THE POLITICS OF STYLE: Baudrillard, Metatheory, Autodestruction
by

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Abstract:

This thesis is an examination of the metatheoretical politics practiced by the eminent French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. Through an examination of the changes in Baudrillard's writing styles I demonstrate how his theoretical trajectory leads to progressively more fragmented and autodestructive textual approaches. I then illuminate the metatheoretical assumptions that inform such practices, making specific reference to Baudrillard's interpretation and use of the works of Georges Bataille.

In the Introduction I set the parameters for an investigation of the political relevence of style in theoretical texts. I demonstrate how the early modern political theorist Thomas Hobbes accorded the question of style a place of great importance in his canonical work *Leviathan*.

In Chapter One I explore the work of number of writers who provide conceptual 'doorways' to the problem of style in theoretical texts. In philosophical terms, I explore the discordance and ambiguity between the concepts of art and truth, as well as style and method. Most importantly, I draw from the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze in order to elaborate the concept of 'noology,' the conceptual tool I use to diagnose the existential character of Baudrillard's universe.

In Chapter Two I begin to map the theoretical trajectory that leads Baudrillard to his later stylistic experimentation. I examine a number of his early works in order to show how his analysis of the object form proper to the social relations of political economy lays the groundwork for a later questioning of the form of theoretical texts.

In Chapter Three I examine the work *Symbolic Exchange and Death,* which is a watershed in Baudrillard's theoretical trajectory. There he elaborates his theories of 'simulation' and 'hyperreality', and initiates his first significant stylistic experimentation. I conclude Chapter Three with an elaboration of the anti-Hegelian metaphysics Baudrillard imports from the work of Georges Bataille in an attempt to combat the homeopathic impenetrablility of simulation phenomena.

In Chapter Four I outline Bataille's theory of general economy, as well as his theory of writing, and demonstrate how Baudrillard's writing style, as well as his key concepts describing the possibilty for change, can be understood by reference to Bataille's work.

In my Conclusion I offer a critique of Baudrillard's stylistic experimentation. Using the concept of noology, as well as the work of Nietzsche, I demonstrate how Baudrillard's metatheoretical politics are imbued with *ressentiment*. I argue that Baudrillard is trapped in his own theory of simulation, and plagued by the 'eternal recurrence' of Hegel. In order to escape the rigid and homeopathic structures of identity he sees in modern society, Baudrillard develops, through a reading of George Bataille, a metatheoretical strategy aimed at destroying identity and escaping the ravages of temporal existence. I characterize such a strategy as romantic, and show how, even for Nietzsche, the writer from whom Bataille and Baudrillard draw so much of their inspiration, one who relies on such a destructive strategy takes revenge on all things by forcing his/her own image, the image of torture, on them.

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For Mook Carlson

I was visited by The Power and The Glory
I was visited by a majestic hymn
Great bolts of lightning
lighting up the sky
Electricity flowing through my veins

I was captured by a larger moment
I was seized by divinity's hot breath
Gorged like a lion on experience
Powerful from life
I wanted all of it —
Not some of it

I saw a man turn into a bird
I saw a bird turn into a tiger
I saw a man hang from a cliff by the tips of his toes
in the jungles of the Amazon
I saw a man put a red hot needle through his eye
turn into a crow and fly through the trees
swallow hot coals and breathe out flames
and I wanted this to happen to me

We saw the moon vanish into his pocket
We saw the stars disappear from sight
We saw him walk across water into the sun
While bathed in eternal light
We spewed out questions waiting for answers
creating legends, religions and myths
Books, stories, movies and plays
all trying to explain this

I wanted all of it
not just some of it[1]

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[1] Lou Reed, "Power and Glory," from *Magic and Loss*, New York: WEA music, inc. (1992), © Metal Machine Music Inc.

PREFACE: Directions and Exclusions

> Whether she turns the inside out or the outside in, she is, like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider. For there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in there, an absolute reality out there, or an uncorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another uncorrupted representative.[2]

The work of Jean Baudrillard is gaining notoriety as a classic example of the 'either love or hate' phenomenon. Baudrillard's detractors are vehemently opposed to his work while his supporters are convinced that he has changed the enterprise of theory forever. Seldom is there an ambivalent treatment of his work. Baudrillard's name appears in a ever-widening range of contexts, from art theory to daily newspapers. However, there are very few sustained analyses of his work, and those that exist exhibit the polarized tendencies indicated above. In so doing these works are often polemical and misleading, or, alternately, constitute slightly divergent emulations of Baudrillard's own writings.

The initial point of interest in my own decision to undertake an analysis of Baudrillard's writing lay with a perceived conjunction of styles in the works of Baudrillard and those of Friedrich Nietzsche: both writers exhibit a steadfast irreverence for accepted scholarly styles and methods. Although there are marked differences between the two writers, the similarities led me to investigate the common critical heritage that pushes both to question the mode of representation of thought (style), and to engage in diverse stylistic experimentation.

Baudrillard, like Nietzsche, exhibits different stylistic tendencies at different stages in his career. Baudrillard's earliest works, *Le Système des Objets* (1968), *La Societé de Consommation* (1970),[3] *Pour une Critique de*

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[2] Trinh Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, New York: Routledge (1991), p. 75.

[3] Baudrillard's first two books are in translation only partially. cf. Mark Poster, ed. *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1988), pp.10-56, as well as Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis eds. *The Revenge of the Crystal* London: Pluto Press in association with the Power Institute of Fine

L'Economie du Signe (1972),[4] and *Le Mirroir de la Production* (1973)[5] all exhibit what may be referred to for now as a standard academic style. Following these works, Baudrillard begins to experiment with the style of the text. Beginning with, *L'Echange Symbolique et la Mort* (1976),[6] through *Oblier Foucault* (1977),[7] *A L'Ombre des Majorities Silencieuses* (1978),[8] *De La Seduction* (1979),[9] *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981),[10] *Les Strategies Fatales* (1983),[11] *Amerique* (1986),[12] *L'Autre par lui-meme* (1987),[13] *Cool Memories* (1987),[14] *La Transparence du Mal* (1990),[15] as well as numerous shorter works, Baudrillard develops a stylistic repertoire that goes against the grain of academic writing.

In addition to stylistic experimentation, Baudrillard gradually becomes more and more provocative in his statements, treading none too lightly on ground held sacred by various 'progressive' strains of thought. In so doing, he has left himself open to, indeed seems to be inviting, harsh criticism from people concerned with maintaining and furthering forms of analysis sensitive to uncritical assumptions about class, gender, race and ethnicity.

Arts (1990), pp. 35-98

[4] In translation as, Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the political Economy of the Sign* (trans.: Charles Levin), St. Louis: Telos Press (1981)

[5] In Translation as, Jean Baudrillard,*The Mirror of Production* (trans.: Mark Poster), St. Louis: Telos Press (1975)

[6] In partial translation as Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (trans.: Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman), New York: Semiotext(e) (1983)

[7] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* (trans.: © *Humanities in Society*), New York: Semiotexte (1987)

[8] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (trans.: Paul Foss), New York: Semiotext(e) (1983)

[9] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction* (trans.: Brian Singer), Montreal: Culturetexts (1990)

[10] In partial translation as Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (trans.: Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman), New York: Semiotext(e) (1983)

[11] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (trans.: Philip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski; ed.: Jim Fleming), New York: Semiotext(e) (1990)

[12] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *America* (trans.: Chris Turner), New York: Verso (1988)

[13] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (trans. Bernard and Caroline Shutze, ed.: Sylvere Lotringer), New York: Semiotext(e) (1987)

[14] In translation as Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories* (trans. : Chris Turner), New York: Verso (1990)

[15] Not translated

Further to this, Baudrillard appears to have abandoned any links he might once have had with thought that could be loosely termed 'liberal' or even 'modernist.' In accomplishing this change of direction, Baudrillard has isolated himself from even the most likely sources of support for his project, those writers who can be placed into the loose category of poststructuralism, and has led one commentator to describe his work as "Post-Post-structuralist."[16]

Unconvinced by such double-post labels, and by much of the secondary commentary, I felt it necessary to engage Baudrillard from a different direction than any of those chosen by other students of his work. By making Baudrillard's style my focus, I hoped to diagnose the character(s) of his thought. Baudrillard himself provided me with the clue to such an approach by asserting that the style of a (theoretical) text tends to mirror its 'object.' I felt that if this was the case with Baudrillard's work as well, I could make, following Nietzsche, a backward inference from the style of the text Baudrillard presents, to the essence(s) of the world(s) it describes. Following Deleuze, I wanted to discover the 'noology' of Baudrillard's thought and ask of his work "what does the one who says "this is . . ." want?" In other words, I sought to uncover the nature of the political tension in Baudrillard's text — a tension between what is variously described elsewhere as what 'is' and what Baudrillard wants to see accepted as what 'is' — as well as the political-textual strategy he initiates in an attempt to realize such a goal.

In taking this particular cut into Baudrillard's work — focussing on his style and utilizing his substantive remarks as clues for understanding that style — I have chosen a metatheoretical approach that takes the risk of suspending judgement on Baudrillard's most questionable pronouncements until an understanding of his more general direction(s) can be established. This risk is justifiable given that other writers have given a whole range of often dubious and misleading objections to Baudrillard's more isolated and frequently incomprehensible statements. For example, the fact that

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[16] Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism*, New York, Routledge (1987), p. 182

Baudrillard suggests a woman as an acceptable sacrifice when visiting a desert[17] is certainly troubling and warrants, from my perspective, wholesale condemnation. But it is a further and perhaps more compelling mystery that such a statement occurs in the context of a work which mixes such incomprehensibility with poignant insights that would seem (on the basis of earlier works as well) to emanate from a more caring and humane thinker.

My analysis, unlike any yet published on the subject of Baudrillard's writing, focuses on the textual strategies of the later, more controversial Baudrillard, the Baudrillard characterized as a postmodern guru, as the postmodern scene itself. What is the metatheory operating within Baudrillard's increasingly fragmentary and hyperbolic texts? What image of the world and of thought about that world do such texts evoke? What political philosophy inheres in thought that seemingly aims at its own dissolution? These are the questions I pose to the texts of a revolutionary philosopher who at times appears to have gone mad, at times become violent, sexist, racist and increasingly pessimistic and fatalistic. In a thoroughly modern fashion, my work asks a question of origins to the work of the later Baudrillard. But, in keeping with the heterogeneity of Baudrillard's text, as well as my own, this working through is not — cannot be — a resolution.

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[17] Jean Baudrillard, *America* (trans.: Chris Turner), New York: Verso (1988), p. 66

INTRODUCTION: *Hobbes and the politics of discourse.*

> Man[18], like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to consciousness is only the smallest part of all this - the most superficial and worst part - for only this conscious thinking takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication, and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness.
>
> - Nietzsche[19]

In Chapter V of the *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes introduces the concept of absurdity. He locates the emergence of absurdity in human affairs at a distinction between two types of 'reckoning.' When one runs into problems reckoning without the use of words, "(as when upon the sight of any one thing, wee conjecture what was likely to have preceded, or is likely to follow upon it;) if that which he thought likely to follow, follows not . . . this is called *error*."[20] In the case of problems encountered when reckoning with the use of words, "when we make a general assertion, unless it be a true one, the possibility of it is inconceivable."[21] It is this latter problem that Hobbes calls absurdity.

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[18] In the course of this text various authors who use sexist language will be quoted. While I have striven to eliminate sexist language from my own writing, I have chosen to leave untouched the sexist language of other writers, as well as the questions surrounding the use of such language. I have chosen this approach in order to avoid mutilating other texts. This should not be interpreted as an acceptance of such practices, which mutilate in their own way. On the contrary, the writers to be explored here are open to question on matters of gender and representation as much as, if not more than, their contemporaries. However, much has been written on this subject and need not (out of consideration of space) be reiterated here. For works that from a Feminist perspective generally address the issues explored here cf. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politizpcs. New York: Methuen and Co. (1985).*Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. For a discussion and Feminist critique of the historical context of the work of Georges Bataille cf. Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and its Pleasures*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press (1992). For an exceptional and unique feminist critique of the work of Friedrick Nietzsche cf. Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (trans.: Gillian C. Gill), New York: Columbia University Press (1991)

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (trans.: Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books (1974), p. 298-299

[20] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (ed.: C. B. Macpherson), New York, Penguin Books (1951), p. 112. All references to the *Leviathan* are taken from the C. B. Macpherson edition.

[21] Ibid. p. 113

The distinction Hobbes makes between error and absurdity involves a 'direction' of reason or argument. By direction the following is meant. Error occurs during an attempt by the subject to make sense of or discover, through articulation, the reason intrinsic to a phenomenon. When this attempt fails, error is present. The movement is from reality to thought to word. In the case of absurdity, a different 'direction' is manifested. The proposition, in words, forms the beginning, and the phenomenon is expected to conform to the proposition. Here the movement is from word to thought to reality. In error, reality escapes the attempt of the subject to represent it in thought. In the case of absurdity, a noise is made, the word, and that word either has its significance in the given situation, or it does not, in which case it is absurd.

Error involves the failure of the subject to represent reality in thought; absurdity involves the improper application of established signs of reality to a given phenomenon. Thus, Hobbes says

> And words whereby we conceive nothing but the sound , are those we call *absurd, insignificant,* and *Non-sense*. And therefore if a man should talk to me of a *round Quadrangle; or accidents of Bread in Cheese;* or of *Immaterial Substances*; or of *A free Subject*; *A free Will*; or any *Free,* but free from being hindered by opposition, I should not say he were in an Errour; but that his words were without meaning; that is to say, Absurd.[22]

It should be noted that Hobbes does not call absurd words that are not words in established language, but rather combinations of words which form a phrase or proposition that contradicts the reality already established by his deductive reasoning.

This discussion occurs in the section entitled "Of Reason and Science." Hobbes sets the human subject apart from other animals in its capacity for both absurdity and reason. In both incidences this capacity is related to the word. God having bestowed this unique capacity on Adam, this capacity for naming the myriad things, it is decreed by Hobbes that reason, and therefore science, have their foundation in the proper usage of words. Science, for

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[22] Ibid. p. 113

Hobbes, begins with the word and the signification inherent in it. It follows in Hobbes' argument that the science of politics also begins with the word. Thus it is possible to understand the *Leviathan* as the embodiment and realization of reason in politics, and as synonymous with the body of Christ. The *Leviathan* can be read as a metaphorical progression from the body of the individual, to the body of the Leviathan, to the body of the divinity, with the truth of each juxtaposed with and rooted in the divination of reason in the word. Individual, Leviathan and God are respectively represented by the speaking subject,[23] the word of the sovereign, and the word of God.

The power of Hobbes' analysis of the modern political condition arises partially from his keen awareness of the power of language as an ordering force. Hobbes' rhetorical strategy in the above quoted passage is that of bourgeois modernity: a *rhetoric of exclusion.* 'Obvious' cases of absurdity, such as "accidents of Bread in Cheese" are included in the same taxonomy as hotly contested notions such as "a free Subject" and "a free Will". Moves like this create an association of an ordering idea with an inside of thought — reason, science — and a dissociation of that same idea from an outside of thought — absurdity, insignificance, and non-sense. It has become commonplace[24] to argue that Hobbes begins his analysis with a rigorous analysis of language precisely because he was aware of its political power. By delineating the reasonable and scientific usage of language, Hobbes creates the *mise en scene* of modern political discourse.

From the wings of the political stage, Hobbes sought to direct the way politics was discussed. But many things go on behind the scenes of the political that are highly political practices in their own right. Hobbes declares that, before speech, "consisting of names or appellations, and their connection,"[25] there was no political order, and humans remained at the social and political level of animals. By delimiting the realm of political discourse, Hobbes effectively excludes certain practices from it. He emphasizes

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[23] The key speech-act of the subject being the consent to be governed.

[24] cf. William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, New York: Basil Blackwell (1988)

[25] *Leviathan*, p. 29

the primacy of language over individual expression, and places the individual in the grip of a specific discourse. This bondage is made evident when he describes the abuses of language, such as "when men register their thoughts wrong, by the inconstancy of the signification of their words; by which they register for their conceptions, that which they never conceived," and " when they use words metaphorically; that is, in other sense than that they are ordained for; . . ."[26]

The term 'ordained' is of particular significance. Hobbes appeals both to reason and to God, but reason has replaced God, to a certain extent, as the explicit *referent*. The referent of the divine has been replaced by a new term. For Hobbes, reason is the adding and subtracting of the consequences of words. Beginning with the proper definition of words, the reasonable political scientist adds and subtracts in order to discover the consequences of a complex reality. "In summe, in what matter soever there is a place for *addition* and *substraction*, there is also a place for *Reason*; and where these have no place, there *Reason* has nothing at all to do."[27] Reason proceeds through agreement. Each person must conform his reckoning, or reasoning, "that is, adding and subtracting"[28] of the consequences of generally agreed upon terms, to the general system of reason established in the community. Reasoning proceeds through a conventional method. The scientist makes a truth claim based on the usage of ordained words, and ordained methods of using words.

Hobbes uses a deductive method. He says that the end of reason is not simply the finding of the truth of one or a few consequences, but rather to proceed from those first few truths to more and more complex truths, the certainty of all being grounded in the certainty of that which came before. As a method for discovering the consequences of political activity, Hobbes' deductive method is one based on inclusion and exclusion. The truth agreed upon excludes that which is taken as absurdity. To express oneself in a

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[26] Ibid. p. 102

[27] Ibid. pp. 110-111

[28] Ibid. p. 111

way deviant from the conventional method is to engage in absurdity. Nonetheless, Hobbes recognizes that, since the punishment wreaked at the tower of Babel, language may not always lead to agreement, and an arbiter must be the site of the last appeal.[29]

Given the weight placed on language by Hobbes, and his recognition of its fallibility, it is not surprising that he should place final authority in a single judge, and the final political power in the sovereign. Since, according to Hobbes, the foundation of our political community is language, and language may lead to absurdity, an authoritative force must be present in the community lest controversies either come to blows or remain undecided, "for want of a right reason constituted by nature; so it is also in any debates of any kind whatsoever."[30]

Despite this final pessimism, and his ultimate appeal to authoritative force, Hobbes still engages in a lengthy treatise on the proper and reasonable organization of a political community. Hobbes' fear of the war of all against all leads him to the conclusion that authoritative rule is better than the rule of fallible language and method, yet he reaches his conclusions through the latter medium. Hobbes' political message may be summed up as follows: all political societies are conventional. These conventions, because they are arrived at through extended reasoning, are subject to absurdity. Absurdity, as the greatest enemy of peace and order, leads back to the state of war. What is necessary, then, to avoid the state of war, is a final arbiter (interpreter and therefore, ultimately, giver) of convention, to whom all members of the Covenant abdicate their personal right to establish convention. The commonwealth avoids absurdity, and therefore war, only through the rigorous enforcement of convention.

It may still be said, however, that Hobbes loved truth, and that he loved language as a means to truth. Despite his ultimate skepticism about language as a medium for the realization of science, and his abhorrence of the propensity of language to lead the scientist into absurdity, he still engaged in a

[29] Ibid. p. 111

[30] Ibid. p. 111

science of politics. He rejected out of hand certain aspects of language for the purposes of science. In language, absurdity can be attributed . . .

> . . . to the use of Metaphors, Tropes, and other Rhetoricall figures, in stead of words proper. For though it be lawful to say, (for example) in common speech, *the way goes, or leads hither, or thither, the proverb says this or that* (whereas ways cannot go, nor proverbs speak); yet in reckoning, and seeking of truth, such speeches are not to be admitted; . . . [And also] to names that signify nothing; but are taken up, and learned by rote from the Schooles, as *hypostatical, transubstantiate, consubstantiate, eternal-Now*, and the like canting of Schoolemen.[31]

To describe the philosophical language of schoolmen as canting is plainly a rhetorical strategy. It appears that Hobbes has caught himself up in an absurdity, and much could be done to illustrate Hobbes' use in Leviathan of the literary techniques he decries. For my purposes here, however, Hobbes' approach is paradigmatic of the way scientific discourse creates its own inside and outside. In science, certain ways of expressing thought in language are acceptable, others are not. Further, the types of linguistic techniques Hobbes disallows are excluded on the basis of the requirements of definition, something Hobbes established as fundamental at the beginning of his deductive procedure. Once this is accepted, it follows that tropes are dangerous to scientific expression and reasoning. In the discussion of politics, the use of trope leads to absurdity (war).

What is at issue here is not Hobbes' specific discussion of and argument about the proper and scientific construction and operation of a political community. Rather, my concern is with how Hobbes *orders* discourse about politics. Hobbes places a great deal of what could be called *political* importance on how politics is to be discussed and written about. The creation of an inside and outside of scientific discourse appears to be one of the major objectives of the *Leviathan*, itself a treatise dedicated to the ideal political community. It begins with extended descriptions of the properties of

[31] Ibid. pp. 114-115

language and discourse. Indeed, Hobbes places the root of science in words. He says that the ultimate sum of discourse "is that conditional Knowledge, or Knowledge of the consequence of words, which is commonly called SCIENCE."[32] Science begins with definitions. If discourse begins not with definitions, but with some contemplation or saying merely repeated by the utterer, Hobbes maintains that it is merely opinion.

The political importance of the *Leviathan* lies not just with what Hobbes says about political community as an institution, but also with what he says about language and science as an institution itself heavy with political meaning. For if we are to accept Hobbes' argument about language and its relation to science, our own accounts of politics will necessarily proceed within discursive limits outlined by him. We may not arrive at identical conclusions, but what *will* occur is a delimitation both of who participates and how participation takes place. If politics is to be based on a process of scientific discovery that unfolds according to the criteria set down by Hobbes — as a conditioned discourse among members of a community capable of constituting themselves as such through convention — then the parameters of political activity have to a large degree already been set before any conclusions about politics are reached.

Consequently, it has long been assumed that one of the crucial characteristics of modern political theory is an awareness of and critical engagement with the conditions of its own discourse. If political theorists are to engage in discourse about politics, they must be aware, as Hobbes was, of the political power of words and their arrangement. How theory is done becomes as politically contentious as the conclusions to which theory leads. Political theory, then, has a critical *metatheoretical* element which has the potential to politicize the theoretical enterprise before any prescriptions about politics take place. It is in this sense that the enterprise of political theory may be said to exist in a political condition.

When Hobbes succeeds in convincing us that, in order to be scientific, discourse must proceed in a particular fashion, it may be that a great political

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[32] Ibid. p. 131

victory has already been won. A victory has been won in the sense that certain groups of people, certain approaches to thinking, certain historically rooted methods of decision making and discourse, have been successfully excluded from the dominant discourse about politics. What has been created is an *inside* of the theoretical enterprise, as well as an *outside*. Inside the theoretical enterprise, the discourse proceeds according to the accepted metatheoretical parameters. Outside, discourse occurs, but it is immediately delegitimized by virtue of its failure to conform to the dictates of accepted metatheory.

In his discussion of language, Hobbes refers constantly to the conventional characters of language and science. Seen in this fashion, Hobbes project is as much concerned with establishing a convention as it is with acquiring knowledge about something. Political theory, then, as practiced by Hobbes, is an *aesthetic* phenomenon in the sense that it is a created form. It is a process through which conventions, human constructs, artifices, myths, rituals and the like are established. To say that politics *is* something is, for Hobbes, as much a process of establishing a political convention as it is a process of describing and accounting for the reality of politics. Indeed, the line between the two is quite indistinct.

It is at this point the term 'metatheory' acquires its relevance. If the enterprise of political theory can be seen both as the establishing of a ground for the acquisition of knowledge about politics, as well as a process of establishing convention, then political theory becomes something more than epistemological and hypothetical. It becomes also a creative/interpretive act. Once it is accepted that political theory not only assists us in acquiring knowledge about politics, but that it also *gives meaning* to politics by reflecting in form the politics it describes, discussions can begin about how theory goes about giving meaning to politics. These discussions are metatheoretical.

Metatheoretical discussions about political theory concern the politics of doing theory. They concern the creation of an inside and an outside of theoretical discourse. They concern the establishment or delineation of the

identity of theory as against that which is *different*. For example, the identity of theory for Hobbes is that type of discourse which proceeds from firm definitions, to deductive propositions and syllogisms, to demonstrable conclusions. Much time is spent by Hobbes decrying that which constitutes the non-identity of theory, that which is different from theory proper, or as he calls it, science or philosophy.

The work of Jean Baudrillard has come under scrutiny and attack as much for the form of its expression as for what it is interpreted as saying. Baudrillard is criticized for his style much in the same way Hobbes criticizes various styles of discourse as being unscientific. Hobbes, therefore, is a good doorway into the discussion that follows precisely because his work is one of the earliest examples of what, for Baudrillard, constitutes the metatheoretical attempt to simulate a new referent, a new *real*, from which we have become separated by the death of God. For Hobbes, that new referent is Nature, and reason is its interpreter. As will be shown in what follows, this move of establishing the new referent, and of prescribing the path toward a reconciliation with it, constitutes the birth of the modern political moment, which is the moment of ideology. Most importantly, Hobbes' own discourse can be shown to reflect the new referent in its organization. The deductive edifice itself is not unlike the *Leviathan*. Hobbes' text reflects the form of its object in the image of thought, or *noology*, offered by its textual form. The *Leviathan* seeks to offer a counterfeit of Nature and its workings in just the same way that the Commonwealth does. For Baudrillard, this metatheoretical move, this attempt on the part of the theorist to emulate in *textual form* the assumptions about reality which inform the text's movement, is the modern political moment *par excellence*.

CHAPTER ONE: *The politics of style*

The preface — It is appropriate, given the discourse to be explored in the pages to follow, to begin at the end of the thesis and the beginning of *writing*. This preface is an announcement. It announces an intention on my part to pursue in form the themes that will dominate the content of the discussion taking place here. The discussion will be one about *writing*, in the special sense of *écriture*, but what will also occur is *writing* (*écriture*). This follows from, and transgresses, an understanding that what I am to accomplish here is a demonstration of my thesis. Within the convention of the discipline, or the discipline of convention, a demonstration of a thesis involves a preamble, a statement of thesis, deductive or dialectical expositional text(s) in support of the thesis and, finally, a conclusive rearticulation of the thesis taking into account what has gone before. This is the movement of demonstration in conventional form. This movement will occur here. A further demonstration will also occur and its movement will be one of transgression.

The position (or rather 'posture') to be taken up and defended here necessitates not only demonstration but also a *demonstration*. In this fashion, the criteria of the discipline will not only be satisfied, but also transgressed through active participation in, or enactment of, *writing* in the many forms manifested both in the works of Jean Baudrillard, as well as the political/theoretical/fictive matrix which grounds the figure of his *writing*. In some ways, however, even this conventional appeal to a gestalt of tradition must be transgressed in the face of the post-phenomenological, post-subject genealogy of writing taking place in the work of writers conventionally corralled under the rubric (read: red, alert, danger!) of post-structuralism/post-modernism. Furthermore, the convention itself must survive in heterogeneity as the other of what is being demonstrated, given that the movement of the thesis is one in which the inadequacy of demonstration is a prime issue, an issue that only achieves its demonstration

through the failure of demonstration, and through the necessity of a *demonstration*.

This preface, then, occurs at the end of the thesis and the beginning of *writing* by announcing my intention not only to demonstrate a thesis, but to *write* something that is necessarily the other of the thesis which serves as its frame, border and identity. To engage in *writing* in pursuing the end of the thesis involves a transgression of the conventional form of writing. But to appeal to the writing of others, to *writing* that has taken place, may be simply to pit one convention against another. It may simply be an example of the dynamic of modernity that sees the transgressive aesthetic turn back and 'bite its own tail' by surreptitiously rejoining tradition. In addition, there can be little doubt that something further is at stake when a distinction is made between conventional form and formless content; that 'something' is the survival of the move which saw method become separated from the fact, and the subject become separated from the truth. In this sense, for *writing* to irrupt on these pages, the fact must become the fact of method and the truth must become the truth of heterogeneity or, rather, its own impossibility.

Baudrillard's project —

> But science, spurred by its powerful illusion. speeds irresistibly toward its limits where optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, e're half their time and inevitably, such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination. When they see to their horror how logic curls up at these boundary points and bites its own tail — suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and a remedy
>
> Nietzsche[33]

[33] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, (trans. Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books (1967), pp. 97-98

"MIND THE GAP."[34] These words, inscribed in large print on an otherwise blank page, close Jean Baudrillard's recent work *Xerox and Infinity*. The essay is about the imperialization of human cognitive functions by electronic media, especially computer networks and their virtually unlimited software applications. Baudrillard is making a play on a sign erected for the benefit of London subway travellers. It means, "beware of this small open space that separates you from the hurtling machine." The gap is the space between the human and the machine, a space that is becoming smaller, placing us in greater danger of being struck down. Where some might see this interface as the growth of human potential,[35] Baudrillard sees its demise. The proliferation and expansion of the individualized electronic environment is, for Baudrillard, the harbinger of the "virtual" human, a being whose capacity for innovative thought disappears in a correlate fashion with the steady creeping of microcircuitry. 'Mind the gap' is a watch-phrase for the future of critical thinking as Baudrillard sees it.

What is disappearing, to put it in the simplest terms, is 'space.' The process initiated by people like Hobbes, the builders of systems of thought, has been taken up and, to use McLuhan's term, 'outered.'[36] Not only are thought and language structured and controlled in the way attempted by Hobbes and others, but the burden or responsibility of conformity has been removed and placed in the machine. The machine, for Baudrillard, has become the final and most potent form of the 'thought police,' to borrow Orwell's term.[37]

The line of argument that leads Baudrillard to this pessimistic diagnosis of the 'electronic age' need not be reproduced, for the moment. Rather, it is presented by way of initiation into the 'problematique' that is at the heart of much if not all of Baudrillard's recent work. Minding the gap has become, after years of working within the 'striated space' of institutionalized

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[34] Jean Baudrillard, *Xerox and Infinity* (trans: Agitac) London: Touchepas [Pages not numbered]

[35] McLuhan's technological humanism for example.

[36] cf. Marshall McLuhan, *Counterblast*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, inc. (1969), p. 39

[37] The two-way VDT is interpreted in Baudrillard's work in the same fashion as Orwell describes it in *1984*: as a mirror of identity.

critical practice, the prime motivation of Baudrillard's recent search for the last remaining 'smooth spaces' for thought. Like Nietzsche and others, Baudrillard's main 'theoretical' concern is now to leave the safe ground of structured debates, the 'ground zero' of political discourse, in an attempt to rethink that ground, and possibly to create new ground. Baudrillard is attempting to achieve a *radical pathos of distance*. Once there, however, he has shown a propensity for leaving, for forgetting, and for unlearning, in order to initiate the process anew.

Baudrillard's introduction of the virtual human is itself symbolic of a particular problematique that, it has been argued,[38] forms the central problem of much of what has been labelled 'poststructuralist' theory, especially when that theory is in dialogue with Hegelian philosophy. Foucault, for example, notes that

> . . . our age, whether through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or through Nietzsche, is attempting to flee Hegel . . . We have to determine the exact extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.[39]

The creeping of microcircuitry metaphorizes a condition in which the theorist or other political actor exists and struggles to escape. This condition is one of incarceration in what Frederic Jameson has called the 'Prison-House of Language.'[40] When language is exclusively understood as a social phenomenon, as something that precedes particular expression, the problem of how the particular can find expression as particular (as difference) becomes extremely difficult.

This difficulty is exacerbated by an influential reading of Hegel delivered in France by Alexander Kojève during the early part of this century. Kojève's Hegelianism set the stage in France for a series of attacks on Hegel as

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[38] cf. Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism*, New York, Routledge (1987).

[39] Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern*, London: Duke University Press, (1991), p.11

[40] cf. Frederick Jameson, *The Prison House of Language*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1974)

the paradigm bourgeois philosopher of identity and annihilated difference. One of the earliest and most radical of these is Georges Bataille's extreme anti-Hegelianism, a position informed by a reading of the master/slave dialectic and of *Aufhebung* in general which depicts an absolute accumulation of negativity in identity. Bataille builds an entire philosophy in an attempt to escape the reduction of being to an identity, and posits a form of freedom — 'sovereignty' — which transcends the master/slave dialectic.[41]

Many strategies have been deployed in the face of such constraining assumptions, but most take as their founding moment the necessary awareness of the conditions of discourse outlined in the introduction of this essay. An awareness of the political nature of these conditions is taken as given by most of the writers to be addressed here. Thus, in the meaning proposed by Karl Marx, these theorists have attempted to construct radical critiques: they have attempted to grasp by the root the conditions of the discourse of their day. Equally, and perhaps less successfully, they have attempted to account for change. In other words, they have attempted to posit the conditions for the transgression of the discursive structure(s) of the day. Such radical critiques have appeared under the banners of archaeology, genealogy, deconstruction, various types of feminism, as well as others.

In the case of the work of Jean Baudrillard, the elucidation of these two moments (the account of the conditions of discourse as well as those allowing for its transgression) takes one of the more novel forms now to be witnessed in the realm of social and political theory. This thesis is concerned to show that this unusual style is the direct result of Baudrillard's delving into the roots of the discourse of his day. Baudrillard's style will be the point of departure because, as I argue at the end of this chapter, it is simultaneously the least understood and most polemically treated aspect of his work. Among those who would challenge Baudrillard's contribution to theory, his stylistic experimentations are met with indignation, puzzlement and outrage;

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[41] This theme permeates Bataille's work from the 1930's onward. The best example is his major work, the three volumes of *The Accursed Share,* New York: Zone Books 1989 & 1991. For a concise, if unelaborated statement of the problem, cf. *Theory of Religion,* New York: Zone Books(1989), pp. 27 - 42.

mainly, they are taken as signs of Baudrillard's theoretical failure and disintegration. Among those who would support Baudrillard's endeavors, the stylistic experimentation is, with few exceptions, misunderstood. This misunderstanding rests on a general failure to make appropriate and needed reference to an important prefiguration of Baudrillard's work in the writings of George Bataille. This prefiguration will be the subject of Chapter Four.

Before any discussion of Baudrillard's theory of subaltern expression can be begun, it is necessary to come to terms with his vision of the discursive conditions against which such expression might irrupt. Indeed, Baudrillard's own theoretical trajectory conditions the structure of this thesis. His early works are examples of his own attempts at theorizing the conditions of discourse. The theses of 'the general political economy of the sign' and of 'the orders of simulacra' are his two main attempts in this direction, and their elucidation respectively comprise Chapters Two and Three of this essay.

Baudrillard's 'genealogical' analyses lead him to increasingly pessimistic conclusions about the possibility (and even desirability) of any form of emancipatory political practice. One of the most persistent themes in his later work consists in demonstrating the futility of the various strategies of emancipation developed by theorists who start, with Baudrillard, from assumptions about the nature of language and its centrality to questions of social and political change. The reasons for this increasing pessimism are rooted in an aspect of Baudrillard's work ignored by most commentators and left undeveloped by Baudrillard himself. That aspect is the critical role played by George Bataille's theory of the general economy in the development of Baudrillard's later positions. Even more importantly, however, there is a theory of *writing* which emerges from Bataille's work that plays an equally important prefigurative role for Baudrillard.

Baudrillard's attempts to discover the conditions of (revolutionary) discourse lead him to an understanding of the modern condition (both historically and today) that places a philosophical analysis of the *object* at the heart of any strategy aimed at initiating change. For Baudrillard, the way humans relate to and appropriate the object world, and thus constitute their

social relations, becomes the central concern. This concern leads him in two directions. The first is an extended analysis of various object forms that hold sway in different modern configurations of social relations. The second is a series of metatheoretical postulations and strategies aimed at unearthing the complicity of critical theoretical writing with the object form it addresses.

For Baudrillard, the style of a text tends to mirror the object form (and therefore social relation) it engages. Truly revolutionary writing must escape in all respects the mirror of what it critiques. In an attempt to escape the mirror of political economy Baudrillard deploys a strategy very much in keeping with project of Georges Bataille, itself an anti-Hegelian critique of political economy and its style. As I will show in Chapter Four, such a strategy emphasizes a teleological movement of all accumulation toward disaccumulation, and thus attempts to mirror this 'absolute expenditure' in the style of the text. In my conclusion I will attempt to provide a critique of such stylistic maneuvers by interpreting them as a politics of *ressentiment*.

Before proceeding to a demonstration of this development in Baudrillard's writing, I will first explore a number of theoretical 'doorways' that, although heterogeneous, provide useful frameworks for approaching Baudrillard's work. Gilles Deleuze's idea of "noology" will be presented in an attempt to provide a starting point from which to identify and critique the aspirations of Baudrillard's text. I will use Deleuze's early, quasi-deconstructive method to try and grasp the sentiment at the heart of Baudrillard's project. Deleuze's work is especially relevant to a work concerned with style since it aims at identifying the 'image of thought' in a particular thinker's work. Style will be shown to be an important element in projecting such an image.

Calinescu's work on modernity will provide a very general field in which to situate Baudrillard, and will allow me to demonstrate that his work emerges in the context of a long tradition of 'aesthetic modernism'. Such a tradition is witnessed in many forms in the modern period and Baudrillard's work exemplifies at least two of these.

Throughout the discussion of both Calinescu and Deleuze, the work of Friedrich Nietzsche will emerge and reemerge as the topic of discussion. The relevance of Nietzsche for this project as a whole cannot be understated. If theoretical discourse were to be viewed as a clashing of giants through their minions, this thesis bears witness to a clash of Hegel and Nietzsche. Nietzsche's 'most multifarious art of style' prefigures the work of many of the theorists to be discussed in this essay, including Bataille and Baudrillard. I hope to demonstrate this prefigurative importance through a process of entry and exit, submergence and re-emergence in relation to Nietzsche's text, and will ultimately deploy a reading of Nietzsche against Baudrillard himself.

Modernity —

> Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable . . .
>
> - Baudelaire[42]

> When one has no character one has to apply a method.
>
> - Albert Camus[43]

Perhaps no thinker epitomizes the critical stance of a politics of style better than Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's writings encapsulate and critically develop three moments of resistance: opposition to tradition, opposition to the bourgeois modern claims to rationality, utility and progress, as well as opposition to Nietzsche himself, in that his project has the capability of generating a new authority or of deteriorating into decadent forms. Indeed, the themes developed in Nietzsche's work are echoed and developed throughout Baudrillard's work, as is the case with many others who have been labelled 'poststructuralists.'

The political importance of style is not readily apparent because style is generally considered to be something different from method. It seems odd to say that a scientific method is a style, mainly because the style of scientific

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[42] Quoted in Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Durham: Duke University Press (1987), p. 48

[43] Albert Camus, *The Fall* (trans.: Justin O'Brien), New York: Vintage Books (1956)

discourse is reified. Style, for the proponent of method, implies a subjective and arbitrary application of literary techniques that are concerned with form and the beautiful. Scientific discourse, on the other hand, is not considered literary. Nonetheless, as I have shown in the case of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the control of style (or the 'elimination' of it) has crucial political relevance. As soon as claims to stylistic validity have been made and accepted, all writing, in order to have even a hope of being considered a vehicle for 'truth,' must conform to an accepted style. But what if a particular writer sees that the path to 'truth' is obscured or blocked by the *style* within which that truth is to appear? In this case, it may be said that the question of style is politically activated.

Truth-claims are, in themselves, political phenomena. This should be self-evident. Discourses about politics, as well as politics itself (the distinction here is not clear) constitute, in many ways, a series of competing truth-claims. In the political 'arena,' for example, the truth-claims of socialism are set against the truth-claims of liberalism (assuming, for a moment, that we know the difference between the two). It may be, however, that once the discourse about politics is initiated and the form set, as they are in the *Leviathan*, an important political 'decision' has already been made. This argument can be extended beyond the realm of strictly political discourse as well, since 'politics' may be conceptualized as more than just the modern political moment of the abstract State. Any discourse about the way society is ordered or disciplined can be taken as political, even if that discourse purports to be about economics, psychology, metaphysics or what have you. The realm of the political, taken as such, can be extended beyond the bourgeois moment of politics, to the underpinnings of society as a whole, and the way those underpinnings are identified and reified.

This is not to say, however, that all things are political. Taking such a position runs the risk of purging the term politics of any practical meaning whatsoever. The political moment being identified here is rather the dialectic of the ordering act and the resistance to it. Taking the question of style as a

political question is, therefore, a move toward the politicization, or re-politicization, of style and of writing in the realms of scientific, philosophical and theoretical discourse, realms where quite often these questions are presumed to have been answered. Nietzsche's reaction to the limitations and short-comings of 'systems' of thought and of writing, in this context, is a political act. Nietzsche's style is politically active in the sense that it challenges the ordering force of conventional discourse, whether that discourse is *about* politics or not.

Bourgeois modernism, as an ordering force, loses sight of the fact that it is a *style* of being, and views itself, rather, as *Being*. Nietzsche opposes his style of thought and writing to the reified style of bourgeois modernism. He explicitly recognizes the importance of style, although the political importance of style is only implicit (the 'political' being defined in his work as mainly the politics of the bourgeoisie). Nietzsche's assault on the accepted stylistic approach for scientific and philosophical discourse is contained not just in what he says about the style of discourse in his day, but also in his own multivariate stylistic experimentations.

> To communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs - that is the meaning of every style; and considering the multiplicity of inward states is exceptionally large in my case, I have many stylistic possibilities - the most multifarious art of style that has ever been at the disposal of one man. *Good* is any style which really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the gestures . . . [44]

This passage illuminates not only Nietzsche's style at its hyperbolic peak, but also one of the reasons for such hyperbole. For Nietzsche, style is important in communicating. Since the inward states of the author differ, and the communication of such states is important for our species, the styles of expression should differ as well.

This may seem rather banal. But in relation to the question at hand,

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[44] Friedrich Nletzsche, *Ecce Homo* (trans. Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books (1989), p. 265

that of the politics of style in theoretical discourse, an assertion about a necessary connection between the expression of thought and style has the potential to create controversy. One of the most frequent margin commentaries on academic papers has to do with style: "This is an inappropriate style for an academic paper." Why is this important? Hobbes recognized its importance and sought to control the stylistic content of discourse about politics. He sought to eliminate the 'aesthetic' techniques and failed to recognize, or at least to admit, that his own discourse was governed by its own aesthetic: the aesthetic of deductive logic. An internally consistent deductive edifice can be viewed as a beautiful thing. It has the capability of enrapturing an audience, and of attracting supporters who may not even be familiar with or understand all of its intricacies and implications. Such an edifice may also constitute the tomb of thought. Certain 'expressions' or ways of understanding our world may not emerge from it given the restrictions that constrain its operation. For example, it may be argued that paradox is a condition of life, but there is no room for paradox in a deductive system. A 'true' expression of a phenomenon does not allow for its *being-in-paradox*.[45]

Thus Nietzsche deploys a range of criticisms against systematic thought, and in his many stylistic variations presents himself as what Walter Kaufmann calls a "problem-thinker."[46] This passage from Kaufmann's book is an excellent description of the practical consequences of the use of a 'problematic' style versus a 'systematic' or 'theorematic' style:

> Yet grave difficulties are encountered when one tries seriously to follow Nietzsche's thought. As soon as one attempts to penetrate beyond the clever epigrams and well turned insults to grasp their consequences and coordinate them, one is troubled. Other thinkers generally accomplish this coordination for us, and if we follow their arguments, they will show us the connection that

[45] An entirely new direction in science is emerging from the refuse left over from such exclusionary operations. Chaos theory studies the non-linear, heterogeneous becoming of matter, the sometimes fatal detritus created by activity below the maximum allowable fluctuation in the equations of linear physics. Cf. James Gleick, *Chaos*, New York: Viking Penguin Inc. (1987)

[46] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1974), p. 82

> leads from one claim to the next. Frequently we may not be convinced, or we detect loopholes or inconsistencies; yet we feel for the most part that we recognize what the author is driving at. Thus it is perhaps easier to form an opinion of the general meaning of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* than to grasp the precise significance of any number of sentences in that work - while in Nietzsche's books the individual sentences seem clear enough and it is the total design that puzzles us. [47]

In Nietzsche's work, the aphorism is a stylistic tendency, as are hyperbole, metaphor and various other tropes and figures. A discussion of Nietzsche's style would be an important step in understanding or interpreting his thought. Aside form this brief mention, however, Kaufmann turns his discussion from style to *method*. It could be argued that the distinction between the two is not perfectly clear. If by method it is meant "the orderly arrangement of ideas"[48] and by style it is meant "the manner of writing,"[49] then there is clearly some interpenetration between the two terms in relation to any philosophical, theoretical or scientific text.

If it can be accepted that a philosophical system is an aesthetic phenomenon, and that its power to convince is rooted in its aesthetic nature just as it is in reason or science, then the question of the difference between style and method becomes truly difficult. Nietzsche's writing is certainly not without method in the normal sense defined above. His texts are structured in a particular way, as Kaufmann and others have demonstrated. Given Nietzsche's own pronouncements about style, it is perhaps his interpreters who are concerned with demonstrating his 'method', and not Nietzsche himself.

One thing is certain, however: in conventional theoretical terms, 'method' is the realm of the ordinary, the standard, the scientific, the acceptable, and 'style' is the realm of the extra-ordinary, the off-base, the extra-scientific and the unacceptable. Method is the proper vehicle of the

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[47] Ibid. p. 72

[48] *Concise Oxford*, Oxford: Clarendon Press p. 746

[49] Ibid. p. 1212

theorematic, and style is the vehicle of the *aesthetic*. Style, in this sense, can be used as a pejorative term aimed at undermining the validity of an argument. For example, one might characterize a position as 'rhetorical' or 'hyperbolic.' This would be tantamount to saying that the only support for a position is its aesthetic value, as opposed to its rootedness in some 'truth.' Similarly, a 'problematic' style may be criticized for having an inadequate method, or no method. The moment of pure politics here has to do with having the 'right' to say that one type of thinking and writing is methodical, and another stylized, when the dispute is perhaps more fundamentally about a political strategy of thinking and writing that is privileged as the path to 'truth'. This would appear to be one reason why Kaufmann is so intent on demonstrating the existence of Nietzsche's 'dialectical' method, when Nietzsche himself is clearly more interested in the necessity of giving a heterogeneous style to one's character and one's writing in approaching and thinking through the problems of existence.[50]

The point is this. The political moment in debates about method has its root in a *creative/interpretive* act. This creative/interpretive act involves the establishment of the accepted practices of thought and writing. Hobbes privileges a certain style of writing and discourse which becomes, by virtue of its 'scientific' rigor, a method; it transcends style and metamorphoses into a 'truth', or a path to 'truth'. All else constitutes the path to absurdity. The style that is privileged becomes the methodical style. Thus it is important for Kaufmann to say that "Nietzsche employed the style of decadence methodically."[51]

It is necessary to this project to remember how Nietzsche conceives the relation between art and truth; necessary not just for an understanding of

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[50] cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, New York: Vintage Books (1974), pp. 232-233. Here Nietzsche speaks of the necessity of giving style to one's character. The emphasis is on *giving*, as opposed to *receiving*. The giving of style to one's character is valorized as a characteristic of the free-spirit who recognizes the need for style, and the constraints of style, but who also recognizes the need for making this style yourself, as opposed to either allowing others to control your own style or rejecting stylistic constraint altogether, both of which being manifestations of *ressentiment* and the herd mentality. This distinction will be of paramount importance for the conclusion of this essay.

[51] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 79

Nietzsche, but also in order to present a critical doorway into Baudrillard's work. Baudrillard's politics of style depends on the conflation of the moments of art and truth in a total project of transgression. He aims not just to change our thinking, but to change the conditions for our thinking as well. The relation between art and truth is important for an understanding of how Baudrillard and others believe such conditions can be altered. Nietzsche's writings on this relation are voluminous, as are the interpretations. One interpretation, developed by Gilles Deleuze, will be briefly recounted here in order to show the ambiguity of the terms art and truth.

Noology —

> Observe the ages in the history of peoples when the scholar steps into the foreground: they are ages of exhaustion, often of evening and decline.
>
> - Nietzsche

In his work *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze offers an interpretation of the relation between art and truth in Nietzsche's works. He counsels us, in interpreting the world around us, to follow Nietzsche's lead and ask not "what is art?" or "what is truth?" but rather to pay attention to what is *called* art and what is *called* truth. In effect, this involves a privileging of the question "which one . . .?" over "what is . . .?". According to Deleuze, this leads us out of the realm of metaphysics or the ideal and into the realm of the particular and empirical. The reason for for asking "which one . . . ?" is rooted in an understanding that the essence of something, 'what it is,' is always an essence for someone and not an essence in itself. The essence of something is always an essence in relation to a value, even if that value is simply one of pure knowledge. Thus when someone says "this is . . " there is always a value being ascribed to it. Therefore, the essence of something is always an essence *for me*, or for the subject of the knowledge of the essence.

Once the perspectival nature of knowledge is accepted, or at least

entertained, it becomes politically relevant, in the sense of politics described above, to ask the question "what does the one who says "this is . . ." want?". In other words, it can be enlightening to view an essence as symptomatic of the will of a subject. To ask the question "what does the one who says "this is . . ." want?" is not to designate an object in itself as an end of that person's wanting or willing, but rather, again, a value or a quality. Thus, the answer to "what is . . .?," as an expression of a value, exists in relation to another value. Taken as a whole, the process becomes constitutive of a system of values and their possible realization; a type of life is described.[52]

Socrates' answer (as interpreted by Nietzsche) to the question of the relation between thought and life provides a helpful example of this type of backward inference. Such a backward inference also leads to an image of thought or *noology* that follows from Socrates' pronouncement. "In Socrates thought serves life, whereas in all previous philosophers life served thought."[53] According to Deleuze, the distinction between these two answers to the question of the relation of thought and life leads Nietzsche to a distinction between *active* and *reactive* life and, accordingly, active and reactive thought. If thought is seen to be in the service of life, then life is taken as the object of knowledge. Knowledge becomes the end of life itself. This form of knowledge can be seen as something that exists against life, in the sense that knowledge is taken as the judge of life. If our knowledge is taken as something which is to govern life, to control it, knowledge thus elevated above life becomes reactive. It serves to delimit life and channel its energies through predestined paths of living. This is perhaps an inevitable form of living and, as Nietzsche notes, the only way living is at all possible in human societies. It is this image of thought in the service of life – this *discipline of the mind* – that Nietzsche speaks of in glowing terms:

> *The Greatest Danger* - If the majority of men had not always considered the discipline of their minds - their "rationality" - a matter of pride, an obligation, and a virtue, feeling insulted or embarrassed by all

[52] Ibid. p. 78

[53] quoted in Ibid. p. 100

> fantasies and debaucheries of thought because they saw themselves as friends of "healthy common sense," humanity would have perished long ago. The greatest danger that always hovered over humanity and still hovers over it is the eruption of madness - which means the eruption of arbitrariness in feeling seeing and hearing, the enjoyment of the mind's lack of discipline, the joy in human unreason. Not truth and certainty are the opposite of the world of the madman, but the universality and the universal binding force of a faith; in sum, the non-arbitrary character of judgements. And man's greatest labour so far has been to reach agreement about very many things and submit to a law of agreement - regardless of whether these things are true or false.[54]

Conversely, if the question is answered differently, namely, in a way that sees life as being in the service of thought, a different noology is present. In the first case, that of thought serving life, the knowledge that accumulates as a result of thought serves to delimit the realm of thought itself. Thought, which was taken to serve life, comes to be constrained by life as life is interpreted by thought. Thus, "reason sometimes dissuades and sometimes forbids us to cross certain limits: because it is useless (knowledge is there to predict) because it would be evil (life is there to be virtuous), because it is impossible (there is nothing to say or think behind the truth)."[55] Life taken as serving thought, however, puts life in a position of serving as the active force of thought. This would be "a thought that would affirm life instead of a knowledge that is opposed to life."[56] The result of such thought would not necessarily be knowledge in the reactive sense but rather the discovering and inventing of new forms of life. In the sense described above, new answers to the question "which one . . .?" are the results of this type of thought, taken as

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[54] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 130

[55] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 100. Deleuze, in cooperation with Guattari, puts the relation in different terms in *Nomadology*: "A "method" is the striated space of the *cogitatio universalis*, and traces a path that must be followed from one point to another. But the form of exteriority [active thought] situates thought in a smooth space that it must occupy without counting, and for which there is no possible method, no conceivable reproduction, but only relays, intermezzos, resurgences" (p. 45). This is further developed in the relation of the maxim to the aphorism: "The aphorism, for example, is very different from the maxim, for the maxim, in the republic of letters, is like an organic state act or sovereign judgement, whereas an aphorism always awaits its meaning from a new external force . . . (p. 44)."

[56] Ibid. p. 101

the creation of new value estimations behind the answer "this is . . ." This would be active thought, the positive creative thought fueled by the affirmative power of life that is constrained by knowledge. This is the type of thought which Nietzsche speaks of in the second part of the aphorism quoted above.

> The image of things still shifts and shuffles continually, and perhaps even more so and faster from now on than ever before. Continually, precisely the most select spirits bristle at this universal binding force - the explorers of *truth* above all. Continually this faith, as *everybody's* faith, arouses nausea and a new lust in subtler minds; and the slow tempo that is here demanded for all spiritual processes, this image of the tortoise, which is here recognized as the norm, would be quite enough to turn artists and thinkers into apostates. It is in these impatient spirits that a veritable delight in madness erupts because madness has such a cheerful tempo. Thus the virtuous intellects are needed - oh let me use the most unambiguous word - what is needed is *virtuous stupidity*, stolid metronomes for the slow spirit, to make sure that the faithful of the great shared faith stay together and continue their dance. It is a first rate need which demands and commands this. We others are *the exception and the danger* - and we need eternally to be defended. - Well, there are actually things to be said for the exception, *provided that it never wants to become the rule*.[57]

It will be noted that Nietzsche does not exclusively privilege one form of thought over the other. Both reactive and active thought are seen as necessary. The moments of active and reactive thought can be seen to correspond with what has been called aesthetic modernism and bourgeois modernism, at least insofar as they relate to modernity. Bourgeois modernism structures the reactive form of thought, the thought which invests life in its knowledge — its reason and science. Aesthetic modernism can be seen as active thought. At all levels the line between these two moments is indistinct and the site of struggle — the gap.

Nietzsche finds the symptoms of this struggle in the life of 'thinkers'. "What is surprising in these lives is that two opposed instincts, which pull in opposite directions, seem to be forced to walk under the same yolk: the

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[57] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 130

instinct that leads to knowledge is constantly constrained to abandon the ground where man habitually lives and to throw itself into the uncertain, and the instinct that wills life is forced to ceaselessly grope in the dark for a new place to establish itself."[58] It is on this ground that the struggle of modernity is continually reformed around the boundary between art and truth. According to Deleuze, it is active life that Nietzsche sees as the soil of art, and art as the expression of active life.

The relation of art to truth, then, can be seen as one of political conflict and renewal. At the root of art, for Nietzsche, is a conflict of values: between the values hidden beneath the knowledge of reactive thought and the valuations continually being made in active thought. Nietzsche's notion of art is distinct from other conceptions, especially those that see art as a healing or soothing process, as in romanticism. For Nietzsche, art is stimulating; it stimulates the creative/interpretive powers of life. This is illustrated in many of Nietzsche's pronouncements on art and style, but his own style illustrates this as well. The aphorism can be seen as as a style that is designed to achieve the stimulation of the latter type of life in the reader. As Nietzsche says in *Human, All To Human*, the incomplete form of an idea is sometimes more effective than a completely worked out system. "[M]ore is left for the beholder to do, he is impelled to continue working on that which appears before him so strongly etched in light and shadow, to think it through to the end, and to overcome even that constraint which has hitherto prevented it from stepping forth fully formed."[59]

More will be said on Nietzsche's style below when the issue of decadence is explored, but it is important here to note that the notion of art in Nietzsche is fundamentally related to thought, since thought is originally an artistic or aesthetic process — a creative process that attaches valuations to essences, or that makes valuations in the absence of any claims about essence. Philosophy, then, as well as the conception of politics present in this essay, is

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[58] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 101

[59] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (Trans.: R. J. Hollingdale), New York: Cambridge University Press (1989), p. 92

an artistic process of revaluation. As Deleuze notes, "in Nietzsche, 'we the artists' = 'we the seekers after knowledge or truth' = 'we the inventors of the new possibilities of life.'"[60] Since thought, in its active form, is conceived as an aesthetic process that animates our engagement with each other and the world, it is important to understand or be aware of and even contest the image of thought that constrains our thinking, and that prevents active thought. It is these constraints that are perpetuated in reactive thought: Deleuze calls it the dogmatic image of thought.

The dogmatic image of thought encompasses three interactive moments of constraint or closure. The first moment establishes the thinker as having access to some innate truth. The concept is viewed as having an *a priori* nature. Thus, the thinker has only to think 'truly' or 'really' in order to access truth or essence. The second moment involves the delineation of that which causes the thinker to stray from thinking 'truly' or 'really'. For example: the body as a filter of truth (reflection); passion as that which taints thought through pollution of 'real' interests; and the sensuous nature of life as the introduction of purely subjective ends. The third moment reveals that which allows the thinker to avoid the traps of the second moment and to access the first. This is the moment of method. Proper method is seen as a vehicle, which surely is an artifice, but nonetheless one that allows the thinker to 'get back' to the 'truth' or the 'real'. Method erases all of the particular pollutants that cloud the universal real. Time and place are erased through method in the sense that the real exists at all times and in all places. Gone is the particularity of experience that allows us to ask "which one . . .?" as opposed to "what is . . .?".

The dogmatic image of thought has an attendant rhetoric. This rhetoric involves the assurance of all its proponents that, if only one follow the method with an eye only to the truth, there will be *safety*. This rhetoric also has its truth. As Nietzsche notes above, the agreement on a faith, whether it be in a god or in reason (the difference is not clear), is a necessary function in human societies. The development of a method, or of a system of thought,

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[60] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 103

allows the seeker after truth to operate within accepted bounds which have been shown, at least for a time and sometimes a very short time (the case of thalidomide comes to mind), to be safe in relation to life. But this rhetoric is also symptomatic of reactivity; it is part of the dogmatic noology. It may be equally necessary to take courage and step outside of the bounds of that image.

Nietzsche makes this task of revaluation his own and expresses his aims in numerous ways. In *The Gay Science*, for example, he reiterates many times the necessity and profundity of moving outside the dogmatic image of thought. "Those thinkers in whom all stars move in circular orbits are not the most profound."[61] For Nietzsche, the greatest task is to recognize that the paths of thought are not necessarily regular, and that they do not necessarily afford safety. "And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others; for example, a bed to rest on, or the way to such a bed, or a diversion, or a form of leisure."[62] Nietzsche privileges the view that sees life as an experiment to be lived in thought. "*Life as a means to knowledge*"[63]: the image of thought that emerges from this understanding serves Nietzsche as the sign of growth, of overcoming, and of refusal to be constrained by the delimited universe of reactive thought.

Nietzsche uses the imagery of growth and decay extensively throughout his works in relation to the notions of active and reactive thought outlined briefly above. He sees the task of the philosophical artist as one of diagnosing the decay or decadence of the image of thought (and its attendant values) that dominates his day. This theme is announced early on in his work[64] and continues to play a role throughout. The idea of *decadence* in Nietzsche's work can be viewed as inextricably linked with the notion of the struggle between active and reactive thought. Thus, in the preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche states

> I am still waiting for a philosophical physician in the exceptional

[61] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 254

[62] Ibid. p. 255

[63] Ibid. p. 255

[64] cf. Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, 224, p. 107.

> sense of that word - one who has to pursue the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of humanity - to muster my courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all truth but something else - let us say, health, future, growth, power, life.[65]

According to some,[66] the theme of decadence is one that Nietzsche develops into a style. As will be argued below, this theme informs the work and style of Baudrillard as well. But there is a profound difference between the two thinkers on the question of decadence. Baudrillard belongs firmly in a tradition of French thought that reached a peak in the late nineteenth century. As I will elaborate below, the tradition of *Décadisme* takes two directions. Whereas Baudrillard takes a direction similar to the catastrophic vein of decadent thought, Nietzsche takes one more akin to a regenerationalist perspective, although it is difficult to separate the two in his work. Although the line between the two strains of thought can be quite nebulous, the primary difference rests on the distinction between active and reactive. One vision, that of Baudrillard, is reactive and teleological, whereas that of Nietzsche is active and existential. Following Matei Calinescu's work on the subject, a further elaboration of the issue of decadence will provide yet another doorway into an elaboration of Baudrillard's stylistic experimentation.

The style of decadence —

> When we say that Victor Hugo has been an innovator, we are not praising him. In France, a country of practical and reasonable literature, a writer who has only imagination, though it be of the rarest sort, cannot be a great writer... In him the imagination takes the place of everything; imagination alone conceives and performs; it is a queen who governs unchecked.

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[65] Ibid. p. 35

[66] Most notably, Walter Kaufmann in his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, pp. 72-118

> Reason finds no place in his works. No practical or applicable ideas, nothing or next to nothing of real life; no philosophy, no morals.[67]

The author of the above quotation is Désiré Nisard, a nineteenth century literary critic. What Nisard has to say about Hugo is echoed in much of the critical literature on Baudrillard's work. The tone and content of the various criticisms of Baudrillard's work are strikingly similar to those Nisard levelled against Hugo. The same can be said of much of the criticism of Nietzsche's work. The reason for this is that Hugo, Nietzsche and Baudrillard share a general stylistic tendency identified by Kaufmann and Calinescu as 'the style of decadence.' Nisard also stresses the *seductive* nature of Hugo's work and views this as one of its most dangerous qualities. Again, the same criticism is levelled against both Nietzsche and Baudrillard.

The 'style of decadence' is something that needs to be distinguished from 'decadence' as it has been conceived by a range of analysts and critics. The notion of 'decadence' at work here has to do with a perception that the success of bourgeois modernism, manifested in the proliferation of technology and rationalization, is leading our world toward catastrophe. Thus, the contemporary signs of decadence would be seen in the threat to the environment, the proliferation and use of weapons of increasing destructive power, as well as the 'over-bureaucratization' of life in general. Many contemporary writers expound on this theme but perhaps no one epitomizes it more than Nietzsche's dedicated, if somewhat critical, analyst Martin Heidegger. In his later writings, Heidegger expends a great deal of effort critiquing the effects on modern consciousness and society of technology. The decadence of contemporary society, for Heidegger, has to do with the loss or submergence of the human capacity for *meditative* thinking in the face of of the *calculative* thinking of bourgeois modernism. The predominance of calculative thinking, for Heidegger, signals the advent of a flight from thinking: a 'modern thoughtlessness'.

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[67] Quoted in Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 161

> But part of this flight is that man will neither see nor admit it. Man today will even flatly deny this flight from thinking. He will assert the opposite. He will say - and quite rightly - that there were at no time such far-reaching plans, so many inquiries in so many areas, research carried on as passionately as today. Of course. And this display of ingenuity and deliberation has its own great usefulness. Such thought remains indispensable. But - it also remains true that it is thinking of a special kind.
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> Its peculiarity consists in the fact that, whenever we plan, research, and organize, we always reckon with conditions that are given. We take them into account with the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we can count on definite results. This calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time ever more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is. [68]

This passage illustrates Heidegger's thoughts on the decadence of our era as it relates to the contemplative realm of human experience. Heidegger, in keeping with Nietzsche, does not condemn the effects of calculative thinking. Rather, he focuses on the *effects* of the growing dominance of calculative thinking. This can be read as the theme of many of Heidegger's later works.

Another theme that from the Nineteenth Century onward permeates the discussions of decadence concerns the equation in bourgeois modernism of the notion of 'progress' with that of 'production'.[69] The Goncourt brothers wrote in 1864 of a modern melancholy which results from the ever-growing demand for production in all realms of existence. They maintain that the "sadness of the century" results from "overwork, movement, tremendous

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[68] Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (trans.: John M. Anderson), New York: Harper Torchbooks, (1966) p. 46

[69] Today this equation is witnessed in the obsession with the GNP. The GNP is seen as an existence-o-meter.

effort, furious labor, from its cerebral forces strained to the breaking point, from overproduction in every domain."[70] This theme is echoed strongly in Baudrillard's work, but also in that of Heidegger:

> In place of the old world-content of things that was formerly perceived and used to grant freely of itself, the object character of technological dominion spreads itself over the earth ever more quickly, ruthlessly and completely. Not only does it establish all things as producible in the process of production; it also delivers the products of production by means of the market. In self-assertive production, the humanness of man and the thingness of things dissolve into the calculated market value of a market which not only spans the whole earth as a world market, but also, as the will to will, trades in the nature of Being and thus subjects all beings to the trade of calculation that dominates most tenaciously . . .[71]

The loss of a contemplative or spiritual ground for existence in the face of bourgeois modern progress is also a major theme of the the nineteenth century French *Décadisme* movement. This movement can be divided into two groups, one associated with a regenerationalist perspective on decadence, and one that manifested a catastrophic outlook on decadence. The distinction between these two groups is not perfectly clear. Both groups shared a conception of society that illustrates the effect of Judeo-christian attitudes on modern thought, in that society was conceived by them as an organism that either grows toward, or decays from, an ideal form. Decadence, taken as such, is a description of the organic state of society.

The first group, which might be associated with the thought of Heidegger, perceived decadence as a condition from which might spring a new health *without* catastrophic effects. Describing something as a catastrophe, of course, would be a value-laden interpretation of an event. Thus Heidegger, at the close of *The Question Concerning Technology*, quotes the poet Hölderlin who writes "But where danger is, grows/The saving power also."[72]

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[70] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 168

[71] cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper and Row (1977)

The second group, with whom I am most concerned here, saw the 'style of decadence' or *Décadisme* as an avant-garde political force. In *Décadisme*, "aestheticism, even in its most offensive forms, is no longer cut off from the various concerns of practical life and, more than that, can no longer be regarded as incompatible with the possibility of moral, religious or political commitments by its adherents."[73] This is an important point, since the accusation of aestheticism is used widely today as a critique of various forms of critical, theoretical writing. *Décadisme* came to be viewed, by its adherents in the late Nineteenth Century, as a vehicle for combatting the decadence of bourgeois modernity, a sort of 'decadence against decadence'. The realization of regeneration would involve a 'catastrophe' in relation to the values of bourgeois modernism.

The various manifestoes of *Décadisme* penned by Anatole Baju provide an excellent example of the tone of the 'style of decadence'.

> Not to recognize the state of decadence which we are in would be the height of insensibility... religion, customs, justice, everything decays... society come apart under the corrosive action of a deliquescent civilization... We commit this leaf to murdersome innovations, to stupefying audacities, to incoherences of thirty-six atmospheres at the farthest limit of their compatibility with those archaic conventions labeled by the term public morality. We will be the stars of an ideal literature... In a word, we will be the Mahdis screaming and preaching eternally the dogma of elixir, the quintessential word of triumphant *Décadisme*.[74]

In the France of the 1880's and 1890's, the *Décadisme* movement was short-lived, giving way to *Symbolisme* and various other avant-garde movements in literature and the arts. But the style of decadence, as a decadence against or *through* decadence found other expressions in the same period, and as will be argued below, enjoys a resurgence in the work of Baudrillard. The critical difference between the two forms of *Décadisme* involves a particular

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[72] Ibid. p. 41

[73] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 174

[74] Ibid, p. 176

relation to decadence itself. In the case of the regenerationalist moment in *Décadisme*, decadence is seen as 'bad.' It is seen as something to be combatted in a return to health. In the second, value judgements about decadence are not made, since decadence is seen as springing from the values of the decadent period itself, or even from underlying phenomena which are the source of those values. Decadence is interpreted as both a condition of decay and as a 'making way' for the growth of new forms of existence. It becomes important, once this is accepted, for the proponents of *Décadisme* to *participate* in the decadence of the era as a critical strategy aimed at the encouragement of creative/interpretive irruptions; irruptions which have as their soil the space created by the dissolving order.

Returning to Nietzsche, he is perhaps the first to develop the style of decadence into a philosophical and theoretical project. Nietzsche's notion of decadence is complex. It is also a very personal notion. He viewed himself as particularly well suited to perceive the symptoms and effects of decadence since he himself had experienced it in a very personal fashion; more specifically, in relation to his own personal illness. In *Ecce Homo* he says

> Need I say after all this that I am experienced in questions of decadence? I have spelled them forward and backward. Even that filigree art of clasping and grasping in general, those fingers for nuances, that psychology which knows how to look around corners, and whatever else is characteristic of me, were learned only then, are the real gift of that time in which everything in me became more delicate: observation itself as well as the organs of observation. To see healthier concepts and values in the perspective of the sick, and conversely, to look down out of the abundance and self-assurance of a rich life to behold the secret doings of the instinct of decadence — in this I have had the longest training, my most characteristic experience: here if anywhere, I became a master.[75]

Nietzsche's notion of decadence, as a cultural and social phenomenon, is rooted in this idea of the perspective to be gained from the experience of decadence itself. It is a dialectical notion that views decadence in two ways: as

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75 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p, 222

a sickness and as sickliness. The two relate to a notion of the will that is at the heart of Nietzsche's philosophy. The first corresponds to a will toward life, toward recuperation and the identification of the source of sickness; the active thought mentioned above. The second corresponds to a will against life, to a nay-saying to life, a Christian morality that views life essentially as a decaying organism and that seeks to control this decay through reactive thought.

Decadence serves a two-fold or dialectical role. It is a moment that recurs in any given society at any time in history and which signals both a decline and re-emergence. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche points to this dialectical character of decadence by saying that times of corruption in a society lead to the destruction of certain social forms as well as the emergence of individuals of great will and creativity.

> The times of corruption are those when apples fall from the tree: I mean individuals, for they carry the seeds of the future and are the authors of the spiritual colonization and origin of new states and communities. Corruption is merely a nasty word for the autumn of a people.[76]

Individual alienation and dissatisfaction or, "diverse dissatisfaction" in Nietzsche,[77] leads to the two moments described above; one immersed in *ressentiment* and reaction, and the other in destructive/creative activity, the latter being described by Nietzsche with the term 'Dionysian'.[78]

This echoes the thought of Paul Bourget. Both thinkers (Nietzsche in his suspicion of systematization, and Bourget in his description of the literary phenomenon of *Décadisme*), pinpoint the characteristics of the style of decadence. Bourget says:

> One law governs both the development and the decadence of that other organism which is language. A style of decadence is one in which the unity of the book breaks down to make place for the independence of the page, in which

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76 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 98

77 Ibid, p. 98-99

68 cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (trans.: Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale; ed.: Walter Kaufmann,), New York: Penguin Books (1954), pp. 553-554.

> the page breaks down to make place for the independence of the sentence and in which the sentence breaks down to make place for the independence of the word.[79]

Nietzsche paraphrases:

> What is the sign of every literary decadence? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole - the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the simile of every style of decadence: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disaggregation of the will, "freedom of the individual," to use moral terms - expanded into a political theory, "equal rights for all." Life, equal vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life pushed back into the smallest forms; the rest, poor in life.[80]

Bourget maintains, in a manner that strikingly coincides with Nietzsche's thought, that the moment of decadence is dialectical. Decadence gives rise both to an individualization of society, and to a proliferation of a 'herd consciousness.' Like Nietzsche, he also notes the profound solitude which comes from adopting the style of decadence in the face of decadence. He says "let us then indulge ourselves in an unvisited solitude. Those who come to us will be truly our brothers, and why sacrifice what is most intimate, special and personal to others."[81]

Nietzsche's own specific use of the style of decadence clearly manifests itself in his approach to philosophy. In his attempt to create a new non-systematic (and therefore non-decadent) philosophy he deploys what I have called a problematic style. This follows from the observation that "a system must necessarily be based on premises that by its very nature it cannot question."[82] For Nietzsche, each system of thought is an expression of a single style of being and thinking in relation to the world and, as such, is a

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[79] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 170

[80] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (trans. Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books (1967), p. 170

[81] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 171

[82] Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 79

reactive form of thought. In this sense, the methodical style of being and thinking in relation to the world is but one possible style among many. Within the bourgeois modern moment of rationalization and bureaucratic organization of the life-world, a methodical style 'corresponds' to or 'operationalizes' these premises. Also, a particular methodical system would be the seemingly desirable outcome of the scientific impulse to universalize our experience of the discovery and revelation of the truth of the life-world. Many different systems have been put forth which seek to attain that end. The element which unites the various systems of thought and discourse is their methodical style, and debates about epistemology generally involve disputes over which methodical style best affords an avenue to the truth, be it objective or otherwise.

Thinkers like Nietzsche contest the move to establish methodical systematization as the preeminent and 'serious' style of seeking the truth. For Nietzsche, the 'will to a system' is a sign of disease of the character and of bigotry; the resultant systems have only succeeded in developing "one particular force of the spirit best by their one-sided demand to see things just so and not otherwise."[83] The 'findings' of a systematic style of thinking, according to Nietzsche, cannot help but be tainted by or 'determined' by the premises of the system itself. Thus Nietzsche himself turns to the style of decadence (the aphorism being one important element of that style) in an attempt to avoid the problems of systematization. His desire is to prevent one perspective on a problem from gaining the upper hand. Each problem is approached from a variety of perspectives, which leads to what some have called inconsistency in his work. This should not be surprising since 'consistency,' in a logical sense, would be the hallmark of any systematic approach. Nietzsche would perhaps ask if the desire for consistency should take precedence over our willingness to put our concepts and ideas to the test of experimentation. He says "I would praise any skepsis to which I am permitted to reply: "let us try it!" But I do not want to hear anything anymore

[83] Ibid., p. 80

of all the things and questions that do not permit of experiment . . . for there courage has lost its rights."[84] The issue of method would appear to be one of those realms that does not permit experimentation, except in terms of content.

The result of such experimentalism is that thought and writing become as much a quest for hidden presuppositions as a quest for solutions. This is the mark of a problematical style, in the sense that a particular problem is not necessarily solved but rather outgrown as the limitations of posing it in a specific fashion are exposed. As Kaufmann says, "the style of decadence is methodically employed in the service of Nietzsche's experimentalism."[85] In this statement, the political moment described above is clearly activated. Kaufmann's desire to win for Nietzsche the status of 'methodical thinker' is clearly evident, and the status of acceptability in the realm of philosophical, theoretical and scientific discourse is at stake in such a contest. Ultimately, Kaufmann is left with one term, 'existential,' as a label to unite Nietzsche's style in all its range. By this term Kaufmann seeks to designate the diversity of styles alluded to in the passage drawn from *Ecce Homo* above:

> . . . Nietzsche is driven from style to style in his ceaseless striving for an adequate medium of expression. Each style is characteristically his own, but soon found inadequate, and then drives him on to another newer one. Yet all the experiments cohere because they are not capricious. Their unity one might call "existential."[86]

So, just as the style of decadence can be seen as 'decadence against decadence,' Nietzsche's method turns out to be 'method against method.' It should be clear that this is not method in the general sense of the term, but rather Kaufmann's striving to win for Nietzsche a method. Ironically, much of Kaufmann's argument rests on Nietzsche's stylistic experimentations. This serves to illustrate the politically charged reversibility of the terms 'style' and 'method.' The ambiguity present in this chiasm of meaning marks the space

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[84] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 115

[85] Ibid. p. 85

[86] Ibid, p. 93

where the border between art and truth is established in one of the more submerged political acts.

What is at stake in a discussion that exposes the ambiguity and tension between the terms style and method, or more generally, aesthetic and theoretic, is not necessarily a metaphysical privileging of one moment over another. Rather, since the concern is with a political question involving the ordering of discourse, it is important to demonstrate how such distinctions are irresolute, and involve an appeal to dichotomies of identity/difference, normal/abnormal and center/periphery.

Such a center/periphery dynamic is the central moment in Calinescu's characterization of the various faces of modernity. For him, the ordering force of bourgeois modernism is faced by three aesthetic modernist moments of opposition: opposition to tradition, opposition to the bourgeois modern claims to rationality, utility and progress, as well as opposition to the specific movement itself, in the light of its capability of generating a new form of authority. The style of decadence, especially in its catastrophic form, represents one of the most radical examples of this phenomenon in its complete rejection of any project aimed at establishing new values.

Baudrillard's work exhibits this style of decadence, but employs other strategies as well. The important thing is to recognize that Baudrillard's work, and Nietzsche's as well, can be understood as emerging from a modernist stream of thought that resists the totalizing movement of bourgeois society. This tradition of aesthetic modernism attempts to maintain the space of experimentation and revaluation. Such writers seek to maintain a center/periphery dynamic, and as metatheory this concern overrides even questions such as 'what is to be done?'

As such, the politicization of the question of style involves the initiation of a theory that appears to be coming from the outside of discourse toward the inside. But in selecting this movement, such a theory attempts to reassert or revalorize its own space at the outside, with both the inside and outside of discourse being taken as coincidental to modernity. As noted above, it is not so much a project of establishing a new inside or school as it is

a reinvigoration of critical strategies that remain, as a force, outside, but are also substantively merged with the inside as active thought is arrested in reactive thought. This does not involve an anti-modernist move, but rather an internally anti-hegemonic move in relation to the dominant forces of modernity. It involves the establishment of a pattern of entry and flight, of 'guerrilla theory'. It is not a privileging of aestheticism or of theoreticism, but an exposure of the space of irresolution behind both terms. Maintaining this 'discordance between art and truth'[87] is the political project informing much of Baudrillard's writing.

The reaction to Baudrillard's style —

> The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological development, by a generation or more, has long been recognized. In this century Ezra Pound called the artist "the antennae of the race." Art as radar acts as an "early warning alarm system," as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them. This concept of the arts as prophetic, contrasts with the notion of them as merely self-expression.
>
> - Marshall McLuhan[88]

The attempt to define an inside and an outside in relation to modernity is conditioned entirely by the notion of modernity being deployed. Many different attempts to define modernity have been made in the past and, it appears, will continue to be made in the future. The notion of modernity being used here is similar to that put forward by Baudrillard. In other words, it is not the notion that sees modernity exclusively in terms of the forces of what has thus far been called bourgeois modernism. Today, modern societies are those in which the forms of bourgeois modernism are hegemonic and hold what could be called the balance of social power. The abstract State, the

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[87] Nietzsche's phrase, which Carroll quotes, is the following: "Very early in my life I took the question of the relation of art to truth seriously: and even now I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance." David Carroll, *Paraesthetics*.New York: Methuen (1987), p. 190, n.7

[88] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, New York: Signet Books (1964) p. *xi*

isolated individual imbued with abstract rights, the labyrinthine bureaucracy, the rationalization and expansion of a means of production based on a radical division and alienation of labor, mental health, the proliferation of mass communications and media: these are the hallmarks of bourgeois modernism, and they constitute the dominant or mass cultural form in so-called Western societies. Despite claims to the *progressive* nature of these dimensions of life, they also constitute the paradoxical 'tradition of modernity;' paradoxical in that they form a reified core around which claims to the progressive nature of modernity must be moulded. Further, the dominant form of modernism does not define modernity in and of itself. Other dimensions of modernity exist in tension with, at the periphery, or on the outside of the center or container that bourgeois modernism creates.

Perhaps the most important element of what has been described as bourgeois modernism to this point, most important in the sense that it relates most directly to the problematique described above, is the existence of an attendant noology or 'image of thought.' The noology of bourgeois modernism manifests itself in the discourse of science, philosophy and theory as the 'discipline of thought' mentioned by Nietzsche or, simply, the 'discipline.' The discipline can be defined as the predominant or reactive style of thinking and writing about the project of modernity, a style that, by virtue of its exclusionary nature, abandons the principles of rupture and challenge (perhaps even those of the Enlightenment) it so desperately wishes to claim as its own.

In the realm of critical theory, as in other practices, the discipline is politically active when what can be called 'the rhetoric of exclusion' arises in response to a particular writer or text. This rhetoric is precisely what Kaufmann is both responding to and capitulating to when he attempts to win for Nietzsche a 'method.' But it is precisely the noology of bourgeois modernism that writers like Nietzsche and Baudrillard want to subvert. The discipline is particularly vocal in the following passages where Robert Hughes and Douglas Kellner describe Baudrillard's recent text *America*:

> Baudrillard . . . has the badge of a distinctive jargon, . . . a thick prophylactic against understanding. . . To write direct prose, lucid and open to comprehension, using common language, is to lose face. You do not make your mark unless you add something to the lake of jargon to whose marshy verge the bleating flocks of post-structuralists go each night to drink. . . Language does not clarify, it intimidates. It subjects the reader to a rite of passage and extorts assent as the price of entry. For the savant's thought is so radically original that ordinary words will not do. Its newness requires neologism; it seeks rupture, over-generalization, oracular pronouncements and a pervasive tone of apocalyptic hype. The result is to clear writing what the flowery blandishments of the valets to Gorgibus's daughters in Moliere's *Les Précieuses Ridicules* were to the sincere expression of feeling: a parodical mask, a compound of snobbery and extravagant rhetoric.[89]

> . . . one could well read Baudrillard's own study as a fiction about America, as a pataphysical projection of his own fantasies about America. More uncharitably, one could read the book as a whole as symptomatic of the decline of Baudrillard's theoretical powers and the collapse of social analysis and critique - as well as politics - in favor of highly uneven social observation and metaphysical ruminations.
>
> In fact, the same basic limitation in Baudrillard's metaphysics is apparent in his analysis of America: his subject matter is undertheorized, and his attempts at theory are uneven and problematical.[90]

Hughes and Kellner represent two extremes in the spectrum of reaction to Baudrillard's work. Hughes is a reviewer for the *New York Review of Books*, and as such has had a limited engagement with Baudrillard's writing. Kellner, however, is Baudrillard's most prolific analyst and critic. Unfortunately, while Kellner's work is easily the most accessible and lucid account of Baudrillard, there has been a decline in his own understanding of the general direction of Baudrillard's project since the latter's 1976 work *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Kellner provides a good account of Baudrillard's work up to *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, but the latter and all

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[89] Robert Hughes, *Nothing if not Critical*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf (1990), pp. 377-78

[90] Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1989). p. 170

works written after it are treated somewhat superficially. This shift in Kellner's approach coincides, as I will argue in chapter three, with a shift in Baudrillard's style. Rather than follow Baudrillard through the labyrinthine paradoxes of Georges Bataille's theory of writing, a move that a close reading of *Symbolic Exchange and Death* might suggest, Kellner shifts to a critical style that can be characterized as a 'rhetoric of exclusion.'

Terms like 'pataphysical', 'fiction', 'fantasy', 'metaphysical', 'undertheorized', 'uneven', 'problematical', and 'ruminations' may or may not be applied to Baudrillard's book *America*. Within the discipline of theory, however, they form body of language aimed at delegitimation. This rhetoric is rooted in a series of 'givens' regarding the way to engage in theory. Their frequent emergence in Kellner's text is an indication of his desire to deny the status of theory to Baudrillard's work.

This project of denial is unnecessary and misleading, since it deflects the reader from an exploration of more bountiful theoretical genealogies in which Baudrillard's work, as theory, could be situated and critiqued. For example, although Kellner notes the "crucial role of Bataille" in the development of Baudrillard's work,[91] he never develops this relation in his book,[92] nor does he even make mention of the Bataillean theory of writing. In fact, Baudrillard's style is not addressed at all by Kellner, and especially not as an integral part of the former's theoretical project.

Kellner's approach to Baudrillard's later work is not unique. Christopher Norris, in his recent work *What's wrong with Postmodernism?*, also questions Baudrillard's credibility as a theorist. Norris' attempt is even less effective than Kellner's. Norris entitles his chapter on Baudrillard "Lost in the Funhouse." The questionable nature of his treatment of Baudrillard's project becomes evident on the first page where he states that the nearest equivalent to Baudrillard's work is that of Richard Rorty and "other Heideggerian apostles of unreason."[93] Yet, as should become apparent

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[91] And this only in a footnote. Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard*, p. 235

[92] An explanation of Bataille's general economy warrants one page, and the issue of Bataille's theory of writing is not discussed.

during the course of this essay, Rorty's neo-pragmatism couldn't be further from Baudrillard's project. For example, where Rorty would seek to achieve a balance of competing discourses, Baudrillard seeks to push such a balance to its catastrophic resolution and expenditure.

Norris' work is perhaps useful in the sense that it employs the rhetoric of exclusion to a hyperbolic and even facetious degree. After engaging in a short (eight page) elaboration of Baudrillard's project, Norris says

> I have offered this lengthy account of Baudrillard's work because I think there is an urgent need to both grasp the sources of its widespread appeal and to put up a resistance to it on principled theoretical grounds.[94]

Norris'"lengthy account" is seriously inadequate in the face of the complexity of Baudrillard's work, and should be rejected "on principled theoretical grounds." Not only does Norris seriously misrepresent Baudrillard's work, but he completely ignores the tradition of writing from which it emerges.

Consequently, Norris does not address the question of Baudrillard's style, other than to mention that Mark Poster, the editor of the volume of collected works on which Norris bases his analysis, exhibits reservations about Baudrillard's "hyperbolic and declarative" tendencies. Instead, Norris attributes Baudrillard's particular type of theorizing to "a politics which goes along with the current postmodernist drift."[95] Norris is simultaneously correct and so far off the mark as to be discouraging. The fact that Baudrillard does 'go along' with the current direction of our society does not imply an acceptance of the situation. Nor does Baudrillard, as Norris asserts, maintain that our only possible future is the hyperreal. Norris, a writer who is familiar with deconstruction, should have been able to make the connection between Baudrillard's work and that of Bataille (given the theoretical proximity of Bataille and Derrida). Instead, Norris tries to situate Baudrillard in the context

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[93] Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong With Postmodernism?* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1990), p. 164.

[94] Ibid, p. 175

[95] Ibid. p. 191

of a North American debate on pragmatism, and thus misses the nature of his stylistic project.

Among Baudrillard's supporters there is an equally conspicuous absence of any sustained discussion of the importance of style in his work. This is again illustrated by a complete reluctance to explore the relation between Baudrillard and Bataille. Mike Gane, in his recent work on Baudrillard,[96] accords the main influence on Baudrillard's writing to Julia Kristeva and says that "a form of writing that is non-accumulative (that is deconstructive) is never . . . the principle aim of Baudrillard. This assertion is dubious on two counts. First, it is true that Baudrillard's writing is not 'non-accumulative;' it is, in fact *disaccumulative*. The difference between the two is decisive, but can create confusion. Second, in saying this, Gane distances Baudrillard's writing from its Bataillean influence, a move which is deeply misleading.

Gane is perhaps more comfortable attributing primary stylistic influence to Kristeva for two reasons. The first is that Kristeva is concerned with, as Baudrillard notes, "the labour of the sign" and "productive inter-textual space."[97] In other words, it is much easier to include Baudrillard's work in the theoretical enterprise if it appears that he is trying to make a contribution to its accumulation of knowledge or the work of theory in general. The second reason has to do with Gane's reluctance to deal with Bataille, despite his recognition of the latter's "absolutely decisive impact on Baudrillard's writing."[98] This statement rests in deep contradiction with his contention regarding Baudrillard's resistance to "non-accumulative" writing strategies, and illustrates a confusion of Kristeva with Bataille.

Baudrillard expressly rejects Kristeva's attempt to save certain notions of labour in Marx, notions that carry over into the realm of metatheoretical practice. He states that her attempt to dissociate labour from exchange value, and value as a whole, is flawed in that it only obscures the ideological roots of

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[96] Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*, London: Routledge (1991).

[97] Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p. 42

[98] Gane, *Baudrillard*, p. 37

the concept of labour itself. For Baudrillard, labour is part and parcel of the whole bourgeois modernist ideology. He writes

> Kristeva would gladly be rid of value, but neither labour nor Marx. One must choose. labour is defined anthropologically and historically as what divests the body and social exchange of all ambivalent and symbolic qualities, reducing them to a rational, positive, unilateral investment. The productive eros represses all the alternative qualities of meaning and exchange in symbolic discharge toward a process which submits us to the destiny of political economy and the terrorism of value, and to rethink discharge and symbolic exchange, the concepts of production and exchange developed by Marx (not to mention political economy) must be resolved and analyzed as ideological concepts interconnected with the general system of value. And in order to find the realm beyond economic value (which is in fact the only revolutionary perspective), then *the mirror of production* in which all Western metaphysics is reflected, must be broken.[99]

Baudrillard's objection to Kristeva's project is a fundamental one — it occurs in the same paragraph as the definition of Baudrillard's project. It would be inherently suspect for Gane to nonetheless attribute her work primary influential status. Baudrillard confirms this suspicion by simply stating several times that his project is more in line with that of Bataille (which is what the above quotation amounts to). He also states that Kristeva's attempt to envision a project along the lines of that prescribed by Bataille ultimately fails on the basis of her unwillingness to part with Marx, and does so in spite what Baudrillard views as willful manipulations of the texts in question: "She would have him read Bataille before he wrote — but also forget him when it is convenient."[100]

Gane maintains that Bataille appears to be, "the strange missing link, the bizarre . . . virtually unthinkable phenomenon of a (Marxist) Nietzschean, surrealist Durkheimean."[101] Bataille's status of 'virtual unthinkability' is sustained by Gane as well since, despite his recognition of the paramount

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[99] Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, pp. 46-47

[100] Ibid. p. 42

[101] Ibid. p. 37

importance of Bataille for Baudrillard's development, he never elaborates on this relation. It would also seem that this failure to elaborate on what is, by his own reckoning, a crucial aspect of Baudrillard's work leads Gane to make a dubious claim about Baudrillard's relation to Kristeva. He characterizes this latter relation as equally crucial when it is clear that Baudrillard is, at best, looking beyond Kristeva to Bataille, but more likely simply disagreeing with her.

The result of Gane's failure to discuss Baudrillard's Bataillean influence results in a brief and inconclusive discussion of Baudrillard's style. Gane limits himself to speculating on Baudrillard's poetry, and fails to properly assess the importance of Baudrillard's challenge to the appearance of theory. "If this change of style, or mode, of writing is fundamental, it also leads to new questions about how to read and assess this new writing."[102] Again, Gane does not elaborate on what such questions might be, and fails to indicate the preeminence of Bataille's theory of writing in initiating the change of style in the first place.

Other supporters of Baudrillard are equally mystified by the sources of his project. Arthur Kroker and Charles Levin, for example, utilize Baudrillard's early work in the building of a large theoretical enterprise, but for the most part dismiss Baudrillard's later writings as pessimism. Even in elaborating the fact that Baudrillard is attempting a type of writing which mirrors the society it describes, they characterize his political stance as one of "ironic detachment."[103] Again, this is suspect. Baudrillard is attempting to push the society he describes in a particular direction. This cannot be accomplished through any form of detachment. Neither Kroker, nor Levin in his early reading of Baudrillard in the introduction to his translation of *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, make any connection between Baudrillard's project and Bataille's general economy, much less a connection between the latter's theory of writing and Baudrillard's own stylistic experimentation.

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[102] Gane, *Baudrillard*, p. 130

[103] Kroker and Levin, "Cynical Power: The Fetishism of the Sign" in *Ideology and Power in the Age of Lenin in Ruins*, Montreal: Culturetextes (1990), p. 133

Other than a single exception,[104] the relation between Baudrillard and Bataille is basically ignored in the relevant secondary literature. Where this relation is not ignored, it is paid only passing attention. For Baudrillard's commentators, his style would seem to be a question of eclecticism and, at best, a reflection of the phenomena he describes. While among his supporters, the latter assertion illustrates a basic comprehension of the movement of the text, among his detractors it simply provides fodder for a wholesale rejection on the basis of a perceived lack of theoretical rigor. Baudrillard's style is the prime source for the emergence of the rhetoric of exclusion mentioned above. Given this, and the failure of his supporters to properly address the issue of style in his work, a work such as my own that seeks to elaborate the stylistic relation between Bataille and Baudrillard seems timely and needed.

* * *

Written as a travel diary, *America* serves as one of the best examples of Baudrillard's stylistic innovation and experimentation. It constitutes a series of experiments aimed at communicating, as well as putting an end to, an element of our modernity. Baudrillard claims that America, or elements of American society, represent a unique manifestation of modernity, a space and time where the dynamics of modernity have been skewed so that the imminent result is catastrophe. But the book itself is testimony to the fact that Baudrillard went to America seeking to track this phenomenon for himself. An ambulant theorist, he travels the American countryside and cities looking not only for America's version of modernity, but also for the existence in America of the seeds of the future, of the smooth spaces, the *deserts* from which new growth will be attained.

But *America* is a work that exists at the end of a long series of writings that inform Baudrillard's practice of writing to a great extent. It exists at the

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[104] Julian Pefanis' work will be elaborated on in Chapter Four.

end of a body of work spanning two decades in which Baudrillard articulates at least two main theories on the nature of object forms and social relations in modernity. An elaboration of these two theoretical moments, as well as a sustained dialogue with the work of Nietzsche and others who influence and inform Baudrillard's development will be the objective of the next two chapters. In chapter four I will turn to the specific question of Baudrillard's relation to Bataille, and the theory of writing that emerges from that encounter.

America is easily read as an attempt to represent the author's views on America in a disciplined, theoretical fashion. Such an interpretation, however, would also easily lead to conclusion that Baudrillard has failed in his objective.

But *America* is also something else, and it is this something else that is at the heart of Baudrillard's project. *America* is also a theoretical object. It is an object that exists in relation to other objects in a semiotic field of theoretical objects. As such it could be seen as a sign. But it is not a sign, it is a symbolic object. It is ambivalent and ambiguous. Its meaning is not given as a signified. Existing as such within a field where the theoretical object is necessarily construed as a signifier of a signified meaning, a meaning that in turn exists in a relation of clearly delineated difference *vis a vis* other theoretical signs, Baudrillard's work is strange — it is alien and its difference is not relational but somehow absolute. As an object that should be able to be read semiotically, it fails.

> All thoughts are entombed with the prudence of the year 2000. They can already smell the terror of the year 2000. Our societies instinctively adopt the solution of those cryogenics that preserve things in liquid nitrogen while waiting for the discovery of a mode of survival. They are like that luxurious and funereal merchandise that we enclose in the subterranean sarcophagus at the "Forum des Hales" as the museum of our culture, for the future generations after the catastrophe.[105]

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[105] Jean Baudrillard, "The Year 2000 Has already happened" in Kroker and Kroker, eds. *Body Invaders*,p. 43

Such a status is indeed Baudrillard's objective. But there is a further objective. His text aims at shattering this glaciation, and at hastening the catastrophe. How this comes to be his objective is the subject of what follows.

Chapter Two: Sign Logic *or* Revenge of the Luddites

In this chapter I will describe the first of Baudrillard's two main theoretic contributions to an understanding of contemporary social relations. This is the first step in developing a general understanding of the trajectory that leads him to adopt the unique and provocative style of theorizing illustrated by his latest works. I will focus on two works, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* and *The Mirror of Production.* In these works, Baudrillard moves decisively from the camp of structural Marxism to the more ambiguous ground of poststructuralism. In so doing he begins to illustrate an indebtedness to the general economy of Georges Bataille. Indeed, the project to be elucidated here can be seen as a clear transposition of Bataille's terms in that Baudrillard chooses to call his theory a "general political economy." Throughout Baudrillard's text, Bataille's theory of the general economy irrupts (in the form of the term Symbolic Exchange) and then disappears without being elaborated, leaving the reader at a loss to explain how Baudrillard envisions their relation. This aspect of Baudrillard's work will be left aside for now for the main reason that, while the political economy of the sign is a thesis that comprises an important stage in Baudrillard's development *vis a vis* the object relations of modern society, it is abandoned by him and replaced before his debt to Bataille really begins to surface in a sustained fashion.

His enquiry into the form of the object, or the way the object appears to the modern bourgeois consciousness, is at the root of Baudrillard's later metatheoretical stance. It is by virtue of his investigations and critiques of how critical thinking has engaged capitalism and its 'consequences' that Baudrillard comes to see critical theory itself as an object among objects, all being *semanticized* in a particular fashion. It is this 'operationalization' of theory within the political economy of the sign that leads Baudrillard toward his later position of scepticism with regards to emancipatory strategies.

As suggested above, Baudrillard's intent is to develop a style that

allows for the emergence of *active* thought. The first step in such a project, or even the first phase that allows for the emergence of such a project, would be to identify and critique the noology of the day. Baudrillard's earlier works illustrate just such a phase. In his ruminations on consumer society, Baudrillard develops an understanding of how our thinking and relating to the objects around us constitutes, for him, the dominant noology of our modernity. The critique of this noology is at the heart of Baudrillard's later work not just as content, but in form as well.

The problematique of the object — Before elaborating Baudrillard's initial paradigm of the object form, it is helpful to contextualize his thought to a certain degree by pointing to an obvious source of influence. While Baudrillard's influences are many and varied, and include Nietzsche, Marx, Mauss, Bataille, Levi-Strauss and a host of other figures, it is a simple statement of research intent made by Roland Barthes that provides, by virtue of its simplicity, directness and brevity, the most suitable doorway into the more convoluted and abstract realm of Baudrillard's thoughts on object forms. The essay is entitled *Semantics of the Object* and was delivered at a colloquium in Venice in 1964.[106]

Barthes begins the essay by stating his intent to reflect on the nature of the object in our so-called technological society, and on the implications of semiotics for understanding our relation to objects. There are different ways, he tells us, that the object is presented to consciousness. The object is defined in two ways by Barthes; first, in relation to what he calls the object's "existential connotations" as "the appearance or existence of a thing which is non-human and which persists in existing, somewhat against us, and, second, in relation to the object's "technological connotations," as "what is fabricated or produced; it is a finite substance, standardized, formed, and normalized, i.e., subject to norms of fabrication and quality; the object is then above all defined as an element of consumption."[107] The two object forms are

[106] Reprinted in Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*. New York: Hill and Wang (1988) pp. 179-190

[107] Ibid, pp. 181-181

distinguished by, in the first instance, being of a subjective nature, and in the second instance, being of a social nature. This point is crucial in that it locates the object form itself at the heart of social relations.

Barthes is concerned with the second object form. He argues that the second form of the object, the technological form, with its connotations of use, function and purpose, is experienced by us in a paradoxical fashion. Whereas we may believe that we experience the technological object only in terms of its pure instrumentality, it actually serves another function: technological objects are also vehicles for meaning. For Barthes, there is always a meaning associated with the object that overflows its use. A telephone, for example, in its many forms, conveys notions of luxury, austerity or even banality. A pen may carry notions of wealth, of simplicity, of seriousness or of whimsicality. The point made by Barthes is that objects, beyond our purely functional notion of them, have the capacity of belonging to a system of objects-as-signs, and as such are available to a semiotic analysis. Even an object which, by virtue of its banality, feigns to have no meaning still enters the system of meaning by having none. For Barthes, "there is no object which escapes meaning."[108]

Barthes emphasizes the social nature of the meaningful object by pointing to its necessary social origin. An object appropriated by an individual in a single instance, for example, the Roman soldier who wraps a blanket around his shoulders against the wind, does not reach the status of the meaningful object. It is still in a state of pure use or function. Once the object is fabricated or produced, given a standardized form and thus a name, 'poncho' for example, the object becomes a vehicle for meaning: 'militariness' in the case of the produced rain-covering for soldiers. Barthes argues that all objects that belong to a society have a meaning. To find an object without social meaning, we must imagine an object which is totally improvised. Even the improvised object quickly becomes the vehicle for meaning, in the sense that, when a homeless person wraps newspaper

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[108] Ibid, p. 182

around a part of the body for warmth, newspaper in this state quickly becomes the sign of the 'bum.'

Having shown the object-as-sign to be as pervasive as other object forms, Barthes suggest that the semiotics of objects ought to be an area of research. Using a simple Saussurian formula, he describes the object-as-sign as existing on two coordinates, the symbolic coordinate of the object as signifier of a signified, as well as the extended coordinate of classification of signs. He goes on to develop this notion in an admittedly prospective fashion that need not concern us here, since it is further developed and altered in later works. The object-as-sign having been identified, the second important moment in the essay for the understanding of Baudrillard's project comes at the close when Barthes speculates on the ideological nature of the object-as-sign. Having remarked that the object presents itself to consciousness in its technological form as a function, as transitive, and that, subsequently, the functional object serves as a vehicle of meaning that is cultural and intransitive – the sign – Barthes postulates that there is a return movement which reasserts the object-as-sign in its functional transitive form. He says that this turning back produces a world of objects with "utopic, unreal function(s)."[109] He says that this process is

> . . . a major ideological phenomenon, especially in our society. Meaning is always a phenomenon of culture, a product of culture; now, in our society, this phenomenon of culture is constantly naturalized, reconverted into nature by speech, which makes us believe in a purely transitive situation of the object. We believe that we are in a practical world of uses, of functions, of total domestication of the object, and in reality we are also, by objects, in a world of meanings, of reasons, of alibis: function gives birth to the sign, but this sign is reconverted into the spectacle of a function. I believe it is precisely this conversion of culture into pseudo-nature which can define the ideology of our society.[110]

To recapitulate, Barthes argues that the functional object is converted

[109] Ibid. p. 189

[110] Ibid. p. 190

by virtue of production into a vehicle for cultural meaning that can be analysed using the tools of semiotics. The standardized production of the object adds an intransitive sign-value to its status of transitive functionality. This sign-value is composed of signifier and signified, and can be further located in a taxonomic structure. The intransitive sign-value of the object is reconverted ideologically into a transitive function or use-value through what could be called a reification of cultural labour.

Though Barthes does not use the terms I have used in this recapitulation, particularly those borrowed from the discourse of political economy, his presentation of the phenomena in question as ideological would certainly invite such transcoding, which is precisely what Baudrillard does in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.* Barthes' general suggestion that a semiotics of objects could lead to an understanding of the ideological role of objects in our technological society is taken up and specified by Baudrillard in a structural Marxist approach. Despite the many metamorphoses of Baudrillard's subsequent paradigm, the problematique of the object remains, to this day, at the core of his project.

The Political Economy of the Sign — The problematique of the object in technological society, as posited by Barthes, is clearly at the forefront of Baudrillard's early work. His first two works, *The System of Objects* and *Consumer Society* reflect this to a great extent. For English-speaking audiences, however, it is *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* that offers the most comprehensive and diverse introduction to his early thoughts on the object. As a collection of essays written between 1969 and 1971, it illustrates in a more condensed but perhaps more theoretically rigorous way the movement of Baudrillard's thought in this period. Baudrillard's acceptance of the general postulate of Barthes' research program, that our relation to and understanding of objects serves an *ideological* function, is illustrated in the title of the second essay in the collection, "The Ideological Genesis of Needs."

In previous works, Baudrillard had identified what Barthes had called

the *tableau vivant* of accumulated objects-as-signs, the semiotic field of objects, as the field of *Consumption*. The term is capitalized by him in order to indicate the further meaning attached beyond conventional usage. As Baudrillard puts it in *The System of Objects*, Consumption is "*the virtual totality of all objects and messages presently constituted in a more or less coherent discourse.* Consumption, in so far as it is meaningful, is *a systematic act of the manipulation of signs.*"[111] This differentiates Baudrillard's notion of Consumption from the conventional term in a number of ways.

Consumption, in Baudrillard's terms, is not a material practice. In other words, it is not the simple act of appropriation involved in eating caviar, or buying and using an object in general; Consumption is rather an active mode of relations. Consumption is not defined by the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the car we drive, nor by the visual and oral substance of images and messages, but in the way all of this is organized into signifying substance in what Baudrillard calls the *Code*. The object is never consumed in its materiality, but in its difference. Consumption is a system and a structure of signification. So, like Barthes, Baudrillard is indicating the cultural significance of the object which exceeds its material relation to a subject in its function.

Baudrillard maintains that, in a society where production intercedes in an ever-widening circle of object relations supported by an ever increasing proliferation of produced objects, the code of consumption serves an essential social function. Through the Code, other individuals become recognizable to us, and are defined for us in their identity, by the objects surrounding them. Like production, which, in its ideal form, seeks to universalize the access of individuals to the objects of their needs, Consumption, through the Code, universalizes the social standing of the individual in the social setting. The Code, by virtue of its legibility, satisfies the "vital need" of people to be informed about one another.[112]

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[111] Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, p. 22; italics in original

[112] Ibid. p. 20

For Baudrillard, the Code does not constitute a democratizing element in society. Despite the fact that the Code is made available for interpretation and application by everyone, the symbolically and structurally impoverished "language" of value inherent in the Code (impoverished by virtue of its rootedness in produced and therefore universalized objects) creates new barriers and new exclusions. The Code, through its extension beyond the values attached to more basic needs, acts to exacerbate the desire for discrimination, and a new or additional morality of class, or caste, is invested in "the most material and undeniable of things."[113] As the benefits of increased material production produce the growing middle class, the Code establishes a new and more rigid set of social interdictions.

Again with Barthes, Baudrillard emphasizes the reified status of the code. He says

> Society is not becoming any more transparent, even if the code of social standing is in the process of constituting an immediately legible, universal structure of signification, one that enables the fluid circulation of social representations within the group hierarchy. The code provides the image of false transparency, of a false legibility of social relations, behind which the real structures of production and social relations remain illegible.[114]

Here Baudrillard is emphasizing the ideological nature of the Code which, by virtue of its coherence and universalization, becomes the best means for the extension of immanent and permanent jurisdiction over all individuals in society. The Code becomes for Baudrillard the sign of totalitarianism. Structural manipulation of the Code, and therefore of Consumption, becomes a new and potent form of power. Consumption is the ideological mode of complicity with that power, which at this point in Baudrillard's analysis is capital.

It is precisely the structural manipulation of the code by the powerful

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[113] Ibid. p. 20

[114] Ibid. p. 21

which is implied in the title "The Ideological Genesis of Needs." There Baudrillard laments the "thoroughly vulgar metaphysic" of Consumption. He says "we believe in Consumption: we believe in a real subject, motivated by needs and confronted by real objects as sources of satisfaction"[115] and says that "the time has come to deconstruct all of the assumptive notions involved — object, need, aspiration, consumption itself . . . He is quite clear in describing the target of such deconstruction. At the core of the problematique is the object in its role as "sign-value." It is not the object as implement, the technological object and its transitive function. It is not the symbolic object, like a gift, which is unique and defined by the relation it symbolizes. It is the object which only finds meaning with other objects, in difference, according to a hierarchical code of significations.[116]

The distinction Baudrillard makes here between symbolic exchange "value" and sign-value is absolutely crucial for the subsequent development of his thought. The symbolic exchange really cannot be abstracted and universalized in the same terms as exchange-value or sign-value. In the gift-exchange there is no system of equivalences beyond the concrete relation symbolized by the gift. The gift, as object, can be totally arbitrary. But as soon as it is given, it is that object and no other which symbolizes the relation and pact it was intended to announce. Everyone knows that the gift cannot be replaced by an object "just like" the original gift unless, perhaps, it is re-given in similar circumstances: the gift exchange must be ritually re-enacted. It is precisely the moment when the object becomes replaceable by one "just like" it that we enter the realm of sign-value instead of symbolic exchange value. The motorcycle I drive is replaceable in its function by another motorcycle. *This* motorcycle, as a symbol of the relation between myself and my friend, who gave it to me, is not replaceable by another. But *the* motorcycle, as a sign which establishes my identity in the code, is replaceable by the one just like it in the display window.

The sign-value of an object of consumption operates in the same way

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[115] Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press (1981), p. 63.
[116] Ibid p. 64

that exchange-value operates in the realm of the commodity. The reification of cultural labour in the object-as-sign is similar to the reification of physical labour and its equivalence in the commodity. Both involve an abstraction. As Marx says "the equalization of the most different kinds of labour can be the result only of an abstraction from their inequalities"[117] and "whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, we also equate . . . the different kinds of labour expended upon them."[118] "Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value rather that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic . . . for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language."[119] So, socially alienated labour is reified by the form of the commodity and its universalized value, resulting, for Marx, in its "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[120] "We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it."[121]

Similarly, for Baudrillard, our cultural objects, in their form of object-as-sign, take on an equally reified characteristic. Instead of abolishing itself in the relation that it establishes, and thus assuming a symbolic value, the object of consumption becomes "autonomous, intransitive and opaque." "The sign object is neither given nor exchanged: it is appropriated, withheld and manipulated by individual subjects as a sign – as a coded difference. Here lies the object of consumption. And it is always of and from a reified, abolished social relationship that is "signified" in a code."[122] So, whereas the reified form of the commodity abolishes a social relation in a move of equivalence, the equivalence of labour, the reified form of the sign object abolishes a social relation in a move of equivalence of differentiation. Just as we believe in the metaphysical truth of money and its innate power to represent and reproduce our labour in relation to the commodity, we also believe in the metaphysical truth of the sign object and its innate power to represent and reproduce our

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[117] Karl Marx, *Capital*, New York: Modern Library (1906), p. 84

[118] Ibid, p. 85

[119] Ibid, p. 85

[120] Ibid. p. 81

[121] Ibid, p. 85

[122] Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, p. 65.

identity in relation to the object.

As Marx said, somewhat prophetically, "In all states of society, the labour time it costs to produce the means of subsistence must necessarily be an object of interest to mankind, *though not of equal interest in different stages of development*."[123] Marx was referring to *earlier* societies. Baudrillard, however, sees the analysis of the code of consumption, given the realization of productive capacity beyond any claim to practical use, as a more important realm of analysis. He says that, "what is revealed in the contemporary profusion of sign objects, objects of consumption, is precisely this opacity, the total constraint of the code that governs social value: it is the specific weight of signs that regulates the social logic of exchange."[124]

So, in ideological terms, the relational problematique is no longer the class basis of exploitation being obscured by the reification of labour in the commodity. The ideological force is no longer one of an abstraction of the logic of equivalences inherent in the commodity form. The ideological force is now located in a combinative logic of difference and distinction where class no longer functions as a hidden term, but is specifically expressed in the code. The ideology of a society governed by the code does not mask coercive exploitation, it simply masks coercion; exploitation is a secondary concern. The social product having long surpassed any appeal to the equitable distribution of goods[125], the question and the challenge for capitalism now becomes one not of production but rather of reproduction and maintenance. Baudrillard goes as far as to question whether this was ever *not* the case. As consumers, as opposed to producers, our political identity becomes one of structurally manipulable monads, convinced not of our participation and equality in the system of production, but of our *need* for further participation in the system of consumption. The political dynamic has shifted from one of coerced exploitation in the competition for scarce goods, to one of coerced participation in the competition for the best possible structural location within the code. Class shifts from being the basis for political struggle to the

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[123] Marx, *Capital*, p. 82, Italics added.

[124] Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, p. 66.

[125] This is a discussion of so-called western industrialized nations.

vehicle for political manipulation. Ideology remains a vehicle for mystification, but for a mystification of needs for consumption.

Rather than enter into an analysis of the code of consumption aimed at demonstrating its alienating power, which would be an analysis along the lines of that deployed against the commodity form, Baudrillard chooses a more radical path. After engaging in some applied analyses of the sign object and its function he turns to a wider theoretical concern. He develops a number of propositions regarding a general theory of the (social) object. In "For a General Theory,"[126] Baudrillard attempts to delineate the various forms in which the object has appeared as a form of "value." Baudrillard attempts to show how the form of value is itself intimately related to the notion of object as function. The phenomenological object and the symbolic object stand in opposition to the object as functional, as useful. Baudrillard aims at setting up *value*, as the measure of the object's functionality, for a deconstruction.

The reason for Baudrillard's extensive foray into the terminology of Marxist analysis becomes clear as the notion of value itself emerges as the site of reification and as the key term to be contested. Baudrillard identifies four logics: the functional logic of use value; the economic logic of exchange value; the differential logic of sign value; and the logic of symbolic exchange. The general theory emerges in the form of a number of formulas of logic and equivalence.

First, the abbreviations: UV = use value

EcEV = economic exchange value

SgEV = sign exchange value

SbE = symbolic exchange

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[126] The echoes of Bataille's General Economy are at this point very strong , but Baudrillard does not develop the point of convergence.

It could be noted immediately that SbE is the only term in which [V] does not appear, providing a clue to what is to follow, namely, a valorization of symbolic exchange against the other forms which are all rooted in a notion of value.

The relational logics: the conceptual movement is from the first term to the second (i.e. *from UV to EcEV*).

> *UV* → *EcEV*: The field of the process of production of exchange value; of the commodity form. Productive Consumption.
>
> *UV* → *SgEV*: The field of the production of signs originating in the destruction of utility. This is the field of Consumption as defined above.
>
> *UV* → *SbE*: The field of the destruction of UV in a movement of transgression of political economy, reinstating symbolic exchange.
>
> *EcEV* → *UV*: the reconversion of EcEV into UV by the individual. This is the general sense of the word consumption.
>
> *EcEV* → *SgEV*: The ascension of the commodity into the sign form. The shift from economic power to domination and social caste privilege. A shift in social logic from the meeting of needs to the production of needs (at least at this point).
>
> *EcEV* → *SbE*: The field of transgression of residual commodity forms in the ascension and reassertion of symbolic exchange.
>
> *SgEV* → *UV*: The reconversion of SgEV into social UV. The assertion, through Consumption, of the privileges of caste membership and privilege, lived by the participant in Consumption as "need".
>
> *SgEV* → *EcEV*: The reconversion of cultural privilege into

economic privilege. Describes the total cycle of a political economy where economic exploitation based on the monopoly of capital and the cultural domination based on the monopoly of the code engender each other ceaselessly.

SgEV → *SbE* - The deconstruction and transgression of the sign form toward symbolic exchange.

SbE → *UV, EcEV, SgEV*: All three describe a single process where symbolic exchange is broken up and reduced to the economic.[127]

Baudrillard's desire to privilege the form of symbolic exchange is clear from this. He contends that the whole field of the economic, whether in its Uv, EcEV or SGeV forms, only arises from a destruction and abstraction of symbolic exchange material. In the case of symbolic exchange, the object symbolizes the social relation established through its exchange. The object has no meaning in and of itself, nor does it have any value which could be appropriated outside of the specific exchange it symbolizes.

Clearly this contention is rooted in more than an analysis and critique of capitalism, although it assumes the rhetorical posture of such a critique. It is rooted rather in a more fundamental critique of the form of the object as function, as useful in and of itself, and, therefore, as valuable in and of itself. The movement from objects which symbolize social relations to objects that have inherent use value is a process of reification along much the same lines as Marx's notion of reification, except it is a more fundamental critique of the object form which sees the form of the commodity as only one permutation of the general functional object form. The whole relation can be expressed in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{EcEV}}{\text{UV}} = \frac{\text{Sr}}{\text{Sd}} \Big/ \text{SbE}$$

127 Baudrillard, *For a Critique*. pp. 124-127

On the left of the formula is the representation of the whole field of political economy. EcEV is equivalent to the signifier of the sign object as well as the commodity, and UV is equivalent to the signified, whether it is the use value of the sign object or the commodity. The radical opposition of the field of political economy to the field of symbolic exchange is indicated by the diagonal slash.

It is Baudrillard's contention at the end of "For a General Theory" that he has not demonstrated anything but the necessity for more work to be done. The first task is to develop a radical critique of use value fetishism. This would take the form of a critique of the commodity form as it relates to the object form. Second, a radical critique of the political economy of the sign. It is necessary, for Baudrillard, to engage the sign form in order to show how the code is organized along the same lines as the system of exchange value. The subordination of the signified to the signifier in the sign must be demonstrated as equivalent to the subordination of use value to exchange value in the commodity. Finally, what must be developed is a theory of symbolic exchange.[128]

One important question emerges from Baudrillard's propositions that has not been addressed. If we are to postulate, as Barthes does in "The Semantics of the Object," that the naturalization or reification of the functional object as sign constitutes the ideology of our society, what happens to the notion of ideology when the functional object itself as a form is questioned. Could we not say, in a slightly altered form of the same statement in Marx, that 'the whole mystery of ideology, all the mystery and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of socially produced useful objects, vanishes therefore, as soon as we come to other forms of objects?'[129] As Baudrillard suggests in "Beyond Use Value"

> Exchange value erases the real labour process at the level of the

[128] Ibid. pp. 128-129

[129] Marx's statement reads "The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, so soon as we come to other forms of production (Marx, *Capital*, p. 87)."

> commodity, such that the latter appears as an autonomous value. Use value fares even better: it provides the commodity, inhuman as it is in its abstraction, with a human finality. In exchange value, social labour disappears. The system of use value, on the other hand, involves the resorption without a trace of the entire ideological and historical labour process that leads the subject in the first place to think of himself as an individual, defined by his needs and satisfaction, and thus ideally to integrate himself into the structure of the commodity.[130]

To successfully demonstrate such a proposition must send the marxist notion of ideology packing, and expose the whole discourse of political economy, as well as its most successful critique, as ideological, albeit in less than a classical sense. This is the case because the ideologically obscured ontological ground of use value is itself exposed as ideological.

It is this new sense of ideology that Baudrillard develops in the last few essays in "For a Critique." It is there that the reader becomes aware that what Baudrillard is doing is more akin to a critique of noology than might be first guessed. It is in the essay *Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* that the reader finally gets a clear sense of what Baudrillard means by equating the forms EcEV/UV and Sr/Sd. He writes

> Marx demonstrated that the objectivity of material production did not reside in its materiality, but in its *form*. In fact, this is the point of departure for all critical theory. The same analytical reduction must be applied to ideology: its objectivity does not reside in its "ideality," that is, in a realist metaphysic of thought contents, but in its form.[131]

It could be said simply that ideology has always implied the misrepresentation of a reality. For Baudrillard, ideology becomes a misunderstanding of the form of representation which is, in any case, the only reality. It is the form of representation itself, the form of the object as represented, that allows the functioning of ideology in the first place. What is ideological, for Baudrillard, is the duality itself, the creation of a form of

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130 Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, p. 138

131 Ibid. p. 144

referent (UV, Sd, the real) against which all representation is tested. For Baudrillard, objects always already exist as a form (a form of object) before any debate about the content of that object gets underway. So Marx 'deconstructed' the commodity as a form (the commodity form) only to reproduce it in another form: the produced useful object. Baudrillard seeks to extend the analysis, and the notion of ideology, to include that form in its more pervasive totality, the bifurcation UV/Sd.

At the heart of such an attempt is the proposition that ideology is the process of reducing and abstracting symbolic material into a form. This is a very Nietzschean proposition in that it posits the *real* (when any distinction is made between apparent and real) as an abstraction: apparent world/real world; EcEV/UV; Sr/Sd; subject/object; superstructure/base; *phenomena/noumena*; etc.. All of these formulations, for Baudrillard, are ideological in the sense that they provide a first ground which is to be obscured by its representation. It is the very insolubility of these dichotomies that should provide us with the hint that they are, first and foremost, instruments of control, and of codification. The instance of politics, then, shifts, for Baudrillard, from debates about contents to debates about forms. Politics becomes something other than a debate about a mode of production, which is really only a debate about the content of production (how we produce, how much and for whom). Politics becomes a debate about a form which produces and reproduces itself ideologically through a naturalization of itself as an autonomous, transcendent signified. "Ideology, in its version as a superstructure of contents of consciousness, is, in these terms, an alienated concept."[132]

It can be seen that Baudrillard's objective is completed in this formulation of ideology. The discussion began with the object in its logical status and ends with the object in its ideological status. Political economy is exposed in its totality as a system and a discourse of power and control circulating around the ideological referent of the useful object. Any theory

[132] Ibid. p. 147

which purports to be critical and yet fails to analyze the object form at the heart of the system is exposed as reactive. Any critique of political economy must, for Baudrillard, reckon with the object form which constitutes its nucleus. Baudrillard writes

> The object of this political economy, that is, its simplest component, its nuclear element - that which precisely the commodity was for Marx - is no longer today properly either commodity or sign, but indissolubly both, and *both only in the sense that they are abolished as specific determinations, but not as form.* Rather, this object is perhaps quite simply the *object*, the object form, on which use value, exchange value and sign value converge in a complex mode that describes the most general form of political economy.[133]

The Mirror of Production — The cover of the Telos Press edition of Baudrillard's *The Mirror of Production* depicts Marx chained to a large gear of the industrial variety. This, as well as the title, suffice to capture the direction of the work. Baudrillard's intent is to show how the most radical critique of capitalist society simply is not radical; it fails to grasp the matter by the root, which is not the alienation and exploitation of labour, but rather the ideological move which established the definition of the individual in relation to an essence (labour), and then organized the project of Consumption around the prospective reclamation of that essence. This, for Baudrillard, is a *productivist* notion inaugurated by the industrial bourgeoisie and 'mirrored' by marxist critique.

Much of *The Mirror of Production* is a reiteration of what was originally presented in *For a Critique,* albeit in a more sustained fashion. Baudrillard opens

> A spectre haunts the revolutionary imagination: the phantom of production. Everywhere it sustains an unbridled romanticism of productivity. The critical theory of the mode of production does not touch the principle of production. All the concepts it articulates describe only the dialectical and historical genealogy of the contents of production, leaving production as a form intact.[134]

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[133] Ibid. p. 148

For Baudrillard, the marxist critique is locked in a dialectical, speculative dead-end. This results from the naturalized human being defined by labour (a generic, humanist definition at the outset) encountering the alienated human being in the market-place. By grounding the critique of capitalist relations of production in a metaphysical representation of a natural human being who regains control of a destiny (the free disposal of labour), marxist critique enters into a *danse macabre* with its object. Marxism assists the cunning of capital. It convinces the labourer that s/he is alienated by the sale of labour, "thus censoring the more radical hypothesis that s/he might be alienated as labour power, as the inalienable power of creating value by their labour."[135]

The same goes for the concept of need. The two concepts 'labour' and 'need' form, for Baudrillard, the "double generic quality" of the human being under western economic rationality. In labour, we give a useful, objective end to nature; in need, we give a useful subjective end to products. The two allow the reproduction of the object form at the heart, not of capitalism alone, but of political economy as a whole. Baudrillard's takes the critique of false needs one step further. In *The Mirror of Production* Baudrillard denies the anthropological vision, which western social scientists project into other cultures, of labouring individuals satisfying their needs as the fundamental ontological category of the human. He seeks to challenge the ideological universalization of the postulates of rational, scientific, political economy that appears in the Marxist mirror of production as the determinant instance.

In opposition to the western impulse, both Marxist and liberal, to view 'primitive' societies through the analytical tools used to analyse their own societies, Baudrillard proposes the opposite. In opposition to the dominant discourse of his day (Marxist/psychoanalytic), Baudrillard asserts that, "there is neither a mode of production nor production in primitive societies. There is no dialectic and no unconscious in primitive societies."[136] Rather than

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[134] Jean Baudrillard,*The Mirror of Production* (trans.: Mark Poster), St. Louis: Telos Press (1975), p. 17

[135] Ibid. p. 31

export these notions, which are the result themselves in their deepest assumptions of a mirroring effect of the realm of political economy (the individual's labour and the individual's desire: both *producing* a massive network of either alienated laborers with repressively sublimated desire, or repressively actualized laborers with repressively desublimated desire), Baudrillard proposes to import the primitive cultures into our own to see what critique, if any, they can offer.

> Instead of exporting Marxism and psychoanalysis (not to mention bourgeois ideology...)[an attempt to encode the primitives, says Baudrillard] , we bring all the force and questioning of primitive societies to bear on Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Perhaps then we will break this fascination, this self-fetishization of western thought. Perhaps then we will be finished with a marxism that has become more of a specialist in the impasses of capitalism than in the roads to revolution, finished with a psychoanalysis that has become more of a specialist in the impasses of libidinal economy than in the paths of desire.[137]

At the end of Chapter One of *The Mirror of Production* Baudrillard asserts that "the critique of political economy is basically completed." He says this in the same fashion that Marx said that the critique of religion was basically completed with Feuerbach. But just as Marx critiqued Feuerbach for making a critique of the contents of religion in a completely religious form, and subsequently called for analysis to move to a radically different level, so Baudrillard critiques Marxism for making a critique of the contents of political economy in precisely the same form as political economy itself. For Baudrillard, the time has come to make a change to a radically different level, to move beyond the critique of political economy toward "its definitive resolution."[138]

What occurs, however, in *The Mirror of Production*, as in *For a Critique*, is a series of propositional remarks aimed at breaking ground. His

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[136] Ibid. p. 49

[137] Ibid, p. 50

[138] Ibid. p. 51

efforts in these works do, despite his own recommendations, present a critique of political economy, and of the critiques of political economy, for the most part in the language and style of political economy and its critiques. Always at the periphery of his analysis lies a notion of the symbolic which promises to open up a new realm for him, a realm radically opposed to the realm of political economy. It is helpful to recall that his formulation of ideology depicts an operation of reducing and abstracting symbolic material. One could assume that Baudrillard is proposing a non-ideological realm. Clues to the nature of this realm are to be found in these early works, but they emerge only as irruptions of what, in the context of his traditional theorizing, appear as nonsense.[139]

For example, in "Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign," Baudrillard provides a simple formulation that encompasses what will become the essence of the political moment in his later works. He writes

> Generalized in the system of political economy, it is the code which ... reduces all symbolic ambivalence in order to ground the "rational" circulation of values and their play of exchange in the regulated equivalence of values.

It is in claims such as this that the metatheoretical problematique destined to condition all of Baudrillard's later works first emerges. For if Baudrillard, as he states in *The Mirror of Production*, seeks to initiate a radically new form of theorizing that escapes the form which it critiques, the question immediately emerges about what role such 'symbolic ambivalence' will play in his own work as object.

Indeed, Baudrillard's consciousness of the object form he critiques is extended in later works to theory as well, in the sense that the theoretical work becomes equally an object among objects, circulating in the system of political economy. But the first signs of this awareness are present in these early works. The final section of *The Mirror of Production* gives a clear sign of a direction Baudrillard prescribes for 'revolutionary' and 'utopian'

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[139] This would not be the case for the reader familiar with the works of Georges Bataille, to whom Baudrillard's infrequent and indirect references would provide strong clues as to the direction proposed.

thought, even for a movement aimed at 'communism.' He writes, "the cursed poet, non-official art, and utopian writings in general, by giving a current and immediate content to man's liberation, should be the very speech of communism, its direct prophesy."[140] For Baudrillard, the utopian poet operates in the realm of the symbolic, and here he gives a definition: "symbolic — which means non-universalized, non-dialectical, non-rationalized in the mirror of an imaginary objective history."[141]

At the root of such an understanding of the symbolic is an understanding of the necessary relation of a particular conception of utopia, the marxist or liberal utopia of the future, with a notion of *time* intimately related in turn to the transitive functional object form at the heart of political economy. The utopia of the future is always out there, separated from the alienated individual. This notion of utopia buys into a modern notion of time inscribed on all the objects of political economy. For the object of political economy is produced, brought forward in a temporal process which moves toward its realization, its bringing forth into reality, and the realization of its use value in consumption.

Baudrillard, in a very ambiguous fashion, proposes that a properly utopian literature would engage not in a production of some new meaning, but rather in a process of rupture, much like the objectives of the utopian socialist movements. In opposition to the "idealists of the dialectic, who are at the same time the realists of politics," Baudrillard proposes that "poetry and the utopian revolt have this radical presentness in common, this denegation of finalities; it is this actualization of desire no longer relegated to a future liberation, but demanded here, immediately, even in its death throes, in the extreme situation of life and death. Such is happiness; such is revolution."[142] Baudrillard's ruminations, at this point in his writing, are difficult to analyze in any way other than as a radical plea for the ambivalence he mentioned earlier.

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[140] Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p. 164

[141] Ibid. p. 164

[142] Ibid. p. 165

> There is no possible or impossible. The utopia is here in all the energies that are raised against political economy. But this utopian violence does not accumulate; it is lost. It does not try to accumulate itself as does economic value in order to abolish death. It does not grasp for power. To enclose the "exploited" within the single historical possibility of taking power has been the worst diversion the revolution has ever taken. One sees here to what depths the axioms of political economy have undermined, pervaded and distorted the revolutionary perspective. Utopia wants speech against power and against the reality principle which is only the phantasm of the system and its infinite reproduction. It wants only the spoken word; and it wants to lose itself in it.[143]

Toward a theory of the modern object — It is only after an engagement with the object form proper to our modernity that Baudrillard develops his own appreciation of the integral necessity for stylistic experimentation in theory. This appreciation develops concomitantly with his theorization of the pervasiveness of the object form at the heart of the code, and bears witness to the codification of theory as well. For Baudrillard, radical theory is not to be presented merely as a critique amongst other critiques, differing only in content. In its form as well, theory must be a critical object existing in a symbolic relation of challenge to the whole of the code, which attempts, at every turn, to encompass it and codify it; it must resist the never ending mutation of *power as code.*

Power as code is Baudrillard's own formulation of reactivity. Just as Feuerbach stood to Marx, Marx stands to Baudrillard as a reactive thinker. In their failure to challenge the form of thought at the heart of the object of critique, Marx's work and all the works of Marxism are instances of reactive thought. Marx is trapped in the mirror of production, and this in itself is a definition of reactivity. Eventually, the identification of this formal complicity of critical thought initiates in Baudrillard's writing a shift in form that manifests itself most profoundly in style.

Before this occurs, Baudrillard offers another and more decisive paradigm for interpreting the object form proper to our modernity. In

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[143] Ibid. pp. 166-167

Symbolic Exchange and Death, Baudrillard introduces the concepts of simulation and hyperreality for which he is (in)famous. These concepts come to dominate and eventually replace those of the political economy of the sign. Baudrillard abandons the form of political economy as a first step to escaping the object form it reflects. But I will eventually show how such a move is inconsequential. For Baudrillard, the object form he theorised in *For a Critique* and *The Mirror of Production* has given way to a new form, that of third order simulacra. This shift, Baudrillard is fond of repeating, is the vehicle that carries us through the exit from history, and from political economy as well.

Seeing that the methods of the discipline merely serve to reinforce the core problems of critical theory through a deep complicity and only a surface play of critique, Baudrillard shifts from a politics of content to a politics of form, a politics of style. He initiates a critique of the noology of bourgeois modernism as a whole. This is a logical progression in the context of the trajectory outlined above. Thus, in elaborating Baudrillard's own path of discovery and continual revaluation I have come full circle back to the observation by Nietzsche which opened the first chapter of this essay:

> But science, spurred by its powerful illusion. speeds irresistibly toward its limits where optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, *e're half their time* and inevitably, such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination. When they see to their horror how logic curls up at these boundary points and bites its own tail — suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and a remedy[144]

Baudrillard's tragic insight involves the final necessity to jettison many of the theoretical tools he sought to save. He has, to his own satisfaction, shown

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144 Nietzsche,*The Birth of Tragedy,* pp. 97-98

how reactive and constraining even the most basic concepts of political economy are for the purposes of radical theory. The only remedy for the theorist is to ventilate the old categories and engage in active thought, the thought of transgression. In the eyes of the guardians of discipline, such transgressions move the writer off the safe ground of structured debates, out of the theorematic into the problematic, from the inside to the outside, and from the scientific to the aesthetic.

What I am seeking to demonstrate in this essay is how Baudrillard derives his agenda for such a transgression from the work of Georges Bataille. The category of transgression is itself fundamental to the theory of writing that emerges from Bataille's work. But it is not only Bataille's theory of writing that Baudrillard utilizes. He appears to adopt many of Bataille's more teleological assumptions as well; assumptions rooted in a metaphysics of expenditure and excess that forms a radical anti-Hegelianism. None of this is readily apparent and needs to be 'teased out' of Baudrillard's text. In fact, the submerged status of Baudrillard's ongoing dialogue with Bataille can be seen as the main source of his bewildered reception in North America.

> Here begins my delirious self-criticism . . . I accuse myself of:
> . . . having sinned by omission of references
>
> Amen[145]

[145] Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*, New York: Verso (1990) p. 38

Chapter Three: *Simulation and Anti-destiny*

> . . . and yet, what if it were better not to meet any expectation and offer precisely that which repels, that which people deliberately avoid, for a lack of strength: that violent movement, sudden and shocking, which jostles the mind, taking away its tranquility; a kind of bold reversal that substitutes a dynamism, in harmony with the world, for the stagnation of isolated ideas, of stubborn problems born of an anxiety that refused to *see*. How, without turning my back on expectations, could I have had the extreme freedom of thought that places concepts on a level with the world's freedom of movement?
>
> - Georges Bataille[146]

Allegory — Let it be known that you are an insect, an insect of the winged variety, of the species mosquito. You were hatched in a puddle fed by an underground stream. The puddle collects on rock thick with lichen and moss. The growth is evidence of the indirect light afforded the small cave that is your sanctuary.

Since your hatching, you have watched as thousands of your kin died for lack of a source of blood. How it came to be that eggs would find their way to a place offering no means of procreation is a mystery worthy of every cell in your insect brain.

As insects are wont to do (but, strangely, none of your kin), you venture off toward the source of light. You discover, perhaps as ancient insect ancestors once did, that the cave is but a small container, and outside of it there teems life unbounded.

Following the instinct of your species, you eventually alight on a thick but juicy hide. You feel justified, given the amount of energy wasted in the creation of this giant, lumbering animal, in removing a slight bit of life giving fluid. Parasite that you are, you draw your energy from a source compiled by a labour not your own.

Upon return to the cave, you find that a Spider has built a web across the entrance. Familiar with these structures, you attempt, at first, to finesse

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[146] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share v. I* (trans. Robert Hurley), New York: Zone Books (1988), p.11

your way past. But every possible entryway is covered. So, you attempt to alight softly, and avoid the sticky strands. As much as possible, you try to keep your body free.

But as soon as you touch a fibre, a shudder is sent out along the web. One strand, you think, would be simple to dispatch. But each section exists only because of its interconnection, and all the different intersections are brought to life by your little foray.

So you struggle. The Architect sits and watches with amusement as the perfect trap snares you at every turn. At each spot you put a leg, you become more entangled. Each movement you make ensnares you further until, your strength gone and ideas expended, you hang motionless, plump with blood, but hopelessly divided from your fellow insects by a small open space.

At the point of abandon, you shiver with horror as the architect starts toward you. In a last futile gesture, in a last and desperate hope of initiating some bizarre implosion of the structure that you are now an integral part of, you turn your stinger and plunge it deeply into your own abdomen.

The architect sees what you have done, and sees that it is good since, even in death, you will reinforce his web with your very shell. He congratulates himself at having built this web — this web at the mouth of the cave. The first one, built in a tree, had been far less successful.

The Three Orders of Simulacra — After *The Mirror of Production,* Baudrillard's next offering is entitled *Symbolic Exchange and Death.* There Baudrillard shifts his style of writing, the form of representation of his thought. This shift occurs as Baudrillard's discussion shifts from an analysis of one object form to the next, from the second order of simulacra to the third. This shift is informed by Baudrillard's awareness of the necessity for developing a form of critique that at least keeps pace with the form of its object. For Baudrillard, all of critical theory is mired in a form of thinking that has been transcended by society in general. All of critical theory still operates on the premise of 'false consciousness,' a premise itself rooted in the notion

of ideology outlined in the previous chapter. All critical theory is, therefore, ideological, while society itself has exited from the realm of ideology. For Baudrillard "we no longer partake in the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication."[147] Baudrillard interprets this societal shift as necessitating a new form of theory as well, and this interpretation is at the root of his stylistic experimentations.

The shift from the second order of simulacra to the third has been represented in many ways other than the one offered by Baudrillard. Seen in a general context, Baudrillard is an 'end of ideology' or 'end of history' theorist. He is fascinated by a proposition found in Elias Canetti's work *The Human Province*. Throughout that work Canetti makes repeated reference to the idea of history as an inexorable process, and exhibits an anti-Hegelian tendency which Baudrillard emulates. Canetti writes, "History restores our false confidence,"[148] and "I fear history, its uninfluenced course, because of the false models it creates daily."[149] But Canetti is most fearful of reaching a point where history no longer operates:

> A tormenting thought: as of a certain point, history was no longer real. Without noticing it, all mankind suddenly left reality; everything happening since then was supposedly no true; but we supposedly didn't notice. Our task would be to find that point, and as long as we didn't have it, we would be forced to abide in our present destruction.[150]

Baudrillard takes this point of departure as given. He posits its occurrence in Hegelian terms. "Dead point: the dead center where every system crosses this subtle limit of reversibility, contradiction and doubt and enters into non-contradiction, into its own exalted contemplation, into ecstasy . . . "[151] The

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[147] Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (trans. Bernard and Caroline Shutze, ed.: Sylvere Lotringer), New York: Semiotext(e) (1987), p. 22

[148] Elias Canetti,*The Human Province* (trans.: Joachim Neugroschel), New York: Farrar Strauss Giroulx (1978), p. 42.

[149] Ibid, p. 43

[150] Ibid, p 69

[151] Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (trans.: Philip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski; ed.: Jim Fleming), New York: Semiotext(e) (1990), p. 14

only change that occurs now is not historical, but genetic. Things do not change through "dialectical transcendence (*Aufhebung*)" but through "potentialization" and "elevation to the N^{th} power."[152] Baudrillard's particular vision of post-historical society will be elaborated below. For the moment, a description of how he arrives at this point will be helpful in situating his genealogy of the 'real' in relation a larger 'death of God' stream of thought.

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death,* Baudrillard's argument follows the same lines as the argument developed in earlier works, but moves on to more general terrain. Briefly, he argues that, with the creation of the Subject and all of the errors to which it is susceptible (proven in Descartes methodical doubt), we witness the creation of the 'real' as well. With the institution of science and method as the vehicle to the real, and of critique as the vehicle to the *a priori,* we also witness the institution of the real as such. The object-in-itself takes on a new characteristic as radically separated from the subject. Ensuing debates take the real as the referent without questioning the possibility of its reality. Kant's *noumena* and *phenomena,* subject and object, Hegel's dialectical reclamation of the object after separation, Marx's dialectical reclamation of the subject after separation: all of these debates and systems take as their ideological justification the existence of the real. Baudrillard's concern becomes one of demonstrating how this sort of representation and quest for the real is particular to modernity. He takes as his battle cry the statement by Nietzsche: "Down with all hypotheses that have allowed the belief in a true world."[153]

It is useful by way of prefiguration to recall Nietzsche's discussion of appearance and reality in *Twilight of the Idols.* Before providing us with his thoughts on "how the "true world" finally became a fable," Nietzsche makes four propositions. First he says that the reasons this world, the world perceived by the subject, is characterized as 'apparent' are the very reasons

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[152] Ibid. p. 41

[153] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (trans.: Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman), New York: Semiotext(e) (1983), p. 15

which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely opaque. What he means by this is, following his own radical 'deconstruction' of time ('the metaphysics of being'), atemporal truth or reality becomes a ludicrous notion. It is the desire for a truth against the truth of becoming (a becoming liberated from any notion of being) or, as Zarathustra[154] puts it, the spirit of revenge against time and its 'it was,' that leads to any notion of the true world of being in the first place. It is only natural, says Nietzsche, that the apparent world should be seen as error, in the face of this *ressentiment*.[155] Thus it is obvious that the 'apparent' world is the 'true' world. The terms 'apparent' and 'true' are conflated at this moment in Nietzsche's text.

Nietzsche's second proposition is that the criteria bestowed on 'true being' are those of 'not being.' The 'true world' is something constructed in opposition to the actual world of temporality. As such, for Nietzsche, it is merely a moral hallucination. There is no actually existing world of being; being is always not-being, or the negation of the actual world. Science seeks to arrest the movement of existence.

Nietzsche's third proposition is that the invention of fables about another world other than this world (the world presented to the subject) has no meaning at all "unless an instinct of slander, detraction and suspicion against life has gained the upper hand in us: in this case we avenge ourselves against life with a phantasmagoria of "an-other" or "better" life."

Nietzsche's fourth proposition is that any suggestion of a distinction between this world and another world is a symptom of decadence, a symptom of the decline of life. Against this, Nietzsche opposes the Dionysian yes-saying to life in all its forms, even the terrible. Thus, Nietzsche speculates on "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable." It is presented as a (speculative) history of an error.

> 1. The true world - attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, *he is it.*

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154 Cf. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the Tarantulas," pp. 211-214, and "On Redemption," pp. 248-254 , in *The Portable Nietzsche.*

155 cf. my Conclusion

(The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence "I, Plato, *am* the truth)

2. The true world, - unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents").

(Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible - *it becomes female*, it becomes Christian.)

3. The true world - unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it - a consolation, an obligation, an imperative.

(At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.)

4. The true world - unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also *unknown*. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us?

(Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cock-crow of positivism.)

5. The true world - An idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating - an idea which has become useless and superfluous - *consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Bright day; breakfast; return of *bon sens* and cheerfulness; Plato's embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

6. The true world - we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.*

(Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.).[156]

The point of interest for this study of Baudrillard's discussion of the object forms proper to modernity, the orders of simulacra, occurs in the transition from (2) to (3). This transition has been commonly referred to as the disenchantment of the world, or the death of God, an occurrence which has been linked in diverse literatures to the incept of modernity.

For Baudrillard also the analysis shifts from one of capital to one of modernity, but it is important to emphasise that, while it may not be explicit, the critique of capital is contained in Baudrillard's critique of modernity. This is clear if attention is paid in earlier works to the link Baudrillard establishes between the capitalist mode of production, or simply the mode of production (since Marxism has been shown as from the start implicated in its other), and

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[156] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 484-486

the form of representation of the real or of the object. It is only in an era when the object is viewed as functional in and of itself, as existing out there imbued with natural attributes or labour-added value, as radically separate from the subject but available to appropriation and production, and freed from any obligation with regard to its social nature as symbol, that a realm of political economy could be established at all. The realm of the free circulation of commodities and objects-as-signs is only possible with an attendant metaphysics of disenchanted, unobliged objects.

Baudrillard identifies three 'orders of appearance' or 'orders of simulacra' that have been dominant at different times in modernity. It should be made clear at the outset that what is appearing, being *simulated*, is the real, the object. The orders of simulacra are, in historical order of dominance, *counterfeit*, *production* and *simulation*. These orders are based on correspondent laws of value: counterfeit on the *natural* law of value; production on the *commercial* law of value; and simulation on the *structural* law of value. By proposing the attendant laws of value, Baudrillard is reestablishing his roots in the earlier analyses of political economy.

According to Baudrillard's paradigm, the order of the counterfeit was born with the Renaissance, and begins with the destructuring of the traditional feudal order by the bourgeois order. This occurs through a breakdown of the interdiction of tradition which protects the signs of status in the feudal order. The challenge of the bourgeoisie initiates open competition in the realm of distinctive signs in the society of the Renaissance. This occurrence is represented by Nietzsche in aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science*.

> 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? . . . What was holiest and mightiest of all the earth has yet owned has bled to death under our Knives . . .[157]

[157] NIetzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181

Nietzsche's famous account of the death of God is interpreted by William Connolly in a way similar to Baudrillard's understanding of the shift that occurred at the incept of modernity. In the pre-modern period, the signs that structured society were anchored in the correspondence of the human interpretation of the signs of nature with the interpretation of sacred texts. Human meaning existed only by virtue of this correspondence. Interpretation of the text of life hinged on human perception of the will of God shining out from the ethics, politics, language and culture of the day. The correspondence of the text of the world with the interpretation of the ancient religious texts was the basis for meaning in life. As long as this correspondence or harmony was seen to exist, knowledge and meaning were secure and the interdiction between signs had its anchor in God. In other words, signs remained symbols of a social order corresponding to the Divine will.

This notion of correspondence formed one dominant theory of knowledge in the pre-modern period. The divine order of hierarchy could be perceived at all scales of existence from a pond to the order of the stars. Thus, signs were not human constructs but human perceptions of this preexisting order. "Everything in the world is a sign, and the will to knowledge is the quest to read in each sign something of the larger pattern of harmonies, thereby moving a little closer to the will of the great Harmonizer."[158] The world of the pre-modern was an enchanted place. The death of God occurred when the world of the pre-modern was disenchanted. The incept of modern science can be seen as an active force in this disenchantment. Galileo's challenge to the Ptolemaic solar system provides only the most obvious example of scientific findings that radically challenge the hegemonic hermeneutic reading of the Universe of God.

This disenchantment is metaphorized when, in Nietzsche's aphorism, the people in the marketplace laugh at the madman when he cries, "I seek God! I seek God."[159] To laugh at the madman is to fail to acknowledge the

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[158] Ibid, p. 9

[159] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181

presence of the will of the divine harmonizer in the behaviour of the madman. The madman is no longer a sign of the presence of God in all things, something that should elicit a profound feeling of respect and wonder, but rather it is a manifestation of unreason and is, in Hobbes' terms, absurd.[160]

The growth of the bourgeois values of reason and science as ends in themselves initiates what Baudrillard calls "the emergence of open competition on the level of the distinctive signs."[161] This ushers in what he calls the order of the counterfeit. The human ability to unlock the secrets of God's nature, as well as the loosening of the Church's grip on society in the face of political pressure from the bourgeois class, allows for the growth of what Baudrillard calls semiurgic projects. The bourgeois challenge to the church opens the way to the destructuring of a society where the signs of hierarchy once pointed to a necessary relation (between God and Man, between Man and Church), and as such were limited by the hierarchy itself. The stuff of the earth, in the Feudal era, was predestined to an order. The stuff of the earth, in the Renaissance, becomes universalized and open to demand. Just as Luther demanded a personal relation between an individual and God, the bourgeois individual demanded a personal relation to the earth and its wealth of stuff for the creation of the signs of prestige.

The bourgeois universalization of the signifying process pays the price of reducing the status of the signs which order society to that of counterfeits of the signs of the previous order. According to Baudrillard, in the order of the counterfeit or first order of simulacra, nature is the simulation of the divine obligation, and reason is its interpreter. Since reason is universalized, available to all if only they would listen to it, the ferocious symbolic hierarchy of the feudal order is replaced by the reign of the emancipated sign. When the sign changes from one of limited diffusion, such as the feudal sign and its correspondence with the hierarchies of the universe, and becomes the signifier of a universal signified nature, the signifier begins to refer back to

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[160] cf. my Introduction.

[161] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 84

the disenchanted world of the signified: it becomes the common denominator of a world to which no one has any obligation. The sign becomes counterfeit not by corruption of an original, "but by extension of a material whose very clarity depended on the restriction by which it was bound."[162]

For Baudrillard this is the end of the 'obliged' sign. Competitive democracy succeeds the 'endogamy' of signs proper to a statutory order. Values and signs of prestige are transferred from one class to another, thus initiating the era of the counterfeit. Society passes from an era that, by virtue of interdiction, prohibited the free production of signs, to an era characterized by the free proliferation of signs by (economic) demand. Baudrillard is quick to point out that "simulacra are not only a game with signs; they imply social rapports and social power."[163]

It is helpful to remember that, for Baudrillard, at this point of early modernity the ruling law is the *natural* law of value. Thus the art and architecture of the day seeks to imitate nature, to provide a simulation of nature in imitative building materials like stucco, and the political order of the day grounds itself in 'natural rights.' Nature remains the simulation of the lost divine referent, but equally, in the simulation of nature, the rising bourgeois class asserts its 'semiurgic' power through its counterfeits of the signs of nature.

In a comparison of the automaton to the robot, Baudrillard establishes the difference between the first and second orders of simulacra. The automaton, like all the artifacts of the counterfeit era, is an analogy: it is an analogy of a human being that, by virtue of its simulation, poses the questions of appearance and reality. It is a sign of the semiurgic aspirations of the day: to interrogate and recreate nature. "The entire metaphysics of man as protagonist in the natural theatre of the creation is embodied in the automaton."[164] This is best illustrated in terms of political theory by the first

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[162] Ibid. p. 85

[163] Ibid, p. 88

[164] Ibid, p. 93

paragraph of Hobbes' Leviathan:

> Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal. For seeing life is but a motion of Limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within; why may we not say, that all *Automata* (Engines that move themselves by springs and wheeles as doth a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the *Heart*, but a *Spring*; and the *Nerves*, but so many *Strings*; and the *Joynts*, but so many *Wheeles*, giving motion to the whole Body, such as was intended by the Artificer? *Art* goes yet further, imitating that Rationall and most excellent worke of Nature, *Man*. For by Art is created that great Leviathan called a Common-wealth, or State, which is but an Artificial Man.[165]

As Hobbes states unequivocally, the automaton is an artificial representation of Nature. It is a counterfeit. The wielder of reason (the key to Nature) illustrates and consolidates power through 'semiurgic' counterfeits of the works of the great Artificer. These counterfeits are, nonetheless, governed by the same natural laws. The robot, by contrast, is the sign of the abandonment of natural law and the entrance of the mercantile law of value. As the equivalent of the human being instead of its analogy, the question of nature is put aside in favour of the questions of value and production.

From the Renaissance, Western culture moves into the industrial revolution as well as into a new order of simulacra. A new form of object is born: the equivalent object. The object is again simulated according to a replacement referent, a new law: the mercantile law of value. This is the era of production. Just as the human being is counterfeited in the automaton, in the era of production, the essence of the human being (labour) is (re)produced. This is the birth of political economy. Since the status of the object in this era has been treated extensively above[166] it need not be recounted here, other than to draw attention to the objectification of the human being as well. Just as the object is interpreted, or rather simulated, in

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[165] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 51

[166] Chapter Two.

terms of its value, so too is the human being. The human being defined as the labouring entity. Labour is seen as a *value* by early economists, a factor of production, and is sold on the market like other factors of production. Marx's critique of capitalism solidifies this view of the human by valorizing labour, and thus the era of production is solidified.

The produced object becomes possible by virtue of the obliteration of any reference to nature. By offering an interpretation, not of nature, but of need and utility, capitalism structures and orders society. Nature is no longer interpreted and emulated but rather dominated and exploited as the source of the satisfaction of need. The new simulated referent is *value*, the new law is mercantile: exchangeabilty.

When compared to the previous order, the order of production illustrates a radical difference in the relation of the human being to the object. Unlike the first order, where created objects were counterfeits of an original Nature, second order objects are produced as equivalents in unlimited series. There is no symbolic status of the object. It does not signify an original Nature but rather an appropriation, a force of extraction and transformation. Second, the human no longer defines the object, the human is defined by the object and objectified in turn, in terms of labour and value. Third, all objects become equivalent by nature, as do humans by virtue of the presence or absence of valuable labour. Says Baudrillard, "in a series [of produced objects], objects become undefined simulacra one of the other; and so, along with the objects, do the humans that produce them. Only the obliteration of the original reference allows for the generalized law of equivalence, that is to say *the very possibility of production*."[167]

The historical importance of this simulation is apparent with respect to the Luddite practices which proliferated at the beginning of the industrial revolution. Baudrillard uses this conflict to illustrate the difference between what he call the *mode* of production and the *code* of production. If

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167 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 97. This recalls Foucault's thoughts on simulation: "Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar." Foucault, *This Is Not A Pipe* (trans.: James Harkness), Berkely: University of California Press (1982), p. 44

machines remain signs of the † of production, that is, if production is accepted at the outset and debate centers on appropriation of the means for production, smashing machines is merely a deviant act. If machines are seen as the tools of the code of production, as the instruments of the social and political code and of power, then the ends of production have collapsed. The machines appear to the Luddites as

> direct, unmediated, and operative signs of the social relations of death upon which capital thrives. Then nothing can oppose their immediate destruction. In this sense, the Luddites were much more lucid than Marx concerning the full impact of the industrial order. And so today, the catastrophic outcome of this industrial process, about which even Marx himself misled us in his *dialectical* euphoria of productive forces, is in a way the revenge of the Luddites.[168]

For Baudrillard, the third order of simulacra involves another shift. It is a shift to the realm of simulation proper, where the question of a referent basically *disappears* behind what he calls cyberblitz. Cyberblitz, as the term would imply, describes the all out assault of capitalism as a system, particularly through the mass media, in an attempt to cybernetically control every corner of human existence. It is an era characterized by *social programming*. The forms are multiple, but generally involve the establishment and radical proliferation of a semiotics of consumption, a political economy of the sign. This constitutes a response on the part of the capitalist system to the crisis of demand. Fordist relations of production represent, for Baudrillard, utopia achieved[169] — the end of history and reunification with the simulated referent of value.

Therefore, what is simulated in the third order is not a referent — it is no longer a referential simulation but an operational simulation. The real is not located by a representational move in an object as such, but rather by a

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168 Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal*, p. 104

169 'Utopia achieved' is the title of a chapter in Baudrillard's *America*, a book which, perhaps more insistently than any other written by him, describes the ahistorical situation of contemporary society. cf. *America*, p. 75.

re-productive move in a system of objects. The referent becomes exclusively a semiotic field in which no object exists in a state of value, but rather in a state of communication of values as a term in a discourse of objects. Society becomes self-referential. An unending consumption and reproduction of the system, an entire way of life, is cybernetically imposed through a coded political economy of the sign.

According to Baudrillard, it is no longer a question today of the proliferation of equivalent objects, but rather of the *ecstatic*[170] mutation of a code, metaphorically represented by a system of language, which takes as its operational strategy a proliferation of differences. The tactile space of the mass media constantly invite, even require, the participation of the subject in a project of social differentiation through fashion and consumption guided by the Code. Reality for us today is *hyperreal* in the sense that it is always already simulated by a model of consumption, always already emerging from a software program in the computer of the social programmer.

At this point in his discussion of the orders of simulacra, Baudrillard's style takes a radical turn. It is necessary, given the nature of the claim being made here about style, to extensively reproduce portions of Baudrillard's text,

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[170] A further key to understanding Baudrillard's account of the third order of simulation rests on the etymology of the term *ecstasis*, which forms the root of the later term alienation. A complete etymology is not necessary here, but rather a distinction between the older philosophical notion of *ecstasy* and the modern notion of alienation will suffice. Both imply a loss of self. In medieval philosophy, ecstasy was a state where the thinker became lost in contemplation: allowed the divine will to overtake the movement of thought. It was a positive state. Alienation implies, in Feuerbach's work, an understanding and acceptance of the contemplative meaning of *ecstasis* (by this time transformed into alienation [*Entäußerung*] *via* the latin rendering [*alienatio mentis*] of the original greek), but also a critique of such ecstasy as a fictional projection of the human into the transcendent realm. Feuerbach's assertion is one of the impossibility of going beyond the human realm, and maintains that alienation is self-alienation which simply discovers (in an attempt to lose oneself in the object [God]) the subject as object.

Baudrillard's rendering of *ecstasis* and *ecstasy* is similar to Feuerbach's alienation: it implies a loss of subjectivity in an object (the "radio-active screen of information") which is actually the subject. This differs from alienation in the Hegelian and Marxian sense precisely in that a religious reunification of man with his essence *has* taken place. The Hegelian Idea has been realized, communism achieved, and our society is in a state of inertia where the machinery developed with such a realization as an aim continues to mutate and reproduce itself. Neo-capitalism has become an *ecstatic* project of re-production as opposed to an alienated process of production of the real. Hegel's Idea is read by Baudrillard as alienation in Feuerbach's terms, but labelled *ecstasis* or *ecstasy*. cf. Nathan Rotenstreich, "On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of Alienation." In *Review of Metaphysics*, March 1963

since to paraphrase would be to obscure the source of the argument. Of the third order of simulacra Baudrillard writes

> After the metaphysic of being and appearance [first order], after that of energy and determination [second order], comes that of indeterminacy and the code [third order]. Cybernetic control, generation from model, differential modulation, feed-back, question/answer, etc.: such is the new operational configuration. Digitality is its metaphysical principle (the God of Leibnitz), and DNA its prophet. It is in effect in the genetic code that the "genesis of simulacra" today finds its most accomplished form. At the limit of an always more extensive abolition of references and finalities, of the loss of resemblance and designation, we find the digital program sign, whose value is purely tactical, at the intersection of the other signals (corpuscles of information/test) and whose structure is that of a macro-molecular code of command and control.
>
> ... We have already seen signs of the first order, complex signs and rich in illusion, change, with the machines, into crude signs, dull, industrial, repetitive, echoless, operational and efficacious. What a mutation, even more radical still, with signals of the code, illegible, with no gloss possible, buried like programmatic matrices light-years away in the depths of the biological body - black boxes where all the commandments, all the answers ferment! End of the theatre of representation, the space of signs, their conflict, their silence; only the black box of the code, the molecular emitter of signals from which we have been irradiated, crossed by answers/questions like signifying radiations, tested continually by our own program inscribed in the cells.
>
> ... Space is no longer even linear or one-dimensional: cellular space, indefinite generation of the same signals, like the tics of a prisoner gone mad with solitude and repetition. ... All aura of sign, of significance itself is resolved in this determination; all is resolved in the inscription and decodage.
>
> ... Such is the third order simulacrum, our own. Such is the "mystic elegance of the binary system, of the zero and the one", from which all being proceeds. Such is the status of the sign that is also the end of signification: DNA or operational simulation.[171]

Such is the tone, language and style that Baudrillard adopts when entering the third order. This marks a turning point, in mid-text, in Baudrillard's theoretical project. Earlier sections of the text do not appear in this style.

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[171] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, pp. 103-106

Indeed, for Baudrillard, it is at the historical juncture which corresponds to the shift from the second to third orders that a shift in the object form occurs; a shift which necessitates for him a concomitant shift in the form of theory. A number of stylistic strategies are evident in the above passage. What Baudrillard is seeking to convey to the reader is the simultaneous rigidity and mutational capacity of the Code at this juncture and beyond.

At the heart of such a shift still lies the fundamental critique developed earlier; the ideological schema of separation and reunification remains intact. The difference lies in the fact that, for Baudrillard, some form of reunification has been achieved. It is the state of *ecstasy* that supplants the state of alienation. For Baudrillard, the era of alienation and of history was one where there was a message being put forth. The message was one of the coming utopia, the Idea. The market was the medium through which that message was conveyed. At some point, as Canetti suggests, we dropped out of history. The quest for reunification gave way to a pure functioning of the medium itself: "it is the medium which imposes itself in pure circulation. Let us call this ecstasy: the market is an ecstatic form of the circulation of goods, as prostitution and pornography are ecstatic forms of the circulation of sex . . . Ecstasy is all functions abolished into one dimension, the dimension of communication. Ecstasy is the state in which reunification is achieved, and the medium through which we achieved this reunification continues to assert itself in an inertial fashion. For Baudrillard, information is the last great commodity — we have now achieved the ecstasy of communication.

This theme is first introduced in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. The discussion of the third order of simulacra is informed by this insight. The referent disappears as we approach it. "The messiah will only come when he will no longer be necessary. He will come one day after his advent. He will not come on the day of the Last judgment, but on the day after." Baudrillard invokes these words from Kafka to punctuate his insight that "the revolution has already taken place."[172] Yet, theorists continue to play the game of linear

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[172] Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* (trans.: © *Humanities in Society*), New York: Semiotexte (1987), pp. 50-51

revolution, while history has finished and redoubled on itself in simulation. The historical project is now being reproduced in excrescent forms and managed in inertial states.

This is the case with Baudrillard's theoretical project as well. All claims to revolutionary aspiration are abandoned by him once the dynamic of the third order of simulacra is identified and theorized. Baudrillard's text becomes a vehicle for the further reproduction of itself as well. The instances of transcoding proliferate to allow for discussion of the same basic phenomena of simulation and excrescent, ecstatic growth to appear and reappear in a multitude of styles. The closure in Baudrillard's writing — the hyperbolic announcements and the all-inclusive conceptual frameworks — mirrors the society he describes. This would be, given what Baudrillard has maintained regarding the political economy of the sign, the first step in establishing a critique: the mirror phase. Just as the discussion in *For a Critique* takes the form of the discourse on political economy, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* takes the form of simulation: continual mutation of an instance of theoretical closure. Thus Baudrillard transcodes the discourse of critical theory, just as Marx, in a certain sense, transcoded it into the discourse of political economy. This time, however, we are treated to the language of chaos theory, computer science, genetics, geology and statistics.

Baudrillard is struck down immediately, however, by his own critique. For despite the effectiveness of the stylistic experimentation he engages in in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), and in later works such as *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (1978), and *Simulacres and Simulation* (1981), despite its innovation in transcoding and stylistic reflection of the totalitarianism of the phenomena he describes, Baudrillard remains, just as his critique of Marx implies, trapped in the mirror of simulation. This is not to deny the usefulness of such stylistic experimentation. It can be seen to serve a function of alerting the reader to the phenomena described in a way that is not afforded by the 'conventional' discourses of theory. Both in its transcoding move, and in its aesthetic density, Baudrillard's text *as object* evokes the sense of total closure that is, according to Baudrillard, effected by

the mutation of capitalism into neo-capitalism. But Baudrillard remains guilty of delivering a critique of simulation in the form of simulation.

Baudrillard became aware of this problem. For him, the mirror syndrome is especially problematic at the level of the third order because of its capacity to "hallucinate" its own reality as total environment, as opposed to object form. Although the third order and its predecessors engage in the simulation of the referent, the third order differs drastically simply because there is no status of the object as such. The object is immediately aesthetically operationalized in simulation by virtue of its necessary status as sign. Thus the system mutates easily to incorporate a new object, a theoretical object even, given the loss of a ground of representation in favour of a semiotic field which is not real but *hyperreal*. It is hyperreal in the sense that it is always already represented by a utopic model which precedes it. The object falls into simulation just as a meaningless word is immediately given meaning by the subject of language who strives after it in its difference.

The fate of theory in the third order, so long as it attempts to critique that order on its own terms (and it would seem that at this point, for Baudrillard, theory has no terms to operate within except those of simulation) is to become immediately operationalized as a sign value. Thus the sign 'Baudrillard' is operationalized as having been written by any number of previously operationalized signs, such as Foucault, Derrida, Nietzsche, *et. al.*. 'Intertextuality' becomes the sign of the simulation of theory itself, since the theoretical object no longer stands alone as a work, written by an author, but rather as a sign that is inserted into a structure of authorless genres and styles, desubjectified concepts and frameworks. All of these, for Baudrillard, constitutes the duplication of the system in its own critique. As a closed system, the Code assimilates theory in a homeopathic fashion.

> In this manner all closed systems protect themselves at the same time from the referential - as well as from all metalanguage that the system forestalls in playing at its own metalanguage; that is to say in duplicating

> itself in its own critique of itself. In simulation, the metalinguistic illusion duplicates and completes the referential illusion (pathetic hallucination of the sign and pathetic hallucination of the real).

Theory is operationalized much in the same fashion as what Baudrillard conceives to be the dominant operational formulation of all of neo-capitalism, that of the binary opposition.

> It might appear that the historical movement of capital carries it from one of open competition toward oligopoly, then toward monopoly - that the democratic movement goes from multiple parties toward bipartism, then toward the single party. Nothing of the sort: oligopoly, or the current duopoly results from a tactical doubling of monopoly. In all domains duopoly is the final stage of monopoly. ... any unitary system, if it wishes to survive, must acquire a binary regulation. ... This regulated opposition can furthermore be ramified into a more complex scenario. The matrix remains binary. It will never again be a matter of duel or open competitive struggle, but of couples of simultaneous opposition.

The various realms of theory pair off with their opposites, which in any case remain trapped in the minimum vibration between the two poles necessary to maintain the illusion of opposition. In such a situation, all representation succumbs to its simulation as representation and takes its place as an element in an pseudo-ideological dyad. Thus the environment of theory is operationalized by virtue of its matrix of circulating, free-floating theoretical object-signs. All reflection comes to reflect itself, just as the two towers of the World Trade Center infinitely reflect each other.[173]

The Flight from Identity —

> I tell you this in truth; this is not the end of this here, but also and first of that there, the end of history, the end of class struggle, the end of philosophy, the end of God, the end of religion, the end of christianity and morals . . ., the end of the subject, the end of man, the end of the west, the end of Oedipus, the end of the earth, *Apocalypse Now*, I tell you, in the cataclysm,

[173] Ibid, p. 151

> the fire, the flood, the fundamental earthquake, the napalm descending from the sky by helicopter, like prostitutes, and also the end of literature, the end of painting, art as a thing of the past, the end of psychoanalysis, the end of the university, the end of phallocentrism and phallogocentrism, and I don't know what else.[174]

So ends Baudrillard's first experimentation with style. Just as my own text became hyperreal in an effort to accurately reproduce Baudrillard's experiment, the same phenomenon occurs in Baudrillard's work as well.

The similarities between Baudrillard's work on the orders of simulation and the method of genealogy[175] should be apparent. Baudrillard maintains that he abandoned genealogical approaches precisely because he saw all genealogical attempts being absorbed by their object. "For a time I believed in Foucauldian genealogy, but the order of simulation is antinomical to genealogy. . . . If you take this logic to the extreme, what you get is the reabsorbtion of all genealogy. That's why I believe Foucault was unable to make the leap. What interests me is the mysterious point where he stops and finds nothing more to say."[176]

Recognizing his own attempts at transcoding the third order to fail, ultimately, on the basis of his own critiques, Baudrillard moves the reader into another realm of analysis, a more encompassing level. Since the discussions of the political economy of the sign and of simulation play a role of mirror critique, and then write themselves into trouble as such, Baudrillard seeks to take theory to another level which allows for the

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[174] Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," *Oxford Literary Review* 6, no. 2 (1984) pp. 20-21

[175] Among other texts by him, Foucault's treatment of *epistemes* in *The Order of Things*, New York: Tavistock Publishing (1970), can be read as prefiguring Baudrillard's own theory of simulacra.

[176] Baudrillard and Lotringer, *Forget Baudrillard*, p. 73-74. Foucault was well aware of the phenomenon Baudrillard describes: "What . . . is the title of your discourse? Where does it come from and from where does it derive its right to speak? How could it be legitimated . . . If you claim that you are opening up a radical interrogation, if you wish to place your discourse at the level at which we place ourselves, you know very well that it will enter our game, and, in turn, extend the very dimension that it is trying to free itself from." quoted in Harland, *Superstructuralism*, p. 120. Whether Foucault adequately responds to these questions he poses to himself is a complex question that cannot be pursued here.

transgression of the limited political economy of the sign and of the mutational architecture of simulation. This is realm is variously called by him and is ruled by the dynamics of 'reversible immanence,' 'objective revenge,' 'the transpolitical,' and of the 'Evil Genie;' but for the alert reader it is, in slightly altered form, the heterogeneous realm of *general economy*.

General economy is a field of analysis introduced by Georges Bataille. Bataille is a figure who looms in the background of Baudrillard's work from the beginning, but steps to the fore only when Baudrillard runs out of breath in the realm of immanent critique. Before giving (in the next chapter) an exposition of how Baudrillard utilizes Bataille's work in the development of his own strategy of writing, it is important to briefly map the philosophical terrain on which Bataille, and subsequently Baudrillard, write. Such cartography will locate Baudrillard as only the latest in a long line of scholars deeply influenced by the Kojèveian reading of Hegel. These scholars, as Bataille puts it, "would flee, endlessly flee" the "infinite shepherd" of Hegelian identity.[177]

Kojève's influence on the development of twentieth century French philosophy is great and has been extensively documented elsewhere.[178] It is not my intention here to offer either a reading Hegel or a reading of Kojève; both of these would be far outside the scope of this essay. Rather, I will seek to outline the crucial ideas appropriated by Bataille from Kojève's reading of Hegel. In so doing, I hope to show the roots of both Bataille's and Baudrillard's reaction against the imperializing movement of an ever-growing conquest of otherness by identity inherent to modernity.

Kojève writes

> Man is desire directed toward another desire - that is, Desire for Recognition — that is negating Action performed for the sake of satisfying the Desire for this Recognition — that is, bloody fighting for this prestige — that

[177] Quoted in Foucault, "Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (trans.: Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon), Ithica: Cornell University Press (1977) p. 43

[178] cf. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*. New York: Colombia University Press (1987); Julian Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern*. London: Duke University Press (1991).

> is, the relation between Master and Slave — that is, Work — that is, historical evolution which finally comes to the universal and homogeneous State and to the absolute knowledge that reveals complete Man realized in and by this State.[179]

This historical evolution is achieved, for Hegel, through the famous *Aufhebung*, the dialectic through which otherness is superceded but simultaneously preserved at the moment of *Aufheben*.

An individual consciousness only achieves self-consciousness through the recognition of an Other self-consciousness. The individual only achieves a thought of itself for-itself through a recognition of another for-itself. This insight forms the core of the Master/Slave relation. It also amounts to the formula for self-alienation. As Judith Butler notes, the evolution toward homogeneity alluded to by Kojève above is accomplished "only through an intentional relation to an Other; [the subject] can overcome its own self-alienation only through overcoming the externality of the Other's self-consciousness."[180]

The drive to homogeneity is accomplished through this Desire inherent in the individual. The end of the Work of History, of *Aufhebung*, in the State is accomplished through the supercession of all Otherness. Hegel writes that the individual consciousness

> must supersede this otherness of itself. This is the supercession of the first ambiguity, and is therefore itself a second ambiguity. First, it must proceed to supersede the other independent being in order therefore to become certain of itself as the essential being; secondly, in so doing it proceeds to supersede its own self, for this other is itself.[181]

Thus the logic of the dialectical progression of identity finds its driving force in Desire, a desire that is always refueled by the supercession of the other,

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[179] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the reading of Hegel* (trans.: James H. Nichols Jr.), New York: Basic Books (1969), p. 139

[180] Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 50

[181] Quoted in ibid. p. 50

who was, before assimilation into identity, the self-alienated source of self-recognition. Desire always needs an Other in order to first posit the self and, through supercession, affirm the self. In supercession the subject reestablishes the lack of ground for Desire. Desire is, therefore, insatiable except, presumably, in the final negation of otherness which completes the Idea.

Bataille opens his work *Theory of Religion* with the following statement from Kojève:

> Desire is what transforms Being, revealed to itself by itself in (true) knowledge, into an "object" revealed to a subject different from the object and "opposed" to it. It is in and by — or better still, as — "his" Desire that man is formed and is revealed — to himself and to others — as an I, as the I that is essentially different from, and radically opposed to, the non-I. The (human) I is the I of a Desire or of Desire.
>
> The very being of man, the self-conscious being, therefore, implies and presupposes Desire. Consequently, the human reality can be formed and maintained only within a biological reality, an animal life. But, if animal Desire is the necessary condition of self-consciousness, it is not the sufficient condition. By itself, this desire constitutes only the Sentiment of self.
>
> In contrast to the knowledge that keeps man in a passive quietude, Desire dis-quiets him and moves him to action. Born of desire, action tends to satisfy it, and can do so only by the "negation," the destruction, or at least the transformation of the desired object: to satisfy hunger, for example, the food must be destroyed or, in any case, transformed. Thus, all action is "negating."[182]

Bataille seeks to challenge the above reading of Hegel that sees negation as a dialectical supercession. Specifically, Bataille is concerned with showing how the logic of identity, which he *accepts*, is itself negated by a more fundamental movement away from identity and toward heterogeneity and the intimacy of a non-differentiated whole.[183]

Bataille posits the impossibility of the resolution of the Hegelian project. This impossibility is the result of an excess that can never be utilized, and must therefore be wasted without use, which is to say, without meaning.

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[182] Bataille,*Theory of Religion*, p. 5

[183] Ibid, p. 13

Bataille's specific formulation of this general economy, whose movement supersedes the movement of the limited economy of the dialectic of identity, will be the subject of the following chapter, as will be Baudrillard's appropriation of the theory of writing emergent from it. The general problematique — a particular teleological reading of Hegel and the subsequent and equally teleological anti-Hegelianisms generated out of it — is set quite nicely by Jacques Derrida in "The Ends of Man."[184]

Derrida describes a movement in philosophy he calls "Metaphysics or Humanism." This is the movement, illustrated in the above discussion of Hegel, toward the establishment of what Sartre calls a 'phenomenological ontology.' Derrida claims that such an attempt constitutes the establishment of a "philosophical anthropology." It is a totalizing move which "links the *we* of the philosopher to '*we* men,' to the *we* in the horizon of humanity." Although such discussions take place often in the venue of history, little attention is paid, according to Derrida, to the history of the concept 'man.' The project of establishing the essence of man constitutes the establishment of a metaphysics or a humanism which attempts to describe the totality of beings as *Being*. Such an aspiration forms the ground for the human sciences.[185]

Derrida's challenge to the universalizing tendency of the discourse on 'man' forms the core of a direction in poststructuralist thought that announces the death of 'man.' Derrida's critique is similar to the one that leads to Foucault's famous dictum regarding the end of the *episteme* proper to the human sciences, an end that would precipitate the 'erasure' of 'man' "like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea." According to Derrida, the difficulty for philosophy today is to posit a way out of the 'we' toward an 'us,' the difference resting on a contest of homogeneity with heterogeneity.[186]

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184 Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 111-136.

185 Ibid, p. 114-116.

186 There is an obvious problem in fixing a critique concerning the 'we' versus the 'us' upon the concept of 'man.' It seems particularly uncritical today to argue for the heterogeneity of 'men' in the 'us' without pointing to the first and most obvious heterogeneity ignored by the term 'man'. Luce Irigaray provides the most contextually relevant of many feminist critiques of the concept of 'man.' cf. *Speculaum of the Other Woman*, Ithica: Cornell University Press (1985).

It is interesting that, in Derrida's recommendations, the question of style plays an important role: "what we need, perhaps, as Nietzsche said, is a change of "style;" and if there is style, Nietzsche reminded us, it must be plural."[187]

While Derrida's position cannot be pursued here because of the constraints of space, suffice it to say that he casts a shadow of doubt on the reading of Hegel which leads, in France, to the form of anthropologism he describes. Derrida and others react to this anthropological totalization through a deconstruction of the opposition between some essentially complete 'man' and an alienated 'man.' Bataille, and Baudrillard after him, instead posit an anti-anthropology, an equally teleological movement that dislocates the source of human behaviour from some 'man' and proffers a non-humanistic cosmology that simply takes identity apart. It is this anti-anthropology that spurs Baudrillard to the dismissal of the so-called anthropological minimum in favour of other teleological necessities

> In fact, the 'vital anthropological minimum' doesn't exist: in all societies, it is determined residually by the fundamental urgency of an excess: the divine or sacrificial share, sumptuous discharge . . . And the priority of this claim works everywhere at the expense of the functional side of the balance sheet - at the expense, where necessary, of minimal subsistence.[188]

This fundamental urgency amounts to the same metaphysics as the 'we' Derrida spoke of above. Baudrillard, closely following the assumptions of Bataille's general economy, creates a teleological anti-Hegelianism. He deploys this set of assumptions to combat what he sees as the internally impenetrable structural logic of the movement of History as a limited economy of simulation. This reversal of the logic of identity is captured in Baudrillard's proposition that "instead of exporting Marxism and

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[187] Ibid. p. 135. It is not my purpose here to give an elucidation of Derrida's position.

[188] Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, p. 80-81. "Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of the organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength — life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (trans.: Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books (1989), p. 21

Psychoanalysis (not to mention Bourgeois ideology . . .), we bring all the force and questioning of primitive societies to bear on Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Perhaps then we will break this fascination, this self-fetishization of Western thought."[189] How such a move could constitute anything other than a double self-fetishization is unclear, and further it smacks of one of the Hegelian 'tricks' foreshadowed by Foucault.[190]

In this attempt to combat the movement of Hegelian metaphysics and its founding 'architecture' (at least, a particular interpretation of them), Bataille and Baudrillard accelerate the metaphysical drive by positing a further essence not only of 'man' but of all things, which inherently resists and reverses the human drive to identity and mastery. This essence, as mentioned above, is characterized variously by Baudrillard, but seems to obtain final conceptualization in his "Principle of Evil."[191] Bataille writes "Precisely because awakening is the meaning of dualism, the inevitable sleep that follows it reintroduces evil as a major force. The flatness to which a dualism without transcendence is limited opens up the mind to the sovereignty of evil which is the unleashing of violence."[192] Baudrillard echoes

> If the morality of things lies in their sacrosanct use-value, then long live the immorality of the atom and of nuclear arms, which cause even them to be submitted to the ultimate and cynical event of the spectacle. Long live the secret rule of the game that causes everything to disobey the symbolic law! What will save us is neither the rational principle nor use-value. Rather, its the immoral principle of the spectacle, the ironic principle of Evil.[193]

For Bataille, the entire process of identification emerges from a primal intimacy and immanence of things, which in this state are not things but are

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189 Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, pp. 49-50.

190 The positing and subsequent pirating, by western 'human' scientists, of some 'questions' that 'primitive society' would like to ask 'western society' would seem to fit well within the Hegelian dialectic of identity.

191 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, pp. 181-191

192 Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 79

193 Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 183

"like water in water."[194] Thus, all things, in the inevitable process of death and destruction, return to the original intimacy. It is this original immanence that all identification struggles against, only to rejoin it in sacrifice and death. The process of identification is subverted from the beginning by its 'ground.'[195] The sacrificer says "I withdraw you, victim, from the world in which you were and could only be reduced to the condition of a thing, having a meaning that was foreign to your intimate nature. I call you back to the intimacy of the divine world, of the profound immanence of all that is."[196]

Baudrillard's notions of 'reversible immanence' and 'objective revenge' echo this latter sentiment of 'return' as well. For Baudrillard, the 'pure object' is not the 'thing' described by Bataille. The order of *things*, for Baudrillard, "is charged with reversibility."[197] This reversibility is the reversible immanence of objective revenge. The realm of *pure objectivity* asserts itself. Revenge of the crystal.

> "What is the crystal? It is the object, the pure object . . . There is another logic simply than the alterity of the object, alienation by the object. These are already tired problematics. [The pure object] is without imaginary, but this is its strength, its sovereignty. This is because it is not caught in a system of projection or identification: the mirror stage, desire or whatever. The object is without desire, and so belongs to the order of destiny. In my opinion there are only two things: either it's desire, or its destiny! . . . here it links up with many of the recent trends: not the search for a positivism, but for a positivity, for an immanence of things.[198]

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[194] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 23

[195] Identification emerges from immanence and seeks to rejoin it in absolute knowledge. Since absolute knowledge presupposes a 'distinction' or 'otherness' between knower and known object, the final act of knowing is, for Bataille, the act of destruction -- self-destruction. There is no identical subject-object for Bataille. He writes that, at a certain place, at an "apex of possibility" for thought, "awareness of the impossibility opens consciousness to all that it is possible for it to think. In this gathering place, where violence is rife, at the boundary of that which escapes cohesion, he who reflects within cohesion realizes that there is no longer any room for him (*Theory of Religion*, p. 10)." In this he perhaps follows Nietzsche's suggestion that "it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish . . . (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 48)."

[196] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 44

[197] Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal*, p. 25

[198] Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal*, p. 19

For Baudrillard, this object is transparent to the principle of Evil. The assertion of the principle of Evil, and of objective revenge, is "proof of a more radical negativity, namely, that if everything finally disobeys the symbolic order, its because everything was already subverted from the beginning."[199]

This counter-teleology is what Baudrillard presents as the solution to the radical closure he describes and emulates in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. The third order of simulacra, despite its homeopathic mutational capacity, will be destroyed by what Bataille describes as the reversible immanence of all flat dualisms. The twin Trade Towers are precisely this type of flat dualism, the dualism of simulation in which the two terms mirror each other.

This prophetic stance offers no explanation of why, if everything is fate, Baudrillard writes theory at all, and especially why he writes the way he does. He says, "all that remains for us is theoretical violence. Speculation to death, whose only method is the radicalization of all hypotheses."[200] Such a statement, I argue, is unintelligible without reference to what has gone before in this discussion. Further, there still remains the question of why he engages in a style of 'speculation to death.' What form do such writing take? What is the image of thought that Baudrillard presents us? What is the noology of reversible immanence and the Principle of Evil? Baudrillard posits the situation:

> Nowadays, one no longer says: "You've got a soul and you must save it," but "You've got a sexual nature, and you must learn how to use it well."
>
> "You've got an unconscious, and you must learn how to liberate it."
>
> "You've got a body, and you must learn how to enjoy it."
>
> "You've got a libido, and you must learn how to spend it," etc., etc.
>
> This compulsion toward liquidity, flow, and accelerated circulation of what is psychic, sexual, or pertaining to the body is the exact replica of the force which governs market value: capital must circulate; gravity and any fixed point must disappear; The chain of investment and reinvestments must

[199] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 183

[200] Quoted in Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern*, p. 125

never stop; [201]

And then the radical politics of style which constitutes the solution:

> One must rouse the principle of Evil.
>
> This is the only scale by which we can measure our present situation. By dint of meaning, information, and transparence our societies have passed beyond the limit point, that of permanent ecstasy: the ecstasy of the social (the masses), the body (the obese, the anorexic), sex (obscenity), violence (terror), and information (simulation). In fact, the era of transgression has ended, it is that things themselves have transgressed their own limits. If one can no longer reconcile things with their essence, it is because they have mocked and surpassed their own definition. They have become more social than the social (the masses), fatter than fat (the obese), more violent than the violent (terror), more sexual than sex (porn), more real than the real (simulation), more beautiful than the beautiful (fashion).
>
> Hence, more beautiful than me you die, truer than me you die, more real than me, you simulate, and more simulated than me you die . . . For critical theory one must substitute a fatal theory, to bring this objective irony of the world to completion.
>
> It is so much more fun to see our universe destined to fatality, which is not transcendent but immanent in our very processes, in their superfusion, in their overdrive, in their surmultiplication, immanent in our banality, which is also the indifference of things toward their own meaning, the indifference of effects towards their very causes. All this constitutes an original situation; that of an evil demon driven by a silent strategy.[202]

Baudrillard has arrived at this conclusion and programme after a long journey of confrontation with the lumbering, mutating identity of modern society. His own inability to escape the logic of identity and the paradoxes of language necessitate, for him, an anti-strategy. Whereas Baudrillard previously criticized Bataille for assuming the possibility of a unilateral expenditure (in an attempt to save the gift for symbolic exchange), such a unilateral expenditure becomes, in Baudrillard's later works, the driving principle behind the very form of his text. Baudrillard's style becomes, in his

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[201] Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, p. 24-25

[202] Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*,

own words, *autodestructive*. As I will show in the next chapter, this, again, is heavily prefigured by the Bataillean theory of writing.

Chapter Four: *Romantics, Heliolaters and the Heterogeneous*

> As long as man is restrained by religion he can objectify his essence only by making it into an alien, fantastic being.
>
> - Marx[203]

Baudrillard and Bataille -

> Major sovereignty is distinguished by its spontaneity and independence of external authority; otherwise "it would acquire an external referentiality, and thus seek control and duration. But these are denied to sovereignty by its own authenticity, since it can only be powerless, unstable, violently (or gaily) destructive, eternally dissatisfied." Because it pushes meaning and discourse to their limits, placing them in relation to the absence of meaning and the absolute non-discourse, sovereign writing is best compared to a potlatch: a transgressive, defiant sacrifice of words.[204]

After first asserting the impossibility of what I propose to do here, I will now attempt to answer the question "why does Baudrillard write the way he does?" Baudrillard continues to expound upon simulation in all of his later works. At the same time his work increasingly changes direction, or *directions* as the case may be. Hiding undeveloped behind the early works was a notion of the symbolic or 'symbolic exchange.' In the later works this notion emerges in full force, albeit in a metamorphic form. Most commentators have missed this metamorphosis, assuming that the symbolic had been simply abandoned in favour of new categories and theoretical strategies. On the contrary, the symbolic is in a constant state of partial or (in)articulation behind much of Baudrillard's most mysterious, puzzling and enraging writing. For Baudrillard, this style, this heterogeneity, this unwillingness to accede to the demands of the discourse of the sign and its pervasive ideology of *'accumulation-toward-reunification'*, is a necessary

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209 Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, p. 241.

204 Michele H. Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1982), p. 70. Richman acknowledges the assistance of Jean Baudrillard in the working through of Bataille's project.

element of his written theory and his theory of writing. In order to understand why, Baudrillard's relationship to the work of Georges Bataille must be made explicit.[205]

As I demonstrated in the discussion of simulation, the sign, for Baudrillard, is the icon of ideological forms. The sign of the third order is a perfected ideological phenomenon, precisely because of its mutation into a signified-free state. The sign itself is freed of any obligation to refer to anything but itself in its element role in operational simulation, a continuing process of reaffirmation of the now idling historical machine. Baudrillard exceeds the logic of theorists like Barthes, for example, who see the structuring power of the sign still rooted in its ability to signify a signified. Baudrillard locates the power of the system in its ability to organize signs in a way that weds their aesthetic role as signifier to a total environment. For him there is no longer a question of a multiplicity of 'meanings' for the signifier. There is no point in talking about '*Différance*,'[206] as Derrida does, or '*signifiance*,' as do Barthes and Kristeva. For Baudrillard, such theories still play the ideological game of the sign. Despite positing the multiplicity of signification, they still ground the sign *ambivalently* on the signified. Baudrillard wishes to show how, in post-historical society, there is no longer any distinction between signified and signifier.

The root of this direction in Baudrillard's thought can be found in his earliest writings, but nowhere more obviously than at the conclusion of *The Mirror of Production*. There, the ontological status of the sign is radically contested by Baudrillard in his denunciation of the vision of revolution attendant to any formation of consciousness under its sway. The ideological move of separation and reunification is contested on the basis of its temporal structure, its waiting for the movement of history. Baudrillard privileges what he calls the 'truly revolutionary' vision which sees the future order as

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[205] Again, this is not something that is accomplished in any of the secondary literature on Baudrillard, excepting perhaps, Julian Pefanis' book *Heterology and the Postmodern*.

[206] cf. in general Derrida's work *Of Grammatology* (trans.: Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1974), as well as "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*.

'here and now.' Against the ideal of separation and reunification, Baudrillard privileges instances where he sees that there was "speech before history." "Courderoy, the Luddites, Rimbaud, the Communards, the people of the savage strikes, those of May, 1968 — in every case the revolution does not speak indirectly; they are the revolution, not concepts in transit."[207]

It seems needless to point out that these moments of revolution were precisely that: moments. Nonetheless, this point is essential for an understanding of the core of Baudrillard's concept of revolutionary activity. Where does the revolution occur? Here it is illuminating to recall the passage quoted at the close of Chapter Two of this essay:

> There is no possible or impossible. The utopia is here in all the energies that are raised against political economy. But this utopian violence does not accumulate; it is lost. It does not try to accumulate itself as does economic value in order to abolish death. It does not grasp for power. To enclose the "exploited" within the single historical possibility of taking power has been the worst diversion the revolution has ever taken. One sees here to what depths the axioms of political economy have undermined, pervaded and distorted the revolutionary perspective. Utopia wants speech against power and against the reality principle which is only the phantasm of the system and its infinite reproduction. It wants only the spoken word; and it wants to lose itself in it.[208]

Baudrillard himself notes that such a position has been characterized as "revolutionary romanticism."[209] It is my contention that there is good reason for viewing Baudrillard's position in a similar light. The key to understanding such a position on revolutionary activity (including writing) lies in a number of assertions contained in the above statement drawn directly from the work of Georges Bataille; assumptions which, long after *The Mirror of Production*, continue to inform Baudrillard's theoretical practice and, most specifically, his style.

Again, speaking in very general terms, Baudrillard's solution to the problem of how to have speech against power, how to initiate change in the

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[207] Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p. 166.

[208] Ibid. pp. 166-167

[209] Ibid. p. 164

midst of structure, differs from most of his poststructuralist cohorts. While others may prefer to theorize change by demonstrating how structures change internally, Baudrillard adopts quite uncritically Bataille's subsumption of structure and the Idea as mere moments in a more totalizing cosmology of general economy. But a familiarity with the the work of Bataille is necessary in order to detect this. Especially in the earlier works, Baudrillard simply drops the Bataillean metaphysics like a bombshell from nowhere, and then moves on just as quickly. The Bataillean assumptions irrupt in the text as a justification for some of Baudrillard's more contentious statements. For example, in *For a Critique*:

> In fact, the 'vital anthropological minimum' doesn't exist: in all societies, it is determined residually by the fundamental urgency of an excess: the divine or sacrificial share, sumptuous discharge . . . And the priority of this claim works everywhere at the expense of the functional side of the balance sheet - at the expense, where necessary, of minimal subsistence.[210]

That a fundamental tenet of Western thought should be discharged in such an off-handed fashion is one of the main sources of complaint about Baudrillard's work. Nonetheless, it is not necessarily the result of a 'fault' in Baudrillard's work that his audience fails to make the jump with him to the conceptual universe of general economy. At the same time, this does not mean that the Bataillean theory is not open to contestation.

It is only in his later works that Baudrillard presents himself (his text) in terms of the *Weltanschaung* which informs his work. It is only at the move from the second order of simulation to the third that Baudrillard becomes a Bataillean object in the face of the object form of political economy. This is Baudrillard's form of transcendence, his form of escape, his way of losing history, structure, and himself in a Sovereign moment of pure Transgression. It also illustrates the depth of Baudrillard's *Ressentiment*, and provides the root of his stylistic tendencies.

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[210] Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 80-81.

Bataille's Text — Until his death, Georges Bataille remained fascinated with a particular moment of human experience that can be characterized as dionysian. This moment received many names during Bataille's career, including ecstasy and *depénse*, but is most adequately and persistently described as *the impossible*. As a moment of disaccumulation and pure loss of self, its essence is conveyed only in the *experience interieur* of the subject lost to itself in ecstasy. In other words, since 'no one' experiences the moment, it is not expressible in a discourse aimed at unity. But this moment can only be characterized as 'dionysian' in a particular sense, one that is expressed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. It is to be distinguished from the notion of the *Dionysian* deployed by Nietzsche in later texts, a difference that will be treated below. In fact, in a very general sense, the privileging of this earlier notion of the dionysian in Bataille's text is characteristic of much of poststructuralist thought in general. It could be argued that the confrontation of structuralist thought with that of a Nietzschean influence turns on this moment of friction: the moment where structuralism disallows the Nietzschean free-spirit through an over-emphasis on 'the prison-house of language.'

It must be understood from the outset that Bataille's position is not commensurable with structuralist thinking. The source of attraction for many poststructuralist thinkers Bataille's focus on the question of transgression of a given structure or order that those wishing to escape the logical closure of structuralism find attractive in his work. Denis Hollier characterizes Bataille's position as radically anti-Hegelian, Hegel being the champion architect of systems and structures of thought. *Aufhebung* itself is pictured as an architectural technique controlling the movement of thought.

> There is consequently no way to describe a system without resorting to the vocabulary of architecture. When structure defines the general form of legibility, nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid. Architecture under these conditions is the archistructure, the system of systems. The keystone of systematicity in general, it organizes the concord of

> languages and guarantees universal legibility. The temple of meaning, it dominates and totalizes signifying productions, forcing them all to come down to the same thing, to conform to its noologic system. Architecture is a compulsory loan burdening all of ideology, mortgaging all its differences from the outset. . . . Otherness is excluded; it has no other place than outside. In an exterior which, reduced to silence, has no voice in the matter. [211]

It is exactly such a noology that Bataille refused to establish. This refusal is the refusal of the "temptation of form. . . The interdiction making it impossible in advance for his works to ever be complete . . . This transgression is the transgression of form."[212] This immediately presents the commentator with the difficulty alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. To write *on* something is to impose a form on it. If writing *on* is formalizing, this betrays Bataille's *writing*. "To write *on* Bataille is not to *write* on Bataille."[213] Nonetheless . . .

Bataille's work evolved concomitantly with the rise of structuralism, but drew on Mauss and Durkheim in a way different from the direction established by Levi-Strauss. Bataille's work was equally influenced by Nietzsche and Marx as it was by Freud and Durkheim. It seems fair, if ironic, to say that Bataille, with the establishment of the *College du Sociologie*, was the founder of his own school of thought or movement. Such a claim is based on Bataille's relegation of structure and history to moments in the dominant movement of the General Economy.

> Civilization in its entirety, the possibility of human life, depends upon a reasoned estimation of the means to assure life. But this life - this civilized life - which we are responsible for assuring, cannot be reduced to these means, which make it possible. Beyond calculated means, we look for the end - or the ends - of these means.[214]

Bataille is looking for the meaning, the end, of life. What is the end of life?

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[211] Hollier, Denis. *Against Architecture* (trans: Betsy Wing). Cambridge: MIT Press (1989). p. 23

[212] Ibid. p. 24

[213] Ibid., p. 25

[214] Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros* (trans. Peter Connor), San Francisco: City Lights Books (1989), p. 19

The end of life is death. The meaning of life is death. The meaning of life is transcendence of life. The meaning of life is the impossible. The meaning of life is its end in the ecstatic and sovereign moment of pure *dépense* and transgression of limit *as* limit. The end of life is the moment of reversibility of extreme opposites, the simultaneity and identity of extreme horror and divine ecstasy. The end of life is the fragmentation of the self into *heterogeneity*. The meaning of life — life in its peak moment — life in its *end* — is expressed in the face of the *Maenad*.

For Bataille, the end of life is (a) Sacred (one). It is intimately related to the source of religion.

> Sacred!
>
> In advance, the syllables of this word are burdened with anguish, and the weight which burdens is that of death in the sacrifice . . .
>
> Our entire life is burdened with death . . .
>
> But, in me, definitive death has the sense of a strange victory. It bathes me with its glow, it opens in me an infinitely joyous laughter: that of disappearance!
>
> .....
>
> .....
>
> If I had not, in these few phrases, enclosed myself in that moment when death destroys being, how could I speak about this "little death" in which, without actually dying, I collapse in a feeling of triumph.[215]

Thus, in lyrical form, Bataille tries to give evidence of the *impossible*. Nonetheless, he maintains that "unless it is given to us in all of its sudden depth, the meaning of eroticism will escape us."[216] Further, "the meaning of eroticism escapes anyone who cannot see its religious meaning."[217] Bataille denies accounts of religious experience that relate it to the moral dimension and picture it existing 'in line' with the law. He says the opposite: "Religion

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[215] Ibid. p. 68

[216] Ibid. p. 69

[217] Ibid. p. 70

is doubtlessly, even in essence, subversive: it turns away from the observance of laws. At least, what it demands is excess, sacrifice, and the feast, which culminates in ecstasy."[218] The pure religious sentiment is expressed, for Bataille, in the tragic eroticism of the dionysian orgies.

At my death
the horse teeth of the stars
whinny with laughter I *death*

Blank death
moist grave
one-armed sun
the death-toothed gravedigger
effaces me

the raven-winged angel
cries
  glory to thee

I am the emptiness of caskets
and the absence of myself
in the whole universe

the horns of joy
trumpet madly
and the sun's bull's-eye
explodes

death's thunder
fills the universe
too much joy
turns back the fingernails.

I imagine
in the infinite depth
the deserted expanse
differing from the sky that I see
no longer containing
those glittering points of light
but sheets of flame
greater than a sky
dazzling like the daybreak

[218] Ibid. p. 72

formless abstractions striated with fractures
heaps of inanities
of things forgotten
here the subject *I*
there the object universe littered with dead notions
where *I* throw out the rubbish
the impotent gestures
the gasps
the shrill cock-crows of ideas

o manufactured nothingness
in the factory of infinite vanity
like a trunk full of false teeth

I leaning on the trunk
I feel
my desire to vomit desire

o collapse
ecstasy from which I fall
asleep
when I cry out
you who are and will be
when I will be no more
deaf X
giant mallet
crushing my head

The sparkle
the top of the sky
the earth
and me

My heart spits you out a star

incomparable anguish

I laugh but I'm cold

. . . A poet doesn't justify - he doesn't accept - nature completely. True poetry is outside laws. But poetry ultimately accepts poetry.

When to accept poetry changes it into its opposite (it becomes the mediator of an acceptance)! I hold back the leap in which I would exceed the

> *universe, I justify the given world, I content myself with it.*
>
> *. . . I approach poetry: but only to miss it.*
>
> *. . . Poetry reveals a power of the unknown. But the unknown is only an insignificant void if it is not the object of a desire. Poetry is a middle term, it conceals the known within the unknown: it is the unknown painted in blinding colors, in the image of a sun.*[219]

What violence do we do to Bataille's work if we try to say 'what he meant' by his writing? It seems that the discourse of 'theory' spins off into its other as it tries to encompass his works.

Having given Bataille his space (allowed his text to appear), it should be asked, in the context of this essay, what the implications are for the style of theoretical discourse. Has my analysis *qua* analysis reached a point of incommensurability with its object? Fortunately, such incommensurability failed to prevent Bataille from writing an immense treatise in 'acceptable' theoretical style aimed at explicating the theory behind such works as *The Impossible*. Similarly, many of the major poststructuralists have engaged Bataille's texts in one fashion or another, and some give his work a place of preeminence in their metatheoretical pronouncements.

Bataille recognizes the paradox of writing about his other literary works in the style of theoretical or philosophical discourse. He writes

> Certainly, it is dangerous, in extending the frigid research of the sciences, to come to a point where one's object no longer leaves one unaffected, where, on the contrary, it is what inflames. Indeed, the ebullition I consider, which animates the globe, is also my ebullition. Thus, the object of my research cannot be distinguished *from the subject at its boiling point.* In this way, even before finding a difficulty in receiving its place in the common movement of ideas, my enterprise came up against the most personal obstacle, which moreover gives the book its fundamental meaning.[220]

The problem Bataille is referring to is the possibility for discussing the dynamics of expenditure and loss in the terms of accumulation. He relates

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219 Drawn from the conclusion(s) of Bataille's work *The Impossible* (trans.: Robert Hurley), San Francisco: City Lights Books (1991), pp. 149 - 164.

220 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share v. I* (trans.: Robert Hurley), New York: Zone Books (1988), p. 10

that at some points he felt that he "could only respond to the truth of [his] book and could not go on writing it."[221] But this statement, and its implications for Baudrillard's work, remain nonsensical until the basic premises of Bataille's ontology are explicated — the basic premises which privilege the 'subject at its boiling point' — the writer in the throes of *religious* ecstasy.

The Accursed Share — Space demands that Bataille's cosmology be discussed here in a rudimentary fashion. I am less concerned with what grounds his various assumptions than with where these assumptions take him in relation to questions of style.

1. Bataille begins by asserting the necessity of studying human production and consumption within a much larger framework than that used by conventional economic analysis. Productive activity should be considered in terms of the modifications it receives from its surroundings and brings about in its surroundings. In studying this general economy, we should pose the general problems that are linked to the movement of energy on the globe.[222]

2. Human economic activity appropriates a general movement of energy on the surface of the globe. This movement has a pattern and laws that humans are ignorant of. The accumulative intentions of human economic activity are vitiated by this pattern and law.

> I will begin with a basic fact: the living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism; if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must be necessarily lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.[223]

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[221] Ibid, p. 11

[222] Ibid. p. 20

[223] Ibid. p. 20

Utilitarian thought allows for the appropriation of energy toward the solution of basic difficulties immediately encountered in living. By positing the successful overcoming of these difficulties as an ideal, it assigns an end to the forces of the earth one which they cannot have, given the laws governing the general flow of energy or the general economy. Accumulation attempts to contain an excess which must, in accordance with the laws of general economy, be expended.

3. Poverty is always a characteristic of a particular organism or limited system. The general economy is always in a state of wealth. Science in general (including economic science) reduces operations to an entity based on typical particular systems (the dependant variable). The typical particular system of economic science is economic 'man' or its aggregate, the *invisible hand* of the market.

> But man is not just the separate being that contends with the living world and with other men for his share of resources. The general movement of exudation (of waste) impels him, and he cannot stop it; moreover, being at the summit, his sovereignty in the living world identifies him with this movement; it destines him, in a privileged way, to that glorious operation, to useless consumption.[224]

The aims of the limited economy cannot subvert those of the general economy, to which they must ultimately give way. Energy cannot endlessly accumulate in productive forces.

4. Ignorance of the principles of general economy ultimately causes us to undergo what we could bring about in our own way, if we understood. This is the source of war.[225]

5. The laws of general economy are as follows:

a. *The superabundance of biochemical energy and growth* — All organic systems are characterized by an excess of energy that allows for and necessitates an expenditure over and above that required for maintaining the

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[224] Ibid. p. 23

[225] Ibid. pp. 23-26

Martin:

The 'Fresh & Tasty' juice in the fridge is for you.
My Class is from 6-9, then I'll be coming straight home.
If you want to come over then (or before) go ahead. If not, I'll hopefully see you @ Eric

Martin ♡ Mum

organism.

b. *The limits of growth* — Solar energy is the source of life's exuberance. The sun gives without receiving. This was originally a source of moral judgement. The glory associated with unproductive activity was once held in higher moral esteem than activity in the realm of productive activity. Today the situation is reversed, but the old conception of glory still finds expression in "romantic protests against the bourgeois world."[226] Solar radiation is a superabundant source of energy for the globe. Living matter utilizes it to the point where space is the only limitation. It is only when the limit has been reached that squandering of an excess takes place. Individuals and groups can reduce the space of other individuals or groups, but the overall level of life remains the same.

c. *Pressure* — depending on climatic and geological conditions, life will exert a certain pressure in all directions, This pressure is witnessed in the fact that if a path once cleared is neglected, life will reoccupy the space. Bataille contrasts the *desire* inherent in such pressure with our calculated economic interests which are informed by a utility itself grounded on a limited understanding of life.

d. *The first effect of pressure: extension* — the vertical growth of trees and the development of animals of the air bear witness to the extensive tendencies of life under pressure.

e. *The second effect of pressure: squander or luxury* — In a particularly opaque logical move, Bataille asserts that the pressure of life results in the development of effects which result in the clearing of new space, or in the erasing of possibilities in excess of the available room. Death is one of these effects. Death is not necessary. It is, rather, the result of the concomitant development of increasingly burdensome forms of life, and the necessity of maintaining the balance of life in the biosphere.

f. *The three luxuries of nature: eating, death and sexual reproduction* — The tiger is the ultimate spacial expression of the luxury Bataille is describing. The tiger is the highest form of depredator of

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[226] Ibid. p. 29

depredators. The tiger consumes the beasts who themselves consume a luxurious amount. The tiger is the highest concentration, in space, of life. The measurement of concentration is based on the amount of waste and excess necessary in producing and maintaining the entity. The space for life will generally produce more calories of vegetation than meat or milk. The inefficiency of the process which creates animal life is a form of luxury. Death is a form of luxury in the sense that it is a final squandering, a terminal expenditure of all that has been invested in the life-form. The sexual act is a temporal expression of luxury, since as a frantic act, it goes far beyond the expenditure necessary to ensure the growth of the species. It appears as the most that any one organism can squander in a given moment. Thus the sexual act is in time what the tiger is in space; both of these connect up with the senseless luxury of death.[227]

g. *Extension through labour and technology and the luxury of man* — Human beings have been the only animals who have devoted a portion of their excess to the development of their energy reserves, and this development of techniques is the the strongest correlate of population growth. But limits are reached in technique which fail to absorb the surplus energy they harness.

> At this point, immense squanderings are about to take place: after a century of populating and of industrial peace, the temporary limit of development being encountered, the two world wars organize the greatest orgies of wealth — and of human beings — that history has recorded. Yet these orgies coincide with an appreciable rise in the general standard of living: The majority of the population benefits from more and more unproductive services; work is reduced and wages are increased overall.[228]

In our capacity, through labour and technique, to facilitate the accumulation of an excess over and above that originally encountered, humanity is the best equipped to engage in "conflagrations befitting the solar origins of its

[227] Ibid. pp. 33-35

[228] Ibid. p. 37

movement."[229]

h. *La Part Maudite* — The 'accursed share' is simply wealth — the excess available to be squandered. Everything conspires today to obscure this basic fact. The demand for economic justice, the raising of the standard of living, is not presented in a way which illuminates the movement of luxury - indeed, the anthropological minimum is continually raised, the interdiction preventing expenditure is not lifted and the resultant war is seen as something alien, when in fact it is produced by the pressure we fail to recognize and channel into acceptable outlets.

i. *Opposition of the 'general' viewpoint to the 'particular' viewpoint* — From the general viewpoint, any historical situation is characterized by the superabundance at the heart of the general economy. From the particular viewpoint, because of unevenness in the pressure of life, the problem of lack of resources rears its head.

> Briefly considering an example, the problem of extreme poverty in India cannot immediately be dissociated from the lack of proportion with its industrial development. India's possibilities of industrial growth cannot themselves be dissociated from the excesses of American resources. A typical problem of general economy emerges from this situation. On the one hand there appears the need for an exudation; on the other, the need for a growth. The present state of the world is defined by the unevenness of the (quantitative or qualitative) pressure exerted by human life. General economy suggest, therefore, as a correct operation, a transfer of American wealth to India without reciprocation.[230]

Thus the consideration of general economy always aims at avoiding the point where excess pressure from one area on another results in war.[231]

j. *The solutions of general economy and self-consciousness* — The solutions of the problems presented by general economy involve, as noted above, a redistribution aimed at evening the pressure in various parts of the

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[229] Ibid. pp. 35-37

[230] Ibid. p. 39-40

[231] Ibid. pp. 38-41

globe. These solutions can only be enacted, however, with the coming of *self-consciousness*. *Self-consciousness* takes on a whole new meaning in the context of general economy. The implications for *self-consciousness* of an ontology which views the end or goal of the human as a moment of pure expenditure, as opposed to an accumulation, are great indeed. *Self-consciousness* means "becoming conscious of the decisive meaning of an instant in which increase (the acquisition of something) will resolve into expenditure; and this will be precisely *self-consciousness*, that is, a consciousness that henceforth has *nothing as its object*."[232]

It is this last point that is of specific interest with regard to the question of style. All other points being taken for granted (that is, the cosmology accepted *carte blanche*), the role of *self-consciousness* in the development of the Bataillean theory of writing is decisive for Baudrillard's project. As a mechanism that can be activated toward a political goal, *self-consciousness* has been appropriated in many ways by writers who follow Bataille. But Baudrillard does not activate it as such. He activates it, practices it in the formation of his text, most evident in his style, as a *personal* moment of *transcendence* that 'leaves the reader behind,' as it were. In his later works, Baudrillard presents us with the traces of his *Experience interieur*. For example, he says of his work *America* " I was trying to get beyond theory, to find an object that was in some way visionary."[233]

The moment of expenditure, for Bataille as well as Baudrillard, is a *mystical* moment. It is a moment where there is a spiritual apprehension of a 'truth' which is beyond the understanding. It is a loss of self in the totality of some transcendent reality. It is a moment where the world is non-separated and all life is immanent in the general economy. Furthermore, there can be no subversion of the general economy. The process of expenditure is ingrained in the flow of all life. Expenditure will occur — all that is left to see is whether it will occur in a *glorious* fashion or a *catastrophic* fashion. For Baudrillard, this question is already answered. There is no question that our

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[232] Ibid. p. 190

[233] Quoted in Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*, p. 178

world is headed toward a catastrophic expenditure. There is no hope of averting this. All of Baudrillard's later writings are aimed at explaining why this is the case. The analyses of the political economy of the sign and of simulation are the theoretical foundation of the history of the future. For Baudrillard, 'the year 2000 has already happened.'

Given this pessimistic conclusion, Baudrillard's works are characterized by a certain degree of resignation. In a stylistic sense, he engages in the final mirror-move. Whereas the thesis on simulation and the third order became trapped in the mirror of what it sought to explain, the description of the catastrophic movement of the general economy also mirrors its (future and present) object. The 'preponderance of the object' is celebrated by Baudrillard not in what he says, but in how he says it. His own resentment of his conclusions leads him to try and outstep the movement of the world around him through his own text. Since there is no averting the movement of things — since the greatest preponderance of the object world is unfolding before our eyes in the form of the objective irony of global catastrophic expenditure — since this deed we have done is still more distant from our consciousness than the most distant stars — since the process we have initiated is governed by laws outside our own accounting of things and therefore appear as random and meaningless catastrophe — since all of this is simply *fatal* — Baudrillard attempts nothing other than a *transcendence*, a glorious expenditure of his own which diverts the flow of energy that is *Baudrillard* before it can be diverted by the catastrophic flow of things. And if one accepts the Bataillean ontology — is this not the only strategy?[234]

Many of Baudrillard's more mystifying statements can be explained by virtue of reference to the mystical ontology presented by Bataille. But the style in which they are presented can also be traced to the Bataillean approach to writing. This is not to say that Baudrillard does not introduce his own variations on the themes elaborated by Bataille,[235] but the divergences between the two are far overshadowed by their convergence. Bataille provides

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[234] This rhetorical question is answered in the affirmative if one follows Baudrillard through his many books aimed at describing the fatal flow of things toward catastrophic expenditure.

[235] These divergences will be elaborated below.

Baudrillard with his escape hatch. The anti-atomistic tendencies of structuralist and post-structuralist analysis are countered by an appeal to an ontological category of expenditure which exists, according to Bataille, "for no other reason than the desire one may have for it."[236] This allows Baudrillard to rail against the hyper-deterministic and homeopathic control exerted by neo-capitalism over everyday life without having to posit a way of confronting power on its own terms. Whereas other post-structuralists have focussed on the transgressive power of language itself (an *internal* metaphysics), Baudrillard appeals to a transcendent power (an *external* metaphysics).

Invoking a power 'greater than' is probably one of the favourite strategies, historically speaking, when one is faced with a situation from which there appears no way out. God's heaven is the favorite western answer in relation to death. The discovery or positing of something 'upstream' is the modern rhetorical strategy *par excellence*.[237] In the case of Baudrillard's work the upstream moment is a historical one in which the social manifestation of object forms allowed for expenditure. This is a romantic move to the beatitude of the primitive, whether the appeal is to a solar economy or a pre-modern system of symbolic exchange more 'in tune' with such an economy. My reasons for asserting this will be made evident below. At this point, more needs to be said about the movement from Bataille's general economy to the theory of writing which follows from it.

Heterogeneity, Sovereignty, Transgression — "The writing of sovereignty conforms to general economy by at least two characteristics: (1) it is a science; (2) it relates its objects to the destruction, without reserve, of meaning."[238] One could ask what benefit is to be had from such a writing.

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[236] Quoted in Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille*, p. 33

[237] See for example Michel Serres' discussion of Descartes in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (trans. various), Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1981), pp. 15-28.

[238] Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy" in *Writing and Difference* (trans. Alan Bass), Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1978), p. 270

The answer, paradoxically, is the benefit of no benefit. It is the benefit of pure loss. In order to grasp this, one must transfer the assumptions of general economy to the realm of the text. If it can be allowed that textual phenomena accumulate meaning, and that this meaning is an energy, it would follow that there must be an expenditure.

At this point, Bataille's theory of writing is addressing a problematique which haunts historical thought (Hegel) and confounds ahistorical thought (structuralism): that problematique is one of *forgetting*. Discursive economy (in a form analogous to limited economy) accumulates meaning as knowledge. In historical thought, *Aufheben* signifies the accumulation, through history, of states of consciousness which we have exceeded but also retained as subordinate moments. The master-slave dialectic stands in the shadows as the other of Bataille's own discursive aims. The roots of this otherness can be found in Nietzsche's *forgetting*. The difficulties in formulating this in opposition to Hegel should be readily apparent, and they are the same difficulties which plague Foucault at the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: how to affirm a negativity or absence in discourse — how to say 'I have forgotten.' At the same time, it is a difficulty in saying power is hidden, that it operates in the shadows when you yourself are elaborating its movement. Either one forgets, and does not mention this fact as a result, or one remembers and retains: accumulates. Either power exists in a determinate fashion and its ground remains in the shadows, or it does not, and thus begins the slide to its demise or at least simulation.

In either case, power or knowledge, Bataille's *sovereign writing* or *major writing* aims to escape the paradox and rejoin the movement of the general economy. As opposed to Hegel's metamorphic slave, sovereign writing does not aim at a suppressive retention, a subordination which constitutes self; "I write to annihilate the play of subordinate operations within myself."[239] Sovereign writing aims not at a negation, not at a moment where a line is crossed in order to define that from which it departed and retains — in the words of Foucault, sovereign writing aims at a

[239]Ibid p. 266

'transgression' which cannot be properly characterized as such, because "it is the moment when being necessarily appears in its immediacy and where *the act which crosses the limit touches absence itself.*"[240]

I have clearly reached the limits of exposition. I have moved from the realm of the explicable into the realm of the inexplicable. Bataille makes no question of this himself. He appears, through numerous discussions of his theory of witing, to be attempting to bring the reader to a particular point, a cliff perhaps. Once at that point, Bataille cannot very well jump over the edge in demonstration, since nothing really will be 'demonstrated' except 'absurdity.' "I publish this knowing it misconstrued in advance, necessarily so . . . I can do nothing, and it along with me, but sink into non-sense to this degree. Thought ruins, and its destruction is incommunicable to the crowd; it is addressed to the least weak."[241]

The question that emerges would seem to be "why?". Why engage in this form of anti-writing at all? Bataille writes

> The science relating the object of thought to sovereign moments, in fact, is only a *general economy* which envisages the meaning of these objects in relation to each other and finally in relation to the loss of meaning. The question of this *general economy* is situated on the level of *political economy*, but the science designated by this name is only a restricted economy, (restricted to commercial values). In question is the essential problem for the science dealing with the use of wealth. The *general economy*, in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless senseless loss that is sovereignty."[242]

Derrida adds

> Insofar as it is a scientific form of writing, general economy is not sovereignty itself. Moreover, there is no sovereignty *itself*. Sovereignty

[240] Foucault, *Language,Counter-memory, Practice*, p. 52

[241] Quoted in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 266

[242] Ibid, p. 270

> dissolves the values of meaning, truth and a *grasp-of-the-thing-itself*. This is why the discourse it opens is not true, truthful, or "sincere." Sovereignty is the impossible, therefore it *is not*, it *is* - Bataille writes this word in italics - "this loss." The writing of sovereignty places discourse *in relation* to absolute non-discourse. Like general economy, it is not the loss of meaning, but, as we have just read, the "relation to this loss of meaning." It opens the question of meaning. It does not describe unknowledge, for this is impossible, but only the effect of unknowledge. "In sum, it would be impossible to speak of unknowledge, while we can speak of its effects."
>
> To this extent, we do not return to the usual order of knowledge-gathering science.[243]

But from this we still have not gleaned the "why?". There seems to be the positing of a necessity for the operation of sovereign writing. That necessity would be founded on the link between knowledge and energy. There is an obvious link in the sense that both are taken as a positive value. Expenditure is the expenditure of value. Absolute knowledge = absolute value = absolute power = absolute energy = (for Derrida) the book = (for Baudrillard) the political economy of the sign. For Derrida, the operation of *writing* transgresses the book. For Baudrillard, the operation of sovereignty manifests itself in writing, and in other places, and transgresses the order of simulation.

To recapitulate (if this term has any meaning in relation to what has occurred above), the fundamental moment or category that informs the Bataillean theory of writing, and which inform the Baudrillardean practice, is the notion of *sovereignty*. Sovereignty emerges in relation to the moment of *Aufheben*. In denying the absolute of history, the sovereign moment asserts the primacy of the general economy in relation to the restricted economy. However, two other categories are needed to complete the impossible rendering of Bataille's theory: *transgression* and *heterogeneity*. Space limits their adequate treatment, but they can be understood (if this word has any relevance) in relation to sovereignty.

Transgression is the moment where the laws of the general economy take the writer across the boundaries of the restricted economy. To where?

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[243] Ibid, p. 270.

The *when* is the moment of sovereignty. The *where* is the heterogeneous, which is

> all that homogeneous society rejects, either as detritus or superior transcendent value. These include the excremental products of the human body and certain analogous materials; those parts of the body, persona, words or acts possessing an erotic change; the diverse unconscious processes such as dreams and neuroses, the numerous elements or social forms which the homogeneous sector is incapable of assimilating: crowds, warrior classes, aristocrats and *miserables*, all different sorts of violent individuals, or certainly those rejecting the law.[244]

Thus, for Bataille, the heterogeneous is the sphere of the sacred and the profane. The heterogeneous completes the triad of sovereignty, transgression and heterogeneity in a way especially important for Baudrillard, and this importance is best prefaced by the following statement from Durkheim:

> For our definition of the sacred is that it is something added to and above the real . . . In fact, we have seen that if collective life awakens religious thought on reaching a certain degree of intensity, it is because it brings about a state of effervescence which changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies are over-excited, passions more active, sensations stronger; there are even some which are produced only at this moment. A man does not recognize himself; he feels transformed and consequently he transforms the environment which surrounds him.[245]

Add to this the conflation of the sacred and the profane and you arrive at Bataille's notion of heterogeneity as well as that at which Baudrillard aims in all of his later books. The notion of 'something added to and above the real' is exactly what Baudrillard sees as a strategy for combatting the obscenity of contemporary culture. It can only be achieved through a sovereign moment of transgressive writing.[246]

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[244] Quoted in Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille*, pp.47-48

[245] Ibid, pp. 48-49

[246] The importance in the above of the notion of the death of God should be apparent. The 'disenchantment of

The Transpolitical — For reasons outlined in the previous chapter, Baudrillard's own analysis of the third order of simulacra and its homeopathic transparency precluded any *anthropological* appeal to a deeper symbolic order. This becomes apparent to him after the analysis of the third order. In a work like "When Bataille attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," Baudrillard is quick to criticize Bataille for ignoring the anthropological dimension of gift exchange as exchange. Later he shifts to a more metaphysical approach and focuses on the excess which is determinate over and above exchange. This is his notion of *objective irony.* Baudrillard writes

> With *Séduction,* there is no longer any symbolic referent to the challenge of signs, and to the challenge through signs, no more lost object, no more recovered object, no more original desire. *The object itself takes the initiative of reversibility,* taking the initiative to seduce and lead astray. It is no longer that of a symbolic order (which requires a subject and a discourse, but the purely arbitrary one of the rule of the game. The game of the world is the game of reversibility. It is no longer the desire of the subject, but the destiny of the object, which is at the center of the world.[247]

In this passage we see the shift from one reading of Bataille to another, but Bataille's work remains at the center of the text. The first reading, which placed the symbolic activity of transgression at the heart of a political strategy, is replaced by a privileging of the sovereignty of heterogeneity, which is a *transpolitical* strategy — a *fatal strategy* in the sense that all accumulative strategies are destined to be reversed and imploded. Most importantly, the political actor and the political itself as a realm of activity take a back seat to the larger movement of things — a trans-cendant, trans-political realm of

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the world' opened the way for questions of radical identity/difference distinctions as well as the imperialization of the life world by rationalization. This discussion occurs in many writers, all of whom prefigure Baudrillard's discussion of the orders of simulacra and the simulation of replacement referents. For an early example cf. *From Max Weber* (trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills), New York: Oxford University Press (1946), p. 281, on the 'irrational basis of rationalization.'

247 Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication,* p. 80.

evil demons. Existential responsibility is purged — the weight of a life is lifted and placed in the hands of Evil.

Before moving on to a demonstration of the operation of sovereignty in Baudrillard's later works, it may be helpful to try and draw everything together into a coherent statement of Baudrillard's relation to Bataille. In Baudrillard's early works, Bataille stood like a shadow behind a series of analyses aimed at describing the operation of various realms of accumulation. Key moments in these analyses were the theses on the political economy of the sign (chapter two) and simulation (chapter three). These analyses were aimed at demonstrating the Hegelian dialectic of meaning encompassed in the movement of reasonable accumulation. This is expressed in the formula

$$\frac{EcEV}{UV} = \frac{Sr}{Sd} \;/\; SbE$$

The diagonal slash indicates the presence of the general economy beyond the realm of reasonable accumulation. Furthermore, the terms on the left of the vertical slash express the ideological realm of the simulated lost referent, separation, and *accumulation-toward-reunification*. In Baudrillard's work, there has been a significant shift in the theorization of what exists on the right of the vertical slash. In works up to and including *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the term *SbE* signified symbolic exchange — deep structures of ambivalent symbolic expenditure which, when activated, would operate in a politically transgressive manner in relation to the realm of accumulation. After *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the terms on the right are theorized in a different manner, emphasizing the *transcendent* nature of the operations that take place there. On the right, it is the heterogeneous that speaks of its own accord in spite of the operation of accumulation and ideology. The relation is *fatal*. The terms on the left will be reversed and imploded in the operation of the general economy, which is metaphorized in Baudrillard's

work as the principle of *Evil*.

The heterogeneity of the principle of Evil (hence its resistance to theorization in the realm of reason and accumulation — hence its impossibility) is expressed in various figures in Baudrillard's later works. Baudrillard attempts, however, to privilege certain figures in relation to others, and the privileging rests on Bataille's distinction between catastrophic and glorious expenditure. Thus, Baudrillard appears to privilege the figure of seduction over the figures of the transpolitical.[248]

Despite this *descriptive* privileging, Baudrillard employs *writing*, the transgression of heterogeneity, as a strategy of his own text. He aims at the sovereign moment. This is the moment of style. This implies an expenditure in his own text — a sacrifice of an excess. This strategy is more apparent as one approaches the latest works published. The work of Julian Pefanis, in *Heterology and the Postmodern*, prefigures my own up to this point. Pefanis correctly draws the links between Baudrillard's work and that of Bataille, but confines his analysis to the works up to and including *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Pefanis is concerned mainly with examining Baudrillard's appropriation of Bataille's thoughts on the limits of historical consciousness and the epistemological problems encountered in speaking of these limits.

> The debt to Bataille is considerable: conceptually in terms of the general economy and transgression and in terms of the vehement anti-productivism and the formulations on death in "La mort chez Bataille;" and methodologically in a radical and reckless gesture which condemns Baudrillard, like Bataille, to exist on the line of impossibility, in the transgression of which Bataille had sacrificed authorial sovereignty. The debt is returned symbolically: in a similar refusal of the rules, as delivered in the theoretical patrimony, which place science above experience, and in a similar willingness, a duty almost, to transgress the

[248] My reading here is radically different than that of Douglas Kellner who, rather than focussing on the distinction between the operations of glorious expenditure and catastrophic expenditure, locates the fundamental binaries of Baudrillard's work in the relation between the restricted economy and the general economy. This is, in fact, not an opposition at all in Baudrillard's work: the restricted economy is subordinate to the general economy, as is the case with most of the binaries Kellner identifies as oppositional. It is my contention that, if there is a binary, it lies in the distinction catastrophic/glorious and the various figures associated with these two forms of expenditure (cf. Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, p. 179).

disciplinary boundaries . . .

Pefanis' reading of Baudrillard is similar to my own, but focuses on different aspects and periods of Baudrillard's work. Like Gane, [249] Pefanis is concerned with demonstrating the epistemological implications of Baudrillard's theory of the political economy of the sign. He is concerned mainly with elaborating Baudrillard's undeveloped notion of symbolic exchange, and with continuing in a direction commensurable with Baudrillard's earlier Maussian rereading of Bataille. As mentioned above, Baudrillard's own work has moved away from positing any such revolutionary status for the notion of symbolic exchange.

In any case, while Pefanis exhibits a willingness to explore the relation of Baudrillard to Bataille, his direction is fundamentally different than my own. Pefanis is concerned with salvaging Baudrillard's early epistemology, whereas I am concerned with demonstrating Baudrillard's later metatheory. Pefanis is concerned, in a cursory fashion, with the *methodological* form of the text in its approach to the impossible, whereas I am concerned with the political strategy inherent in the style of the text itself. Further, Pefanis' work is not sustained. It occurs in the context of a larger work that also deals with Bataille and Lyotard, and that aims at developing a particular (different) political problematique. Understandably, Pefanis does not aim at a full elucidation of Baudrillard's work. He uses what he can of Baudrillard's work in relation to the problematique of political heterology and leaves further criticism to others. He admittedly focuses on the early Baudrillard and states that he would not even want "to infer the definition or even existence of a "late" Baudrillard."[250] It is the "late" Baudrillard that I am concerned with here.

The final question, in any discussion of Baudrillard's style, is whether his own text is a glorious or catastrophic expenditure. This question is itself destined to be diverted by the play of heterogeneity. Of course, it may be that

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[249] cf. Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory, passim.*

[250] Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern,* p. 140

we cannot identify any instances of glorious expenditure in Baudrillard's text — but what criteria could be established? It would appear that the best criteria to use would be Baudrillard's own[251] — the criteria that lead him to privilege certain figures of expenditure over others. It is this direction in the analysis of Baudrillard's text that leads to the question of romanticism and *ressentiment*.

In a work of this size it is possible only to brush the surface of the substantive discourse of a writer like Baudrillard. This is because of the sheer volume of material, but it is also because of the heterogeneous style of the text itself (something that will be discussed below). As a result, I will draw on one instance of Baudrillard's description of the movement of the general economy in several of his latest works. It will be helpful to recall that I am not attempting to generalize the direction taken in these works, but rather to provide illustrative examples of what I have outlined above.

Forget Foucault — In this work, Baudrillard delineates his Bataillean theory against that of the later Foucault (*Discipline and Punish, History of Sexuality*), as well as that of Deleuze and Guattari, and Jean-François Lyotard. His criticism is quite simple in terms of what has gone before in this chapter. He locates Foucault's later discourse[252] in the realm of restricted economy. Baudrillard maintains that there is no room in Foucault's discourse for the question of reversibility and expenditure:

> For Foucault, the crisis or peripeteia of power does not even exist; there is only modulation, capillary, a micro-physical segmentation of power as Deleuze says. And this is true: for Foucault, power operates right away like Monod's genetic code, according to a diagram of dispersion and command (DNA), and according to a *teleonomical* order. Down with theological power, long live teleonomical power![253] Teleonomy is the end of all dialectic: it is the

[251] It would be impossible to engage Baudrillard at this point on any other ground but his own. In order to do otherwise I would have to begin at the beginning and challenge the assumptions of general economy itself -- something I am not *prepared* to do in a work of this nature.

[252] Foucault's earlier works are spared criticism because Baudrillard sees them as representative of the same articulation of power his own work presents: an identity/difference referential power structure aimed at the repression of the heterogeneous -- a mode of social organization.

> kind of generative inscription of the code that one expects[254] — an immanent, ineluctable, and always positive description that yields only to infinitesimal mutations. If we look closely, power according to Foucault strangely resembles "this conception of social space which is as new as the recent conception of physical and mathematical spaces," as Deleuze says now that he has suddenly been blinded by the benefits of science. It is precisely this collusion that we must denounce, or laugh about. Everyone today wallows in the molecular as they do in the revolutionary . . .
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> This "veering away" in Foucault's writing occurs progressively since *Discipline and Punish*, going against *Madness and Civilization* and the whole original ordering of his genealogy. Why wouldn't sex, like madness, have gone through a confinement phase in which the terms of certain forms of reason and a dominant moral system were fomented before sex and madness, according to the logic of exclusion, once more became discourses of reference . . .
>
> . . . Desire and intensity remain force/notions; with Foucault power remains, despite being pulverized, a structural and polar notion with a perfect genealogy and an inexplicable presence, a notion which cannot be surpassed in spite of a sort of latent denunciation, a notion which is whole in each of its points or microscopic dots. It is hard to see how it could be reversed . . . [255]

Without passing judgment on Baudrillard's passing judgment, the critique contained in the quotation above is perfectly in line with what I have described as Baudrillard's Bataillean strategy. Foucault is criticized for failing to remain true to the 'beyond' of general economy. For Baudrillard, Foucault has slipped into the mirror of power, lost touch with his Nietzschean roots, and allowed his discourse to operate on the same terms as that which it critiques.

The figure of expenditure and excess that emerges in this discussion is power itself. What happens to power? The answer is that power succumbs to seduction. In *Forget Foucault* (as is the case with most of his works) Baudrillard does not attempt to explain in a rational fashion why something aligned with the strategy of reason reverses and implodes. I believe

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[253] An overt reference to the death of god and the introduction of the replacement referent.

[254] *sui generis* -- again, the replacement referent.

[255] Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, pp. 35-39

Baudrillard, like Bataille, feels this is impossible. Unlike Bataille, Baudrillard is fascinated by collecting examples of the movement of reversal in action. The destiny of power is as follows:

> The one-sidedness of a force relation never exists, a one-sidedness on which a power structure might be established, or a form of reality for power and its perpetual movement, which is linear and final in the traditional vision but radiating and spiralling in Foucault. Unilateral or segmentary: this is the dream of power imposed on us by reason. But nothing yearns to be that way; everything seeks its own death, including power.
>
> . . . Power shares all the illusions of the real and of production; it wants to belong to the order of the real and so falls into the imaginary and into self-superstition (helped by theories which analyze it even if only to challenge it). Seduction, however, does not partake of the real order. It never belongs to the order of force or to force relations. It is precisely for this reason that seduction envelops the whole *real* process of power, as well as the whole *real* order of production, with this never-ending reversibility and disaccumulation - *without which neither power nor production would even exist.*[256]

Power is not opposed to the moment of the general economy — seduction in this formulation — it is subordinate to it. Power would not exist without the never-ending reversibility and disaccumulation of *the general economy*. Power is minor — seduction is major. Power is limited — seduction is general. Power is authorial — seduction is sovereign. Power is homogeneous — seduction is heterogeneous. These are not oppositions. Power is destined for its teleological conclusion and rebirth in some other form. And since power is a strategy of the real, it is destined for a catastrophic expenditure. As Baudrillard concludes in prophetic majesty at the close of *Forget Foucault* "the cycle must be accomplished (p. 63).[257]

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[256] Ibid pp. 44-45

[257] It should be noted that this process of reversibility, in keeping with Bataille, is not immediately generalizable in a spacial sense. The energy of the Earth is not evenly distributed. This allows for micro-operations in the *reversibility* of power. The cycle does not occur in a total sense, although it varies toward the global end of the scale today.

In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities — The key figure in Baudrillard's description of the reversibility of contemporary social and political institutions is that of the Masses. The mass Baudrillard refers to is, for example, the majority of the American electorate who don't vote in a presidential election. They do not 'speak' in terms of liberal political institutions. The mass refuses to be represented. It is a mass in terms of a mass of people, but also in terms of a ground for electrical current. All attempts to establish a relation with the mass is impossible, since these attempts are absorbed. The result is a silence:

> But this silence is paradoxical — it isn't a silence which does not speak, it is a silence which refuses to be spoken for in its name. And in this sense, far from being a form of alienation, it is an absolute weapon.
>
> No one can be said to represent the silent majorities and that is its revenge. The masses are no longer an authority to which one might refer as one formerly referred to a class or to the people. Withdrawn into their silence, they are no longer (a) subject (especially not to — or of — history), hence they can no longer be spoken for, articulated, represented, nor pass through the political mirror stage and the cycle of imaginary identifications . . .
>
> The strategy of power has long seemed founded on the apathy of the masses. The more passive they were, the more secure it was. But this logic is only characteristic of the bureaucratic and centralist phase of power. And it is this which today turns against it: the inertia it has fostered becomes the sign of its own death. That is why it seeks to reverse its strategies: from passivity to participation, from silence to speech. But it is too late. The threshold of "critical mass," that of the involution of the social through inertia, is exceeded.[258]

For Baudrillard, the masses are another instance of accumulation — not so much in terms of people but in terms of institutions, definitions, roles, etc.. The masses are inherently the chalices of the social. For Baudrillard, the social is the apparatus erected to allow for the accumulation of residuals without the necessity of outright destruction. Baudrillard asserts that the social is the

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[258] Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (trans.: Paul Foss), New York: Semiotext(e) (1983), pp. 22-23

realm of the "functional ventilation of remainders."[259] It has been the case, especially since the Depression of the thirties, that power has been in the business of the production of needs. The social has been the container for that which is produced to meet those needs. The masses have functioned as the ground for the social. They have been a 'spongy referent' for the strategy of the real. This is changing, according to Baudrillard.[260]

The (un)reason things are changing, according to Baudrillard, is because of a condition of saturation, excrescence and hypertrophy. This argument clearly exhibits the debt to the Bataillean general economy. The piece concludes with a section entitled "Implosive Systems/Explosive Systems." These two systems follow the distinction made by Bataille between glorious and catastrophic expenditure. An implosive system is one characterized by a collapse of meaning. The implosion can happen in two ways: it can be a controlled implosion where the reversals and transgressions of the ordering restricted economy occur in a ritual fashion; or it can happen after the growth of an explosive identity/difference driven system. The accumulation takes place by virtue of economic and philosophical investments in the expansion of identity (reason). Once a level of expansion is reached that can no longer be sustained, implosion is immanent.

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[259] Ibid. p. 77

[260] Baudrillard outlines the strategy of the masses in the third order of simulacrum as one of constant subversion of the attempts by power to assign more meaning. This is a result of the antagonism between the class which is the bearer of reason and history and the uninformed, residual, senseless mass. In the realization of the necessity of activating the mass, as opposed to counting on their apathy, power unleashes a new force of resistance: the perversion of the real in everyday life. "The private, the unnameable, the ordinary, the insignificant, petty wiles, petty perversions etc." These small transgression are seen by Baudrillard as *transpolitical* (see below), but not as a site of 'political' struggle. He warns against the attempt to view them as such.

> "But take care! Out of this private and asocial universe . . . some would like to make a new source of revolutionary energy. They would like to give it meaning and reinstate it, in all its banality, as a historical negativity. Final somersault of the intellectuals to exalt insignificance, to promote non-sense in the order of sense. . . . Banality, inertia, apoliticism used to be fascist; they are in the process of becoming revolutionary - without changing meaning . . . one more trick of the liberationists. *The denial of meaning has no meaning* (pp. 40-41, emphasis added)."

This criticism is perhaps aimed at Deleuze and his micropolitics.

> Implosion is inevitable . . . The molecular revolution only represents the final stage of "liberation of energy". . . The final sparks of the explosive system, the final attempt to still control an energy of confines, or to shrink the confines of energy (our fundamental leitmotiv) so as to save the principle of expansion and liberation.
>
> . . . the only remaining alternative is between a violent or catastrophic implosion, and a smooth implosion, an implosion in slow motion. There are traces of the latter, of various attempts to control new impulses which are anti-universalist, anti-representative, tribal, centripetal, etc.: communes, ecology, ZPG, drugs - all of these undoubtedly belong to this order. But we must not delude ourselves about a smooth transition. It is doomed to be short-lived and to fail. There has been no balanced transition from implosive systems to explosive systems: this has always happened violently and there is every chance our passage toward implosion may also be violent and catastrophic.[261]

Based on what I have outlined above, without a transposition of terms a clearer affiliation to Bataille could scarcely be envisaged.

Fatal Strategies — Baudrillard's work *Fatal Strategies* focuses on the strategy of the object and the destiny of the object. In further elaborating his concepts of objective revenge and objective irony, Baudrillard introduces a number of figures of the transpolitical. These are all figures of catastrophic expenditure, both violent and slow-motion.

> The transpolitical is the transparency and obscenity of all structures in a destructured universe, the transparency and obscenity of change in a dehistoricized universe, the transparency and obscenity of information in a universe emptied of event, the transparency and obscenity of space in the promiscuity of networks, transparency and obscenity of the social in the masses, of the political in terror, of the body in obesity and genetic cloning . . . The end of the scene of the historical, the end of the scene of the political, the end of the scene of fantasy, the end of the scene of the body - irruption of the obscene. The end of the secret - the irruption of transparency.
>
> The transpolitical is the mode of disappearance of all that (it is no longer the mode of production but the mode of disappearance that excites us); it

[261] Ibid pp. 60-61. The 'may' in this last sentence echoes prodigiously at this point. At later points the echoes can no longer be heard.

> is the malicious curvature that puts an end to the horizon of meaning. The saturation of systems brings them to the point of inertia: the equilibrium of terror and deterrence, the orbital round of floating capital, H-bombs, information satellites - and of theories, themselves floating, satellites of an abstract referential. Obesity of memory systems, of information stocks that are henceforth no longer treatable - obesity, the saturation of a system of nuclear deterrence now exceeding its own ends, excrescent, hypertelic.
>
> The transpolitical is also this: the passage from growth to excrescence, from finality to hypertely, from organic equilibrium to cancerous metastases. This is the site of a catastrophe . . .[262]

The transpolitical is the slow-motion catastrophe Baudrillard spoke of in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*. He sees it invading all sectors of life. It would appear that the final catastrophic expenditure is still ahead. Right now we live in fear. In any case, none of the figures Baudrillard points to above are glorious — they are all catastrophic, whether slow-motion or full speed.

Evil — Baudrillard makes much of the insight which informs the discussion of the figures of the transpolitical. The original insight is visible as early as *Forget Foucault* and reaches its hyperbolic peak in *Fatal Strategies*. Indeed, the theme of *accumulation-towards-catastrophe* permeates all of Baudrillard's works following *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. He takes many different approaches to his transpolitical objects, but the basic idea remains the same. Indeed, it might be suggested that Baudrillard is a brilliant writer simply for his virtuoso variations on a theme.

But Baudrillard does more than just pummel the idea of catastrophic expenditure. He also engages in various and heterogeneous explanations of the dynamic behind the catastrophe we are now witnessing. The most prevalent of these is the discussion of *Evil*. At the close of *Fatal Strategies* is a short section entitled "For a Principle of Evil." There Baudrillard offers one of many versions of the general economy premise.

> But the object is always the fetish, the false, the *feiticho*, the

[262] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 25

> factitious, the lure, everything that incarnates the abominable confusion of the thing with its magical and artificial double; and that no religion of transparency and the mirror will ever be able to resolve: that is the principle of Evil.[263]

Just as Bataille entreated us to turn our attention to the general economy beyond the identity of reason, beyond the homology of the restricted economy, and to heed the call of the heterogeneous in a way that would facilitate glorious expenditure, Baudrillard asks us to side with the object in the face of hyperreality. But for Baudrillard it is not a question of building a new society based on glorious expenditure. It is not a question of a strategy aimed at demonstrating anything. It is a strategy aimed at allowing things to demonstrate, to "leave the field open to objective irony."[264] This involves pushing the realm of identity and the real until it collapses — implodes in a catastrophic expenditure. For catastrophe is the only release from the hyper-logic of simulation — the only force strong enough to counter the realm of simulacra and the excrescent production of the real. This force always appears on the side of the object — this force is always emerging from the beyond of our discourse — this force is always beyond our control — this force is out of our hands and all we can be is its harbingers. Jean the Baptist announces the second coming of the object and the day of judgement for western civilization.

> Physicists believe in a "true world" in their own fashion: a firm systematization of atoms in necessary motion, the same for all beings - so for them the "apparent world" is reduced to the side of universal and universally necessary being which is accessible to every being in its own way (accessible and also already adapted - "made subjective"). But they are in error. The atom they posit is inferred according to the logic of the perspectivism of consciousness - and is therefore itself a subjective fiction. The world picture they sketch differs in no essential way from the subjective world picture: it is only construed with more extended senses, but with our senses nonetheless - And in any case they left something out . . .[265]

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[263] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 184

[264] Ibid. p. 190

Conclusion: Can the Subaltern Speak?[266]

> To speak is above all to possess the power to speak. Or again, the exercise of power ensures the domination of speech: only the masters can speak. As for the subjects: they are bound to the silence of respect, reverence, or terror. Speech and power maintain relations such that the desire for one is fulfilled in the conquest of the other.
>
> - Pierre Clastres[267]

In light of the previous chapter, the question "what does the one who says 'this is . . . ' want?" seems particularly relevant given that style can be a politically active moment in a text. Posed in terms of the challenge of the heterogeneous to the homogeneous, the question of style becomes crucial. A radically different ontology is at work behind the texts of Baudrillard — an ontology not without precedent in modernity, but one which nonetheless places itself in opposition to the linear, historical and accumulative movement of bourgeois modernism. Baudrillard's style(s) are the most apparent signs of this ontology and decisively contribute to the formation of the noology present in his work.

The noology of bourgeois modernism is perhaps best evidenced by dialectical thought, idealist or materialist, but is evident in most of the canon of political theory as well. Hobbes' insistence on definition as a the crucial moment in avoiding absurdity makes the word the site of political struggle. This is especially true for Baudrillard and others who follow Nietzsche and Bataille. Nietzsche writes "it is enough to creates new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new 'things.'"[268]

The appearance of the word, and how the word appears in relation to other words are crucial moments in deciphering a noology. Clear definition and a rigid grammar provide a structure on which an edifice may be built, a

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[265] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power* (trans.: R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann; ed.: Walter Kaufmann), New York: Vintage Books (1968), pp. 339-340

[266] The question only is borrowed from Spivak. I am not suggesting any coincidence of inquiry.

[267] Pierre Clastres, *Society against the State* (trans.: Robert Hurley), New York: Zone Books (1989), p. 151

[268] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 122

history delineated and knowledge accumulated. In Hegel's thought, the moment of *Aufheben* reflects the aspirations not only of a text and a philosophical project, but of a society as a whole. The goals of a society are *imaged* in the noology of the texts which give expression to those goals.

Style is important precisely because, in its irruption, it is a clue to the answer to the question posed at the outset. When Deleuze articulated the question 'what does the one who says "this is . . . " want?,' he was concerned with identifying the noology of the speaker or writer in relation to Nietzsche's dichotomy of active and reactive. If it is allowed that such a distinction has political importance (reactive enforcing the *status quo*, active challenging it), then the analysis of the style chosen by a particular writer is crucial. To ask the question "what does the one who says "this is . . ." want?" of Baudrillard is to attempt to diagnose the essential character of the world he describes. In other words, it is to answer the question "which one . . .?" in relation to the texts treated in the previous chapters.[269]

Of course, there is the matter of the 'this' in the above formulation — what is the 'this' for Baudrillard? For Baudrillard, the 'this' is our Western civilization, which is a process of, in Bataille's words, "reducing being to a totality." It is an ideological movement in which the identity of our society is continually posited as something from which we are separated, and toward which, through history, we struggle for reunification. In Hegelian terms, the movement of our society is from one concept to the next without ever reaching the Idea. For if the Idea is actualized, the project is over. At the same time, the moment of *Aufheben* ensures that the goals of identification find less and less to objectify as *other*. For most philosophers of postmodernity, the great historical machine is currently idling; engaging in a process of system maintenance and damage control. For philosophers like Baudrillard and Bataille, the machine is being thrown into reverse.

It seems, and this is at the core of much recent 'poststructuralist' thought, that many are now viewing this process of movement toward an all encompassing identity as fascistic. In Deleuze's terms, life is reactive and

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[269] The reader is referred to the section on Noology in my Chapter One, pp. 18 - 26

dogmatic if thought (with the abstract state as its emissary and enforcer) encroaches on and delineates all aspects of life. No room is left for the actual *thinking* of life. Thought is no longer served by life — life is served by thought. This characterization is a plea for ambivalence, for mystery and the symbolic. It is a plea for difference. It implies a noology in the sense that the critique itself gives us an image of the essence of life. It places a value on life as a vehicle to active thought — a creative thought. It places a value on life lived as an aesthetic journey without end or conclusion. The moment of *revaluation*, of active thought, is valued above all.

Such a critique has been present within modernity for much longer than the era of poststructuralism. Indeed, such an critique has been deployed against the dominant modern noology — that of bourgeois modernism — since the birth of the period identified as modern. Calinescu has identified this critique as aesthetic modernism[270] — it is a thought, a noology, that places itself in opposition to tradition, to the ordering of bourgeois modernity as a supposedly progressive force, and to itself, insofar as it runs the risk of becoming dogmatic. In Baudelaire's terms, it aligns itself with the *essentially* modern moment. He writes "modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable." Whereas bourgeois modernity might operate on the basis of accepted utilitarian categories and ends (the more adequate meeting of the latter signifying progress and overcoming), aesthetic modernity would identify another operation — that of creating new values — as the essence of 'the good life.' As Baudrillard puts it, modernity 'makes crisis a value,' whether you refer to bourgeois values or the values that run counter to them.

For bourgeois modernity, the crisis is false. Bourgeois modernity, as Baudrillard's analysis of the three orders of simulation shows, is organized around a replacement referent: formerly nature and exchange, and currently the code. Today the crisis of need is kept alive by simulating it in fashion. Operational simulation extends its reach into daily life and allows for the

[270] See my Chapter One

continued expansion of the bourgeois project. Neo-capitalism structures society around a model of consumption which refers back to itself as a total language of objects. The final need is one of speaking, and crisis is ensured by a continual and arbitrary changing and expansion of the vocabulary. The achievement of identity is always preempted by the arrival of the new catalogue. This cultural logic is identified by some as post-modernism.[271]

It is clear that, in offering such a description, Baudrillard is attempting to instill in us a sense of the awesome structuring power and homeopathic impenetrability of our current society. For Baudrillard, *the subaltern cannot speak*. The voice of the particular is filtered and operationalized, and this includes the voice of the theorist. Baudrillard's own text illustrates this movement in the way it caricatures and sends packing the various theorists who have attempted to show how the subaltern can and does speak in a politically relevant or effective manner. For Baudrillard, all emancipatory strategies are fatal strategies; they all play into the logic of production and the code. All emancipatory strategies aim ultimately at defining and producing the essentially free being who is, by definition, determined in advance.

Thus Baudrillard does not pursue or develop an emancipatory strategy. He opts instead for a catastrophic strategy. Rather than appeal to an analytical strategy which seeks to show how structure undermines itself,[272] or how the practice of everyday life is one of subversion,[273] Baudrillard demonstrates how structure is, in its own sphere, unbeatable. He pushes the logic of structuralism to its extreme. Having demonstrated the impossibility of the situation, he then appeals to a power greater than structure, greater than Identity, which is Evil. Evil is, simply put, the movement of things which outstrips any attempt to capture them in Identity. Evil does not operate at the periphery, as the vernacular of poststructuralism tends to repeat, but irrupts at the center in catastrophic fashion. Evil is the will to power of the object —

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[271] Most notably, Frederic Jameson (cf. "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146, July-August, 1984, pp. 53-93

[272] Deconstructive strategies, for instance. Cf. the work of Derrida.

[273] cf. the work of de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans.: Steven Rendall), Berkeley: University of California Press, and Deleuze and Guattari, "Micropolitics and Segmentarity" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (trans.: Brian Massumi), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1987), pp. 208-231

it is the strategy of the object. The sheer mass of the project of neo-capitalism provides the opportunity for catastrophic irruptions of Evil: *objective revenge*. This implies a deep affiliation with the general economy of Georges Bataille, a theorist who equally appealed to a disaccumulative metaphysics as an escape from the encroachment of Identity.

For Baudrillard, and Bataille as well, the subaltern cannot speak — but it asserts itself in unspeakable ways. For Bataille, it is simply a question of the propensity toward expenditure asserting itself. The process of life, for Bataille, runs counter to the project of Identity — all life aims at death and expenditure. The moment of expenditure is the highest, and this is encapsulated in the erotic ecstasy felt in religious and sexual contexts. The dionysian moment, for Baudrillard and Bataille, is not a moment among many, but the end, literally and (as in the theory of *writing*) figuratively. Behind all of Baudrillard's writing looms a teleology that allows him to escape any necessary theorization of how to speak truth to power.

If one is to ask the question now, at this point, a crucial snapshot of Baudrillard's noology emerges. If we ask 'what does Baudrillard want when he identifies his answer of choice to the question "what is (the essential character and destiny of our society)[?]," the answer that immediately comes to mind returns us to the end of *The Mirror of Production*. Baudrillard wants only the spoken word and wants to lose himself in it. Baudrillard wants the utopia that occurs in the sovereign moment of speech against power. Baudrillard's work offers an interpretation of Bataille that empties the latter's work of all collective significance. Baudrillard wants something visionary. He wants an expenditure. He wants the transgressive moment of sovereignty, and will utilize and debase any heterogeneous element to achieve it.

> Death Valley is as big and mysterious as ever. Fire, heat, light: all the elements of sacrifice are here. You always have to bring something into the desert to sacrifice, and offer it to the desert as a victim. A woman. If something has to disappear, something matching the desert for beauty, why not a

woman?[274]

Baudrillard's styles — This propensity for romanticizing the moment of loss and expenditure brought about through sovereign writing can be seen in much of Baudrillard's writing. The stylistic manifestations are many. First, and most obvious, is the style of Decadence. On this count, Baudrillard is recycling — he becomes what he most despises: postmodern. Resurrecting a *fin de siecle* technique, Baudrillard allows the text to disintegrate.

> What is the sign of every literary decadence? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole - the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the simile of every style of decadence: every time, the anarchy of atoms, disaggregation of the will, "freedom of the individual," to use moral terms -

[274] Baudrillard, *America*, p. 66 -- Such gross statements, as well as his general anti-feminist tendency, are among the more disturbing aspects of Baudrillard's work. The passage quoted above has been the focus of much attention. Gane goes to absurd lengths to try and excuse Baudrillard's offence and attributes it to "some strange slips of analysis (Gane, *Baudrillard*, p. 62)." Gane's misunderstanding is equalled by Baudrillard's detractors as well. All have missed the Bataillean source of Baudrillard's darker ruminations on sacrifice.

Like many French readers of Nietzsche, Baudrillard often uses 'woman' as metaphor for truth. In this sense, he follows Nietzsche's thought on the reality or truth of existence. In Nietzsche's work, women are victims not only of reduction to a mobile trope, but also of reduction to the worst example of the phenomenon the trope is designed to metaphorize. "When we love a woman, we easily conceive a hatred for nature on account of all the repulsive natural functions to which every woman is subject (*The Gay Science*, p. 122)." Knowledge of the superficiality of existence (ie. of a woman's beauty) elicits in the skeptic a desire for a "welcome veil over a pudendum (Ibid. p. 125)."

In this case, to dismiss the statement as metaphor is not convincing, since Baudrillard goes to great lengths elsewhere (for example in *Seduction* (trans.: Brian Singer), Montreal: Culturetexts (1990), pp. 8-11) to show how perhaps more than anyone (or 'thing') else women are the victims of 'hyperrealization.' Bataille and Baudrillard do not stop with the veil. They seek the dissolution of truth and the real in immanence. Womens' 'realization' is for them only the most repulsive example of the 'thingmess' of the world under the tyranny of identity. To sacrifice a woman is to return her to the immanence from which she was taken, and where she supposedly thrives because of some inherent qualities. Thus, harkening back to Bataille's discussion of the place of preeminence and respect accorded Aztec sacrifice victims *(The Accursed Share v. I*, pp. 45-61) , to sacrifice a woman would be, as Baudrillard says, "the greatest compliment I could pay her" (*Marxism Today*, January, 1989, p. 54-55). Clearly, it is not a compliment to deny the reality and diversity of women's voices and experiences by suspending them in a state of immanence. For further discussion of the roots of this tendency in French poststructuralism cf Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and its Pleasures, Ithaca*, New York: Cornell University Press (1992) and Somer Brodribb, Nothing Mat(t)ers. N. Melbourne, Vic. Australia: Spinifex Press (1992).

> expanded into a political theory, "equal rights for all." Life, equal vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life pushed back into the smallest forms; the rest, poor in life.[275]

It might be argued that Baudrillard's stylistic experiments are not entirely capricious. There is a propensity however, as one works through Baudrillard's texts, for the disintegration of the text to become more and more apparent, reaching a peak in *Cool Memories*. Whereas in works like *Seduction, Fatal Strategies* and *America*, the text is properly designated as aphoristic and arranged somewhat thematically, in *Cool Memories* it falls completely to a centrifugal force. There is not even a perceivable thematic arrangement.

Such a style could be employed in a number of ways. For example, it could be used to juxtapose a number of themes in a very direct fashion. The writer can intermix various images or interpretations of a given situation in order to show incommensurability. This would be, and has been, a style of choice for writers of the heterogeneous. In Baudrillard's case, the style of decadence is used in a way intended to emulate, prefigure, participate in and even accelerate the impending and unavoidable catastrophe. Baudrillard might as well be writing in the period of *Decadisme*.

> Not to recognize the state of decadence which we are in would be the height of insensibility . . . religion, customs, justice, everything decays . . . society come apart under the corrosive action of a deliquescent civilization . . . We commit this leaf to murdersome innovations, to stupefying audacities, to incoherences of thirty-six atmospheres at the farthest limit of their compatibility with those archaic conventions labeled by the term public morality. We will be the stars of an ideal literature . . . In a word, we will be the Mahdis screaming and preaching eternally the dogma of elixir, the quintessential word of triumphant *Décadisme*.[276]

Such resignation to and encouragement of the catastrophic resolution of things is characteristic of Baudrillard's works from the late 1970's onward. As

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[275] Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, p. 270

[276] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 176

mentioned above, he goes out of his way to demonstrate how no approach will work to reverse the slide towards catastrophic expenditure.

The rest of Baudrillard's stylistic tendencies tend to reinforce this sense of impending doom. Hyperbole is deployed lavishly throughout Baudrillard's *ouvre* in an attempt to hyper-realize the closure on theoretical work. Irony abounds as the instances of objective revenge are delineated. Transcoding is employed in diverse ways in order to draw from other realms of discourse instances of inexorable processes and mutations. In all, Baudrillard's styles are aimed at one end and one end only — to demonstrate the foregone conclusion to the project of Western civilization. Quite to the contrary of his earlier position[277] in which he emphasised the necessity of avoiding a critique of a power structure in the form of the discourse proper to it, it is now Baudrillard's project to participate in that which he critiques in order to push it toward its definitive resolution.

> What good is theory? If the world is hardly compatible with the concept of the real which we impose upon it, the function of theory is certainly not to reconcile it, but on the contrary, to seduce, to wrest things from their condition, to force them into an over-existence which is incompatible with that of the real. Theory pays dearly for this in a prophetic autodestruction. Even if it speaks of surpassing the economic, theory itself could not become an economy of discourse. It must become excessive and sacrificial to speak about excess and sacrifice. It must become simulation if it speaks about simulation, and deploy the same strategy as its object . . .
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> It is not enough for theory to describe and analyse, it must itself be an event in the universe it describes. In order to do this theory must partake of and become the acceleration of this logic. It must tear itself from all referents and take pride only in the future. Theory must operate on time at the cost of a deliberate distortion of present reality.[278]

The Noology of Ressentiment — Again, the paradox of structuralism, once it attempts to provide a vehicle for political analysis aimed at change, is its inability to account for its own subversion. All speech occurs in the

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277 In *For a Critique, Mirror of Production* and *Symbolic Exchange and Death.*

278 Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Communication*, pp. 97-99

language of the day, or at least is understood in those terms. Can the subaltern speak? Nietzsche's work prefigures that of poststructuralism precisely in this capacity to hinge everything on the answer to this question.

> This is the essence of phenomenalism and perspectivism as *I*[279] understand them: Owing to the nature of *animal consciousness*, the world of which we can become conscious is only a surface and sign world, a world that is made common and meaner; whatever becomes conscious *becomes* by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization. Ultimately, the growth of consciousness becomes a danger; and anyone who lives among the most conscious Europeans even knows that it is a disease.[280]

Language is the *form* of the consciousness Nietzsche refers to here and it arises simply out of a need for the particular members of the species to communicate with each other while configuring their various wills. Because language is necessarily general, the answer to the question posed above is 'no': the subaltern will speak the language of the herd, which extinguishes the particular character of anything being communicated. The rich combination of reds I see will always be just red to you.

Nietzsche does posit a way out of the quandary. But it is not a way out for the individual. The individual is doomed to herd speech. When the subaltern speaks, it is not in the capacity of the individual. The individual *qua* individual is already embedded in reactive thought — already structured in the grammar of the day (the metaphysics of the people) and understood as such. For Nietzsche the subaltern speaks in art. For Nietzsche, we the artists = we the seekers after knowledge or truth = we the inventors of the new possibilities of life. But the artist is a vehicle for art, for the subaltern expression. This may seem a difficult contradiction, but it is only if the individual is viewed as coherent. If it is admitted that the individual is

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[279] This is an extremely ironic "I", since Nietzsche had just finished explaining how language makes the unique experiences of the individual seem less than unique.

[280] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 299 -300

actually heterogeneous, made up of a multiplicity of conflicting desires and aspirations, then the artist is not necessarily the individual. Indeed, for Nietzsche, the individual communicates, but the monological artist does not.

> *The first distinction to be made regarding works of art.* - All thought, poetry, painting, compositions, even buildings and sculptures, belong either to monological art or to art before witnesses. In the second class we must include even the apparently monological art that involves faith in a God, the whole lyricism of prayer. For the pious, there is as yet no solitude; this invention was made only by us, the godless. I do not know of any more profound difference in the whole orientation of an artist than this, whether he looks at his work in progress (at "himself") from the point of view of the witness, or whether he "has forgotten the world," which is the essential feature of all monological art; it is based *on forgetting*, it is the music of forgetting.

The individual exists, by definition, in relation to the herd. The individual is an interchangeable signifier. The artist is something else. The artist is not even in a relation of comprehension with the individual who we take as the embodied form of the artist. At least, this is the case for the Dionysian artist. Dionysian art is monological; it is private speech, a soliloquy of the free-spirit.

In some cases, the tastes of the individual may serve to constrain the expression of the subaltern through the artist, simply because the individual is already, in the *act* of self-consciousness, a herd phenomenon. On this point it is helpful to consider the following:

> *Our side by side* - Don't we have to admit to ourselves, we artists, that there is an uncanny difference within us between our taste and our creative power? They stand oddly side by side, separately, and each grows in its own way. I mean, they have altogether different degrees and *tempi* of old, young, mature, mellow, and rotten. A musician, for example, might create his life long what is utterly at odds with what his listener's ear and listener's heart esteem, enjoy, and prefer — and he need not even be aware of this contradiction. As our most painfully frequent experience shows, one's taste can easily grow beyond the reach of the taste of one's powers, and this need not at all paralyze

> these powers and keep them from continued productivity. But the opposite can happen, too - and this is what I should like to call to the attention of artists. Consider a continually creative person, a "mother" type in the grand sense, one who knows about the pregnancies and deliveries of his spirit, one who simply lacks the time to reflect on himself and his work and to make comparisons, one who no longer has any desire to assert his taste and who simply forgets it, without caring in the least whether it still stands, or lies, or falls - such a person might perhaps eventually produce works *that far excel his own judgment*, so that he utters stupidities about them and himself - utters them and believes them. This seems to me to be almost the norm among fertile artists — nobody knows a child less well than it parents do — and it is true even in the case, to take a tremendous example, of the whole world of Greek art and poetry: it never "knew" what it did.[281]

Nietzsche raises the spectre of the individual's taste (again, already a herd phenomenon) as *preventing* the subaltern expression. It must be understood that, for Nietzsche, the individual is not the particular or the artist. Nor is it the individual who engages in the *forgetting* necessary for the monological art. Rather, it is the individual who is forgotten in the Dionysian moment of revaluation.

That was "the Dionysian moment of revaluation." The divergence between Baudrillard's catastrophic strategy and Nietzsche's Dionysian art turns on the word 'revaluation.' Indeed, much of the poststructuralist appropriation of Nietzsche focuses on one side of the movement of revaluation. It focuses on the *dionysian* as it was posited by Nietzsche in the *Birth of Tragedy*, as the destructive moment of frenzy and transgression which exists in a dialectical relation to the *apollinian*. The concept of revaluation involves one inseparable movement that results in both the destruction of the old values and the creation of the new. Referring to the process of *revaluation* Nietzsche writes, "what at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably, the essence and is effective as such. How foolish it would be to suppose that one only needs to point out this origin and this misty shroud of delusion in order to destroy the world that

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[281] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 326-327

counts for the real, so-called "reality." We can destroy only as creators."[282] Many poststructuralist strategies aim at 'pointing out the origin and misty shroud of delusion' — genealogy, deconstruction. Baudrillard's genealogy of the replacement referent is a prime example. What poststructuralism appropriates from Nietzsche is a dionysian antidote. The problem of *forgetting*, in a world of homeopathic simulation, is solved only through a dionysian movement.

Again, this latter movement is not the movement of the revaluation. In the case of Bataille, the problem of forgetting is not posed in terms of revaluation at all. It is posed in opposition to a Hegelian movement which values the accumulative and the historical — the total self-consciousness and total identity of the Ethical Idea. Bataille does not revaluate in any sense other than to place the highest value on devaluation — expenditure, loss, death. "Like a flock chased by an infinite shepherd, we, the bleating wave, would flee, endlessly flee, from the horror of reducing being to a totality."[283] Bataille seeks a moment of dionysian violence — destruction and destructuring — in order to counter the horror of a life of identity. He finds this violence in the simultaneous and identical ecstasy of eroticism and torture — the continuation of life, and death. The shattering of the self in orgasm and in death is *forgetting achieved*. "In the violence of the overcoming, in the disorders of my laughter and my sobbing, in the excess of raptures that shatter me, I seize on the similarity between a horror and a voluptuousness that goes beyond me, between an ultimate pain and an unbearable joy!"[284]

For Bataille, Hegel is a figure to be feared, and represents a failure of modern life to connect up with the essential nature of the general economy — a nature only truly experienced in instances of dionysian rapture. The project of rationalism, as a system of values aimed at ensuring the possibility of human life, extinguishes human life by reducing being to a totality. The *essence* is in the heterogeneous — the sacred and the profane. This is

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[282] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 122

[283] Quoted in "Preface to Transgression," p. 43

[284] Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, p. 20

something that, historically, we once understood and have now eliminated from our understanding through excrescent rationality. The means to assuring life has dominated the living of life. Thought has become reactive, in Deleuze's terms.

How to escape? Bataille's answer is fundamentally romantic, as is Baudrillard's. For Bataille the development of religion, and the movement from religion to rationalism initiated by the death of God, has been a process of losing touch with something the dionysiac cults were in touch with — precisely the moment of forgetting and loss. Bataille wants to get back, and builds a theory in order to show how, whether we like it or not, we *will* come face to face with his highest value: expenditure and death.

It is an unusual move that Bataille makes between recognizing the reactive force of Hegel and the subsequent privileging of death. Certainly the dionysiac cults were an example of the irruption of the heterogeneous in Greek culture — an instance of glorious, controlled expenditure through uncontrolled festivity, feast and eroticism. Indeed, Nietzsche counsels a Dionysian attitude which says Yes to the heterogeneous. But nowhere does Nietzsche *privilege* or describe as *primary* the moment of death. He counsels the opposite. He emphasizes the banality of death. "How strange it is that that this sole certainty and common element makes almost no impression on people . . . It makes me happy that men do not want at all to think the thought of death. I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them."[285] In fact, it is the central tenet of Nietzsche's existentialism that one say Yes to life.

> Saying yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the sacrifice of its highest types — that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not in order to be liberated from terror and pity, *not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge* — Aristotle understood it that way — but in order to be oneself the

[285] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 225

> eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity — that joy which included even joy in destroying.[286]

This embracing of the heterogeneous includes the embracing of death and loss as necessary, but it certainly does not elevate them to the high point of human existence. One loses in order to acquire again, but only through acquiring. One destroys in order to build, but only through building. The two moments of dionysus and apollo are united in Nietzsche's Yes-saying, and it is the *movement* that is privileged, not the moment. It is the "eternal joy of becoming" that is placed at the peak of Nietzsche's revaluation, and the privileging of a 'vehement discharge of a dangerous affect' is expressly denounced.

Baudrillard looks out at the world and sees the absolute impenetrability of power. The simulation of the world is complete and goes about its business in a mode of automatic growth. The great historical machine is on autopilot and cruising without a referent. The subaltern cannot speak. The theorist can have no effect other than to hasten the catastrophic expenditure. It is only on this that one *can* depend. History intimates that there were societies where power was automatically dispersed through ritual expenditures and gift giving. Potlatch is viewed as the ritual establishment of the new order through the expenditure of the old. The Baudrillardean prophesy of autodestruction and death makes way for the reestablishment of such a society of symbolic exchange. This is precisely the vehement discharge Nietzsche describes above.

Nietzsche labels the type of approach taken by Baudrillard and Bataille as Romantic. In *Nietzsche contra Wagner* Nietzsche writes

> Every art, every philosophy, may be considered a remedy and an aid in the service of either growing or declining life: it always presupposes suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *overfullness* of life and want a Dionysian art as well as a tragic insight and outlook on life — and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment* of

[286] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in the *Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 562-563, emphasis added.

> life and demand of art and philosophy, calm, stillness, smooth seas, or, on the other hand, frenzy, convulsion, and anesthesis. Revenge against life itself — the most voluptuous kind of frenzy for those so impoverished.[287]

Baudrillard responds to this dual need of the latter no less than Bataille: they negate life, they slander it, hence they are Nietzsche's antipodes.

What does the one who says "this is . . ." want? It is from the latter passage in Nietzsche that the source for Deleuze's figuration is drawn. Nietzsche claims that he is skilled in the fundamentally necessary *backward inference* which moves from "every way of thinking and valuing to the want behind it that prompts it."[288] The characterization of Baudrillard as a writer who is a romantic and imbued with *ressentiment* is drawn from precisely such a backward inference — an inference informed by Baudrillard's concern with and answer to the difficult problem of whether the subaltern can speak. An inability to work out of a predicament of life incites hatred and *ressentiment* — a desire for revenge against life. An inability to speak to power leads Baudrillard to theorize the spectacular way in which power will disintegrate with no help from him, and even to suggest that he might be able to help it along by emulating it.

To take the point further, one can travel with Nietzsche to an even clearer distinction of Baudrillard's malaise. This version is tied tightly into the problematic of forgetting that haunts poststructuralist thought. As outlined above, Nietzsche sees the aesthetic moment — the creation of new values in the search for knowledge — as a moment when the subaltern speaks without reference to the individual. The particular, for Nietzsche, is not to be placed at the height of value. But the particular is absolutely necessary for the health of the species. The free spirit is a particular expression that aims not at assuaging some personal malaise, but at acting as a bridge to a greater future. Particular experience is something to be drawn on, but it remains particular: "Such a spirit who has become free stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the faith that only the

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[287] Nietzsche, *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 669-670

[288] Ibid. p. 670

particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole — *he does not negate any more.*"[289] The *Amour Fati* in this formulation couldn't be more distant from Baudrillard's fatal strategies, although they are informed by exactly the same problematique. One's particular and historical being is not escapable. As an individual consciousness, time is the condition of existence. Revenge against life — *ressentiment* — (in a particularly important formulation for Nietzsche) is exactly the hatred of this condition — this temporal condition that implies a history from which one always emerges and cannot entirely forget. Such romanticism

> can also be the tyrannic will of one who suffers deeply, who struggles, is tormented, and would like to turn what is most personal, singular, and narrow, the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering, into a binding law and compulsion - one who, as it were, revenges himself on all things by forcing his own image, the image of torture, on them . . .[290]

If Foucault is right in asserting that philosophers of his era are engaged in a process of fleeing Hegel, as well of one of determining to what extent "our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us,"[291] then Baudrillard is surely plagued by the 'eternal recurrence' of Hegel as well. The inability to forget, to leave the structured debate and begin anew, is a source of discouragement. If this is the source of Baudrillard's torture, then he is certainly successful in projecting it onto the things (and theories) around him. The desire to lose oneself — the very un-Nietzschean dionysian desire — is itself a sign of *ressentiment.*

Nietzsche's orientation toward heterogeneity is one of affirmation and celebration. That which is *identified* as the good holds little promise for him. But by the same token, evil is not, for Nietzsche, the source of the breakdown of things. It is, rather the source of the revaluation. In order to revaluate, one

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[289] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 554

[290] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 330

[291] Quoted in Pefanis, *Heterology and the Postmodern*, p. 11

must be willing to go beyond good and evil. Baudrillard maintains that, even though we cannot effect a move beyond good and evil through theory (since evil is now banal and operationalized in a move of reversal and simulation), the *principle* of Evil operates nonetheless. Baudrillard heads straight to the heart of Evil in his hyper-realization of the logic of simulation, and does this in an attempt to accelerate the expenditure of the excrescent modern identity. Heterogeneity *will* assert its primacy in objective revenge. Baudrillard heads toward his fatality willingly, but only to cure himself of life. At the end of it all, Baudrillard owes a rooster to Aesculapius. This could hardly be more different from the Nietzschean fatality, or from the Nietzschean heterogeneity:

> We are misidentified - because we ourselves keep growing, keep changing, we shed our old bark, we shed our skins every spring, we keep becoming younger, fuller of future, taller, stronger, we push our roots ever more powerfully into the depths — into evil — while at the same time we embrace the heavens ever more lovingly, more broadly, imbibing their light ever more thirstily with all our twigs and leaves. Like trees we grow — this is hard to understand, as is all of life — not in one place only but everywhere, not in one direction but equally upward and outward and inward and downward; our energy is at work simultaneously in the trunk, branches and roots; we are no longer free to do only one particular thing, to *be* only one particular thing.
>
> This is our fate, as I have said; we grow in *height*; and even if this should be our fatality — for we dwell ever closer to the lightning — well, we do not on that account honor it less; it remains that which we do not want to share, to make public — the fatality of the heights, *our* fatality.[292]

The ambivalence of the pronoun 'we' in the above rings out prodigiously. Nietzsche's fatality is heterogeneous. Baudrillard's fatality aims at the heterogeneous, but communicates only the particular suffering of a theorist trapped in the mirror of his own textual production.

Heterogeneity as Problematique —Baudrillard's work is much more

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[292] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 331-332

than just an exercise in *ressentiment.* His writings address a problem that is at the center of much of social and political discourse today — the problem of difference. The march of identity through history is now viewed in some quarters as an inherently suspect project. For some theorists, extricating ourselves from the structures built to liberate has become the main task. This emerges from a sustained critique of instrumental reason and a rebirth of the question of humanity's aesthetic life as an end.

Bataille's setting of the problem seems to be an important one for poststructuralist thought

> Civilization in its entirety, the possibility of human life, depends upon a reasoned estimation of the means to assure life. But this life — this civilized life — which we are responsible for assuring, cannot be reduced to these means, which make it possible. Beyond calculated means, we look for the end — or the ends — of these means. [293]

Bataille's own answer to the question is documented above. He focuses on the assertion of the heterogeneous in the face of the onslaught of the homogeneous. This onslaught is the site of theoretical struggle for many poststructuralist writers.

But this struggle is not, by any means, new. Modernity has been characterized by struggle between the rationalism of bourgeois thought and what Calinescu calls aesthetic modernism. Baudrillard's work fits into the latter category. In opposing bourgeois thought, Baudrillard places his work in line with a number of traditions in modernity, namely those of Decadence and the Avant-Garde. In recognizing the importance of the form of the bourgeois object in serving as an ideological justification for the continued growth of the project, Baudrillard attempts to counter not just through a general political economy and a genealogical approach to the phenomenon of simulation, but through a strategy which presents the reader with a different noology as well. Explicating these three moments has comprised the latter three chapters of this essay.

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[293] Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, p. 19

Baudrillard deploys the instance of style as political force in his text as a direct challenge to the noology of bourgeois modernism. Recognizing that Marxism, the thought which tried to counter bourgeois political economy, concluded by mirroring its object not only in its assumptions but in its form as critique, Baudrillard initiated a series of stylistic experiments aimed at instilling in the reader a different noology — a noology of heterogeneity. Baudrillard's own hyper-structuralism necessitated an appeal to a teleological force which would clear, for him, the only path allowing the subaltern to assert itself. This path is, as described above, catastrophic.

Whereas Baudrillard's project may have been one aimed at "minding the gap,"[294] his hyper-determinist logic of simulation serves as one of the most articulate cases *against* the possible reinvigoration of this "lost dimension."[295] Baudrillard's work stands as an example of the paradox suffered by any theory that accords such a primary place to language when approaching a politics of change. At the same time, Baudrillard's text is itself heterogeneous. His work is filled with insights as well as closures. Baudrillard is worth reading if only to familiarize oneself with the line that separates Identity from its subaltern field of conquest. It is also worth struggling through as one example of the thought which tries to transgress this line. The essential irritant for those who assert, with Camus, that hope cannot be eluded forever,[296] is found in the obvious conclusion that Baudrillard has given up all hope of coming back alive.

Theorist as Bridge —

> We dream of a state of clairvoyance which is that of the mastery and reversibility of time, just as we dream of a state of sexual pleasure that would be a state of mastery over the reversibility of sex.

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294 cf. the opening paragraph of my Chapter One

295 Many other writers in the French context are concerned with the depth of homogenization. cf. Paul Virilio, *Lost Dimension* (trans.: Daniel Moshenberg), New York: Semiotext(e) (1991).

296 Albert Camus,*The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (trans.: Justin O'Brien), New York: Vintage Books, (1983), p. 113

The supreme orgasm is metamorphosis.[297]

Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* "The now and the past on earth — alas my friends, that is what I find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live if I were not also a seer of that which must come. A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future — and, alas, as it were, a cripple at this bridge: all this is Zarathustra."[298] This is Zarathustra speaking of himself. But it may also be read as Nietzsche discussing the existential condition of anyone struggling toward new truths.

The political theorist is specifically concerned with the future. Thought aims at achieving a better understanding of political community. But some theorists, in their loathsome particularity, have posited that the aim of theory is not only to achieve a working idea of what constitutes the best political community, but to live it as Truth as well, as the "warm narrowness that keeps away fear and encloses one in optimistic horizons."[299] Regrettably, for such a romantic, "he cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he may run, this chain runs with him. . . A leaf flutters from the scroll of time — and suddenly floats back again and falls in the man's lap. Then the man says "I remember" and envies the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is extinguished forever."[300]

There is no going back, despite the fact that hindsight is clearest. The past cannot be changed or erased, nor can the passage of time be stopped to allow for that eternal moment, lived in its purity. Anyone who wills a new order will always be conscious of the act of willing it — it will not be lived as Truth, but as a truth for now. As long as a new order is measured against an abstract idea, the historical emergence of it will never be enjoyed by the theorist. Jean Baudrillard manifests the symptoms of this *sickliness* when he

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[297] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 128

[298] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans.: Walter Kaufmann) in The *Portable Nietzsche*, p. 250-251

[299] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 328.

[300] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" in *Untimely Meditations* (trans.: R. J. Hollingdale), New York: Cambridge University Press (1983), p. 61

says "Utopia wants speech against power . . . It wants only the spoken word; and it wants to lose itself in it."[301] Baudrillard does not discriminate between the temporality of ideology, which he is railing against, and the existential temporality of human cognition. Instead, he flies headlong into a radically atemporal stance of loss of self and ecstasy. "The Utopia is here in all the energies raised against political economy. But this utopian violence does not accumulate; it is lost."[302]

Such a stance evidences a politics of *ressentiment* so thorough and deep-running that closure is invoked on all other political strategies. The cripple before the bridge exacts his revenge on all other political visions. "Everything passes away and therefore everything deserves to pass away. And this too is justice . . ."[303] "Each man is totally there at each instant. Society is totally there at each instant."[304] "'Alas, where is redemption from the flux of things and from the punishment called existence?'"[305] Such is happiness; such is revolution."[306] "Thus preached madness."[307]

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[301] Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production*, p. 167

[302] Ibid, p. 166

[303] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 252

[304] Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production*, p. 166

[305] NIetzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 252

[306] Baudrillard, *Mirror of Production*, p. 165

[307] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 252

The Dream Before

(for Walter Benjamin)

Hansel and Gretel are alive and well
And they're living in Berlin
She is a cocktail waitress
He had a part in a Fassbinder film
And they sit around the house at night now
Drinking schnapps and gin
And she says: Hansel, you're really bringing me down
And he says: Gretel, you can really be a bitch
He says: I've wasted my life on our stupid legend
When my one and only love was the wicked witch

She said: What is his story?
And he said: History is an angel
being blown backwards into the future
He said: History is a pile of debris
And the angel wants to go back and fix things
To repair the things that have been broken
But there is a storm blowing from paradise
And the storm keeps blowing the angel
backwards into the future.
And this storm, this storm
is called progress[308]

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[308] Laurie Anderson, Strange Angels, © Difficult Music BMI (1989)

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