

Seducing the Void: An Exploration of Baudrillard's Phenomenology of Absence

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2009

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis attempts to illuminate new approaches to the thought of Jean Baudrillard, by understanding his unique phenomenological approach and radical affirmation of experience. This will be considered through an exploration of some interesting distinctions between his work and Friedrich Nietzsche's. Where Nietzsche attempts to fall out of exchange with the world, it will be found that Baudrillard's work is attempting to enact a kind of tension with things. This aspect of Baudrillard's work will be examined through some interesting connections to the later work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, specifically through the concept of reversibility. These connections and distinctions will gather in some important insights on Baudrillard's approach to the topics of void, the hyperreal and relationality. Moreover, through exploring the intricacies of his phenomenological approach, I hope to understand more clearly what it means to sink into appearances, and to locate the subject wholly within the tensions of relations and forces enigmatic to it.

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I have a friend who, 18, spun out of orbit, and defying absorption into nothingness, took off for Mexico to find Don Juan, and with nothing to lose she pushed up against that great yawn until she fell right into it. It was an echoey territory, which didn't gather you up in any depth, colour or texture, it didn't lure you or offer up any charm (you see, chairs didn't crouch, clothing hangers didn't ask questions, and the Yerba Santa and blue monarchs collided like cold and uncompassionate couples). She traveled in this inert geometry, this lack love torture, too empty to be lonesome, surely mad as anything in many eyes, until she came upon an old Curandera, who told her that she had been to this *place* once before and that there is a dance and song which must be performed to seduce a world back into existence. And so, for many years she danced and sung a world back to life.

Mingling breath with birdsong, luring spruce limb with the tilt of a hip, swelling air with syllables (and even the chairs began to stretch their limbs).

Body blooms again.

Introduction:

I've always been cautiously attracted to limit seekers— explorers, poets of the road— those who venture to, or find themselves at the brink of society, systems, land, or reality, and often with a touch of madness, find the clutch of things in this unnerving sense of loss of ground. As Sal states of Dean Moriarty: “They dance down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘aww!’”¹

This has been my attraction to Friedrich Nietzsche, a mythical and seductive figure in the tale of our modern selves. He seeks to fall out of exchange with society and the redundancy of the system— this genealogy he was born into, and to risk himself up against that empty breath of solitude. As he dares to be the maker of his own laws, he illuminates the disappearance of things in his own ecstatic energy. Though we can catch him looking back, he pushes that going over— beyond territory and gravity. He seeks to be a dancing star, freely metamorphosing, spiraling in on himself, *untouchable*: a figure of becoming, destiny, and fatality. Burn, burn, burning. And are we not seduced by his sovereign passion that promises to deliver us from the plural, the fractal and the spectral? That desire for the blue centerlight- POP, defying emptiness?

¹ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1976). 5.

As will become clear throughout this thesis, I have a great degree of caution towards my own captivation, but believe that such thinkers as Nietzsche, do, in wide-eyed honesty, bring us to an important ‘place’: that brink, which marks a dissent from what we take to be terra firma— the real, the system, that great cosmology, God...or whatever have you. I experience this dissent through my lack of relationship with this land and territory I’ve spent my entire life in, the food I eat, and my co-inhabitants. Consumer, voter, renter— my dumb hands and these pages are, however, attempting, against Nietzsche’s challenge, to decipher the rules and the rituals, to enact some sort of tension with things, to decipher the subtleties of such an ambiguous exchange, and to dispel, or shall we say, seduce the void that Nietzsche so brilliantly lights up. And so, can we find the clutch of it all not in the POP but in the sly duel of things?

Equally, I hope to illuminate new approaches to the thought of Jean Baudrillard, who I will take as a guide in these pursuits. Of course there are many interpretations of Baudrillard that one could choose from. For this thesis, it is the lesser known Baudrillard-as-phenomenologist whom I feel most called to trace. Perhaps this is because there is something in his phenomenology that fulfills my own dire will to change course in an obscene world, and perhaps it’s *this* Baudrillard which challenges most clearly Nietzsche’s beguiling Overman, Zarathustra. As Dominic Pettman states: “Baudrillard reminds us that a woman is whispering into the man’s ear, ‘what are you doing after the orgy?’ It is a potential rendezvous, an occasion to look forward to, and

build toward: a slight shift in perspective, which creates a more promising view of the orgy itself.”²

All of this will be pursued in the spirit of a secret that I am attempting to acquaint myself with, a secret that both Baudrillard and Nietzsche bring us to— that despite the death of God, there never really was a real ground. I am captivated by this point, for it seems to be a conceptual starting point that both theorists orbit around. And though Baudrillard’s work is in so many ways haunted by Nietzsche, it is also an interesting point of dispersal into different directions. For Nietzsche, the death of God reverberates a sense of void, which he is pushing up against in response— every muscle twitching to live and go. For me, this points to the way in which his work has not quite come to know the very secret, that is, the primacy of appearances, which he himself acquaints us with. As for Baudrillard, this state of so-called completed nihilism does not hearken an occasion for any sort of ‘overcoming’, as foretold by Nietzsche (nor does he invite a recovering of anything lost), but rather calls us to something else.

It is on this terrain that Jean Baudrillard, not so immersed in cynicism, irony and nihilism as he allows us to think, but rather with a flair for magic, will be our guide in the enacting of something different. Perhaps nothing might yet be challenged and seduced, and things might be caused to exist. “For nothing exists naturally, things exist because challenged, and because summoned to respond to that challenge. It is by being challenged that the powers of the world, including the gods, are aroused...it is by the

² Dominic Pettman, “A Belated Invitation to the Orgy,” In *Fatal Strategies*, by Jean Baudrillard, trans. Philippe Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski, 10 (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008).

challenge that the game and its rules are resurrected.”³ Our task then is the very opposite of a going over, and is to rather shape a subtler form of subjectivity, which finds itself wholly within the tensions of relations and forces enigmatic to it. His work thus calls us to sink into the world of appearances, where to seduce the world into existence always means to be seduced oneself:

What makes you exist is not the force of your desire...but the play of the world and seduction; it is the passion of playing and being played, it is the passion of illusion and appearance, it is that which comes from elsewhere, from others, from their face, their language, their gestures— and that which bothers you, lures you, summons you into existence; it is the encounter, the surprise of what exists before you, outside you, without you- the marvelous exteriority of the pure object, of the pure event, of what happens without your having anything to do with it. What a relief- this is enough to seduce you; we’ve been so solicited to be the cause of everything, to find a cause for everything.⁴

It is Baudrillard the phenomenologist, who, building off of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s radicalization of phenomenology through concepts such as reversibility, fleshes out the various subtleties of this relation and tension of things. As we will see, it is a phenomenology at play in illusion, ritual, seduction, and magic. Underlying this, we will always be in conversation with Nietzsche, looking to touch on the impossibility of the ontological void Nietzsche pushes up against. This phenomenology of absence, as Baudrillard has referred to it sparingly, will seek to show that absence is in the fold, the invisible, “the application of the inside and the outside to one another, the turning point.”⁵

³ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. and ed. by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 91.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and Its Destiny, 1968-1983*, ed. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis, (London: Pluto in Association with the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1990), 139.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Ledfort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968), 264.

It is not something outside of Being, but designates Being's essential distance and invisibility—the inherent alterity of things. Suddenly reality and void become merely the visible and the invisible, plays of illusion, games of appearance and disappearance—all matters which can be seduced, danced, and dueled into existence, or sunk into like the night. And so, slow your bones—the world still lies sly and ironic.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes.
"Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him--you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning?"⁶

-Nietzsche

⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 125.

Chapter One: Are we not so young and easy?

I. Woe when you feel homesick for the land

As David B. Allison states, “One hundred years after Nietzsche’s madman proclaimed the death of God, Baudrillard, perhaps more cogently than any of our contemporaries, explains what the effects of this ‘greatest event’ means for us, since even great deeds and events take time to be known.”⁷

Baudrillard relates the death of God to what he sees as ruptures in human relationships to various elements— the things, others, and territory, that once made our world seem meaningful. And so he tracks this subtle death through the loss of reference, correspondence, representation and meaning in our time— as the supposed ‘thing as it is’ increasingly escapes our grip. Ours is the era in which the ‘real’ is revealed as nothing other than its own simulation, mediated by ideas (even the highest values, are incapable of resisting reversal and devaluation). This is the time of the hyperreal, marked by what he refers to as the death of the referential, and the resurrection of signs. These signs never touch down, but rather float free of direct relation to any ‘real,’ any ‘thing,’ or any territory. Consequently, both Nietzsche and Baudrillard connect the nihilism of their ages to this sense of hyperreality, whereby signs escape the function of representation, and values become both orbital and refractory— never touching ground. In Nietzsche’s aphorism, *How the ‘True World’ Became a Fable*, he offers a genealogy of this

⁷ David. B. Allison, “Iconologies: Reading Simulations with Plato and Nietzsche,” SUNY-Stony Brook. http://www.stonybrook.edu/philosophy/research/allison_2.html

devolution, and states that the true world is “an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—consequently, a refuted idea.”⁸ This echoey space where things don’t connect—this vertigo of things, is what I seek to explore further in the following.

Before Zarathustra’s trumpeting, there are moments in Nietzsche’s work where one can actually feel his lip quiver. I hold these parts closest, as if in these cracks and fissures, something of his humanness surfaces that challenges his philosophical bravado. For this reason, I am intrigued by aphorisms such as the one entitled *Over the Footbridge*, found in *The Gay Science*. Here Nietzsche speaks with a tremble of nostalgia for a time when nothing separated the intimacy of relations but a footbridge; as he states, “since then mountains and torrential rivers and whatever separates and alienates has been cast between us, and even if we wanted to get together, we couldn’t. But when you now think of that little footbridge, words fail you and you sob and marvel.”⁹ I understand the footbridge as that in-between zone of relations— the tissue and tension, which both holds apart and holds together the placement of things, people, worlds— or the other side of the bridge. It is that which keeps things from colliding, spinning or fusing into each other, as well as that which maintains the distance of looking and the element of seduction through difference and separation. At the very least it *holds things in tension with each other*.

The importance of the footbridge is just this, that it is a bridge, not some law cast from the heavens or any kind of transcendent. The bridge stretches out to the other side,

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Common, (Massachusetts: Digireads, 2009), 17.

⁹Nietzsche, *Gay*, 41.

while also holding apart. Its existence is always reversible: it can always be broken, crossed in some silent hour, swept into the river— not as a law that is transgressed, but as a bridge that is always *nothing more than the collective sharing of simulacra*. This is to describe that which is built in the violent mastery over freedom and movement, but can always be laid to rest, refused or turned back on.

And have we not destroyed this bridge? As Nietzsche writes:

We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us— indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity... Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more freedom— and there is no longer any ‘land.’¹⁰

This sense of diaspora, groundlessness and vertigo— is it nothing more than the dispersal of the footbridge? That *collective simulacra*, which had a way of placing elements within the becoming and disappearing of things, and within a certain tension of relation?

Woe indeed, but alas, for Nietzsche, man is a going over and across, not content with the ritualistic bridge as is. Man seeks something more— to pave his *own* bridge to somewhere else not contingent on the other side. The creative bridge is no longer that *tension between*, but a means for *going over*. But this holds with it the risk and challenge of ‘a going under,’ to spin and splash until one learns to handle the current *on one’s own*. With the loss of the small footbridge, we might also see what Baudrillard refers to as the loss of the scene, the loss of ceremony and the loss of the rules of the game, but also where the gods turn and man becomes most interesting.

Ceremonies, rules and games, as described by Baudrillard, are creative but limited accomplishments of man. They are creative in that they are a sharing of simulacra that

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 130.

places elements in a choreography of movement. This is also the establishment and obedience to limits. As Baudrillard describes, the ceremony is constituted by a system of rules and its process is the unfolding within these, but in the sense that things are already there before happening and becoming meaningful. One can see then that the ceremony, in its fatality, is not constituted by any sense of metaphysics, interpretation or expressionism, since something other than the real is at stake here. Rather, the stakes are in the mastering of appearances and the sharing of a secret arrangement. As with the footbridge, the ceremony is a violence done to infinite possibility, potential, and time, but only in terms of the violence of a rule, which can always be reversed and carries with it its opposite. This is also not the violence done on the behalf of subjects' interests, for subjective interests and desires are stricken from the ceremony.

Nietzsche's nostalgic Noble race, spoken of in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, exhibits a similar air to Baudrillard's figures of ceremony, who know nothing of the internalization of meaning, but are rather involved in the unfolding of things. As Nietzsche explains:

All human concepts from earlier times were, to an extent which we can scarcely conceive, initially understood in a crude, clumsy, external, narrow, and frankly, particularly unsymbolic way. The 'pure' man is from the outset merely a man who washes, who denies himself certain types of food which cause skin complaints, who refrains from sleeping with the unclean women of the lower classes, who abhors blood— and not a great deal more than that!¹¹

For the Nobles, qualities are no more than signs, which maintain a measure of distance. Thus, the social is nothing more than the meaningless circulation of these signs within disinterested limits and differences. However, they are disinterested only in the sense that this unfolding lays no claim to a truth or a sense of reality. The nobles interact with

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Stilwell: Digireads, 2007), 12.

others and with territory, fatefully, not by chance or accident, nor through meaning or non-meaning. This is an arbitrary and sometimes cruel order, the order that owl and mouse, and wolf and deer know. It circulates these bodies and holds them in a fateful tension that is never accidental and would never flail them together in the night or crash teeth to tail. And so, Nietzsche's vandals are rejoicing monsters, who "kill with the innocence of the predator's conscience."¹²

Despite Nietzsche's interest in the Nobles, it is only with man's departure from this meaningless circulation of signs and ceremony that man becomes truly interesting and creative. Signs no longer simply circulate within the unfolding of the ceremony, but the simulacra of this gains an element of theatrics. Like Adam and Eve realizing they are naked, the ceremony realizes it's on the stage—the spectator emerges and one becomes aware of one's movements in the eyes of the other. A perspective blooms, and like those great artists of the renaissance, discovering the qualities of dimension, illusion and viewpoint, so too blooms the ability to twist fate, for the element of creativity to surface, for things to transform themselves, and for meaning to emerge—but still with a sense of arbitrariness.

With what Baudrillard refers to as 'the scene,' the small footbridge is given a shake. It becomes a scene—a stage of relations rather than a space of unfolding. There remains a distance between things, but the limits and placement of elements can dance, play, challenge and bound. One can sense the meaning of this in Baudrillard's description of the scene of the body: "where the body is in play and particularly where it plays itself, where it escapes into the ellipsis of force and movements, into dance, where it escapes its inertia, into gesture, where it is unbound itself, into the aura of looking,

¹² Ibid., 26.

where it makes itself into allusion and absence— in short, where it offers itself as seduction.”¹³ This is the time of the subject, which plays with itself, the other and the world. Here, one is moved by the alterity of the other— the other side, the defiance to the real, difference and the failing silences.

The play and dance of the scene, the regulated unfolding of appearances in the ceremony, and Nietzsche’s little footbridge, all give way in our time to a lack love chaos of brittle habits, blind rituals, and as Nietzsche states in his footbridge aphorism: dissimulation and witty sarcasm.¹⁴ Relations seem to have become displaced and homeless in a cosmos that once placed them. Baudrillard uses the term ‘the obscene,’ to describe a modern form of relation that is not duel, but is rather of the order of a demand: the demand to be real, to reveal in the whole, to search for implications and origins, and to exhaust appearances back to their causes. Thus, in a world which is seen neither as a dance or a choreography, things link up in causal relations, left to just act and be acted upon, or collide and flail in chance and void. However, according to Baudrillard:

In a sacred, ceremonial universe, things do not touch each other, and they never meet. They link up without fail, but without contact. Tact in this matter is precisely avoiding contact. Remark how ceremonial gestures, dress, and bodies roll, intertwine, brush past each other, challenge one another, but without ever touching. No chance, that is, no slip that would hurl bodies toward each other, no disorder that would suddenly allow things the liberty of fusion...a very powerful force was required to break this magnetic distance where each body moves, as well as to produce this indifferent space where chance is able to put them in contact.¹⁵

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. W.G.J Niesluchowski and Philippe Beitchman, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008), 51.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 41.

¹⁵ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 180-181.

Forgoing the tension of the bridge, our relation to things becomes one of proximity rather than seduction and play. This is to describe, as Baudrillard does, “the total promiscuity of the look with what it sees. Prostitution...stripped of masks, of signs, of ceremony, they shine, in effect, with the obscenity of their demand. And we submit to the solicitation of this truth, and spend all our energy on this vacuous decipherment.”¹⁶ In this criminal demand, the other and the other side of the bridge, are stripped of all alterity and otherness. The tension of seduction and ritual no longer hold us apart, dance us, or brush our limbs up against each other. As Baudrillard exclaims, “where is the other now, with whom do we negotiate what is left of our liberty and sovereignty, with whom do we play the game of subjectivity and alienation, with whom do we negotiate over my image in the mirror, what has disappeared is that good old alterity of relation.”¹⁷

For a theorist who wills the courageous ‘going over’, beyond that fateful footbridge, one is struck, particularly in *The Gay Science*, by the fragments of nostalgia present in Nietzsche’s text. His aphorisms track like a sleuth the elements of disappearance in his time:

Just as all forms are visibly perishing by the haste of the workers, the feelings for form itself, the ear and eye for the melody of movements are also perishing. The proof of this may be found in the universal fervor for gross obviousness in all those situations in which human beings wish to be honest with one another for once...one no longer has time or energy for ceremonies, for being obliging in an indirect way, for esprit in conversation, and for any opinion at all...Virtue has come to consist of doing something in less time than someone else.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 84.

¹⁷ Nietzsche. *Gay*, 190.

¹⁸ Ibid., 259.

Thus, there is a part of Nietzsche that mourns the ceremonies of relation, as seen in the loss of intimacy between the worker and his boss, as compared to the warrior and his leader.¹⁹ The ceremonies of thought too have lost their scene in the face of information, as he states, “we think too fast, even while walking or on the way, or while engaged in other things, no matter how serious the subject. We require little preparation, not even much silence: it is as if we carried in our heads an unstoppable machine that keeps working even under unfavorable circumstances.”²⁰ Thus, “reflecting has lost all the dignity of its form: the ceremony and solemn gestures of reflecting have become ridiculous, and an old-style wise man would be considered intolerable.”²¹ He even imagines the possibility of general exchange ceasing to be necessary.²² It seems, as Baudrillard reflects, and Nietzsche might agree, that “things have found a way of avoiding a dialectics of meaning which was beginning to bore them.”²³ This sense of loss speaks to me of an honesty I dare say becomes mute and hidden with the prevail of Zarathustra, the brave and triumphant conclusion of his work. Let’s remember this sense of loss as we carry on to describe the ‘going over’.

II. Little ship

“We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us.”²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid.,259.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 81-82.

²¹ Ibid., 81.

²² Ibid.,103.

²³ Baudrillard. *Fatal*, 25.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 130.

As Nietzsche argues, this ‘going over’— or this burning of bridges, is begun by ‘the teachers of existence’, who:

Invent a different existence and unhinge by means of this new mechanics the old, ordinary existence...His inventions and valuations may be utterly foolish and overenthusiastic; he may badly misjudge the course of nature and deny its conditions— and all ethical systems hitherto have been so foolish and anti-natural that humanity would have perished of every one of them if it had gained power over humanity— and yet, whenever ‘the hero’ appeared on the stage, something new was attained: the gruesome counterpart to laughter.²⁵

It is neither rationality, nor a love for of the species that moves *this* going over, rather, some other creative force is pushing up.

History sometimes provides us with a crystallization of a new element, or idea, emerging and dispersing ripples and wiping away a horizon— no doubt with much blood. The swift conquest of the kingdom of Montezuma, equipped with several hundred-thousand troops, by Cortez, who only had several hundred, provides such crystallization. According to Tzvetan Todorov, we glimpse here the coming in contact of a new idea. As he explains, the Spaniards “experience themselves not in communication with the sensuous forms of the world, but solely with one another. The Aztecs must answer, in their actions as in their speech, to the whole sensuous, natural world that surrounds them; the Spanish need answer only to themselves.”²⁶ This new idea is intertwined in the ability to abstract the individual or ‘the human’ from nature. The Spaniards participate solely through their own, and their sovereign’s, needs and wants. They float free of the surrounding landscape, not beholden to these relations. They can therefore be unfaithful and deceitful, in the presence of the sun, the moon, and the forest. According to David

²⁵Nietzsche, *Gay*, 75.

²⁶ Todorov Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 89.

Abram; “the Aztecs are unable to use their spoken words, or their written characters, to hide their true intentions, since these signs belong to the world around them as much as to themselves. For the Aztecs, to be duplicitous with signs would require one to go against the order of nature, and against the encompassing speech or logos of an animate world, in which their own tribal discourse was embedded.”²⁷ *Something new is attained—freedom from territory, the unconscious is born.*

While for Todorov this moment captures a massive shift, this has been brewing in Europe far longer, and can be found between the shift from Pre-Socratic Greece to the dominance of Platonic and Socratic thought. As David Abram states of the pre-Socratic era:

In Homer’s songs the natural landscape itself bears the omens and signs that construct beings in their endeavors; the gods speak directly through the patterns of clouds, waves, and the flight of birds... here, then, is a land that is everywhere alive and awake, animated by a multitude of capricious but willful forces, at times vengeful and at other times tender, yet always in some sense responsive to human situations.²⁸

In this sense, the gods are indistinguishable from natural elements, and these elements reveal one’s particular embeddedness in the world, which is of a multiplicity of causations. Thus, we find here a different sense of the individual subject. One cannot be fully responsible or guilty, for one is not called forth by one’s own autonomous determination, and reality is not an object of one’s thought. However, in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, we see the rise of an idea and a new fearsome power. The Chorus marvels at the majesty of a new type of man, not beholden to the landscape and the gods that dwell

²⁷ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 134.

²⁸ Abram, *Spell*, 102.

within it— he who “abounding in wiles, entangles in his toils and carries captive away.”²⁹ And so, by the 4th century BC, the gods of Greece are slowly expelled from their natural surroundings. *Something new is attained— phenomena-noumena, subject-object.*

Can we not see the effects of this ‘going over’ in Socrates’ dialectic? This is a method to disrupt the mimetic thought patterns of an oral culture, enmeshed in a multiplicity of place based and elemental gods, goddesses and spirits. The dialectic targets people for whom qualities like ‘virtue’ and ‘justice’ are entwined in specific situations and events in which those qualities are exhibited— utterances that slip back into the silence immediately after they are spoken, and thus have no permanent abstract sense outside of particular energies, places, and elements of flux, growth, decay and cyclical change.³⁰ By asking the interlocutor to explain himself or repeat a particular instance of ‘justice’ in different terms, Socrates forces his interlocutor to separate himself, for the first time, from not only his own words, but from his habitual, traditional, storied sense of the world.³¹ This is a move away from a sense of truth that is of the particular, the embodied, the experiential, and the event. It is exchanged for abstracted ideal forms, existing within timeless dimensions. *Something new is attained— a subject of responsibility, a subject with a signature.*

III. The waves keep rolling

In these crystallizations we can see glimmers of that sovereign passion Nietzsche seeks in the going over. We can also see in them the creation and nailing down of new

²⁹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1993) 14.

³⁰ Abram. *Spell*, 102.

³¹ *Ibid.*, *Spell*, 102.

webs of relations, which are not yet conscious of the comedy of existence— and thus the spirit of the going over. Perhaps what is missed is the very secret that this thesis seeks to acquaint itself with— that there is no real.

Nietzsche seeks a going over that knows the fatality of things, which does not seek to reveal anything, or get anywhere, and which understands the vital immorality, duplicity and debauchery of signs. The wisdom that Nietzsche's going over offers is a certain understanding of the energy of the world— that plural multiplicity of force. It knows that energy moves in useless ways, and keeps moving when the job is done. It cannot be quantified, subordinated, it spends now rather than contributing to some future goal or transcendent principle, and its corruption and generation derive from the same principle. As Nietzsche states of the world: "it is neither perfect, nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things: it does not by any means strive to imitate man. None of our aesthetic and moral judgments apply to it. Nor does it have any instinct for self-preservation or any other instinct."³²

This understanding of energy comprehends that there is no causal subject, reality, or truth below the manifest, and consequently, it challenges us to have the courage to face a world not split into causes and their effects. As Nietzsche elaborates:

For, in just the same way as people separate lightning from its flash and take the latter as an *action*, as the effect of a subject which is called lightning, so popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of strength, as if behind the strong person there were an indifferent substrate, which is *free* to express strength or not. But there is no such substrate; there is no 'being' behind the doing, acting, becoming. 'The doer' is merely made up and added into the action— the act is everything. People basically duplicate the action: when they say a lightning flashes, that is an action of an action: they set up the same event first as the cause and then yet again as its effect.³³

³² Nietzsche, *Gay*, 168.

³³ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 29.

For Nietzsche there are no objects, only force. Objects are expressions and apparitions of force, and every force is related to other forces. Forces do not act upon passive objects, nor can they be thought of as singular. Force is always plural and is only force within a series of dominations.³⁴ This is to describe, as Deleuze does in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

a plurality of forces acting and being affected at a distance, distance being the differential element included in each force and by which each is related to others— this is the principle of Nietzsche’s philosophy of nature. The critique of atomism must be understood in terms of this principle. It consists in showing that atomism attempts to impart to matter an essential plurality and distance which in fact belongs only to force. Only force can be related to another force.³⁵

Nietzsche thus critiques what he sees as an ignorance and passivity in the face of the spontaneity of force, overcoming, and the will to power. He critiques the reliance on concepts such as adaptation, origins and responsibility, which are of the logic of cause and reaction, and place emphasis on the essentiality of matter and objects. Hence, Nietzsche reflects on cause and effect, and notes that “such a duality probably never exists; in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces, just as we perceive motion only as isolated points and then infer it without ever actually seeing it.”³⁶

The overcoming that Nietzsche calls forth forms a subjectivity that is not defined by its relations to objects, and is not played by any underlying universe, cosmology or territory. This is, as Deleuze describes, the sense by which we must understand existence

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and philosophy*, (London: Athlone, 1983), 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 173.

as Heraclitus does, as the instinct of play, an aesthetic phenomenon involved in the calling forth of worlds, and an affirmation of becoming against all hubris and interior subjectivity.³⁷ This challenges the subjective sense of force that is identified as a ‘unitary force,’ instead of the plural sense of force emphasized in Nietzsche’s accounts. As Nietzsche states, “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, acting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction imposed on the doing— the doing itself is everything.”³⁸

Baudrillard is attempting to describe an order quite similar to Nietzsche’s, and starts from the notion of the primacy of appearances. As he explains: “Seen as substance in need of energy, the world lives in the inner terror of the random, it is shattered by chance. Seen as the order of appearances and their senseless unraveling, seen as pure event, the world is, on the contrary, ruled by absolute necessity.”³⁹ And so he seeks a return to a subtler ‘actual’— the objective domain of appearances in its objective necessity, as Allison states:

Expressed in terms quite reminiscent of Zarathustra's account of the Will to Power, such an objective dimension is framed to challenge the original sin of a significant and purposive ‘world order,’ one so transparent in its hyperreality as to leave practically no clue that the entire order is itself what he would come to term ‘the perfect crime.’ Baudrillard's inquiry into the transfiguring and transforming play – the seductive game – of objective appearances would serve as a modest beginning to counter the totalizing systems of purposive interpretation, whose legitimate agency, we finally and fatally come to realize, may be largely nominal. The interminable age of this ‘moral-optical illusion’ may well be returned, as Nietzsche had hoped, to the domain of *bon sens* – of good sense – where chance and necessity would give rise to the fatality of a tragic wisdom, a joyous wisdom. And this was Zarathustra's ‘secret.’⁴⁰

³⁷ Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 22.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Gay*, 29.

³⁹ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 185.

⁴⁰ David B. Allison, *Iconologies*

For Baudrillard, the joyous wisdom of this ‘moral-optical illusion’ that is our times, is that something of singularity is always snatched back from beyond the event horizon and lays us to rest in marvelous mockery. The danger, that is, the lack of origins, and the lack of any binding truth or reality, is also our saving power, and describes a certain invulnerability of the world to our petty contrivances. And this is where Baudrillard and Nietzsche meet in their similar moves to unhinge us from an excrescent cosmos and to make things more enigmatic, more unintelligible, and to grant an immoral singularity and radical uncertainty to things and events.

IV. Zarathustra the Dancing Star

The meaning of appearances has, however, different emphases for Baudrillard and Nietzsche. These differences form a subtle divergence that becomes all the more interesting the more one zeros in. Nietzsche’s emphasis lies on a conception of force, which is all heat and avowal, radiating and liberated. It is sovereign (not split), in that it is not thrown by a world of causes, but fully coincides with itself. A crystallization. For Baudrillard, we find our selves within the primacy of appearances through a tension of relation, a subtle play of things, and a turn. Our task is then to fall— to be seduced, and thus returned to the sovereignty of a world made of surfaces, not energy. As Baudrillard states, this is “not about strategy— not about securing the sovereignty or prosperity of the subject, but rather we are deployed here by forces enigmatic to us: evil genies, sly objects, ironic events, and spinners in the world which escape the centripetal will and best laid plans of the individual.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 179.

These different emphases produce very different responses to the sense of void, or vertigo, produced by our times. Where Nietzsche's work seems to always be pushing up against a great void, with Baudrillard we are never alone. For Baudrillard, if the world is indifferent, you must learn to seduce it, to move to it, and be seduced yourself. As Baudrillard explains, "the problem today is not so much a loss of home but rather the ability of our modern world, this simulacrum of a once meaningfully ordered cosmos, to place us all too well, so that what may already have become a ruin, nevertheless still functions as a prison to stifle freedom."⁴² In this sense, we have not killed God or 'the Real,' the world has simply outbid us, and we have forgotten how to play along.

Zarathustra's world too is alive with seductive elements: animals speak to him, Life pulls him from a sinking dream with her fishing rod, and the man in the moon spies down on him. And Zarathustra is seduced; as he states of life, "one thirsts after her and is never satisfied; one looks through veils, one grabs through nets...perhaps she is evil and false and woman in every way...ah and then you opened your eyes again, O beloved life and again I seemed to myself to be sinking into the unfathomable."⁴³ He dances after life, follows where her traces linger, "Where are you? Give me your hand! Or only one finger! Where are you? Give me your hand!"⁴⁴ Simultaneously, however, Zarathustra detests this position of always being in relation and being thrown by the other's forces—this is not the position of the Overman. And so he turns to life again and says, "I am very weary of always being your sheepish shepherd. You witch, if I have so far sung to you,

⁴² Jean Baudrillard. *Fatal*, 3.

⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 109.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

now you shall cry. Keeping time with my whip, you shall dance and cry! Or have I forgotten the whip? Not I!”⁴⁵ Just being in such a conversation of duel shows that Zarathustra is seduced. Even if abusively, he dances with life. However, much in the same way that Machiavelli takes the elemental figure of Fortuna seriously, as seductive force and goddess, the stakes lie somewhere else than the play and dance. The stakes lie in the creation of something of one’s own. Perhaps this is why the characters and elements of Zarathustra’s world are always on their knees: Life so sweet so him, Sensuality so begging, and his animals so endlessly supportive. As he states, “For me—how should there be any outside—myself?”⁴⁶

The stakes for Nietzsche, and particularity for his Zarathustra character, are not the alterity of the world, but one’s own sovereignty. “Can you give yourself your own evil and your own good and hang your own will over yourself as a law? Can you be your own judge and avenger of law. Terrible it is to be alone with the judge and avenger of one’s own law. Thus is a star thrown out into the void and into the icy breath of solitude.”⁴⁷ He appears here like one of Baudrillard’s last objects, which are utterly sovereign and heterogeneous, having fallen out of exchange. Systems of relations cannot make any sense of them, they’ve gone beyond any relationality, and rather they shine entirely for themselves. The last objects are thus models of refraction and reference leading nowhere. They are just plays of signification, where nothing (no value) remains to be signified—they conjure only fascination. Their dematerialization is accompanied by a crystallization, a defiant re-materialization, and this is the dimension which guards

⁴⁵ Ibid., 225.

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 217.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 55.

and guarantees object-hood and alterity. The singular object is resplendent with inverse energies. The energy of the false shines with the power of the true, and all oppositions gain a sense of singular anamorphosis. This begs us to ask: how could one oppose, duel, or seduce such a sovereign object? This singularity has no dance, no turn, and no bridge— but rather emits in solitude.

As Zarathustra exclaims, “Light am I; ah, that I were night! But this is my loneliness that I am girt with light. Ah, that I were dark and nocturnal! How I would suck at the breasts of light! And even you would I bless, you little sparkling stars and glowworms up there, and be overjoyed with your gifts of light. But I live in my own light; I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me. I do not know the happiness of those who receive.”⁴⁸ And this is Zarathustra’s gift— to shine in the ecstasy of his own crystallization and singularity. “This is my blessing: to stand over every single thing as its own heaven, as its round roof, its azure bell, and eternal security; and blessed is he who blesses thus.”⁴⁹ And for this crystallization of self, “one thing is needful- to give style to one’s character- a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses light the eye.”⁵⁰

Baudrillard and Nietzsche’s different emphases become clearer when we consider Baudrillard’s interest in seduction, versus Nietzsche’s interest, and constant reference to love— particularly Zarathustra’s love. As Zarathustra states, “Let the flash of a star flitter in your love!...Let there be bravery in your love! With your love you should attack

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 106.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

him who inspires you with fear! Let your honor be in your love!”⁵¹ However, according to Baudrillard “love is born from the destruction of ritual forms, from their liberation. Its energy is an energy of the dissolution of these forms, including magic rituals of the seduction of the world.”⁵² Love is thus a proselytizing energy: it is radiant, extensive, and exoteric, whereas ritual, ceremony and seduction are esoteric. “Love is expression, heat, avowal, communication, and therefore a passage of energy from a potential, concentrated state to one that is liberated, radiating, caloric and thereby endemic and degraded.”⁵³ There is something gossipy about love, as well as Zarathustra. Love seems to imply the possibility of revealing something, and begs Baudrillard to wonder how someone could proclaim love so much? “From where could there have originated the crazy idea of revealing the secret, exposing the bare substance, touching radical obscenity? That, in itself, is a utopia. There is no real, there never was a real. Seduction knows this, and preserves it enigma.”⁵⁴ Thus it is no surprise that Zarathustra must be alone, for as Baudrillard explains, everyone finds themselves alone in love, whereas seduction is a duel. As Baudrillard states,

I prefer the form of seduction, which maintains the hypothesis of an enigmatic duel, of a violent solicitation or attraction, which is a form not of response, but of challenge, of a secret distance and perpetual antagonism that allows the playing out of a rule...with Heraclitus: it is the antagonism of elements, beings of gods which comprises the game of becoming, not a universal solvent, of an amorous con-fusion— here the gods affront and seduce each other; and love, when it comes along with Christianity as the principle of creation, will put an end to this great game.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., 92.

⁵² Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 133.

⁵³ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 129.

Thus, where the ceremony and the rules of the game are laid to rest there opens up a space for salvation and universal effusion, which work to overcome the separation of souls and bodies.

Of course Nietzsche could hardly be pegged with such plans. His love does not seek connection, but is rather luminous in its own glow— the glow of a last object. One can grasp this sense of Nietzsche in Zarathustra’s description of the final stage of the Overman, which is that of the child: “the child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘yes.’ For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred ‘yes’ is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.”⁵⁶ The child, for Zarathustra, represents an expressive force that emerges out of its own yes. Baudrillard questions this through an argument which could stand as an ideal figure of the rift between the thinkers. Baudrillard explains that “Our ideal vision of the game is that of the child; *paideia*, free spontaneity and wild creativity, the expressing of a pure nature, before the time of law and repression. The animal game as opposed to the ceremonial game. But we know that the bird does not sing for its own pleasure, nor does the child play this way. Even the most frenzied games, the charm of recurrence, of ritual, of meticulous unfolding, the invention of rules and complicity in observance, are what make for the intensity and simplicity of child’s play.”⁵⁷

If we think of Nietzsche as a figure of ecstatic singularity, in the realm of the last objects: a star, a sun, an explosion, a sovereign scream, then it becomes clear why he

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 27.

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 212.

remains so untouchable and difficult to pin down in the realm of theory. As Zarathustra states, “What I want is more, I am a seeker. What I want to create for myself is a sun of my own.”⁵⁸ His ends are not of our world and cannot be exchanged for anything in this world. We can feel his glow but he is beyond all interpretation, touch and play. This is his genius, his seductive indifference amidst dead scenes, dead ceremonies, dead aesthetics washed up on shores— a murky universe of concepts. Perhaps, in this sense, it is possible to think of Nietzsche as a last object of modern thought, left in the void of totalized nihilism. The last object is what remains when all is totalized— when you come to the end of land, the brink of a system, and a deadened reality. Thus, his fascination and untouchability derives from the great vacuum all around.

However, Baudrillard offers us something other than these solemn explosions and dancing stars. This is not to say that he holds a sense of meaning, importance and purpose up to the world. Rather, despite the vacuous totality of things, which leave us naked with the last objects, *this only spells the death of a sense of the real which never really existed*. With Baudrillard, magic has never wavered, and pushes up behind all things. This does not move him to take the solemn position or light up like a dancing star, but rather to sink into the world. This is against any notion of man as a lucky throw of the dice, a bridge, or a promise. And so, *Fatal Strategies* could be read as a long and coaxing hush to Nietzsche’s lonely scream: to his war calls, his mad ecstasy, his ships set for uncharted seas. Fatal strategies are beyond human control, for that mysterious entity known as the world, continues to use its own immoral techniques to thwart human hubris, and return us to the waves of laughter. For Baudrillard, at our very best we are a turn of engagement and abandonment. He thus challenges us to lose ourselves to games of

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 254.

seduction, illusion and to relations beyond exchange. These are the stakes. So, might we dare to find our commandments on the side of the inhuman, of animal gods, of constellations and faceless divinities?⁵⁹ In a sense, the void which gives Zarathustra, the dancing star, such a fascinating and sovereign glow, is only void of a sense of the 'real' that we perhaps once held— but the world still lies sly and ironic. It doesn't care to draw us in, its feelings are not broken, and things still connect, dance, morph and duel in unseen ways: shall we burn our maps and begin again?

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 203.

The Discovery – Gwendolyn MacEwan

do not imagine that the exploration
ends, that she has yielded all her mystery
or that the map you hold
cancels further discovery

I tell you her uncovering takes years,
takes centuries, and when you find her naked
look again,
admit there is something else you cannot name,
a veil, a coating just above the flesh
which you cannot remove by your mere wish

when you see the land naked, look again
(burn your maps, that is not what I mean),
I mean the moment when it seems most plain
is the moment when you must begin again

Chapter 2: Phenomenology of Absence

Having just described the intriguing point of divergence between Nietzsche and Baudrillard's understandings, I will now begin to unpack this divergence in hopes that it might highlight new ways of understanding Baudrillard's work, and perhaps make clearer the notion of 'changing course' and the potential 'rendezvous' after the 'orgy.'

I. "The Gulf War did not take place"

This thesis will argue that much of the divergence of Baudrillard's work from Nietzsche's, as well as much of the frustration surrounding his work, derives from his phenomenological approach. From his earliest work, where he is exploring the sign economy and analyzing consumption as maintained by a self-reproducing code, to his work exploring power, and eventually to his evocative fatal strategies and exploration of seduction, his main challenge and motive circulates around a radical affirmation of experience. Tilottama Rajan notes that Pierre Bourdieu describes *The System of Objects* as a "phenomenologico-semiological analysis" and Baudrillard himself describes this work as a "phenomenology of consumption."⁶⁰ It will thus be argued that while Baudrillard studies hyperreal structures of signification, power and consumerism, he is never concerned with understanding these within a real/unreal dichotomy, but is rather concerned with that which interrupts this division and the semiological sphere, as Chris Rojek explains:

⁶⁰ Tilottama Rajan, *Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology: Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), 237.

It is as if Baudrillard ceases to be interested in a theory of society and instead commits himself to becoming a camera...Baudrillard reveals the desire to sink himself, without praise or condemnation, into the vortex of popular culture. He displays the same delight in masks, surfaces and apparition. He impresses the reader with the same fearless indifference.⁶¹

Thus, while he traces the codification of society and the dispersal of the Real and the social dialectics of challenge, duel, and theatrics, Baudrillard avoids finding himself stuck in this dichotomy of the real/unreal, instead descending into an order of aleatory forms. The fatal is not the antipode of the semiological. Rather, as Rajan states, “Impossible exchange is the ultimate presupposition of all the systems of exchange, hence fatal strategy is an archeology of simulacra.”⁶² Baudrillard seeks to go beyond the sign economy, to dare to speak of that which we can say nothing of. As he states, “even signs must burn.”⁶³

While set in the context of sociology, Baudrillard’s stakes are not the social, but the impoverishment of our ability to experience things, and thus he seeks a return to things themselves. He seeks to make space and to thin the fat of theoretical sedimentations and subjective projections, so that we might glimpse the independent light which shines forth from appearances upon their own intensity, and grasp their unfolding between appearance and disappearance. As Rojek explains, the only political rights that Baudrillard recognizes are observing and communicating, and this “does not mean seeing through surfaces to a putative hidden essence; it means following the aleatory trajectories of dispersed bodies and signs like a weather vane following the wind. Communicating

⁶¹ Chris Rojek and Bryan Stanley Turner, *Forget Baudrillard?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 118.

⁶² Rajan, *Deconstruction*, 295.

⁶³ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin, (St. Louis: Telos Press Publishing, 1981), 163.

does not mean opposing depthlessness and seduction with utopia; it means speaking in the tongues of depthlessness and seduction.”⁶⁴ Thus, at the base of our interaction with the world rests not reality, but a play of appearances. Appearances and images, which are bound to neither truth nor reality, are things that Baudrillard believes touch us directly, “below the level of representation at the level of intuition, of perception.”⁶⁵ In light of this understanding, seemingly audacious claims such as “the gulf war did not happen” begin to reveal other levels of existence and ‘reality’ beyond the fabled dualism of the real/unreal.

II. A radical phenomenology

In one sense it seems strange to be thinking Baudrillard’s thought through phenomenology, which classically is engaged in the topics of meaning, subjectivity, reduction and reference, which seem antithetical to Baudrillard’s fatal theory. Is this phenomenology of absence just the flip-side of classical phenomenology? Certainly it cannot be anti-phenomenological because of its interest in describing phenomena as they appear; but as Saulius Geniusus states, “This appearance... is unexpected and unusual, for it belongs to the sphere of seduction, to the enchanted simulacrum, to the vital illusion: appearance precedes the order of subjectivity, meaning, reality and truth.”⁶⁶ In a statement deserving to be quoted at length, he goes on:

⁶⁴ Rojek, *Forget Baudrillard*, 118.

⁶⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, trans. Chris Turner, (New York: Berg, 2005), 91.

⁶⁶ Saulius, Geniusus, “Baudrillard’s Raw Phenomenology,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 35, No. 3: (2004): 294

By insisting that the question of meaning precedes the question of being, that the appearance of the world as a phenomenon is the realization that the being of the world is no longer its existence or its reality but its meaning, classical phenomenology unjustifiably shifted the question of the mystery of appearance into the realm of manifestation, disclosure, revelation and epiphany, that is, ultimately into the realm of meaning. Non-manifestation is granted a limited role: it is merely that which is not seen or encountered yet. Baudrillard seems to be bringing to light the following: consciousness does not merely indicate the self-manifestation of beings; it also indicates the mystery, the “distance” of things, their resistance to appropriation and meaning.⁶⁷

Baudrillard seeks to qualify a sense of appearance that never manifests itself fully as ‘meaningful,’ and to return to the world before it assumes the force of meaning. It is here that we can understand the way in which Baudrillard is not ‘anti-phenomenological,’ for he does not seek to oppose meaning to non-meaning. Instead, he accounts for the reversibility, and “ex-centric displacement of meaning, the real, subjectivity; and the resistance of the object to appropriation and meaning – demanding that we grasp its incessant appearance and disappearance.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Baudrillard insists that seduction “is not the opposite of truth: it is a more subtle truth which enwraps the former in the sign of its parody and its erasure.”⁶⁹ Thus he will speak of the loss of the real to simulacrum, but also point to a more subtle and radical form of the real-- that of the vital illusion, which is the absolute limit of the system. In this same line of thought, he is not anti-subjectivity, for he seeks a subtler form of subjectivity: a subject willing to fall to the game of a fatal order, to be seduced by objective disappearance, and to be the mirror of the reversible object. Only through the sacrifice of subjectivity and meaning can seduction make its appearance, as Geniusus describes:

⁶⁷ Geniusus, *Raw*, 298.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*. 151

This order is based on a bet. There is no bet without a subjectivity: I, the interpreter, am to realize the impossibility of any representational theory and to bet on the objective disappearance; I, the interpreter, am to realize the distant nature of the real, I am to realize that the real is just an illusion, and in the shadow of this illusion, to constitute the autonomy of the virtual by challenging the irony of the distant real.⁷⁰

This is to join the game of reversibility and the incessant appearance and disappearance of things, by letting the object retain its ambiguity.

Baudrillard's phenomenology is best described in his own clear elucidation of the task of fatal strategies, which "is not to fall into the universe of non-meaning, but to recover the potency and originality of the world before it assumes the force of meaning and becomes, in the same movement, the site of all powers."⁷¹ His thought is engaged in the world of forms and appearance, and seeks an access to things, not for a buried truth or elaboration of underlying structures of power, not to experience something, but rather to assert and find joy in this very movement of experience, and to find oneself wholly within this movement, tension and relationality.

III. Absence

This engagement with appearances is interesting however, for while phenomenology is generally the study of presencing, Baudrillard's phenomenology is just as much a phenomenology of absence, that is, the absence of the object. Rex Butler states of Baudrillard's writing:

It attempts to form a relationship with that with which it cannot attempt to form a relationship, attempts to describe something that at once is excluded to allow to be represented and only exists after the attempt to do so. In a sense, therefore, it must seek to represent nothing. But the risk and the strategy of writing [...] is that it is

⁷⁰ Geniusus, *Baudrillard*, 298.

⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, 16.

only by daring to represent nothing, to offer nothing in exchange for the appearances of the world, that the world necessarily recognizes itself in it, that we catch the world up, bring about an exchange with it.⁷²

Butler's insight is highlighted in Baudrillard's fascination with photography. He writes in his essay entitled, *Photography, or the Writing of Light*:

Against meaning and its aesthetic, the subversive function of the image is to discover literality in the object...In a sense, the photographic image materially translates the absence of reality...such a phenomenology of reality's absence is usually impossible to achieve. Classically, the subject outshines the object. The subject is an excessively blinding source of light. Thus, the literal function of the image has to be ignored to the benefit of ideology, aesthetics, politics, and of the need to make connections with other images. Most images speak, tell stories; their noise cannot be turned down. They obliterate the silent signification of their objects. We must get rid of everything that interferes with and covers up the manifestation of silent evidence, the object's own magic (black or otherwise).⁷³

He goes on to describe the photographic image as a kind of negative theology, in the old sense of the practice of proving God's existence by proving what he wasn't rather than what he was. In this sense, photography creates a kind of desert, a sense of phenomenological isolation or immobilization of appearances.⁷⁴

This immobilization allows a slight play of things to come forth, one which is not determined by the subject of consciousness, and thus does not produce the object as finite thing, or as "alienated object in the process of de-alienation, the enslaved object claiming its autonomy as a subject, but the object such as it challenges the subject, and pushes it

⁷² Butler, Rex, *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real*, (London: Sage, 1999), 96

⁷³ Baudrillard, Jean, "Photography, or the Writing of Light," *Ctheory*, trans. Francois Debrix, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker. 2000, www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=126

⁷⁴ Ibid.

back upon its own impossible position.”⁷⁵ This immobilization allows for a subtler experience to surface, which never falls on either side of the subject-object divide.

In order to gain a stronger grasp of what exactly this phenomenology of absence, and ultimately, what this divergence from Nietzsche’s thought, will speak to, I will investigate this approach further in the following chapters. I’ll begin with some brief contextualization, which goes hand in hand with a more in-depth investigation of Merleau-Ponty’s unique approach to phenomenology. By offering some contextualization and by bringing Merleau-Ponty into the fold, I hope to demonstrate the unique elements of Baudrillard’s phenomenology and the conversations it is involved in.

⁷⁵ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 143-144

i. The Phantom of Phenomenology

Baudrillard was known to disregard attempts to position his ideas within a theoretical lineage, and would likely claim that such a practice is averse to theory itself. However, there are many accounts of phenomenology's place within theory, and its role in deconstruction, post-structuralism, cultural studies, and subsequently its so-called 'silent effacement' in later post-structuralism and what could be termed post-modernism. One of the most comprehensive of these works is that of Tilottama Rajan's *Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology*, from which I will briefly recount some key arguments— not so much to consider them in their own right, since accounting for a genealogy and history of phenomenology is hardly the task at hand here, but rather to see how Baudrillard's own phenomenology plays off of this elaboration.

Rajan's text understands deconstruction to be deeply engaged with the phenomenological project that is born with Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s. According to Rajan, the phenomenological project is partly a reaction against the popularity of the human sciences and hard sciences, positivist and structuralist approaches, and thus challenges modern assumptions, such as the notion of a determinable objective reality. It is also an attempt to rethink philosophy, by turning to the neglected realm of subjective experience and to the things themselves— not to explain, represent or capture things, but simply to pay attention to the rhythms and

textures of the experienced world and become familiar with its diverse modes of appearance.

According to Rajan, the phenomenological project eventually becomes neglected—a silent point in the realm of late 21st century theory, largely because of its focus on consciousness, perception and representation. Still, for many of the theorists Rajan understands as deconstructive thinkers, the phenomenological project is very much alive; perhaps we can see this in their fascination with the negativities, absences, and gaps inherent in all forms of positing. However, according to Rajan, with the rise of the body of theory she defines as ‘post-structuralism,’ phenomenology is rejected as a serious theoretical lens. She notes how, according to Judith Butler, post-structuralism is founded on its “constitutive loss” of phenomenology.⁷⁶ She thus traces the shift from, as she states:

... a deconstruction that comes out of phenomenology to a poststructuralism that refigures deconstruction so as to abject a vocabulary of consciousness in favour of what Peter Dews calls an “imperialism of the signifier.” Thus, while deconstruction makes language an occasion for a broader reflection on the relations between ontology, epistemology, and culture, poststructuralism (to adapt Foucault’s description of a classicism that he links to structuralism) confines signs “within...representation...in that narrow space in which they interact with themselves in a perpetual state of decomposition and recomposition”... Poststructuralism registers the trauma of technology and structure in its submission to a “postmodern” world of depthless surfaces. This is expressed as a minimalism that refuses to register anything outside discourse (Foucault), media simulation (Baudrillard), or rhetoric (de Man).⁷⁷

She thus understands phenomenology’s erasure as directly linked to what she refers to as post-structuralism’s viral forms, which are involved in the dissolving of binary oppositions and ‘referentials,’ as well as the deterritorialization of theory. As she states,

⁷⁶ Rajan, *Deconstruction*, xvi.

⁷⁷ Rajan, *Deconstruction*, xii.

“Post-structuralism’s viral forms are the equivalent of the networks and circuits privileged by capital’s self-fascination with structure as it mutates from a controlled system into the ‘immense polymorphous machine’ that is ‘the organless body of capitalism.’”⁷⁸ It will not be the object of this thesis to challenge or give due attention to this genealogy of phenomenology’s effacement or this bold and sweeping understanding of post-structuralism, but rather to consider the last two chapters of Rajan’s work. It is here that she brings Baudrillard into this genealogy, and her particular conception of how he fits into this, highlights the very understanding that I will seek to challenge.

According to Rajan, Baudrillard “turns from deconstruction to its dissipation in a post-structural world of depthless surfaces.”⁷⁹ From this vantage point he performs a phenomenology of this orgy of depthless surfaces— this techno-culture of codes and signs. Through his analyses of the hyperreal and the code, he involves himself in a “phenomenology of post-structuralism.”⁸⁰ While it can be appreciated that she captures something of his phenomenological approach, the substance of it is missed. To recognize what is missed we must grasp that Rajan understands his work as the playing out of a single important thematic, as she explains, “this is the dialectic of matter and antimatter, code and symbol, between which he sees a symbolic, catalytic exchange.”⁸¹ According to Rajan his phenomenology of the post-structural system is always set up against an impossible and romantic ‘outside’ of the system. It will be my argument that there is something flawed in this understanding. Thus, to state as Rajan does, that “it is clear that

⁷⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁷⁹ Ibid., xx.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 236.

⁸¹ Rajan, *Deconstruction*, 262.

his own anthropology figures a nostalgia for a unified, non-alienated, organic world”⁸² reveals that she is reading Baudrillard as an ontologically dualist thinker. In this reading of his work, Baudrillard’s phenomenology is understood as romantic—still on the side of the modern and seeking unity.

This understanding is ironic, since as Victoria Grace writes, “Baudrillard’s writing on symbolic exchange, seduction, reversibility, illusion, the double, and the transparency of evil open up new possibilities for considering the “unsaying” of a phenomenological and deconstructive project.”⁸³ Thus, I do not see the tired dualism Rajan sees in Baudrillard’s work, and conclude that to view his writing in such a way is to miss the most important aspects of his work. Thus, I will pay special heed to his emphasis on reversibility, a concept that contests and confuses the idea of dualism, and seeks to sink and seduce the viral codes of the hyperreal into the plane of appearances and disappearance, not to retain something lost but to ignite a tension with things. Baudrillard’s phenomenology of absence is not a phenomenology of an absurd system against a more real and meaningful order. Rather, it is about the continuous displacement of meaning and reality. To misunderstand this is to mistake one of the challenges Baudrillard’s radical phenomenology presents us with; that is the challenge to give up the search for ‘the real’, and to find the clutch of things, that is, one’s ground, one’s reality, one’s home, and one’s self, wholly within always incomplete tensions of relations and enigmatic forces.

⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁸³ Victoria Grace, “Disentangling the Dispersion of Deconstruction,” *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 2, No. 2: (2005), http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_2/grace.htm.

Baudrillard's phenomenology could also be more broadly read against Rajan's attempt to consolidate and capture the phenomenological approach within a referential timeline, consisting of beginnings and endings and boundaries of thought. Baudrillard would certainly never accept this, for there is something in this move that does damage to that which is most radical and evasive in the phenomenological approach. That said, perhaps this explains why he is reluctant to bring unnecessary attention to his phenomenological approach by referencing it. For Baudrillard, it would seem that his phenomenology, as much as it is a theoretical basis, is most importantly a tool, which he uses to sink us such that the world becomes a little more enigmatic, confusing, seductive and malevolent. This will become clearer in the following sections.

II. Merleau-Ponty

While we can conclude that Baudrillard's phenomenological approach does not fit so easily into Rajan's outline, nor does it fit into the rhetoric of the effacement of phenomenology, this does not mean that there are no connections to be made.

At this point I will begin to further unpack Baudrillard's phenomenological approach by connecting it to the work of Merleau-Ponty. This is a connection that is not only interesting in itself, but also helps us to flesh out Baudrillard's unique approach and, ultimately, his divergence from Nietzsche's thought. I am choosing to focus on Merleau-Ponty's final work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (a work interrupted by his sudden death in 1961), where he most clearly descends into the aleatory order of phenomenology, and sinks himself into appearances. In order to understand this theoretical approach, it is necessary to briefly describe how it arises. This will involve a brief exploration of

Edmund Husserl's thought—an examination that will be limited in its scope, and will primarily be a stepping stone to Merleau-Ponty's thought.

Phenomenology is first given articulation as a field of thought in the early 1900s, through Edmund Husserl's philosophical attentiveness to the primacy of direct experience and his turn to 'the things themselves.' In many senses, his broadest motives are similar to Baudrillard's and Nietzsche's in that he seeks to challenge the dominant assumption that our experience of the world is derivative of an objective dimension that is somehow "real" or 'true', whether that be the dimension of the hard sciences, mathematics or social sciences. He thus challenges the objective sciences to face the way in which knowledge is gained on the level of experience and from a subjective point of view. As Abram states of Husserl's work, "the whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world, of which science is the second-order expression..."⁸⁴

However, Husserl's affirmation of the primacy of experience, against the objective claims of science, is pursued with the understanding that this experience is of the realm of a pure transcendental consciousness that is capable of separating subjecthood from phenomena and the objective world of science. Thus, in these early stages of phenomenology, Husserl paints a dualist picture of a purely subjective, immaterial, and mental dimension set against a field of appearances. This quality of early

⁸⁴David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-human World*, (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 36

phenomenology is quickly challenged for its solipsism, and its way of trapping us in our own solitary experiences.

In order to address these challenges and enrich his insights on the primacy of experience, Husserl turns to the body's involvement in experience. He thus brings light to the way in which the body not only accompanies experience, but is fully entangled with one's awareness. However, turning to the body not only means turning to the perceiver's body, but also means opening the phenomenal field to other bodies. Thus, through the body, Husserl opens phenomenology to the idea of 'intersubjectivity.' As Abram explains, in this manner, Husserl is "carefully describing the ways in which the subjective field of experience, mediated by the body, opens onto other subjectivities—other selves besides one's own self...the field of appearances, while still a thoroughly subjective realm, was now seen to be inhabited by multiple subjectivities."⁸⁵ In this sense, phenomenology recognizes two phenomenal fields; one being that of one's own body-subject that unfolds entirely for oneself, and the other as that region where we are in relation to a multiplicity of other subjectivities, 'the intersubjective'. The intersubjective is still a subjective order that is seen through our own dispositions and mediated by our body, but it is never wholly ours either. This move is radical in that it alters our understanding of the objective order by shifting the subject-object dichotomy to one which reframes reality as a feature within the subjective field. This reveals the idea of an objective 'reality' as an idealization of the intersubjective order. The intersubjective, or the *Lebenswelt* (life-world), insures that every experience is entangled in other experiences, and thus there is always an unseen angle to every perception.

⁸⁵ Abram, *Spell*, 37

With Husserl's turn to the body and his conception of the *Lebenswelt*, he moves phenomenology closer to a recognition of a more corporeal layer of lived experience, midway between the transcendental consciousness of his previous work and the objective order contrived by the sciences. As has been stated, his work is still on the side of subjective order, whereby the transcendental ego is independent from the phenomena that it interacts with, posits and ponders. In this sense, his work still echoes some of the idealistic ambitions of philosophy and the sciences, and it is this that Merleau-Ponty attempts to radically challenge.

Merleau-Ponty's project will begin by breaking down the divisions between the experiencing 'self' and the bodily organism. The body will begin to be re-imagined as the very possibility of reflection, thought and knowledge— all of which are born of a contact with other embodied beings and shapes that surround us. With his conception of *flesh*, his focus will not only challenge the mind-body distinction, but will turn to the felt world and seek to uncover an order of appearances, which is not that of the mythic inner man, but man-in-the-world. As Abram explains, "By 'the flesh' Merleau-Ponty means to indicate an elemental power that has had no name in the entire history of western philosophy. The flesh is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity."⁸⁶ With the idea of *flesh*, everything is simultaneously holding and held, and that which sees is also seen— 'the flesh of the world'. He thus brings us to the sense by which we are always intertwined with the world. We enter into the solicitation of other

⁸⁶ Abram, *Spell*, 66.

beings and seductive objects, below the level of the verbal, the rational, or any sense of self. Thus, Merleau-Ponty:

Calls attention to the obvious but easily overlooked fact that my hand is able to touch things only because my hand is itself a touchable thing, and thus is entirely a part of the tactile world that it explores. Similarly, the eyes with which I see things, are themselves visible. With their gleaming surfaces, their colors and hues, they are included within the visible field that they see— they are in themselves part of the visible, like the bark of a cedar, or a pore of sandstone, or the blue sky.⁸⁷

The following will be an exploration of this radicalization of phenomenology, which also marks a shift in Merleau-Ponty's own work. This radicalization of phenomenology is of particular interest to me because it captures the burgeoning roots of such concepts as seduction, reversibility and appearances, which make up Baudrillard's fatal strategies. And in this sense, Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* introduces a kind of fatal phenomenology.

iii. Fatal Phenomenologies

So where Husserl's work and Merleau-Ponty's earlier work are still on the side of the subject, Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* shifts to the side of the object, much like Baudrillard's fatal strategies that always elude direct confrontation with human subjects. (This is not to describe the alienated object in a process of de-alienation, or the object as reflected by the subject, but rather the sly object of reversibility that challenges the subject-object divide). Consequently, both of their fatal phenomenologies have a kind of carnal element to them, in that they carefully avoid abstractions, and the language they choose can be felt as much as understood. There is the sense that one could open up their

⁸⁷ Ibid., 68.

texts randomly and not be lost, for these are meditations, traces that lead ‘nowhere’, but rather sink us further into appearances. In going ‘nowhere,’ they make no promises to achieve a complete picture or a theory of reality— instead they sink us such that we cannot fathom achieving the distance of consciousness that would be required to comprehend anything in completion. This is what it means to dare to make contact in exchange for nothing. As Marc Guillaume states of Baudrillard’s work in the Introduction to *Radical Alterity*, “the world is given to us with no possible giving back, with no responsibility of any kind, especially not the responsibility to explain it.”⁸⁸ Again, this is theory as sinking, and as Merleau-Ponty expresses, it is only through this acknowledgement that no one conquers anything, and this relinquishment of human agency, that we begin to “comprehend our own obscurity”⁸⁹ And so:

We are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of sur-reflection (that) would not lose sight of the brute thing, and the brute perception and would not finally efface them, would not out the organic bonds... (of) our mute contact with the world when they are yet things said... it must plunge into the world instead of surveying it.⁹⁰

And so, a fatal phenomenology offers us a world shrouded in *objective dignity*—this *flesh of the world*— preserving its radical alterity against discourses on power, recognition, and truth.

Reading more of Merleau-Ponty and Baudrillard, one might find oneself plunging, and perhaps— midway between this and that, one might grow a little more

⁸⁸Marc Guillaume, “Introduction: Cool Thinking,” in *Radical Alterity*, by Jean Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume, trans. Ames Hodges, 10 (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008).

⁸⁹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. by Claude Ledfort, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1968), 39.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

secure in one's absence. One might start to think that the subtle play of subject and object being accounted for might hold something. Beyond the theoretical discourses of which we have become accustomed— discourses that Baudrillard acerbically relates to 'the real', which revolve around sites of power, responsibility and desire— is a reversible sphere. This is where, as Abram explains, "climbers climb not to conquer mountains but to have the rocks speak to them."⁹¹ No one conquers anything. We are thus not only challenging the transcendental subject for a fatal engagement, but also challenging Nietzsche's subject of sovereign will and overcoming. For this fatal engagement finds the clutch of things in the passion of being played— in tensions of relations, sly duels, and ambiguous exchanges that no subject can wholly account for. Thus, we are beckoned into existence by forces enigmatic to us, by the lure and seduction of surfaces and appearances, and our own objective dignity.

It requires a certain risk of the reader to comprehend this level of Baudrillard's thought, a risk that perhaps Rajan's work was not up for. We must run the risk of forgoing the freedom of consciousness that would be required to capture anything of this world in completion, or retain the discourse of 'the real.' Only by running this risk might we grasp for a moment Baudrillard's flair for magic, and this subtle tension of things that summons us and the world into existence.

IV. Surfaces of Absorption

There are many aspects of this fatal phenomenology to touch upon, but firstly it must be demonstrated as an affirmation of the primacy of appearances. It is fitting then

⁹¹ Abram, *Spell*, 42.

that Merleau-Ponty begins his reflections in *The Visible and the Invisible* with the remark that “we see the things themselves, the world is what we see.”⁹² Thus, Baudrillard’s and Merleau-Ponty’s works attempt to shift our attention to the order of appearances, and away from the project of uncovering latent meaning— which is always underneath, in between, or outside of manifest discourse. Therefore, both thinkers relate the ‘primacy of appearances’ to an order by which things do not oppose the real or the visible, but are ambivalent to such divisions. This is an order that is at play in the incessant appearance and disappearance of things; or what Baudrillard refers to as the “superficial play of appearances” and “what tears you from your own desire to return you to the sovereignty of the world.”⁹³

Throughout this chapter the notion of appearances will be reflected in many of the major concepts that both thinkers work through, such as reversibility and seduction. We can see this clearly through the concept of seduction, which Baudrillard frequently refers to as being involved in what he calls, ‘the sacred horizon of appearances.’ As he elaborates, “When things go faster than their causes, they have the time to appear, to occur as appearances before even becoming real. It’s then that they keep their power of seduction.”⁹⁴ Seduction is not of the order of the real or the meaningful, but finds its power through the lure of surfaces and appearances. Seduction is also at play in a strange game of depth and deception. We often attribute surfaces with a shallowness and superficiality, and contrast this with depth, which is interpreted as having a stake in the

⁹² Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 3.

⁹³ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 142.

⁹⁴ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 161.

unconscious, meaning and interpretation—the old statutes of phenomenology. Though Baudrillard speaks primarily of shiny surfaces of non-sense, and Merleau-Ponty speaks more of a depth, they both seek to transform this dichotomy— and perhaps they meet in the sense by which we are absorbed into an impossible depth of shallow surfaces. Thus, Merleau-Ponty accounts for a sense of depth that denies any pretension to penetration to absolute surfacelessness— as he states, “what is proper to the visible is...to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own.”⁹⁵ And Baudrillard accounts for a level by which we are absorbed by surfaces, but never fuse with them, or bring a complete exchange with them.

Consequently, surfaces of seduction cannot be represented, for, as Baudrillard states, “the distance and void between the real and its double and the distortion between same and other is abolished.”⁹⁶ The space that would make such a distinction possible is the space of nothingness, but such distance of perception is impossible. As Merleau-Ponty elaborates, “the world achieves visibility only to the extent that it fills me up, circumscribes me in such a way that I cannot traverse its thickness, bring it to transparency, and transform this vision into a possession without remainder.”⁹⁷ What is being accounted for here is not simply the relation of the subject to surfaces and appearances, but a form of subjectivity that is *absorbed* into the *immediacy* of surfaces and appearances— in other words, the order of seduction. (Importantly, this is not to

⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty. *Visible*, 143.

⁹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. and ed. by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 67

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

allude to any measure of fusion or coincidence, which would reveal the secret or capture appearances.)

Baudrillard thus relates seduction to Narcissus, who bending over a pool of water quenches his thirst:

His image is no longer ‘other;’ it is a surface that absorbs and seduces him, which he can approach but never pass beyond, for there is no beyond, just as there is no reflexive distance between him and his image. The mirror of water is not a surface of reflection, but of absorption...to seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion. It is to be taken in by one’s own illusion and move in an enchanted world...Narcissus too loses himself in his own illusory image; that is why he turns from his truth, and by his example turns others from their truth.⁹⁸

V. The Rose

So what does it mean to turn from the transcendental and to sink into appearances and aleatory forms in a fatal phenomenology? In part, as we have seen, it means owning up to the absurdity of existence and resisting the urge to presuppose meaning, or cheapen engagements to assume a provider of meaning. This does not mean, however, opposing meaning to non-meaning, but to account for a subtler meaning that is of the enchanting order of appearance and disappearance— which is always open, incomplete, shared and reversible.

Take, for example, Merleau-Ponty’s meditation on Heidegger’s analysis of the poem by Angelus Silesius about a rose in *Satz vom Grund*:

The rose is without why
It blooms because it blooms
It is not troubled about itself
Asks nothing
Nor desires to be seen

⁹⁸ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 68-69.

Merleau-Ponty claims that for Heidegger, the essence of the rose exists in a state of ‘continuous auto-creation’ that does not involve any demand.⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, however, is attempting to account for a different relation to the object of the rose, which is caught up in his considerations of flesh and reversibility, and is always uncertain and never complete. Consider the following working note from March 1959: “Becoming-nature of man which is the becoming-man of nature—the world is a field, and as such it is always open”¹⁰⁰ Thus, contra Heidegger, the rose does not hold an underlying meaning— it is always at play, and not only gives but takes as well. As Duane Davis states, “Heidegger’s *transcendentalism* allows for the field of differentiation to become hypostatized as nature becomes de-natured, portrayed as giving without any questions, making no demands.”¹⁰¹ With Heidegger we are always a bit too estranged from nature.¹⁰² Merleau-Ponty on the other hand is attempting to account for a level of latent and disruptive intentionality that keeps the field of relation and meaning open, unstable and reversible.

If the rose not only gives but takes, are we not also within a seductive and challenging relationship with it? Thus, the relationship that Merleau-Ponty attempts to account for in his unfinished work is in many ways drawn out in new and interesting ways in Baudrillard’s work. In statements like the following, we can decipher new ways

⁹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essay*, trans. by John Wild and James M. Edie and John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 178.

¹⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 185.

¹⁰¹ Duane H Davis, “Umwelt and Nature in Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology,” In *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, Comp. by Sue L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick.130 (Albany: State University of New York, 2007).

¹⁰² Where as with a figure such as Thoreau, are we not a bit too familiar?

of approaching the seductive rose, and the dislocation of meaning. As Baudrillard elaborates:

Likewise, the challenge, also a dual form, exhausts itself instantaneously, and derives its intensity from this immediate reversion. Also bewitching, like a meaningless discourse, to which, for this absurd reason, we cannot help but respond. Why do we answer a challenge? This is the same mysterious question as: what is it that seduces?...to challenge or seduce is always to drive the other mad, but in a mutual vertigo: madness from the vertiginous absence that unites them, and from their mutual involvement.¹⁰³

To understand these ideas better, and to continue weaving these concepts and thinkers together, the following will be an exploration of Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh, and Baudrillard's interaction with this concept through their similar conceptions of reversibility.

VI. **Flesh and Reversibility**

Flesh substitutes for the old relationship between consciousness and the world, and thus works to nullify and confuse this relation. Flesh speaks to the coiling over of the visible upon the visible. Flesh both touches and is touched and is neither matter nor mind, and here resides the reversibility and the chiasmic qualities of the flesh of the world. This flesh gives rise to the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of spontaneous activity. Thus, perspective is not privileged to one site, one consciousness or one view, but is rather spread across surfaces. It mingles indiscernibly with others, and is neither active nor passive. There is no original layer of experience, nor any perspective which sits alone in a void, holding the world at its grips. Perspective is always caught in a flesh of folds and chiasms, and so flesh never falls on either side of

¹⁰³ Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster, trans. by Jacques Mourrain (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 161.

the subject-object divide, but rather finds the clutch of things in the in-between, where what is touched is simultaneously touching, and exists within a reversible fabric.

There is something of this understanding of flesh that is a great deal more fluid than Baudrillard's textual emphasis on differentiation and the gathered intensity of objects. Thus, the mood of flesh differs from the mood of Baudrillard's ironic objects. Still these insights, against their differing vocabularies, share a great deal, and this is particularly seen where they meet in the concept of reversibility.

As Baudrillard explains in regard to photography:

But no matter which photographic technique is used, there is always one thing, and one thing only, that remains: the light. Photography: The writing of light. The light of photography remains proper to the image. Photographic light is not 'realistic' or 'natural.' It is not artificial either. Rather, this light is the very imagination of the image, its own thought. It does not emanate from one single source, but from two different, dual ones: the object and the gaze. The image stands at the junction of a light which comes from the object and another which comes from the gaze.¹⁰⁴

Here we gather a sense of not only Baudrillard's phenomenology of absence, but also his own version of a 'phenomenology of flesh', which builds upon Merleau-Ponty's reflections on reversibility, and the spreading and confusing of perspective and experience. The light of photography represents the reversibility of this experience. The light lies neither with the subject or the object, but exists somewhere between these in the reversible image. This speaks not of some origin or essence captured or represented, rather, the object of photography, or the rose of Silensius's poem, exists in a kind of junction between the real and unreal, subject and object— in the imagination of the image. The image exists between things— it is neither active nor passive and exists only in the interaction of things. The imagination of the image, or the imagination of the rose,

¹⁰⁴ Jean Baudrillard, "Photography, or the Writing of Light," *Ctheory*, trans. by Francois Debrix, ed. by Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, (2000), www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=126

is found in the move to action (passage à l'acte), "which is a way of seizing the world by 'acting it out.' Photography exorcizes the world through the instantaneous fiction of its representation."¹⁰⁵ --And what of the poem to the rose? I believe we find here a radical affirmation of experience, engagement and perhaps most importantly reversibility. To exist within a flesh is to exist within an open and uncertain reversibility.

This conception of reversibility counters most clearly what Rajan refers to as Baudrillard's dualist phenomenology, as we will see in the following section. It accounts for a continuous displacement and openness, as well as a unique loss of self— or rather, a shifting of 'the self', to describe a subject that is always enveloped and engaged with the world. Thus, both Merleau-Ponty and Baudrillard account for an order by which the self exists in a kind of tissue of relations that is never fully ours, but is returned for a subtle and seductive game. As Merleau-Ponty describes:

My gazes pairs off with colour, and my hand with hardness and softness, and in this transaction between the subject of sensation and the sensible it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers the action, or that one confers significance on the other. Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning.¹⁰⁶

and so he takes a simple quality like the colour blue, and describes the way in which it:

...sets a kind of muddled problem for my body to solve. I must find the reply to a question which is obscurely expressed. And yet I do so only when I am invited by it, my attitude is never sufficient to make me really see blue or really touch a hard surface...As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not set over against it as a cosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards some idea of blue such as might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it thinks itself within me,' I am the sky itself...my consciousness is saturated with this limitless blue.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), 248.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 249.

Thus, the subject's activity is as passive as it is active, and this quality particularly arises as we migrate our attention to our own visibility and objective dignity:

Not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen.¹⁰⁸

Hence, the way in which the concepts of seduction, reversibility and appearances play off each other in Merleau-Ponty's work. They account for a level of interaction where things challenge and bound, and attune to the styles of others in a wordless dance and reciprocal encounter.

One of the interesting aspects of the concept of seduction is that the common understanding of seduction understands the role of the seducer as the role that holds the power over the meek seducee. However, Baudrillard understands seduction as reversible in that in order to seduce, one must already be seduced one's self. No role is merely active or passive, and the absorption of this interaction lays all power to rest. Much like Merleau-Ponty, Baudrillard accounts for this fatal reversibility by challenging the assumed centrality of the subject:

The main focus of interest has always been on the conditions in which the subject discovers the object, but those in which the object discovers the subject have not been explored at all. We flatter ourselves that we discover the object and conceive it as waiting there meekly to be discovered. But perhaps the cleverer party here is not the one we think. What if it were the object which discovered us in all this? What if it were the object which invented us? This would give us not merely an uncertainty principle, which can be mastered by equations, but a principle of reversibility which is much more radical and more aggressive.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

¹⁰⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. by Chris Turner (Verso, 1996), 55.

Only through this reversible confusion within the depths of all encounters, are we confronted and drawn into relation and action. As Merleau-Ponty states, “the things are structures, frameworks, the stars of our life: not before us, laid out as perspective spectacles, but gravitating about us.”¹¹⁰ The object gathers my senses together, holds me in its grip, and it is here that I might experience my own flesh under the gaze. We are all animals and animists, some being more thoroughly conscious of this, as Richard Nelson states, “Traditional koyukon people live in a world that watches, in a forest of eyes. A person moving through nature-- however wild, remote, even desolate the place may be-- is never truly alone. The surroundings are aware, sensate, personified. They feel. They can be offended. And they must at every moment, be treated with the proper respect.”¹¹¹

VII. Seducing the code

“As a fresh millennium dawns around us, a new and vital skill is waiting to be born... a new talent called for by the curious situation in which much of humankind now finds itself. We may call it the skill of “navigating between worlds.”¹¹² -David Abram

We can feel this subtle seduction— this flesh— between ourselves and the colour blue, but what about the letters of the alphabet? What of signifiers sans signified— the code? How do you beckon the fall of its reality principle (or its hyperreality principle), and the coming of another logic? As Baudrillard states, “Expelled from its own frame,

¹¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 220.

¹¹¹ Richard Nelson, *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 14, quoted in David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-human World*, (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 69.

¹¹² Abram, *Sensuous*, 150.

from its own principle, pushed toward its extraneity, the real has become an extreme phenomenon. So, we can no longer think of it as real. But we can think of it as ‘ex-orbited,’ as seen from another world— as an illusion then.”¹¹³ And perhaps this is precisely where the promise lies. Where the more-real-than-real’s irreversibility is realized as an *effect*, its vital illusion—that is, its existence as appearance, might be revealed. As Baudrillard states, “perhaps this is in the process of changing. What if even physical laws, the surest guarantee of the effect of irreversible causality in the universe, are slipping so gently into the reversible?”¹¹⁴

I believe this is what Baudrillard’s fatal strategy and phenomenology of absence are involved in— not the conjuring of a new sincerity, but rather the returning of things to a reversible realm of appearances and experience. This fatal strategy is ironic in that it is beyond the subject’s will and best interests. Rather, as Baudrillard states, it is ‘woven into the fabric of the cosmos’:

For that mysterious would-be holistic entity know as ‘the world’ will— it seems— continue to use its own diabolical techniques to thwart human hubris and lack of imagination (which may or may not amount to the same thing). For instance, the object may only pretend to obey the laws of physics, because it gives so much pleasure to the observer.¹¹⁵

Thus, Baudrillard’s work is involved in registering an order by which even the vertiginous code is returned to a play of appearances that can be felt and experienced (an order which must not be confused with the ‘real’). This is not your common fatalism however; there is still a challenge and strategy kicking here, albeit not your typical

¹¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Radical Thought*, trans. by Francois Debrix, ed. by Sens & Tonka (Paris: Collection Morsure, 1994), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/radical-thought/>

¹¹⁴ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 200.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

subjective strategy, but one that seeks to tinker with the semiotic code, realizing it as a surface of an ineffable flesh of surfaces. Perhaps this has the potential to “transform human intimacy beyond the unthinking form of personal blackmail that it has largely become.”¹¹⁶

In Merleau-Ponty’s later writings the immaterial— if not hyperreal, spheres of science, mathematics and thought, are portrayed as the invisible. This is radical in that he imagines these not within the tired dualism of the real and unreal (as Rajan figures them), but within the fabric of the visible and invisible, and of appearance and disappearance. Nothing exceeds at being outside of these, and this goes for the viral codes of our modern experience as well. These particular ideas will be explored further in the following chapter.

Part of this move to bring about the primacy of appearances, involves the affirmation that there is a seductive level to everything. Baudrillard uses the example of love to display this, which we touched upon earlier in reference to Zarathustra:

Happily, anyways, “I love you” does not mean what it says, and it should be understood otherwise— in the seductive mode (all verbs have a secret mode, beyond the indicative and imperative, the seductive). Seduction is a modality of all discourse, including the discourse of love (at least, let’s hope so), which means that it plays games with its enunciation and affects the other differently than stated. So with “I love you”; isn’t it said not to tell you you’re loved, but to seduce you? It is a proposition that oscillates on its two sides, and which thereby retains the insoluble charm of appearances, of what is senseless and therefore useless to believe.¹¹⁷

Considering this, might we seek the level by which the alphabet is not merely a set of codes, which decipher the real and make demands of us, but rather characters that speak to us and seduce things into existence? Following this theme, there is a way in which

¹¹⁶Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 18.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

Baudrillard's interest is focused on the more melodic layers of the exchange through language. Beyond information and the translatable conceptual code, he is intrigued by the level whereby we seduce each other's speech, and each voice mimes the other's melody while adding its own inflection. He thus seeks to express this radical level of seduction and exchange, which cannot be described by any structure. This is not to describe an order above or below things, but to express the way in which we are always on the border of exchanges— never quite this or that. There are living animate powers even within abstractions, and some have not lost this sense of their letter system. Abram relates to this and describes the way in which “a Zuni elder focuses her eyes upon a cactus and hears the cactus begin to speak, so we focus our eyes upon these printed marks and immediately hear voices. We hear spoken words, witness strange scenes or visions, even experience other lives...this is a form of animism that we take for granted, but it is animism nonetheless— as mysterious as a talking stone.”¹¹⁸

Whatever this life of things is, both Merleau-Ponty and Baudrillard understand the futility— of this order of things, for it is an order which cannot be represented or given purpose or meaning. As Merleau-Ponty states; “We know neither what exactly is this order and this concordance of the world to which we thus entrust ourselves, nor therefore what the enterprise will result in, nor even if it is really possible.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Abram, *Spell*, 131.

¹¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 39.

God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is afoot. Magic is alive. Alive is afoot. Magic never died. God never sickened. Many poor men lied. Many sick men lied. Magic never weakened. Magic never hid. Magic always ruled. God is afoot. God never died. God was ruler though his funeral lengthened. Though his mourners thickened. Magic never fled. Though his shrouds were hoisted the naked God did live. Though his words were twisted the naked Magic thrived. Though his death was published round and round the world the heart did not believe. Many hurt men wondered. Many struck men bled. Magic never faltered. Magic always led. Many stones were rolled but God would not lie down. Many wild men lied. Many fat men listened. Though they offered stones Magic still was fed. Though they locked their coffers God was always served. Magic is afoot. God rules. Alive is afoot. Alive is in command. Many weak men hungered. Many strong men thrived. Though they boasted solitude God was at their side. Nor the dreamer in his cell, nor the captain on the hill. Magic is alive. Though his death was pardoned round and round the world the heart would not believe. Though laws were carved in marble they could not shelter men. Though altars built in parliaments they could not order men. Police arrested Magic and Magic went with them for Magic loves the hungry. But Magic would not tarry. It moves from arm to arm. It would not stay with them. Magic is afoot. It cannot come to harm. It rests in an empty palm. It spawns in an empty mind. But Magic is no instrument. Magic is the end. Many men drove Magic but Magic stayed behind. Many strong men lied. They only passed through Magic and out the other side. Many weak men lied. They came to God in secret and though they left him nourished they would not tell who healed. Though mountains danced before them they said that God was dead. Though his shrouds were hoisted the naked God did live. This I mean to whisper to my mind. This I mean to laugh with in my mind. This I mean my mind to serve till service is but Magic moving through the world, and mind itself is Magic coursing through the flesh, and flesh itself is Magic dancing on a clock, and time itself the Magic Length of God.

-Leonard Cohen

Chapter 4:

Limit, Void and Challenge

Is not the possibility of seducing the code all but vanquished for Nietzsche? In a cosmos where everything is hyperreal, calculable and finite, Nietzsche appears to me as that which is left over at the limit of a system touching radical obscenity. In such a state, what is needed is courage, above all else— courage to sing a sacred yes, to be a sovereign expression of force and will, and to defy absorption into that great yawn. As Nietzsche states, “The man who does not know how to play lacks the courage to face eternity, but rather holds onto causality and finality...against becoming chaos aligned with mechanical causality.”¹²⁰ But it is the individual subject that must do this, alone— surrounded by the void which haunts at the edges.

But what is this void that he illuminates in his ecstasy? Considering our previous discussion of Merleau-Ponty and Baudrillard, how subjective is Nietzsche’s sense of void? What of the possible indifference of the world to the death of God (or the indifference of God to his own death)? Nietzsche is all too aware of the abundance which spills at the world’s measured seams, and thus the image of the void is where we must place some thought. In doing so, part of my project in this chapter is to contest the experience of limit I see in Nietzsche’s work with the sense of flesh, reversibility and seduction I see in Baudrillard’s and Merleau-Ponty’s work.

All three thinkers seek to describe a level by which things do not oppose the real or the visible, but are ambivalent to such divisions and the need to be real. This seeks to

¹²⁰ Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 11.

uncover the space by which things are never subjective or objective, meaningful or not meaningful. While Nietzsche finds this in the order of undivided force, for Merleau-Ponty, this is constituted in the order of flesh, which describes our envelopment in a world where we always exist within a reversibility— between touching and being touched. Baudrillard, less interested in the ‘in-between’ per se, finds this order in the seductive poles of difference and the reversible play of appearances, where things incessantly duel, appear and disappear. Thus, what marks Merleau-Ponty’s and Baudrillard’s approaches is a certain engagement, connection and relationality that we do not find in Nietzsche’s work.

To deepen this exploration, let’s think through this notion of void and negativity. Does not the very nature of theory assume a separation of discourse from subject, whereby the theorist is able to unground oneself as if not in-oneself? Without this negation there is no philosophy. This move, unlike fatal theory, moves towards objects, world, and Being from a place of nothingness, assuming that these emerge from nothingness. Thus, as Renaud Barbaras explains:

This does not characterize being from itself but from what in it, is able to resist nothingness; being, as it were, needs the plenitude, the positivity of essence, to surmount the threat of nothingness. Being is entirely what it is, fully and clearly determined, for the slightest insufficiency, the slightest lack of determination, would entail its absorption by nothingness.¹²¹

This conception of negativity comes under attack in the radicalization of phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty explains in his own words:

In order to really reduce an experience to its essence, we should have to achieve a distance from it that would put it entirely under our gaze, with all the implications of sensoriality or thought that come into play in it, bring it and bring ourselves

¹²¹ Barbaras, *Being*, 170.

wholly to the transparency of the imaginary, think it without the support of any ground, in short, withdraw to the bottom of nothingness.¹²²

In this sense, nothingness, as a kind of void, is an abstract conception that supports our sense of objectivity. Sounding eerily like Baudrillard some years later, Merleau-Ponty states, “the thing thus defined is not the thing of our experience, it is the image we obtain of it by projecting it into a universe where experience would not settle on anything, where the spectator would abandon the spectacle— in short, by confronting it with the possibility of nothingness.”¹²³ A radical phenomenology, then, seeks to signify the impossibility of an ontological void. This is not only to challenge the Copernican revolution and Descartes, but also to challenge much of modern critical theory, where this sense of void still lingers— as I believe we can see in Nietzsche’s work.

While it could be argued that Nietzsche is approaching a sense of reversibility in that he calls forth a reversion of all categories of the real, and thus seeks to collapse the divisions between subject and object, sign and meaning— he does so in a different spirit than the one we find in Baudrillard and Merleau-Ponty’s work. For Baudrillard these poles of difference are not collapsed but are rather brought to play, for the reversible—the inherent reversion— also marks a crossroads that makes possible the connection between interior and exterior, male and female, subject and object. These are connections that are not marked by power or energy, but by seduction. They reach to the other side, or the other side of the bridge— the horizon, in a circular world without edges. They account for a world that does not end at disappearance, but holds the promise of

¹²² Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 111.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

metamorphosis. On the other hand it seems as though Nietzsche's sense of reversibility is one which understands things as oscillating between collapse and expressive force.

With Baudrillard's phenomenology of absence, and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of flesh, how is it that this void is transformed into that which can be seduced, and brought to play? This was touched on briefly in the previous chapter, and is an approach that moves against what Baudrillard refers to as fascination—fascination being that which attaches itself to disappearance and to the void of things, an element that can be located in Nietzsche's work.

For Merleau-Ponty, "the only place where the negative would really be is in the fold, the application of the inside and the outside to one another, the turning point."¹²⁴ To constitute nothingness as the invisible is a truly radical move, and brings the being of the world this side of the opposition between sense and fact, presence and non-presence, real and unreal. Relating this to Baudrillard, a phenomenology of absence is not referring to absence in ultimate terms, but rather absence describes the invisible—the disappearance and inevitable reversibility of things. Appearance contains disappearance, and they continually play in fatal chains of seduction. As he states, "In fatality or destiny, the linkage, far from being causal, is rather this: the sign of the apparition of things is also the sign of their disappearance. The sign of their birth will be the sign of their death...the emblem of elevation is the same as at the fall, the emblem of appearance is that of disappearance."¹²⁵ Merleau-Ponty relates to this in the following:

To conceive the invisible requires that one understand invisibility as the "power" of the visible and the phenomenon as its own imminence. This is why the nihilation of nothingness must be exercised against itself qua pure nothingness.

¹²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Invisible*, 264.

¹²⁵ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 193.

The invisible provides the genuine meaning of nothingness because the invisible never exceeds the visible that it nevertheless negates.¹²⁶

Barbaras uses the example of 'sense' and 'the sensible' to describe Merleau-Ponty's play of the invisible and visible and appearance and disappearance, thus:

The invisibility of sense, then, does not mean that the sensible, by which invisibility realizes itself, would be of another order than that of the sense: the sensible presents sense as 'a certain absence.' The sensible must be characterized as 'negation-reference,' not as immediate negation of sense. Invisible in the form of a pure sense, sense is retained nevertheless in visibility, as the meaning that invisibility conceals: the sense is the 'zero' or the 'power' of visibility.¹²⁷

What I see here is a kind of reversibility and seduction, if not even a destiny between the sensible and sensing, and thus between the invisible and the visible, appearance and disappearance. As he states further:

The being of the sensible precisely consists in not being based in itself like a being, but instead in being woven from the invisible, in exhibiting the invisible as its secret counterpart. Correlatively, the being of the sense consists in its incapacity for gathering itself together beyond the sensible whose sense it is; it consists in its incapacity thus to subsist as its own concealing....there are not two terms but a place where they are destined for each other.¹²⁸

In the broadest sense, one can see that Merleau-Ponty is seeking a dispersal of the dichotomies set up between the real and unreal, between appearance and disappearance, as well as positivity and void, by demonstrating how all such terms meet and coil over each other, seduce each other and hold each other within. This is what the visibility of the flesh speaks to.

¹²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, xi.

¹²⁷ Barbaras, *Being*, 163.

¹²⁸ Barbaras, *Being*, 163.

We can understand Baudrillard's and Merleau-Ponty's work as not dispersing the real for the void, or meaning for non-meaning, but rather seeking a subtler order on the level of experience. In a radical affirmation of experience, negativity is not something outside Being, but designates Being's essential distance, the inherent invisibility of the visible—its reversibility. Similarly, invisibility is not the non-meaning to the visible's meaning. Disappearance and appearance are contained within each other. This means that appearance implies a kind of disappearance—as Rex Butler points out in regard to Baudrillard, “this is what he means by ‘concepts and ideas vanishing into their very fulfillment.’”¹²⁹ Similarly, Merleau-Ponty states:

The invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework, and the invisible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the *Nichturprasenerbar* which is presented to me as such within the world—one cannot see it there and every effort to see it there makes it disappear, but it is in the line of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree).¹³⁰

This invisibility is our saving grace, the essential negativity, or as Baudrillard calls it, ‘the vital illusion.’ As he explains, “if this ‘dark matter’ did not exist, our universe would long ago have vanished into thin air. And this is, indeed, the most likely outcome if we succeed in eliminating it...” for “the real divested of the anti-real becomes hyperreal, more real than real, and vanishes into simulation, matter divested of anti-matter is doomed to entropy.”¹³¹ The vital illusion is that power of things that will always defy our attempts to entrap and represent them within closed systems, and thus, to

¹²⁹ Butler, *Fatal*, 30.

¹³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 215.

¹³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2001), 12.

appear means to appear at a distance, or, as Merleau-Ponty states, “the visible is a presentation of a certain absence.”¹³²

Here we find an unexpected optimism, similar to Heidegger’s moment in *The Question Concerning Technology*, where after discussing the bleakness of technology and the modern mind, he quotes Holderin to announce the possibility of the saving power. Baudrillard quotes Holderin as well; “But where the danger is, grows the saving power also,” but goes on to write:

It applies today— with the caveat that, as the evil genius of modernity has changed our destiny, Holderin’s phrase must be reversed: the more the saving power grows, the greater the danger. For we are no longer victims of an excess of fate and danger, of illusion and death. We are victims of an absence of destiny, of a lack of illusion, and consequently of an excess of reality, security, and efficiency... But it seems that something resists this irresistible trend, something irreducible. And here we might quote, as a counterpart to Holderin’s phrase, this very mysterious sentence of Heidegger: “When we look into the ambiguous essence of technology, we behold the constellation, the stellar course of mystery.”¹³³

The world— God, that great cosmos— whatever have you— is it not all invulnerable to us? Does not the world always steal something of singularity back from beyond the horizon? This vital illusion and essential distance of experience, seduces the cyclical emergence of appearances, as Clarke states:

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).¹³⁴

¹³² Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, 136.

¹³³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. by Julia Witwer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 81.

¹³⁴ Rex Butler, “Commentaries on Jean Baudrillard’s ‘On Disappearance,’” in *Jean Baudrillard: Fatal Theories*, ed. by David B. Clarke, Marcus Doel, William Merrin and Richard G. Smith, 30 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

So in a world of spinning chance and crashing bodies, where the energy of the ‘real’ is felt to be entirely absorbed by the void, Baudrillard suggests that “there is perhaps another, more joyous way of seeing things, and of finally substituting for eternally critical theory an ironic theory.”¹³⁵ As he states:

The other, the object, disappears on the horizons of science. The event, the meaning, disappears on the horizon of the media. But one may see that the disappearance itself can also be a strategy— not a necessary consequence of the information system, but a strategy proper to the object, for which the monitor’s screen would serve somehow as a screen of disappearance.¹³⁶

It is our task to enact a kind of phenomenology of absence, that is, to allow for the disappearance of things. This is a certain kind of disappearance though, not one of void, but one that is of the order of appearance, and can thus be seduced and brought to play. To seduce is to put things back into their cycle of appearance and disappearance, where, as Baudrillard states, “all the art lies in the positioning of oneself.”¹³⁷ This is the promise of the vital illusion, to “allow for a domain of pure appearance.” For, “the nothing is precisely not a state of things. It is the product of the dramatic illusion of appearances”¹³⁸

If the world seems indifferent to us, then we must learn to seduce it, to move to it, in order to be seduced ourselves. Baudrillard’s work seems to gather its strength from a world of reversible objects and beings, in a way that I do not find in Nietzsche’s work. Rather I find in the latter’s work a certain sense of a forgoing of the world. And despite the waves which return everything to laughter— his writing is full of edges. Is there

¹³⁵ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 161.

¹³⁶ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 113.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹³⁸ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 12.

something in the Overman that does not fully know or understand that though god is vanquished to laughter, the world still dances?

Dark Pines Under Water - Gwendolyn MacEwan

This land like a mirror turns you inward
And you become a forest in a furtive lake;
The dark pines of your mind reach downward,
You dream in the green of your time,
Your memory is a row of sinking pines.

Explorer, you tell yourself this is not what you came for
Although it is good here, and green;
You had meant to move with a kind of largeness,
You had planned a heavy grace, an anguished dream.

But the dark pines of your mind dip deeper
And you are sinking, sinking, sleeper
In an elementary world;
There is something down there and you want it told.

Chapter 5:

Sink sleeper

In the following, I will expand upon the concepts we have been exploring thus far, such as seduction, reversibility and flesh. In this chapter I will align these not with the expressive and sovereign force of Nietzsche's work, or the one directional movement of Silensius's rose, but with ritual. Ritual is always duel, continuously renewed, and never frivolous. It is involved in the meticulous acting out of the world, the *passage a l'acte*, "seizing the world by acting it out."¹³⁹ It is here that we might locate the place where such a raw phenomenology might meet action, and perhaps its fatal strategy. First let's dip into the reversible ritual life of the Haida, as described by Patricia Locke.

I. Straits

The high culture of the Haida has many stories and much wisdom which reveal the sense of living on narrow straits between life and death and inhabiting a thin blade of land above high tide, interrupted by transformations between animal and human, male and female, elder to child and back again, as Locke states:

To signify the narrow margin between life and death, and what a slight cause is required to bring about a change from one to the other, it was a saying at Masset that 'the world is as sharp as a knife,' meaning, if a man does not take care, he will fall off.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Photography*

¹⁴⁰ Patricia Locke, "The Liminal World of the Northwest Coast," in *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought*, comp. by Sue L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, 62 (Albany: State University of New York, 2007).

The edge does not open up to any sort of void, but rather to an abundance of foreign cycles, patterns, connections and rituals, and a fabric of boundaries, crossroads and metamorphoses:

Everything is on the brink of reversibility here, just beyond capture. Orca lives both on land and in the sky, Bear shifts between worlds like a shaman, and Whale may be found between Thunderbird's wing, with a human face peering out its blowhole and Frog between its teeth.¹⁴¹

Locke describes Haida art forms in a way that gives us the sense of flesh we have been approaching. She explains how the weaving of colour and shape give the perceiver of Haida art a dynamic experience of the reversibility of flesh. Coloured regions contradict the outlines of shapes. We can never quite capture the form between the crisscrossing horizons of depth and colour. This is the terrifying nature of totem poles, which seem to hold such tensions— contained, but always ready to break out:

The perceiver is actively involved in the perception of shape and color, but at the same time color is never entirely one with form. The perceiver may know himself or herself touching an object by hand or more distantly by eye, yet there remains a gap, or straits, between the touching and his or her self as touched or seen by the world. He or she is always on the verge, the border between touching and being touched, between being human and animal, but never entirely able to be aware of both at once. All objects, including his or her corporeal existence, have a thickness, a depth to them that is suggested by the textured surface he or she sees and feels. The limit of the darkness of the interior life and the perceptible exterior world is the skin.¹⁴²

Locke seeks to describe the Haida's comfort in this in-between— this straits, or porous zone, where things double and reverse. Thus, the limit she describes makes possible the connection between interior and world, and between all oppositions. It is a space where subject and object have not yet been tamed into separate domains, and things always hold a secret reversal. In his own way, Baudrillard reflects upon this order:

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴² Locke, *Liminal*, 62.

Destiny dooms us to a personal death, but something of this multiple predestination remains. Alterity is a trace of these crossings, which provide one of the grids of becoming: becoming-animal, becoming-plant, becoming-women— crossing the demarcation line between the sexes and the species. At the point where this irreversible separation takes place— between the animate and the inanimate...emerges the equally irresistible denial of this separation. The living will retain a nostalgia for the inanimate...thought will retain a nostalgia for nonintelligent matter, or for the beasts which neither speak or think.¹⁴³

The Haida experience is unique, but it is also not wholly estranged from the ‘Western,’ colonizers situating point. What I mean to say is that, even if it may not seem apparent, we always live on the blade of a knife, between a proliferation of worlds; perhaps never to such a degree as we do today. You do yoga, you check the stock market’s latest figures, you kiss your children goodnight and plunge into cyberspace— television or any other screen— all in an evening without a blink of an eye. It is both ungrounding and wildly exhilarating. However, what we seem to lack in our time is the ritual life to link up all these seemingly disparate worlds— which are as diverse as Coyote’s world and the Banyan Tree’s world. Merleau-Ponty and Baudrillard, however, are interested in accounting for an order which leaves its traces on all these seemingly disjointed worlds; that level of appearances and experience. Only upon this level might we challenge and seduce these fractured pieces to play, and link up.

II. **An Unsung Land is a Dead Land**

“Nothing is dead, nothing is inert, nothing is disconnected, uncorrelated or aleatory. Everything, on the contrary, is fatally, admirably connected-not at all according to rational relations (which are neither fatal nor admirable), but according to an incessant cycle of metamorphoses, according to the seductive rapports of form and appearance.”¹⁴⁴

-Baudrillard

¹⁴³Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 83.

¹⁴⁴ Baudrillard, *Fatal*, 150.

This sense of flesh and reversibility also recalls the Aboriginal notion of Dreamtime, that time, as Abram explains, “before the world itself was entirely awake (a time that still exists just below the surface of wakeful awareness).”¹⁴⁵ Dreamtime understands a time when the earth itself was still malleable, in a half-awake state. Kangaroo Dreaming Man, Emu Woman, Frilled Lizard Man and other Ancestors shaped the surface of the land in their wanderings and songs, leaving in their wake meandering trails, or ‘songlines’, of geographic sites.¹⁴⁶ As Abram states:

Each Ancestral track is a sort of musical score that winds across the continent, the score of a vast, epic song whose verses tell of the ancestor’s many adventures, of how the various sites along her path came into being...the distance between two significant sites along the ancestors track can be measured, or spoken of, as a stretch of song, for the song unfolds in an unbroken chain of couplets across the land, one couplet for each pair of the Ancestors’ footfalls.¹⁴⁷

Dreamtime turns us from ‘the real’ and ‘the truth’— in favor of a subtler reality, which exists within a certain sense of flesh. Dreamtime is not psychological or supernatural. It does not direct our attention to dimensions hidden above, behind, or beneath appearances, but directs us to a boundary country, that is, the tissue, tension and intimate rapport between beings and a land that watches from both sides. In this sense, the sensuous land— this shifting flesh, is still the dwelling place of gods and the numinous powers that either sustain or extinguish human life.

As we recall the common saying in Masset; ‘the world is as sharp as a knife,’ let us focus here on Locke’s interpretation of this, which is that “if a man does not take care,

¹⁴⁵ Abram, *Spell*, 164.

¹⁴⁶ Abram, *Spell*, 165.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

he will fall off.”¹⁴⁸ What is this ‘taking care’, and what does it have to do with the flesh of the world?

Dreamtime is also of the order of ritual, which recalls the notion of the footbridge. Ritual knows that there is no vision without the screen. Rather than seeking a latent level of understanding, ritual functions through cycles and recurrence and is always arbitrary and reversible. As Baudrillard states:

The inscription of rules in a sphere without a beyond (it’s no longer a universe, since it no longer aspires to universality) is as difficult to understand as the idea of a finite universe. A boundary without something beyond it is unimaginable. For us the finite is always set against the infinite; but the sphere of ritual is neither finite nor infinite—transfinite perhaps. It has its own finite contours, with which it resists the infinity of analytic space. To reinvent a rule is to resist the linear infinitude of analytic space in order to recover a reversible space.¹⁴⁹

Moreover, Dreamtime realizes Baudrillard’s understanding of seduction, challenge, duel, and might we add, care; as Abram explains:

‘Dreamtime is not, like the western, Biblical notion of Genesis, a finished event; it is not, like the common scientific interpretation of the ‘Big Bang,’ an event that happened once and for all in the distant past. Rather, it is an ongoing process—the perpetual emerging of the world...from invisibility to visibility, from the secret depths of silence into articulate song and speech. That native Australians chose the English term “dreaming” to translate this cosmological notion indicated their sense that the ordinary act of dreaming participates directly in the time of the clan Ancestors, and hence that time is not entirely elsewhere, not entirely sealed off from the perceivable present. Rather, the dreaming lies in the same relation to the open presence of the earth around us as our own dream life lies in relation to our conscious or waking experience.¹⁵⁰

In the continual renewal and singing of the land into existence and visibility, Dreamtime is not in the least bit frivolous or expressive. It is rather a careful and meticulous reenactment, with all the characteristics of a game that is always challenging and duel:

¹⁴⁸ Locke, *Liminal*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 134.

¹⁵⁰ Abram, *Spell*, 169.

The maintenance of a site requires both physical caring— for example the rubbing of rocks or clearing of debris- and the performance of ritual items aimed at caring for the spirit houses at it. Without these maintenance processes the site remains, but is said to lose the spirit held within it. It is then said to die and all those who share physical features and spiritual connections with it are then also thought to die.¹⁵¹

Dreamtime understands the order of seduction, which is not of the order of energy and force, but that of songs and rituals. It comprehends ‘reality’ as that which lies in games and challenges, which are always also relational— existing as shared simulacrum. Things don’t simply exist; they exist because they are challenged, and so appearance hinges on a seductive drawing out, rather than a linear relation of cause and effect. You are never alone, or set off aimlessly in Dreamtime or any kind of seduction. Everything is tied to everything else. This is similar to how Baudrillard describes Magic, which is “a ritual for the maintenance of the world as a play of analogical relations, a cyclical progression where everything is linked together by their signs. An immense game, rule governs magic, and the basic problem is to ensure, by means of ritual, that everything continues to play thus, by analogical contiguity and creeping seduction.”¹⁵²

We must conclude that there are other ways to be a player, beyond Nietzsche’s understanding of the player, who is sovereign, nomadic, and at play in a kind of becoming, expressionism, force and energy. The player of Dreamtime is, on the other hand, always engaged and intimately connected with a ‘territory,’ and in this duel one never finds oneself alone, but always enchanted, entangled, playing with rules and pacts, and paying heed. Thus, despite the seeming enchantment of Dreamtime, it is far too orderly and conventional for Nietzsche’s going over. For Nietzsche’s writing always

¹⁵¹ Abram, *Spell*, 171.

¹⁵² Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 139.

holds the seductive promise of creative expression, self-reliance and freedom, and perhaps even an element of liberation and spontaneity. We are thus building upon a subtle differentiation, which we might find useful to understanding not only Nietzsche, but Baudrillard as well.

Imagine a long-maned stallion breezing across a golden plain, a V of Canada Geese— wild and free, unruly, rustic and uncouth. Imagine a whole weight of beasts— exultation of energy and force, some groping out, some flagging, some eyes in front— victoriously overcoming. But in a subtle twist, we can let many other things speak, as Abram states:

We could say a food brings a form into existence. Huckleberries and salmon call for bears, the clouds of plankton of the north Pacific call for salmon, and salmon call for seals and orcas. The sperm whale is sucked into existence by the pulsing, fluctuating pastures of squids, and the pen niches of the Galapagos Islands sucked a diversity of bird forms and functions out of one line of finch.¹⁵³

Suddenly Coyote and Ground Squirrel hold a secret compact, a ritual where one plays predator and the other plays game. Roles are continuously exchanged; each is successively touching and touched. Response— counter response. Challenge— seduction. As Baudrillard states:

Suppose that all the major diacritical oppositions with which we order our world were traversed by seduction... Suppose not just that the feminine seduces the masculine, but that absence seduces presence, cold seduces hot, the subject seduces the object, and to be sure, the reverse... for seduction supposes that minimum reversibility which puts an end to every diced opposition... One might imagine (but why imagine it, when it occurred in ancient Greece) that gods and mortals, instead of being separated by the moral abyss of religion, sought to seduce each other and, indeed, maintained no other relations but those of seduction."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Abram, *Spell*, 109.

¹⁵⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 104.

This cycle prohibits the completion of this reversibility— a coincidence that would catastrophically doom the game to completion. If it is our task to witness this cycle, then this is the challenge Baudrillard confronts us with in regard to nature and animals, which are assumed to be of a different order— an order more in line with Nietzsche’s will to power— all force, avowal, and energy. But perhaps, as Baudrillard states, “what is seductive about animals is not their “natural” savagery, unpredictability and impulsiveness, but rather their high degree of ritualized behavior, and observance of fixed forms and appearances, whether in relation to their territory, other animals or humans.”¹⁵⁵ That is, there is “nothing more errant, more nomadic in appearance than animals, and yet their law is that of the territory.”¹⁵⁶ Baudrillard’s term ‘territory’ refers not to property or the subject’s relation to space, nor does it describe the “vital function, of an environmental bubble where the whole system of needs is summed up.”¹⁵⁷ ‘Territory’ is aligned with Merleau-Ponty’s sense of ‘flesh’ and the Aboriginal sense of Dreamtime, and is neither dead nor objective, nor matter of consciousness or unconsciousness. It is an interactive dimension, which finds itself only through webs of continuously acted out relations. As Baudrillard describes:

The territory is the site of a completed cycle of parentage and exchanges— without a subject, but without exception: animal and vegetal cycle, cycle of goods and wealth, cycle of parentage and the species, cycle of women and ritual— there is no subject and everything is exchanged. The obligations are absolute therein— total reversibility— but no one knows death there, since all is metamorphosed. Neither subject, nor death, nor unconscious, nor repression, since nothing stops the enchainment of forms. Animals have no unconscious, because they have a

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 130.

territory. Men have only had an unconscious since they lost a territory... Animals have never wandered, were never deterritorialized.¹⁵⁸

This understanding of Animals is drawn in contrast to the libratory phantasmagoria, society has conjured to understand bestiality. However:

The free, virgin nature, without limits or territories, where each wanders at will, never existed, except in the imaginary of the dominant order, of which this nature is the equivalent mirror. We project (nature, desire, animality, rhizome...) the very schema of deterritorialization that is that of the economic system and of capital as ideal savagery. Liberty is nowhere but in capital, it is what produced it, it is what deepens it. There is thus an exact correlation between the social legislation of value (urban, industrial, repressive, etc.) and the imaginary savagery one places in opposition to it: they are both 'deterritorialized' and in each other's image. Neither the beasts nor the savages know 'nature' in our way: they only know territories, limited, marked, which are spaces of insurmountable reciprocity.¹⁵⁹

And so, Baudrillard picks up on the ritual traits of Animals and their aptitude for finery. As he states:

If there is a preference for animal masks, it is because animals immediately appear as ritual masks, as a play of signs and a strategy of finery... If we find animals appealing and seductive, it is because they remind us of this ritual arrangement. They do not evoke a nostalgia or the savage state, but a feline, theatrical nostalgia for finery, for the seduction and strategy of ritual forms which transcend all sociality and which, thereby, still enchant us.¹⁶⁰

And yes we have burned our bridges— we have exited the cycle and we have ruptured our exchange with animals. The cycle itself is always symbolic, and is braided through reversible enchainment. Whatever it might be, for a long time one qualified only by one's affiliation within such cycles. And thus, might we once again find the clutch of things not in ourselves or the will that drives us, but rather in the tension between us and other bodies, a tension which is always seductive and careful, if not meticulous?

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹⁵⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 141.

¹⁶⁰ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 89-90.

Conclusion:

“Florence Edenshaw, a contemporary Haida elder who has lived a long life of work and family, was asked by the young anthropologist who interviewed her and was impressed by her coherence, presence, and dignity, “what can I do for self-respect?” Mrs. Edenshaw said, “Dress up and stay at home.” The “home,” of course, is as large as you make it.”¹⁶¹

I write this thesis on the edge of a western most coast—the end of the road, where this great body of land falls off into the deep blue of the Pacific. For a very long time this place has been known as Lekwungen Territory—the grassy lands of Gary oak and Camas meadows, but others refer to it as Victoria now. I was born here in a suburb, built on paved over pumpkin fields and a buried creek. I had a loving family and reliable friends—but I never once felt at home here. I tried finding home—18 on steel wings to Amsterdam to test out my Dutch blood, but just lumbered around awkward and strange. I’ve carried my things on my back for months, I’ve drank back great gallons of black gold to speed up the rushing of the plains, and I’ve cast my nets from the highest buildings and caught nothing but slow phosphorescence...

What does it mean to be a settler? It means to have bloody hands—a descendent of Cain; displaced from home, roaming the harsh earth looking for land to till and working one’s whole life for somewhere to call home. We can settle in restless ways, but will always be looking to roam farther afield, into unknown lands; always ready to migrate. And when we come to the end of land, and are still without a home, we will resolve to rise above the land, to build another version of Eden—to escape our endless exile and reach the heavens instead.

¹⁶¹ Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, (Berkeley: North Point Press, 1990) 24.

If there is a single challenge that has seduced these pages, it is the challenge issued from the settler within me—the relentless readiness to leave and to migrate, as well as the lonesome desire for home. And in part, the reason Nietzsche and Baudrillard are such fascinating characters is because they are able to bring us to a very familiar, but also difficult to speak of place: that sense of homelessness—that dissent from what we wish to be terra-firma, the end of land and the vertigo of the hyperreal.

Nietzsche has no territory, and thus his Zarathustra figure is an ambulatory figure, always walking; crisscrossing those sordid and lonesome mountains in a kind of madness that recalls for me Kerouac's Dean Moriarty, scorching across America in a stolen Cadillac, chasing the empty headed west or the unconditioned south, that sprawling bohemian camp, all in a sacred yesss... *Where the land ends and all surfaces come into each other, madness blooms into a strange flower.* And so Zarathustra first addresses his doctrine of the eternal recurrence to sailors, who, finding themselves at sea, have left behind their homes. And does not philosophy have its origins in dislocation? Is it not a leave-taking from the everyday relations that normally orient and ground us? And is not this leave taking a basis of Nietzsche's thought? He seeks to be master of his own revolution, to be independent of every logic of cause and effect, origin and end. But even this kinsman of the sun— all heat and avowal, seems to spiral inwards at points. We feel the nostalgic vertigo of a previous life— as if the death of the real, the land or territory, illuminates him directly— his shadow does not move with the sun, and does not grow with dusk.¹⁶² In some senses, is he not Baudrillard's ghost haunting the stage?¹⁶³

¹⁶² Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) 155.

¹⁶³ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 60.

I must admit, I am growing impatient with Nietzsche as I become wearier of my own complaining homelessness. *At what point did we come to believe that the world only gives?* The ‘Real’, ‘God’, the cosmos— or as I prefer to call it, ‘home’, was never anything more than shared simulacra; the binding reality we create, which is always enchanting, dual, and never complete. It requires calloused and dirty hands. And so, ‘home’ is of the order of appearances and disappearance; and this requires us to acknowledge it as an absurd order, as well as resist the urge to presuppose its meaning, or cheapen our engagements to assume it as a provider of meaning. We must then sink the notion of home into a reversible flesh, constituting that tissue between the ‘too much at home’, and the ‘too estranged from home’. Home takes as much as it gives, and if it seems estranged and indifferent, you must learn to seduce it, to move to it, and be seduced yourself. This is a meticulous and ongoing process, which demands that we shape a subtler form of subjectivity that finds itself wholly within the tensions of relations and forces enigmatic to us.

I believe Baudrillard’s fatal phenomenology presents the settler with a worthy challenge, which is the challenge to give up the search for ‘the real’, and to find the clutch of things, that is— one’s ground, one’s reality, one’s home, and one’s self, wholly within incomplete tensions of relations and enigmatic forces. This is the potential rendezvous after the orgy, which is always waiting for us. Certainly it is made more difficult in a hyperreal world, but I believe Baudrillard’s work sets in motion some important reflections to help us along, and much of this comes from his subtle phenomenology.

To repeat an important quote; perhaps nothing might yet be outbid and things might be caused to exist, “For nothing exists naturally, things exist because challenged, and because summoned to respond to that challenge. It is by being challenged that the powers of the world, including the gods, are aroused...it is by the challenge that the game and its rules are resurrected.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 91.

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