critique of *ressentiment* constantly in the background, there is an allergy to anything smacking of moralism or revenge. At the same time, for Baudrillard, discourses of liberation resonate all too harmoniously with the positivized pathos of expanding production and circulation. As for the prop of a teleological humanism, actual humanity, far from unfolding towards a higher autonomy and creativity, it is busy making itself redundant, together with the sex and death essential to its nature, in the face of its biological, machinic, organizational and neurological doubles.

Nevertheless, a charm in Baudrillard's thinking, and a toughness, is that no matter how illusory any would-be transformist project is taken to be, and how misbegotten the very aim, the will to keep open in thought, as a challenge to practice, some kind of essential gap between actuality and its immanent beyond, is never wholly abandoned. To such an extent, indeed, that pessimism regarding the forces overwhelming the possibility of collective self-transcendence becomes itself, if not exactly a principle of hope, then at least a line of flight. It is this very cross-over, together with its paradoxical continuity, that I want to highlight here. To grasp how it operates, and the new aporias to which it leads, we have to understand not only the angle at which Baudrillard exits from the heterodox Marxism from which he begins, but also the nature of the receiving problematic into which he settles down, and which he reworks. This latter, but again leading to a barred exit, turns out to be a mutant and updated extension of the schema wherein Nietzsche problematized nihilism.

History stopped

Baudrillard's departure from Marxism – which sets Marx against Marx just as he sets Saussure against Saussure, Freud against Freud, etc., redefining them all as simulation models – has been extensively commented on. Here, by way of clarifying the pivot that occurs, I will mention just two of its salient features.

The first pertains to the problem of how to characterize the epoch, given a new twist by Kojève (1980 [1934]) in his readings of Hegel. What makes this a problem, at least for the post-War European left, is the fate of the Revolution. Not just the one that did occur (1917 *et seq.*), but more especially the one that did not occur – not in the 1920s and 1930s, nor in the aftermath of World War II, nor again in the 1960s and 1970s: the Revolution in the West. If one impact of this non-occurrence was to hasten the

dissipation of the socialist project into a multifarious project of (morally driven) reform within the system, another was the proliferation of strategies on the one hand to keep the horizon open, at least globally, while, on the other, explaining the difficulties of making a break towards it in the capitalist heartland. Lenin's (1948 [1917]) *Imperialism*, with its theses about super-exploitation, the embourgeoisement of the Western proletariat and the weakest link, offered a classical prototype for one such strategy, which even after the collapse of the 'socialist camp' still has its echoes in hopes invested in the politics of the Second or Third World.

For others, the catastrophe of fascism, and the decline of class consciousness in the West during the long post-1945 boom, even of what could be any more recognized to be class antagonisms, led to a revaluation of the Marxist paradigm itself, including, for some, the identification of the working class with the revolutionary subject. Overall, it seemed, with an increasingly knowledge and service-based economy, more complex stratification, a massive system of state management, welfare and incarceration, and a consumption/advertising/entertainment complex that shifted all the terms of discourse and consciousness, capitalism had surmounted its long crisis, and had achieved a higher level of integration and robustness than ever before.

From here, two positions were possible.

One was that advanced, or late, or post-industrial, capitalism had indeed systemically changed. The impasse, however, was less solid than it looked. In this vein, amidst a renascent mass radicalism, the later Marcuse, Sartre and Bataille together with the minoritarian traditions of art and anarchism, became important relays in the emergence of a new Left, with its search for creative expedients to kick-start the gummed-up dialectical machine. The Situationists, with their attention to commodities and media, and their panoply of tactics – the *dérive*, *détournement* and *contestation* – for breaking the spell, had a particular success in France. Baudrillard was himself, through 1968, an intellectual and artistic outrider of this tendency. The semioclasm advocated in *Towards a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* – 'Even signs must burn' (1981 [1972]: 163) – vibrates with its ultra-*gauchiste* effects.[2]

Another possibility entirely – first voiced in the 1940s but taken up again in the disillusioned aftermath of 1968 – was that a socialist transformation may once have been possible, and it remains desirable, necessary even. But the opportunity has irrevocably passed away. With the triumph, transformation and triumph again of capital, the game is well and truly over. It is here that we find the melancholics of Frankfurt, and later, in his own revised version, Baudrillard.

The tension in his position – between a provocative activism that will never quite let go, if only in the stylistics of writing, and a stoical adaptation to hypercapitalism as destiny (interpreted, nevertheless, as the triumph of death) – should be emphasized. As too should its distinctiveness within the wider ideological arena.

Among the heirs of Hegel, and of Enlightenment progressivism generally, two theses have long confronted one another. The *first* – liberalism of all stripes – is that with democracy, science, the rule of law, etc., we have arrived. History, as the story of that arrival, is over. (There is mopping up to do, but the main event is over. A new problem, however, begins to appear. The labour of negativity has no 'useful' employment.) Against this, the *second*, oppositional, thesis holds that history has not yet ended, but that there is one more transformation to undergo. Only, indeed, when we reach the *next* stage will history in the sense of the freely autopoetic activity of an autonomous humanity truly begin. A secular version of this chronotype is socialism, but apocalyptic constructs of all kinds belong here. (In this penultimate moment, there is one more struggle to wage. Strife is unavoidable. Negativity finds employment.)

In the impossibilist response to the non-occurrence of the Revolution, we now have, however, a *third* position. History has not completed the dialectic of social development, as in the first thesis, nor does our epoch take its meaning from being an antechamber, or birthing process, as in the second. We are, rather, stuck in the penultimate, whose unresolved contradictoriness, alienation, etc., have become self-cancelling. The last but one phase of human development has become permanently the last. History, on this view, has stopped before it has come to its end. Indeed, the piled-up consequences of the fact that the locomotive has stalled are themselves invisible. There is now no engine and no track. (Negativity again has nothing to do, but this time only after it has gone round a demystifying spiral, which, in pursuit of an exit, it can choose to repeat.)

It is the figure of history stopped that leads Baudrillard, via what he takes from McLuhan and Benjamin, to reconfigure where we are. What he presents is an ironic culmination of the Marxist story in which capital has totalized and merged with the circulation of signs, praxis has become meaningless as a category, the 'critique of political economy' is unmasked as a ruse of the system, and the human, such as we have been existentially and teleologically imagining it for five centuries, is passing away before our eyes. This is not to say, however, that Baudrillard leaves Marxism on any vector of mere disillusionment. The old dialectic transmutes into a new figure of conflict and reversibility within which radical theory itself retains an activist role. But before coming to that, one further element of his dissolvent alteration of Marx requires comment. This concerns what Baudrillard takes from his critical encounter with French sociology.

What Baudrillard learnt from sociology

Baudrillard's dismissiveness towards the discipline to which he was nominally attached at Nanterre is well known. In his essay on 'the end of the social' he dismisses sociology *tout court*, deeming fantasmatic any real object it might try to give itself (Baudrillard, 1983 [1978]). Marxism is among his

several targets, but he takes particular aim at the social ontologizing – society as a real and distinct order of being – that marked the Comte-to-Durkheim school, and that continued to underlie French sociology long after its aspiration to be the official ideology of the Republican state, so savaged by Nizan (1972 [1932]), had passed away.

From this same tradition, nonetheless, there are three things that Baudrillard appropriates, each in their way crucial for his journey.

To begin with, his very insistence that the domain of what we can no longer think of as the social should be thought of entirely and cruelly as having the character of (an) object, a domain, moreover, which operates as a game with its own rules, preserves, at least in its form, the anti-psychologistic move that underpins the essentialist content of the social realism that he simultaneously rejects. It is by this route, rather than, say, through Spinoza, as with Deleuze, that Baudrillard reaches his particular form of rooting out 'the subject' from social/cultural thought.

In the second place, the practical and intellectual unravelling of society-worship in the French state, and the parallel self-undermining of the Left's own foundational categories (community, humanity, etc.), provide a figure for a second, or aftermath-like, death of god, making that figure indeed, for him, a key for understanding the present situation. It is noteworthy however that Baudrillard does not, as with Nietzsche, or in accordance with classical French sociology itself, convert the conjointly real and theoretical ending of the social into a new and intensified problem of meaning – vertiginous disorientation, the de-founding of values, etc. The system can operate without meaning. Individuals have become nodes in a network. The very space in which orientations might be mentally mapped as guides for action has dissolved. If there is an equivalent, in this scenario, of a transvaluation, it has nothing, moreover, to do with self-assertion or self-overcoming. It is no more, perhaps, than the mental shift that makes the disappearance of meaning visible, while overcoming any desire to go back.

Despite all this nullity, third, from the very wreckage of Durkheimianism something positive can be extracted. This is the turn to ethnology and the primitive that marked the early Annalians, the radicalization of this turn through Bataille and the Collège de sociologie, and above all from that vantage point, what can be made of Mauss's (1990 [1924]) theory of the gift.

The gift, with its symbolic obligation, is the one concept that Baudrillard unabashedly parades as a Real. His incorporation of it into the analysis of capitalism both explodes the productivism of the classical critique and enables him to recast the way in which the dialectical quality (and transformation possibilities) of capitalism might be better understood. On the one side, as an outgrowth of an autonomized accumulation process, the gift and its symbolically mediated dynamics degrades, increasingly and in every aspect of life, into the exchange of equivalents. More and more, then, capitalism prevents the operation of symbolic exchange. On the other side, however, at the level of the totality (or with regard to what Baudrillard calls, in

an off-guard moment, the essential marrow of the social), the counter-gift is inextinguishable.

At the limit, we can imagine the suppressed symbolic irrupting as a gigantic counter-gift in which 'society' responds to capital's mortal challenge with an even more fatal challenge of its own. What this cataclysmic counter-gift would look like, of course, is notoriously vague, especially as a path to transformation. A clue may be found in Bataille's play with the idea of a ritualized human sacrifice as a device to trigger off a Revolution conceived as a wider one.[3] In the work of the 1970s, Baudrillard flirted with images of terrorism, and more generally with escalating duels of death with death. In the 1980s and 1990s, the register becomes more metaphorical. But the point remains the same. In the inextinguishability of the gift, in its ambivalence and reversibility (negative gifts, gifts as challenges …), and in the always potentially escalating-to-the-limit nature of its back-and-forth dynamic, we can find a principle of contradictoriness (one, in fact, that *replaces* 'contradictoriness') that is basic, pervasive and potentially transformative. It is a principle that survives class antagonism, that survives, indeed, the de-realization of the economic, and the disappearance of politics into the trans and the screen. It is also a principle that enables Baudrillard to rethink the destructive/transformist element of what he ceases to call critical theory itself. Hence, as a leitmotif, his intermittent disquisition on the role of theory (his theory) as itself, in a gift-economic sense, performative: to be understood, that is, as a challenge, a seduction, a confounding of sense, etc., that is itself elicited (automatically, one might say) by the zombie excess it still more excessively and fatally throws back.

Ultimate nihilism, in this reworking, would not be the disintegration of the will to power in the spectre of the last man. It would be the devitalization of the gift dynamic, at the meta level of the a/social whole. In one last spiral though, the erasure of symbolic exchange might even itself rebound, in so far as impossible exchange – both the presencing of that, like death and the useless, which cannot exchange, and the becoming impossible of exchange as such – is a catastrophe for the universal commutability on which the infernal metastasizing virtualized corpse of dead labour depends.

Nihilism and judo

I have already, in these remarks, begun to describe how Baudrillard's problematic transmutes into a revised version of Nietzsche's schema for nihilism. The transmutation becomes complete when Baudrillard moves to champion not simply the object (a vantage point from which of course Nietzsche's own ultimately subject-based drama of the will to power must be rethought) but the negativity of the object, objective nihilism – not simply in the irruptive sense of the revenge of the crystal, or of terrorism, but in the quieter dissolution of all the great Reals that have formed the now-revealed-to-be-groundless grounds of rational–progressive thought, that of the

historical Left included. The class dialectic transmutes, in other words, into a dialectic of nihilism (the nothing nothings itself). It is one that closely shadows at least the forms of the scenario developed by Nietzsche at the end of the nineteenth century. Radical theory, in just the same way, will be the counterpart, in thought and writing, of the *practical* active nihilism that uncannily (again) marks the political landscape.

There is though a signal difference. The Nietzschian schema – which had permuted Comte's story of negativism and the *dégéneration de dieu*, with the fantastic project of overcoming Schopenhaurian pessimism – proposed a completion of nihilism that passed into an omega point of weightless being blessed with infinite creative power. For Baudrillard, the great noontide at which the 'real world' might be abolished has more than arrived. However, our condition of ironically completed nihilism is the occasion not for the anthropological breakthrough envisaged by Nietzsche but for a new movement of redundancy and vertiginous devolution. It is on this terrain – not so bathed in cynicism as he himself allows us to think that, but with an air of magic – that Baudrillard has continued to scan for judo moves wherein the Nothing might yet be outbid, or caught in its own trap. To take him seriously as a theorist is not necessarily to join him in this enterprise. But it is to take account of the original combinatory he has forged, and to pursue its possibilities.

Notes

1 Thesis X reads: 'The standpoint of the old materialism was civil society; the standpoint of the new materialism is social humanity or human society' (Marx and Engels, 1947: 199).
2 See especially Chapter 9, 'Requiem for the media', pp. 164–84.
3 The plan was to be carried out by the secret society known as Acéphale, initiated by Bataille in 1936: see Bataille (1999); see also Pearce (2003).

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