

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

THE SEDUCTION OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD:
A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE
OF FATAL THEORY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AM	<u>America</u>
EC	<u>The Ecstasy of Communication</u>
EDI	<u>The Evil Demon of Images</u>
FS	<u>Fatal Strategies</u>
ES	<u>L'échange symbolique et la mort</u>
FB	<u>Forget Baudrillard</u>
GS	<u>Gesture and Signature: The Semiurgy of Contemporary Art</u>
IN	<u>An Interview with Jean Baudrillard</u>
MMC	<u>Mass Media Culture</u>
SI	<u>Simulacres et simulation</u>
SN	<u>Seduction</u>
SLV	<u>The Structural Law of Value</u>
SW	<u>Jean Baudrillard. Selected Writings</u>
BM	<u>Baudrillard's Marx</u>
CI	<u>The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception</u>
CS	<u>The Theoretical Violence of a Catastrophical Strategy</u>
HP	<u>Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard, and Lyotard</u>
MPB	<u>Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond</u>
PM	<u>Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</u>
PS	<u>Towards a Politics of Signs: Reading Baudrillard</u>
R	<u>Resignation</u>
SS	<u>Shadow and Substance: A Study of Jean Baudrillard and the Collapse of Critical Theory</u>
TT	<u>Post-Marx: Theological Themes in Baudrillard's America</u>
VN	<u>The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead"</u>

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God ! I seek God !" . . . "Whither is God" he cried. "I shall tell you. *We have killed him* - you and I. All of us are his murderers."

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science

The madman . . . is . . . the one who seeks God, since he cries out after God. Has a thinking man perhaps here really cried out *de profundis* ? And the ear of our thinking does it not hear the cry ? It will refuse to hear it so long as it does not begin to think. Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought.

Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'"

The true nihilists are the ones who oppose nihilism with their more and more faded positivities, the ones who are thus conspiring with all extant malice, and eventually with the destructive principle itself. Thought honours itself by defending what is damned as nihilism.

Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics

Je suis nihiliste.

Jean Baudrillard, Simulacres et simulation

Introducing Jean Baudrillard

To embark upon a detailed study of Jean Baudrillard is a hazardous project. His description of how the world is constituted as hyperreal in the third-order of simulation is difficult to combat, without merely dismissing it. But the more I read and consider this latter day Nietzschean thinker of the postmodern, who has the unnerving ability to sound like Adorno on fast forward, the less I am inclined to dismiss him. I am firmly of the opinion that Baudrillard can be considered an heir to Nietzsche, although perhaps not in ways which are readily apparent.

My selection for the epigraphs to this thesis is certainly not intended to portray Jean Baudrillard as a desperate seeker after God, although I am certainly open to that possibility. My intention is rather to highlight the extent to which nihilism, both on a philosophical level and I believe at a social level, is perhaps the prevalent condition of our twentieth century. As Michel Haar says, "Nihilism assails man and his culture as the experience and sentiment of a *critical condition* that has become brutally actual . . . the *débâcle* of all meaning."¹ According to Arthur Kroker the work of Jean Baudrillard is a hermeneutical strategy which interprets late capitalism under the sign of nihilism.²

¹Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation, (1977) ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985), 13.

²Arthur Kroker, "Baudrillard's Marx," The Postmodern Scene. Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 187. Hereafter cited in parentheses as BM.

I make no claim for having done a thorough study of the relevant philosophers who are concerned with nihilism, together with the range of discussion on the topic -- that can wait for another project. But I do make a strong claim for situating Jean Baudrillard within a Nietzschean, and therefore nihilist, framework. I will also state from the outset that I believe there is more to the philosophical trajectory of nihilism than usually meets the eye, and together with Heidegger and Adorno -- no association intended -- I presuppose the power of thought to mediate this troubling and monumental spirit of the twentieth century. I should also say that I do not recommend the autonomy of thought, but I do suggest that the critical and reflective power of thought is immanent to the life and world in which we live as thinkers, philosophers, and cultural theorists. In other words, my particular social, cultural, historical, and religious context will inevitably shape my critical and reflective thought.

I am concerned to stage a collaboration between the immanent method of analysis³ to which I adhere for a good part of this thesis, and the method of transcendental criticism. A transcendental critique, like an immanent critique, is concerned to pose questions and problems which are firmly located within the system or framework of the other thinker or philosopher. But it is the task of transcendental critique, and one which is peculiar to it, to move within and beyond the system of thought under analysis.

³Robert J. Antonio defines the immanent critique of critical theory as one of the means of detecting the societal contradictions which offer the most determinate possibilities for social change, and as a nonpositivist epistemology and critique of the reification of "conventional values legitimating capitalist society." By "immanent" I primarily mean the method of discovering what Baudrillard is doing within his own thought, to discover the contradictions and the "determinate possibilities for, what could be." (338) Robert J. Antonio, "Immanent Critique as the core of critical theory: its origins and developments in Hegel, Marx and contemporary thought," British Journal of Sociology 32, No3 (September 1981): 330-345.

A transcendental critique begins from an internal starting point and then seeks to pursue the points of tension within the system of thought, in order to give the opportunity for opening up any particular system of thought or philosophical position.

The question naturally arises, why should one want to move beyond any given system of thought ? What if one should find that a particular system of thought is worth adopting in part or as a whole ? Inevitably one cannot help being influenced by the work one studies for any length of time. But from my own perspective I have decided, after a considerable time spent with Baudrillard's work, that this particular system of thought is worth both an immanent and a transcendental critique. In other words I wish to move within and then go beyond Baudrillard's thought. I can only hope that I will be successful in my attempt. As the reader will appreciate, I am sympathetic to the tradition of critical theory, and yet I am convinced of that tradition's limitations. My study of Jean Baudrillard has made me aware of those limitations, and led me towards an appreciation for transcendental criticism.

I have decided to restrict the scope of my analysis of Baudrillard to what are his later writings. One thesis has already been written on Baudrillard's early work, focusing particularly on *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972) and *The Mirror of Production* (1973), key texts in Baudrillard's critique of Marxism.⁴ There has also been a book length study of Baudrillard which attempts to deal with most of his work.⁵

⁴Charles Levin, "Shadow and Substance: A study of Jean Baudrillard and the collapse of Critical Theory," MA Thesis (McGill University, 1981). Hereafter cited in parentheses as SS.

⁵Douglas Kellner, Jean Baudrillard. From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond (California: Stanford University Press, 1989). Hereafter cited in

My thesis will refer to Baudrillard's earlier work and outline the most significant points, but I am concerned to deal with Baudrillard's development subsequent to *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (1976).

There has been significant development in Baudrillard's writing, from an initial concern with how objects function⁶ in the discursive totality of modernity along with the logics of consumption; he then moves on to a critique of the political economy of the sign and the manoeuvre away from Marxist teleologies; Baudrillard then explores the idea of symbolic exchange and the charge that we now live in the third order of simulation and hyperreality. In my judgement Baudrillard's earlier and later work are related, and one can still find in his recent work the development of earlier ideas. However, it is also clear that after *L'échange symbolique et la mort* Baudrillard becomes preoccupied with simulation and hyperreality, and these ideas can be seen as a significant departure from his earlier work.

I am concerned to focus my analysis on how Baudrillard explicates his position as a theorist of the postmodern, or how the world is constituted in the third order of hyperreal simulation. My analysis will involve a detailed immanent investigation into Baudrillard's genealogy of the simulacrum and how he assigns priority to the simulacrum as an explicit critique and overturning of the Platonic hierarchy of Idea, Representation, Simulacrum; Baudrillard's

parentheses as MPB. As I finished writing this thesis a new book on Baudrillard was published: Mike Gane, Baudrillard, Critical and Fatal Theory (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁶Baudrillard earlier in his work had an appreciation for Lukács's theory of reification. Lukács's project was to overcome the increased distance between subject and object in the reified conditions of capitalist society. The important point to grasp is that Baudrillard's work initially set out to understand the reified phenomena of capitalist society in terms of consumption. Hence, his preoccupation with the world of objects understood in terms of the complex meaning of the commodity. For Baudrillard, in distinction from the traditional

adherence to nihilism and a Manichean view of reality; how theory functions in Baudrillard's thought, and the question of identity. The main concern of this thesis is to investigate Baudrillard's development, as I have just outlined, towards the seductive strategies of a fatal theory. My aim is then to offer a transcendental critique of that fatal theory.

Baudrillard's work stakes out the parameters of a "catastrophization of the modern," and this is a position which proposes the progressive disappearance of all referentiality in political, sexual, religious, aesthetic and philosophical terms. Baudrillard, following McLuhan, delivers his theoretical strategies with the concept of "implosion," which is the unfurling upon and invasion of daily life by the image.⁷ Discursive polarities such as subject/object, private/public, imaginary/real, have become set loose from determinate meaning, with the mass media exemplifying the installation of a new reality: hyperreality. Simulation provides the *modus operandi* of hyperreality through models which precede and anticipate the "real." Models of simulation volatilize the "real" and transform it into

analysis of critical theory, the capitalist system of objects can only be understood adequately in terms of a system of signification over against a political-economic analysis. The object (the commodity) is part of a complex system of signs. The crux of Baudrillard's early theorization of the object is that it has become loosened from the referential contexts of social life. For Baudrillard, it is only when objects become autonomized as differential signs and made intelligible within a system can there be any theory about the consumption of objects. Reification becomes for Baudrillard integral to consumption and not production, due to a systematic closure effected by the totalization of signs (SS:114).

⁷See Baudrillard's review of McLuhan's Understanding Media, in *L'Homme at la Société*, no 5 (1967). According to Douglas Kellner (MPB:66), Baudrillard initially criticized McLuhan's formula of the "medium is the message" as a technological reductionism, only to take up McLuhan's formula and rework it for his own purposes -- the concept of implosion is a prime example in my judgement.

a special effect.⁸ Baudrillard's aesthetic of contemporary culture, put simply, is this: the voluminous and all-pervasive nature of the screen in public and private life serves to create a "special effect" which is not narcissistic but rather a conjuncture of object and image which produces a culture of the simulacrum -- a culture of excess, saturation and over-production.

In my judgement one of the most significant social, cultural, and historical changes brought about by the transformation of the "real" into special effect is a pervasive feeling of nostalgia and melancholy. If we understand "special effect" to be the great proliferation of mass media images, and an increasing problematization of the meaning of "fiction" and "reality," then I think the term "nostalgia" is quite accurate in describing and accounting for the way in which many people in contemporary society are being drawn to some way of making sense of what Baudrillard calls the volatilization of the real. Attempts at nostalgic remembering and yearnings for authenticity are, in my judgement, the flip side of postmodernism's repudiation of such attempts and yearnings. Nostalgia, and melancholy we might add, may in fact be part of a complex dialectic which is brought to increasingly higher levels of intensification in postmodernism.

In a recent text Baudrillard clearly states the thrust of his project: "For critical theory one must therefore substitute a fatal theory, to bring this objective irony to completion."⁹ A fatal theory involves a complex

⁸Jean Baudrillard, The Evil Demon of Images, trans. Paul Patton and Paul Foss (Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1987), 11. Hereafter cited in parentheses as EDI.

⁹Jean Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1988), 83. Hereafter cited in parentheses as EC.

intersection of concepts in Baudrillard's work. Those concepts are "seduction," "disappearance," and "metamorphosis." For introductory purposes I will briefly outline the place these concepts occupy in Baudrillard's thought.

It is important to understand that Baudrillard does not see theory as providing a rational and coherent explanation of the world. Theory for Baudrillard is a philosophic and poetical game, and the fatal element of theory is precisely its attempt to bypass rational meaning and indeed any form of mediation. For Baudrillard theory is "an art of disappearing, a way of modulating it and making it into a state of grace."¹⁰ "Seduction" is related to this process of disappearing -- in fact seduction for Baudrillard is a process of enchantment as things appear and disappear without mediation in "instant commutation." (FB:75)

The concept of seduction is pivotal for Baudrillard's fatal theory, and it is important to state clearly from the outset just what is meant by his use of the word "seduction." For Baudrillard, seduction is to resemble and take on the appearance of the other, indeed to make the other enter the realm of metamorphosis. The concept of "metamorphosis" replaces metaphor for Baudrillard as the possibility for communicating meaning. In the order of metamorphosis there is the possibility of "transmutation" -- a process beyond system, law and symbolic order (FB:75). Baudrillard is opposed to the idea of the individual's cultivating difference and originality, because this moves away from seduction (EDI:15). In Baudrillard's terms, a "banal strategy" is a strategy where one asserts individual identity and difference: a fatal strategy involving seduction is opposed to a banal strategy.

¹⁰"Forget Baudrillard: An Interview with Sylvère Lotringer," Jean Baudrillard, Forget Foucault (New York: Semiotext(e), 1987), 128. Hereafter cited in parentheses as FB.

In chapter III these concepts which go together to make up a fatal theory will receive greater elaboration and critical attention. The first chapter of the thesis will involve a contextual setting of the parameters of critical theory in relation to postmodernism, and an analysis of Baudrillard's early work. In chapter II I am concerned to give detailed immanent analysis of Baudrillard's fundamental ideas regarding the simulacrum, the hyperreal, simulation, and primitivism. This chapter plays a crucial chronological role in the development of Baudrillard's fatal theory, and I hope to show how this development is significant for later work. In chapter III the full extent of Baudrillard's fatal theory comes to the fore, and the radical implications of such a theory will be the concern of this chapter. In chapter IV I will begin to give substantial critique of Baudrillard's strategies, and my own presentation of alternative strategies.

CHAPTER I
HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, AND AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

Historical and Social Conditions

"Many are the texts of postmodernity" might well be the most fitting ensign for the historical period which is still our contemporary moment. Postmodernism now serves as a descriptive noun for our cultural terrain, at least in the advanced Western societies. Perhaps this noun also serves as a meaningful description even in the so-called underdeveloped or third-world societies. In my judgement the cultural dominant of postmodernism is largely due to the obliteration of distinctions between high and popular art -- with the result of a culture of the popular, in the sense of an increased blurring of the distinctions between what is popular and what is not. This kind of erasure of the defining boundaries of what constitutes "art" and "culture" is an effect of the global system of late capitalism, and an effect which signals a voracious but far more transparent cultural system than hitherto perceived or envisaged.

I date the beginning of the collapse of the distinctions between high and popular art after World War Two, when in Britain and Europe massive social reconstructions and cultural changes at fundamental economic levels affected the ascendancy and dominant cultural expression of modernism. High art was drawn into modernist abstraction and increasingly sophisticated meditations on technological symbolisms. There was also an increase in sophisticated expressions of form being drawn into production and artifact,

and one might say that the result of such artistic production was a highly rationalized view of art. The subsequent effects of these meditations resulted in an aesthetic of empty tradition and the growth of a self reflexive avant-garde.

These developments within a high modernist avant-garde movement generated a highly formalized language in which to express potentialities of authentic and emancipatory experience. The stress on newness of experience, feeling, and vital energy was quickly absorbed into a formal cultural language, accessible only to what became a modernist élite. The mass of consumers increasingly absorbed by the post-war affluence and "consumer society," were often alienated from the meditations of an artistic élite grouping. The significant point is the economic one, whereby an ever decreasing funding of modernist art led to an increased emphasis upon popular cultural products, and the explosion in the late 1950s and 1960s of various popular forms such as rock music, fashion, and the radical questioning of bourgeois society through subcultural groupings.

The concept of postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" was initiated by Fredric Jameson who has also theorized a set of constitutive features under that cultural dominant¹: a new depthlessness, which is a culture of the simulacrum; a weakening of historicity; the play of new intensities, marked by the need to identify what constitutes that "other" of society after the eclipse of Nature by late capitalism and vast urban development; and new technologies and an economic world system. Jameson then wants to ask, what are the possibilities for a radical or political art in this new world space of capitalism?

¹ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 6. Hereafter cited in parentheses as PM.

The contemporary situation is also our historical situation, and I affirm the necessity of retaining a sense of history despite the deep skepticism of much postmodern thought in this regard. In Jamesonian terms there has been a progression in the stages of capitalism leading up to our present stage. This periodizing strategy is derived from Ernest Mandel¹² and begins with Market Capitalism (1840s-1890s) as the first technological revolution; Monopoly Capitalism (1890s-World War II) as the second technological revolution; and the most recent stage in Late Capitalism beginning in the 1950s and becoming fully apparent as a break with previous economic, political and cultural structures during the 1960s with the shift to a consumer capitalism. The stages of Monopoly and Late Capitalism are the most relevant for the present discussion, although a more involved historical account would most certainly include the first stage. It is precisely in the latter stages of monopoly capitalism that Adorno and Horkheimer began to theorize about the concept of the culture industry which still bears historically on the current debates over postmodernism.

The concept of culture industry is central to critical theory, and was originally introduced by Adorno and Horkheimer in order to analyse and make sense of the social conditions of advanced capitalist society. In their essay, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, Adorno and Horkheimer propose that "the fusion of the arts in one work" is the promise of all industrial products: the production of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.¹³

¹²Ernest Mandel, Late Capitalism, trans. Joris de Bres (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1975).

¹³Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso NLB 1979), 124. Hereafter cited in parentheses as CI.

A devastating fusion and integration of advanced capitalist society is in operation, culturally and artistically. There is an illusion of provision for all, which is highly deceptive, since the effect is one of a levelling out in reality of all difference and autonomy: a "circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger." (CI:121) This highly structured system and uniformity of culture produces cultural products which are, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, no longer a pretension to be art, but instead an ideology of business and industry with complete social utility. An objective social tendency is hidden in the subjective motivations of culture industry directors and leaders (CI:121).

The culture industry can only be the product of capitalism, and has its origins in the liberal industrialized nations (CI:132). Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the phase of mass culture evident in monopoly capitalism, compared with the late liberal stage of market capitalism, is the rigorous exclusion of the new. Consumption becomes determined by the formulaic codes of the culture industry, and a predictable set of features consonant with the mass society where anything new or untried is deemed an unnecessary risk. Whatever is able to be sold is good for consumption purposes, and what cannot be sold is useless for those purposes. A reworking of Walter Benjamin's thesis emphasizes "the universal triumph of the rhythm of mechanical production and reproduction." (CI:134) Adorno and Horkheimer also use Plato's concept of the immutable ideas, to suggest that an all powerful authority exists to ensure a certain number of cultural commodities are available for mass production and consumption -- "ideas written in the cultural firmament." (CI:135)

The culture industry has the effect of integrating its consumers from above, as well as forcing together high and low art: such

a forced integration has drastic consequences for both forms of art.¹⁴ High art loses its significance as a serious art because of a demand that it become efficacious, whilst low art's inherent potential for rebellious resistance is muted by a civilizing process. It is certainly true that Adorno is more concerned with the fate of high art, but he can not be so easily labelled "anti-popular art" as is frequently supposed. He is in fact against a levelling process whereby both forms of art lose their distinctive nature and appropriate social roles. Adorno's critical formulation of this problem was that high and mass art are torn halves of an integral freedom.

For Adorno, the essential problematic, in social and historical terms, is the relation between culture and organized power. The question is how these are in dialectical tension with each other. Adorno maintains that culture contains "a critical impulse," or oppositional tendency, towards the integration and establishment of the status quo by administered power structures. Culture is able to pose a critique of the levelling unification carried out by administrative power.¹⁵ Such a critique is particularly evident for Adorno in the German concepts of *Kultur* and *Bildung*, which oppose administration with the idea of the autonomy of culture as educated thought, and with the idea of culture as a pure manifestation of humanity as popular opinion. For Adorno it is the artificially imposed separation of "culture" from the praxis of life which is accepted as "cultural," and hence culture's neutralized status. The question for Adorno must always be how culture might stand in some kind of opposition to administrative power, in order for it to have any critical impulse.

¹⁴Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" (1963), New German Critique No6 (Fall 1975), 12.

¹⁵Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture and Administration" (1960), Telos No37 (Fall 1978), 99-100.

Adorno's analysis was concerned with the kind of social and historical conditions which made possible the emergence of a "contemporary mass consciousness," epitomised through the new mass music and what he called regressive listening.¹⁶ Adorno highlighted certain features of this "new situation" as being characterized by terms such as "banal," "catastrophic phase," "ecstatic ritual" -- a new situation which theoretically poses an "always-identical" society. "Culture industry" and "administered culture" provide the theoretical framework for understanding the formalized elements of popular art and culture. The crucial point is that these formalized elements are not made by the masses but by the culture industry. There is no question in Adorno's mind that this kind of popular culture is not produced by the people, but for them.

The applicability of the culture industry thesis to postmodernism is a critical question, and the political and intellectual battle lines have been staked out between a critical theory and a postmodernist cultural theory. One can see these lines being drawn in the introduction to a recent collection of Adorno's essays on mass culture and the culture industry.¹⁷ J.M. Bernstein argues that "the controlling movement of postmodernism" is found in the very pervasive collapse of the difference between culture and practical life.¹⁸ Bernstein maintains that his thesis can be supported by Adorno's contention that the difference between culture and practical life is

¹⁶Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938/1956), The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

¹⁷Theodor W. Adorno, The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture, ed. and introduction by J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁸J.M. Bernstein, *ibid.*, 10.

erased by the commercial character of culture.¹⁹ Bernstein understands well that postmodernism has more patience for popular culture and the potentialities for that kind of culture, in a critical stance towards Adorno's more pessimistic theories of mass culture. But Adorno's pessimism is vindicated by the homogeneity of postmodern culture, argues Bernstein, and the project of negation is still relevant for a time in which the illusory reconciliation of universal and particular is even more apparent. However, Bernstein does not give his reader any substantial examples of postmodernist cultural theory and therefore his enthusiasm for a critical theory tends to obscure what a postmodernist cultural theory might look like.

I do not have much difficulty with Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis in terms of its historical and cultural specificity -- a culture industry critique which is adequate for analysing the final phases of monopoly capitalism. If one were to pursue this particular culture industry thesis I think that the thesis would only be able to analyse the post-World War Two cultural situation in terms of more of the same getting worse. In my judgement Fredric Jameson's concept of a cultural dominant tends to show up some of the shortcomings of a culture industry thesis, especially with regard to the changes and developments within postmodernism. I think it is also problematic to employ the Adorno and Horkheimer analysis of popular art in the 1940s to the contemporary scenario of popular culture.

¹⁹Theodor W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture, 53.

Baudrillard and Culture Recycled

Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis was that the culture industry produces for consumers a cultural environment which induces them to have a fetishized relationship with commodities. The culture industry offers a stereotypical identity for its manipulated and dominated consumers, and produces an imitation of identity in an absolute way with obedience to the social hierarchy (CI:131). Above all, Adorno regards the culture industry's culpability as "anti-enlightenment," because it impedes the development of individuality. The culture industry provides the social context for pseudo-individuality. In fact one may say, argue Adorno and Horkheimer, that the self in advanced capitalism is indeed a "monopoly commodity determined by society." (CI:154) The individual is transformed by the power of the generality, and can only be situated where the general tendencies meet (CI:155). However, for Adorno, enlightenment must still be a real social possibility.²⁰ Culture and administration are not totally reified; they in fact always "refer back to living subjects -- just as does the most adventurous cybernetic machine."²¹ Difference and divergence are the hope for living subjects who work within the administered world.²²

²⁰Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," *ibid.*, 18-19.

²¹Adorno, "Culture and Administration," *ibid.*, 111.

²²Throughout this thesis the notion of "identity" will be a constant theme and in chapter IV I will engage in a critique of such a notion as it pertains to postmodernism and philosophy. For clarity's sake let me state that the word "identity" is used in the sense of how human beings have a social, cultural, historical, and individual identity. The word usually refers to what Adorno calls "living subjects." We should also be aware of the debates and disputes that have been raging for at least two decades now over the theoretical

Baudrillard's position in his early work is somewhat akin to Adorno and Horkheimer's totalizing schema in which mass culture engulfs the individuality of subjects. The system of recycling affects the constitution and identity of individuals in a consumer society, which now excludes the figure of traditional culture, the autodidact, as well as the cultured man who is "that fragrant garland of humanism now rapidly beginning to decay."²³ The reconstitution of the individual is in terms of "an aesthetic recycling," in a society which encourages the functional rationalization of forms, a society in which an environment and ambience creates an aesthetic homogeneity of "functionalized material of messages, texts, images, classical masterpieces or comic strips." (MMC:74)

The early work of Jean Baudrillard (mid 1960s to early 1970s) comes at a crucial time in the development of critical theories of society. The student revolts and general upheavals of the 1960s in Europe, North America, and Third World countries, led to some radical questioning of existing critical theory and the various formulations of Marxian thought. Without going into a history of post-1968 radical thought, I want to focus on Baudrillard's notion of culture recycled, or the adventures of the object.

It is Baudrillard's contention that cultural consumption as social reality has become anachronistic:

cultural consumption can thus be defined as the time and place of the farcical resurrection and parodic evocation of that which is already

notion of a "subject." Critical theory, structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction have all been engaged in one way or another in the problematic of "the subject" and "identity."

²³Jean Baudrillard, "Mass Media Culture," Revenge of the Crystal. Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny 1968-1983, ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London, Concord Mass: Pluto Press, 1990), 73. Hereafter cited in parentheses as MMC.

no more -- of that which is "consumed" in the original sense of the word (consummated and terminated). (MMC:63)

Baudrillard's early thesis was that cultural recycling, as an organizing principle, dominates the whole of mass culture. Those who are acculturated have access not to culture but cultural recycling (MMC:65). Notions of culture as tradition inherited and worthy of preservation, or as a form of transcendent criticism and reflection, are violently opposed by a "cyclical subculture" which is composed of "obsolescent ingredients and signs." (MMC:65)

Baudrillard is concerned to argue against both the mass culture critics and its populist defenders, maintaining that the problem of the vulgarisation of art and culture is a false one in the context of his own thesis of perpetual cultural recycling. Baudrillard flattens all difference between art forms, gadgets, and media, to say that the meaning circulated by all cultural commodities is the cyclical form of signification (MMC:66). The flattening of all difference and cultural recycling takes place through a total system of communication so that the same mode of succession, alternation and combinatorial modulation is imposed on all cultural forms (MMC:66).

What Baudrillard is attempting to get at, is the status of Culture in relation to the narrow definitions of high and mass culture -- these are two polar opposites which have become obsolete in the face of culture actually becoming an object of consumption. Everything is sold and consumed together as culture, and culture is under the same demand for competitive signs just like any other category of objects (MMC:73). Culture becomes a function of the demand for competitive signs, "subject to the constantly changing cycles and dictates of fashion, thus one replacing the elitist practice of culture as a system of symbolic meaning with a ludic and

combinatory system of signs." (MMC:73)

It is possible to distinguish between three definitions of "culture" here in Baudrillard's analysis. First there is Culture as a concept which is related to the second definition of culture as a social reality in terms of cultural forms, practices, and institutions. This second definition is also dependent upon the distinctions between "high" and "mass" culture. A third definition, and the one Baudrillard adopts as his own, I think, is culture as signification. Culture is part of the system of signs, defined in semiotic terms. I think it is useful to bear in mind Baudrillard's use of the word, and how he deals with the usual distinctions made between high and mass culture, distinctions which he argues are obsolete in the face of cultural recycling.

Baudrillard's initial concern to make critical judgements concerning the consumer society, was still in large part dependent upon the Marxian framework for analysis of reification and commodity fetishism. But it is precisely on those very concepts of commodity fetishism and reification that Baudrillard's work also begins to take some distance. Charles Levin has argued that Baudrillard goes beyond the perceived limitations of Adorno's theory of commodity fetishism located in the act of consumption itself -- a fetishized economic act (SS:96-7). Baudrillard's concern is with the system of objects, and how to interpret that system. Baudrillard's initial strategy was to appropriate the structuralist analysis without its idealizing systematicity, in order to use it in a critical interpretation of contemporary culture.

Baudrillard reinterprets structuralism "as a response to the ordered abstraction of commodity culture and the self-regulating impersonality of systems of exchange, and of signification in complex, neo-capitalist

societies." (SS:32) The formal features of structuralist analysis -- sign as arbitrary, system as having constitutive status, manipulation of discrete terms according to rules of the code -- appear in Baudrillard's early work as actual embodied features of capitalist commodity culture and social experience. The sign becomes for Baudrillard a structural model of reification (SS:32).

The problem with traditional critical theory, according to Levin, is that it fails to conceive of the commodity as having its own intrinsic aesthetic logic -- a logic of signification. The specificity of commodity objects is ignored by such economic and anthropological categories as "need" and "use value." The basic premise of critical theory is the consistent acceptance of Marx's critique of political economy, and to develop this along social and cultural lines (SS:101). Baudrillard's initial project was to make clear the complex problematic of the "meaning" of the commodity. Baudrillard treats commodities as terms in a problematic signifying system, contrary to Marx's analysis of commodities as elements in a problematic value system (SS:102).

Jean-Claude Girardin has also written in an affirmative manner on Baudrillard's early attempts to overcome the Marxist analysis of consumption.²⁴ Girardin argues that Baudrillard seeks to go beyond the manifest and familiar contents of consumption in order to show their form. In other words, Baudrillard constructs a schema which re-articulates the real into neo-reality by mixing the governing code and the latent contents of any given message (PS:133). In Baudrillard's first book, *Le système des objets* (1968), there is a subversion of McLuhan's thesis of the medium is the

²⁴Jean-Claude Girardin, "Towards a Politics of Signs: Reading Baudrillard," *Telos* No 20 (1974). Hereafter cited in parentheses as PS.

message in order to provide an intricate sociology of the everyday -- it is the form which has to be subverted in a society of significations (PS:134).

Kitsch: from Critical Theory to Postmodernism

Earlier on in his work, Baudrillard elaborated a theory of how the consumer society was fast becoming a culture of kitsch, defining kitsch as an aesthetic of simulation and as pseudo-object (MMC:75). For Baudrillard, kitsch is a "cultural category" -- a simulation, copy, facsimile, stereotype, saturated by detail. Kitsch has proliferated due to industrial multiplication and the vulgarization of distinctive signs: "the bygone, the neo, the exotic, the folkloric, the futuristic." (MMC:75) According to Baudrillard, kitsch forms an integral part of the consumer society, and it is a "cancerous excrescence in the population of 'pseudo-objects'." (MMC:75) But kitsch and the authentic object are in relationship to one another, and together they organize the world of consumption, since kitsch affirms the value and rarity of unique objects (MMC:76). Kitsch is also a threat and in opposition to the aesthetic of beauty and originality. It would seem that in Baudrillard's view the formalized elements of popular culture would be kitsch, imitation, mimicry, parody, perhaps even pastiche. Others have also noted, in a somewhat critical vein, the way in which kitsch has come to be a sustaining force in contemporary culture.²⁵

²⁵Milan Kundera has written, "le kitsch devient notre esthétique et notre morale quotidiennes" (p.199), arguing that kitsch is the everyday aesthetic of (post)modern society. Kitsch has saturated our cultural consciousness, particularly via the mass media, L'art du roman (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 1986). Calvin Seerveld denounces kitsch as "the technocratic denaturing of ordinary life" (p.63). Kitsch, in Seerveld's view, falsifies societal consciousness leading the masses to accept triviality, fakery and inferior cultural objects as the norm for everyday life, Rainbows for the Fallen World (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 1980).

The critical question is how one is going to settle on the issue of kitsch and the so-called denaturing of artistic and cultural realities, due to the rapacious logic of late capitalism. The word kitsch often functions powerfully as a well-timed curse word -- to call something kitsch is almost the worst one can say about an object. However, we are concerned here with the way in which the popular culture of postmodernism has certain formalized elements which have some connection with the social conditions of this period or epoch. Perhaps one response would be to account for those social conditions which engender a fascination for kitsch and the way in which kitsch objects are used. If postmodernism is characterized by depthlessness, or can be given the title of "a culture of the simulacrum," then one really has to reconsider the whole business of "original" and "unique" in relation to "kitsch," "imitation," "parody," "pastiche." It seems to me that we are now in a cultural situation where "original" and "unique" have become intensely complicated matters.

Baudrillard's analysis of everyday objects also extended to "the discourse of art," and he contends that it was not until the twentieth century that objects took on an importance and independent function in art, for example the analysis of space in Cubism (MMC:80). The object, for Baudrillard, becomes fragmented through abstraction in this early phase of modernism, then finds "parodic resurrection in Dada and Surrealism," only to move towards "decomposition and volatisation through Abstract Expressionism." (MMC:80) The object then finds its "self-referential home" in neo-Figuration and Pop Art. It is Baudrillard's contention that art loses its uniqueness as an object, as it becomes located and disseminated amongst other cultural forms, as multiplication of series objects. When this happens to works of art they begin to assume meaning in relation to other objects of consumption,

although it might be argued that works of art have always assumed some kind of meaning in relation to other objects. Art objects also enter "into the constellation of those displayed accessories by which the 'socio-cultural' standing of the average citizen is determined." (MMC:71). Art in the cultural consumption of perpetual recycling no longer stands in opposition to other objects.

It is with Pop Art that Baudrillard argues the object suddenly finds itself elevated to a "pinnacle of artistic figuration." (MMC:80) But the key question for Baudrillard is whether Pop Art is an effect of fashion and a pure object of consumption, or is it contemporaneous with the signs of the consumer society? Object and image now inhabit the same physical and logical space, they coexist and are both signs as "differential, reversible, and combinatorial relations." (MMC:81) Pop Art's implicit claim is that it is one with the immanent sign order of the consumer society. Baudrillard maintains that Pop Art contests the previous signification of painting and art, and art's former propensity towards a transcendent nature in order to reveal inner truth.

Pop Art is a model of pure exteriority, lacking transcendence or some interiority which is revelatory. But the implication seems to be according to Baudrillard, that art once was oppositional and contestatory -- it once had transcendent possibilities. To the question of whether Pop Art is a secularizing movement, Baudrillard replies that it can only comply with the logic of consumption in consumer society. It is actually a part of the system of objects to which it addresses itself (MMC:82). Painting is an object, and Pop Art "is the first movement to explore the very status of art as a 'signed' and 'consumed' object." (MMC:82) With the Pop Artists, exemplified by Warhol, the idea is that the canvas is an everyday object just

like any other object. Art's transcendent character is lost in Pop Artist's perception of art's function in society, to become one with all signifiers.

The key to understanding Baudrillard's thought on modern art is his consistent claim that art's signification has become a fatal integration.²⁶ I think it is important to note that Baudrillard is already in his early work moving towards a "fatal theory" in his explanations for art's serial differentiation within a structural integration of the modern world. The paradox is that art can no longer lay claim to immanence or transcendence. Art cannot be regarded as part of the everyday and neither can it give critical comment on the everyday (GS:109). Baudrillard is above all concerned with the way in which a technical world, or a "systematized world," imposes a certain "limiting condition" for art. The only recourse art has, argues Baudrillard, is towards a "structural homology," because the subjectivity of art can only exchange its signification with the objectivity of the systematized world (GS:109). There is indeed in Baudrillard's account a profound contradiction at the heart of modern art, in that art attempts to be critical and yet art also wishes to be integrated. Baudrillard describes this contradiction as a "fatality." (GS:110).

Baudrillard's thought follows a complex trajectory, moving from an earlier preoccupation with the possibility of modern art's negating its own disappearance, even if it is caught within a total integration of art and world, to the heterogeneous styles of postmodernism. It is important to understand what Baudrillard is doing with his descriptions and observations. Baudrillard gives phenomenological description a desirous intensity: to be

²⁶Jean Baudrillard, "Gesture and Signature: The Semiurgy of Contemporary Art," For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, Mo.: Telos Press, 1981), 110. Hereafter cited in parentheses as GS

really modern (ultramodern) and somehow recapture that most primal and basic state of modernity. Baudrillard's recent writing on America is a good example of phenomenological hyper-aesthetic description which pushes further at the boundaries of the real in order to describe hyperreality, but attempting, if it were possible, to go beyond even hyperreality.²⁷ The kind of phenomenological description found in Baudrillard's *America*, serves to support his own insistence that he is not like the intellectual who draws his material from the history of ideas, but rather "from what is happening now." (AM:63) Phenomenological hyper-aesthetic description in Baudrillard's writing indicates a fascination for the present and aesthetic forms which are reflective of the present.

"We have to name the system"

Much of the critical debate surrounding postmodernism has been over questions of "fragmentation," and "disintegration." In short, how are we to analyze and describe a cultural situation which has as its very target the idea of the whole, or the totality? Naming the system has been the project of Marxism ever since Marx. Baudrillard often writes of "the system" as if "it" were an obstacle, and an obstacle which fatal theory is to seduce rather than climb or conquer. The system is also in Baudrillard's writing a rather expansive region -- no less than the whole cosmos. What becomes evident in Baudrillard's work, as it develops, is that the idea of stable referents and signifiers is rather tenuous for us mortals in the grip of a

²⁷Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London/New York: Verso, 1989). Hereafter cited in parentheses as AM.

catastrophic implosion by hyperreal models of those once stable referents. For Baudrillard, naming the system is not really the point -- but rather how one may seduce and play with the objects of that system as they clash and collide in the third order of simulacra. However, it would be instructive to look at how one could name the system.

Fredric Jameson is concerned with the way in which the concept of totality and the project of totalization are undermined in postmodernism. Jameson remains skeptical of the postmodern emphasis upon "groups" and "difference" as a way of combatting tyranny, philosophically or politically (PM:340). The notion of consensus is attacked by "the new social movements," because consensus is understood in terms of representative democracy and public opinion polls. Jameson argues that the rallying cry of "difference" in the face of multinational capitalism and huge bureaucratic government machinery is really no more than liberal tolerance. In suitable dialectical argument Jameson poses the question whether "difference" is really a result of the homogenization and standardization in contemporary culture (PM:341). The question remains for Jameson whether fashion and the market do indeed dictate the ideology of difference.

Jameson also questions "differentiation" as an adequate sociological term for what is happening in postmodern society. He opposes the theoretical notions of "difference" and "differentiation" as reifications, and argues against the idea that the system cannot be accounted for in totalizing terms because it is so differentiated and pluralistic. Difference seems to be opposed to totalizing schemas, but at the same time the very logic of postmodernism is explained in terms of difference which presupposes some form of totalization. Jameson would like to avoid an unsystematic theory of difference and differentiation, therefore he offers a theory of postmodernism

as the cultural dominant of late capitalism. This theory depends upon a dialectical understanding of postmodernism as a cultural logic and the capitalist system which provides the impetus for that logic. In other words, Jameson sees the theory of difference as a product of the current stage of capitalism with its universal features of the media and the market.

For Jameson, the interpretation of postmodernism as a cultural dominant becomes less one of impending, or even achieved, apocalypse or an "ending," but rather features of a cultural dominant which can be interpreted "as new and intensified forms of a structural tendency" foreseen by Marx (PM:380). According to Jameson, we can only understand the systemic changes in capitalism via a structural and dialectical analysis, and not via an apocalyptic vision of post-history or drastic endings in a pessimistic sense. Although Jameson adheres to a basic Marxist ontology and epistemology of culture, there is more than a hint that his categories may fall apart in his attempt to understand postmodernism.

Despite holding on fiercely to a Marxist commitment, Jameson's navigation through the fragmentation and bewildering array of postmodern art forms and cultural products could at any moment disintegrate into incoherence.²⁸ In other words, Jameson's fascination for the postmodern

²⁸The problem of incoherence in Jameson's work is also picked up by Lambert Zuidervart who suggests in a tentative fashion that Jameson's adherence to the Marxist tradition may be short-lived, particularly as Jameson's stated aim of dialectical analysis is at odds with the postmodern impulse he so desires to understand. It is certainly possible to go ahead and "correct" Jameson towards a more consistent Marxist analysis, but would that give us any advance on understanding the impulse of postmodernism? In my judgement, if Jameson is veering towards incoherence and struggling to find viable oppositional tendencies, or a legitimate politics of postmodernism that does not fall prey to the criticisms he has made of existing politics, his only alternative would be to revert to a more traditional critical theory as espoused by J.M. Bernstein, for example. Lambert Zuidervart, Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1991), 262.

culture is not always in keeping with a Marxist dialectic and emancipatory ideal, however close he wishes to stay with that mode of analysis. It is not only Karl Marx who informs Jameson's analysis of postmodernism. The idea of the simulacrum and a culture saturated by third order simulation finds expression in Jameson's work on postmodernism, only to be historicized and made to conform to a periodizing strategy which posits an explanatory option for "our times." That explanatory option is precisely what is at stake in assessing Jameson's analysis of postmodernism. One need only consider Jameson's precarious balancing act of Marxism and a sympathetic turn towards a Baudrillardian understanding of culture saturated by images in order to appreciate the high wire Jameson insists on walking.

In my judgement Jameson accurately pinpoints the "theoretical aesthetic" of postmodern thought (the style and discursive art of postmodern theory and writing) to be a deliberate exclusion of the doctrine of presuppositions and foundations. But as Jameson points out, this is a very demanding aesthetic to adopt, because it means that language has to become purified of any reference to ontology, metaphysics, or system. Language cannot be true any longer, but it can certainly be false: the result is the development of a theoretical discourse which is so negative and critical that it can remain above all ideological illusions. However, as Jameson correctly states, this development or goal is largely unattainable, because "every negative statement, every purely critical operation, can nonetheless generate the ideological illusion or mirage of a position, a system, a set of positive values in its own right." (PM:393)

The periodizing strategy of Fredric Jameson is also a resolutely historicizing strategy: a strategy which is a "postmodern Marxism" by virtue of Jameson's acceptance of the cultural logic of late capitalism to be postmodern. In fact his aim to provide cognitive mapping for the subject in

postmodernism and the retention of a concept of totality are by his own admission modernist strategies. A fully postmodern political aesthetic, in Jameson's terms, is the undermining of the structure of an image society by producing even more images, or the implosion of the simulacrum itself by even more simulacra -- an aesthetic which by no means belongs to Jameson's project. Jameson requires his strategy to be overtly rhetorical in "systematizing something that is resolutely unsystematic, and historicizing something that is resolutely unhistorical" in order to force a historical way of understanding and interpreting postmodernism (PM:418).

I shall be returning to Jameson's work in chapter IV and particularly with regard to his concern for a theory of identity in postmodernism. Jameson's ideas on "difference" and "cognitive mapping" are important enough to deserve critical attention alongside Baudrillard's speculations on identity. In my judgement the emphasis that Jameson places on historical, social, and cultural determinants (the totality) is necessary and indispensable for a detailed cultural analysis. This emphasis has to be borne in mind as I enter the complex and sometimes disturbing thought of Jean Baudrillard. We will encounter a number of claims by Baudrillard regarding the disappearance of the "social" and "history." Such claims are, I believe, indeed a sign of postmodern times and thus postmodernism is a fully social, cultural, and historical moment.

In my judgement there is an incredible struggle that is being played out on the cultural terrain of postmodernism, and I believe this struggle has certain philosophical implications. Baudrillard's work is a catastrophic meditation on that struggle and the way in which the rational coherence of Western culture has been given over to the simulacrum. Baudrillard's meditation, in the guise of a fatal theory, continually implies that

subjective identity is radically affected by the changed conditions of a third order hyperreality. Baudrillard's thought from *L'échange symbolique* documents, albeit in a speculative-philosophic form, the way in which third order simulation is a radical re-ordering of the social world with drastic consequences for subjective identity. I will now begin to discuss the way in which Baudrillard theorizes about such changes.

CHAPTER II

SIMULATED IDENTITY AND THE CRISIS OF REALITY

A Genealogy of the Simulacrum

Why do we find within postmodern thought such an excessive fascination for the simulacrum ? Nowhere does this fascination become more readily apparent than in Baudrillard's writing. Gilles Deleuze has given a detailed polemical account of what is behind the fascination for the simulacrum. It is the overthrow of Platonism and the raising of the simulacrum. The simulacrum is asserted over and against the Platonic reification of the Idea as having superior identity which then grounds the authenticity of copies:

The simulacrum, in rising to the surface, causes the Same and the Like, the model and the copy, to fall under the power of the false (phantasm). It renders the notion of hierarchy impossible in relation to the idea of the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, and the determination of value. It sets up the world of nomadic distributions and consecrated anarchy. Far from being a new foundation, it swallows up all foundations, it assures a universal collapse, but as a positive and joyous event, as de-founding (*effondrement*).²⁹

In Baudrillard's work, particularly since *L'échange symbolique*, we are given to understand that the third order is now our inescapable social reality. In my judgement Deleuze highlights what is at stake in giving

²⁹Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," October 27 (1983), trans. Rosalind Krauss, 53.

priority to the third order of the simulacrum -- an order which is at one remove from the real world made by people, the second order, and at a double remove from the first order of an essential reality and in the kingdom of Plato also known as the Idea. Julian Pefanis has also emphasized Baudrillard's reversal of the Platonic hierarchy, and Pefanis makes the important point that this reversal in turn results in an ethical position -- a Nietzschean aesthetic of the simulacrum as the real world, opposed to the "real world" as illusion.³⁰ The crisis of reality, representation, epistemology, and indeed the whole of Western culture in the postmodern third order, is for Pefanis a question of the reversal of the Platonic hierarchy, and it is in Baudrillard's thought that we find perhaps the most acute articulation of the crisis of reality (HP:60).

We shall be considering the way in which Baudrillard presents his genealogy of the simulacrum, and his periodizing strategy of the three orders. But first I want to suggest that Baudrillard's ideas on the progression of the simulacrum through a historical account, leading to the present conditions of simulation, are prefigured by Nietzsche's short account of the six stages of the disappearance of the "real." Nietzsche's first stage is the real world corresponding to the truth -- the real is the truth. By the second stage, according to Nietzsche, the real world as a correspondance to the truth becomes unattainable for the moment -- the truth is promised. In the third stage the real world has become unattainable as the truth -- the truth is sought only as a duty and as an imperative. Nietzsche signals the influence of Kant at this third stage. By the fourth

³⁰Julian Pefanis, Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard, and Lyotard (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 60-61. Hereafter cited in parentheses as HP.

stage positivism has begun to exert itself, and there is no longer any duty or imperative towards knowing the truth but rather an emphasis upon observation and experiment. For Nietzsche, by the fifth stage, the idea of a "real world" is totally useless and quite incomprehensible. The final stage abolishes both the real world and the apparent world.³¹

Baudrillard makes a clear distinction between what he considers to be a principle of simulation and a reality principle, with the latter finding its rapid disappearance in the third order of postmodernism. The implication is that future social conditions will not be able to be accounted for in terms of a principle of reality, but rather the principle of simulation.³² In order to understand this principle of simulation and the conditions of the third order, Baudrillard argues that we need a genealogy of the law of value and simulacra. Such a genealogy will make possible a grasp and understanding of the hegemony and enchantment (*féerie*) of the actually existing system, or the structural revolution of value (ES:9). It is precisely this kind of genealogy which serves to replace the analysis given by political economy of the simulacra of the second order.

Baudrillard's employment of a genealogical method should be understood in the Nietzschean sense as unmasking and unearthing. Genealogy in this sense is indefinite and makes no pretense to reveal an originary identity or a primary foundation. When Baudrillard undertakes a genealogy of the law of value and simulacra, this undertaking is best understood in terms of

³¹Friedrich Nietzsche, "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth," Twilight of the Idols, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 40-41.

³²"Aujourd'hui, tout le système bascule dans l'indetermination, toute réalité est absorbée par l'hyperréalité du code et de la simulation. C'est un principe de simulation qui nous régit désormais en place de l'ancien principe de réalité." Jean Baudrillard, L'échange symbolique et la mort (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 1976), 8-9. Hereafter cited in parentheses as ES.

interpreting values as so many signs -- signs of the impulses at work in any given time period, of the transformations and transmutations that take place in value.³³

In the Renaissance (classical period) there is the first-order of simulacra which is based on the Natural Law of Value; this lasts until the dawning of the modern era. In the first order a counterfeit scheme obtains for representation as central to images and art (a theology of truth). The second order of simulacra is based on the Market Law of Value. This is operative for the Industrial Revolution Era which is a production scheme (ideological). For the Twentieth Century we have the third-order of simulacra based on the Structural Law of Value. This is a simulation scheme, with images as objective forms governed by the code (the crossover point from the Nietzschean assault on truth to the pure simulacrum).

In Baudrillardian terms the "classical" economy of value (Marx) and the "classical" configuration of the linguistic sign (Saussure), have been superseded by another, more radical form of value. But the two aspects of value, structural and referential, have become "disarticulated." Referential value disappears and thus gives advantage to the structural play of value.³⁴ Baudrillard writes of an "emancipation of the sign" which becomes free from the referentials of production, signification, effect, substance, history -- the sign becomes free from its form as representative equivalent (SLV:60). The sign takes on a completely new role, from determinate equivalence to

³³Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," *ibid.*, p.7 and p. 16. For a clear and sympathetic treatment of genealogy as a method see Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-165.

³⁴Jean Baudrillard, "The Structural Law of Value and the Order of Simulacra," The Structural Allegory, trans. Charles Levin from *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, 60. Hereafter cited in parentheses as SLV.

structural and combinatorial play (SLV:60). The sign comes to "signify" a radical indeterminacy. For Baudrillard, value has become autonomous -- a process in which every term and concept takes on indeterminacy and commutability.

It is Baudrillard's contention that Marx, Saussure and Freud could not foresee this third-order simulation of reality for they represent "the golden age of the dialectic of signs and reality, the classical period of capital and value." (SLV:60) For Baudrillard things have been set loose from their determinations, propelled forth into an "operational configuration" (SLV:65) which is governed and inscribed by the genetic code. The genetic code, for Baudrillard, is a discontinuous indeterminism maintained within a contemporary system of communication which is also a binary signalling system (SLV:66).

For Baudrillard, the stage of capitalism that is now in operation is no longer the one of political economy; in fact, capital plays with political economy like a model of simulation. The operations or mechanism of the market law of value is absorbed and recycled in the operations and mechanisms of the vast expanse of the structural law of value. Baudrillard's concept of a "structural law of value" is the transformation of Marx's concept of the "commodity law of value," and in transforming Marx's concept Baudrillard depends upon a radical interpretation of Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas on the relationship between economic values in economics and the exchange of meaning in linguistics (HP:80).

If we recall from Chapter I that Baudrillard's early theorization of the sign as a pure signification means that the sign takes on a logic of its own, then we can see that the structural law of value is the articulation of the structural game and combinatorial rules for the sign as pure signification.

It is precisely through this systematic process of absorption and recycling that political economy is contained and simulated within the third order: political economy is assured "d'une éternité seconde." (ES:9) Baudrillard's genealogy of the revolutions in value depends upon the idea that each law preceding the next is actually taken up and integrated into the succeeding law of value:

Chaque configuration de la valeur est ressaisie par la suivante dans un ordre de simulacre supérieur. Et chaque phase de la valeur intègre dans son dispositif le dispositif antérieur comme référence fantôme, référence fantoche, référence de simulation. (ES:9)

It would seem that Baudrillard presupposes the perfecting of a system of value which gets increasingly nearer to a pure simulacrum. Baudrillard's model is dynamic and reversible in that each preceding law of value is taken up and imploded within the following law of value. Pefanis has usefully delineated Baudrillard's "methodological trope" as a "doctrine of immanent reversibility," -- a method which presupposes that appearances now tend to replace meaning and that "when something is everywhere, it is nowhere." (HP:71) In Baudrillard's genealogy of the simulacrum we find a preoccupation with the disappearance of categories of socio-philosophical thought, and heightened incredulity towards the overtaking of meaning by appearances (HP:71).

Arthur Kroker maintains that Baudrillard's writing is a significant departure from the sociology of knowledge and theories of power and norms, in what Baudrillard perceives to be "the brutal processes of dehistoricization and desocialization which structure the new communicative order of a signifying culture." (BM:175) The exchange-principle is now governed by highly abstract and hyper-symbolic disseminations of information; there

ensues a maximum production of meaning and words for constituted historical subjects who are condition and effect of the simulacra (BM:175-6). According to Kroker, Baudrillard theorizes about the sign as "the purest, most intensive expression possible of the heteronomy of the purely abstract quality of the commodity-form prophesied by Marx in Capital." (BM:179) It is Baudrillard's contention that in the production era of capitalism the theory of commodification kept intact the centre of the capitalist exchange-system. The era of simulation brings a conflation of use and exchange value, as mirrored aspects of a single semiological reproduction, or a structural homology at the centre of the sign. The subjectivity of use-value is then given up for an analysis of the purely relational and objective functioning of the objects that constitute a free floating sign world (BM:179-80).

Baudrillard maintains that operations of cybernetics, the genetic code, and the general principle of uncertainty and indeterminism, succeeds a deterministic science, objectivity, and a dialectical view of history and knowledge. Yet despite this negative affirmation of one principle for another, Baudrillard's genealogical schema seems to allow for the previous order to be included in the succeeding order, even if that previous order appears as simulation or phantasmic hyperreality within the next order. In other words, Baudrillard's schema does not completely transcend that which it is in criticism of, and purporting to go beyond. Baudrillard also pushes at the question of how it might be possible to get another "ordre supérieur"; is there a theory or subversive practice which is more uncertain and risky than the system itself? However, for Baudrillard it is only symbolic exchange and death which can surpass the system:

La mort peut-être et elle seule, la réversibilité de mort est d'un ordre supérieur à celui du code. . . . C'est pourquoi la seule stratégie est *catastrophique*, et non pas du tout dialectique. Il faut pousser

les choses à la limite, où tout naturellement elles s'inversent et s'écroulent. (ES:11)

Baudrillard's problematic is that he is setting out the schema of how the system works in periodizing terms, from first to third order, but then sets himself the question of how that system might be transcended. The dialectic of the system he describes has to be transcended. For Baudrillard that process of transcending the system must take place via a science of imaginary solutions (pataphysics) which is able to go beyond the system of hyperreality: "une science-fiction du retournement du système contre lui-même, à l'extrême limite de la simulation, d'une simulation réversible dans une hyperlogique de la destruction et de la mort." (ES:12)³⁵

It seems to me that Baudrillard's aim, at least in *L'échange symbolique* which is his most theoretically significant text for subsequent thought on simulation and hyperreality, is to overcome the capitalist system via a notion of death and pushing the system to its extremes.³⁶ But the

³⁵Pataphysics, as a concept, was introduced by the writer Alfred Jarry, 1873-1907. Jarry was prolific in writing novels, poetry, plays, and criticism. One could cite just two of his influential works: *Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* and *Ubu roi; drame en cinq actes*. There is also some debate over the extent to which Jarry's work anticipated the Dadaists and Surrealists. According to Pefanis pataphysics "represents an obverse and parodic mirror to the philosophically and scientifically serious." (HP:121n) The science of imaginary solutions, as pataphysics is commonly known amongst its adherents, was also a central idea for the Situationist movement of the 1960s as "an aesthetic nihilism and a will to crisis." (HP:122n) According to Pefanis pataphysics is an active nihilism, a point worth bearing in mind when we examine more closely Baudrillard's nihilism in chapter III.

³⁶When one considers the concept of "death" in Baudrillard, or any of the poststructuralist thinkers, it is important to remember that the concept has philosophical import. I agree with Pefanis who maintains that the "poststructuralists aim at deepening epistemological crises wherever they occur," (HP:4) and I think that this aim is directly linked to the deployment of the concept of death. Death as a concept for the poststructuralist philosophers is

question is how Baudrillard's theory and himself as theorist are able to transcend that very system. Is it even desirable, in Baudrillardian terms, to completely transcend the system ?

According to Baudrillard *néo-capitalisme* is a system characterised by reproduction. In a production based schema the question of shortage or abundance predominates. But things have changed, and there is now an indeterminacy to such terms as shortage or abundance; the kind of social reality that is produced under late capitalist conditions results in an uncertainty of just how to determine the crisis in hand (ES:57-8). Baudrillard argues that the situation is now very different from Marx's explanation of events passing into historical existence only to be resurrected in parodic form -- in the present system these two phases are collapsed into each other (*se télescopent*) (ES:61).

articulated via such notions as exhaustion, excess, and intensity. Pefanis has argued that Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel in the 1930s has had an important influence upon postmodernism and poststructuralist thought. Pefanis highlights the importance of a footnote which appeared in the 1948 edition of Introduction to the Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, where Kojève writes of the disappearance of man and the end of history -- key notions in poststructuralist thought (HP:2). It is also Pefanis' contention that Bataille incorporates Kojève's reading of Hegel. I am not in a position at this moment in time to discuss further, or with any authority, the role of Bataille except to indicate his influence on Baudrillard.

Pefanis makes some useful links between Bataille and Baudrillard, and in particular the conceptual debt to Bataille's notion of a general economy and the anti-production and death Baudrillard explored in his section, "La mort chez Bataille" in L'échange symbolique et la mort (HP:61). Douglas Kellner has also given an excellent summary of Bataille's influence on Baudrillard, whilst noting the substantial difference between the two in terms of interpretation of Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift (MPB:42-45). This difference of interpretation is worked out in a review by Baudrillard, "When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, volume XI, no 3 (1987), 63-72. The important point to note, in my judgement, is that the concept of death found in Baudrillard's work is preceded by some very substantial work in philosophical terms on death which informs Baudrillard's ideas.

In Baudrillard's genealogy of the three orders of simulacra there is a principle of absorption of one generation of signs into another. From the first order we move to the second: "C'est une nouvelle génération de signes et d'objects qui se lève avec la révolution industrielle," (ES:85) and from the second to the third, with each preceding order brought into simulated relationship with the next. The relations of the first order of imitation are the double, the mirror, the theatre -- a game of masks and appearances; the second order of seriality and the technique of reproduction is one of less breadth; whilst the third order is the era of simulation which one reads in Baudrillard's writing as being the most open-ended of the three orders and considerably more advanced in its social and cultural implications.

It seems plausible to suggest that Baudrillard might privilege the first and third orders: the first is a precapitalist era, and the third one is an era which is surpassing the phase of capitalism in ever increasing simulated models of that system. If the second order is a catastrophic mutation in Baudrillard's view, with all his targets for theoretical violence in that order -- production, Marx, Freud, Saussure, Mauss, psychoanalysis -- then perhaps his ideal would be an absorption of orders one and three into an even higher order of simulacra. But the next, and more speculative, question would be around the issue of a possible fourth order of the simulacrum. Baudrillard certainly views the third order as the time and place of pure simulation, but perhaps there is an implicit dissatisfaction on Baudrillard's part with the third order.

The Hyperrealism of Simulation: Symbolic versus Imaginary

The third order of simulation and hyperreality, in Baudrillard's

formulation, is the time and place of the effacement of the Real and the Imaginary (ES:112). The hyperreal is also the beginning of the infinity of the symbolic.²⁷ One can find in Baudrillard's work an explication of two ways of relating to the real: in symbolic terms or via the imaginary. According to Karl Racevskis, Baudrillard favours the symbolic. Baudrillard accepts the Lacanian interpretation of the imaginary as a negative and destructive relationship which is formed during the mirror stage in childhood; the child identifies him or herself in the mirror and produces another self, and this identification process forms the basis for all subsequent identifications.²⁸ The identification of self in the mirror stage forms the basis for the Imaginary, an order where resemblance operates and signifier/signified coalesce.

In Baudrillard's work this deceitful, imaginary relationship is an apt description for the collusion between signifier and signified, between exchange and use value, with the imaginary having become the ruling mode in culture. It is particularly the discourse of production which reflects the

²⁷Robert D'Amico has usefully delineated the way in which Baudrillard's notion of the symbolic attempts a demystification of the homogeneity of exchange and the commodity form. The symbolic is for Baudrillard a way of resisting and opposing the social structure (100). However, D'Amico contends that Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange is weak because it can only understand the social process from the perspective of consumption and exchange: the equivalence form is only challenged by an undefined "desire" which is ambiguous and cannot be fulfilled (106). Symbolic exchange in Baudrillard's work is supposed to assert itself against positivity, equivalence, and reduction, in the value-form and in the realm of meaning. But according to D'Amico, the argument for a unique form of exchange or consumption does not provide sufficient opposition or resistance to a social structure which is geared precisely to maintaining the illusory independence of consumption (106). Baudrillard's argument for the *défaillance* (exhaustion) of the subject cannot really oppose the system, just as the hope for an exhaustion of surplus value will not break the system (107-8). Robert D'Amico, "Desire and the Commodity Form," *Telos* No35 (1978), 88-122.

²⁸Karl Racevskis, "The Theoretical Violence of a Catastrophical Strategy," *Diacritics* (September 1979), 33-42. Hereafter cited in parentheses as CS.

imaginary in an all pervasive and towering influence over people's lives, and only through this imaginary of production can people recognize themselves. The human subject spends his or her time in an endless effort to decipher him or herself through work, and the discourses of production and representation are a mirror in the Imaginary.

Baudrillard argues that in order to leave the crisis of representation, one must take the real into pure repetition (ES:112), to capture the real in a vertigo of simulation. Such a manoeuvre is aimed at the liberation of the object: "d'extirper toute psychologie, toute subjectivité, pour le rendre à l'objectivité pure." (ES:112) It is in the hyperrealism of simulation that the object is enabled to make an appearance, it is the perspective of the object which is now in operation: "c'est l'optique tout entière, le scopique devenu opérationnel à la surface des choses, c'est le regard devenu code moléculaire de l'objet." (ES:112)

However, Baudrillard does maintain that the hyperreal is not beyond representation because the hyperreal is still contained within simulation (ES:114). Hyperrealism is still an integral part of a coded reality, one which it perpetuates but cannot change (ES:114). For Baudrillard, "il faut interpréter l'hyperréalisme à l'inverse: c'est la réalité elle-même aujourd'hui qui est hyperréaliste." (ES:114) In the third order, according to Baudrillard, we find ourselves living amidst an aesthetic hallucination of reality. This situation is one of radical disenchantment whereby reality passes over into "the game of reality." Baudrillard perceives an aesthetic fascination everywhere in the hyperrealism of simulation: subliminal perception, sixth sense, *du truquage* (cinematic-like tricks), montages of reality-effects. There is now in the third order of postmodernism an intensification of the aesthetic: reality itself has become aesthetic (ES:116).

For Baudrillard the third order of simulation has brought about the disappearance of the real and the imaginary. At a glance it would seem that Baudrillard's conception of symbolic exchange might provide an alternative way of negotiating that disappearance, perhaps as a compensatory ideal. However, the concept of symbolic exchange is complicated in Baudrillard's work by the fact that the concept is an attempt at "a deeper notion of reciprocity." (HP:112) According to Pefanis this concept is resolutely opposed to "any exchange of identities, either mediated or unmediated." (HP:112) However, I tend to interpret Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange as a way of reconciling the dualisms, or binary oppositions: man/nature, woman/man. It seems that Baudrillard is looking for a way to overcome the "reality effect" which produces the binary oppositions, and in particular the death/life binary.

I would argue that Baudrillard is attempting to privilege the symbolic exchange he sees occurring in primitive society, where it functions as "une loi absolue: obligation et réciprocité sont infranchissables." (ES:207) Baudrillard aims to present symbolic exchange as a way of escaping this systematizing and production based imaginary. Symbolic exchange functions in Baudrillard's work as a mode of exchange between humans which establishes a link also between humans and the totality of their universe (CS:36-37).

Primitivism versus Differentiation

Racevskis argues that it is possible to read Baudrillard as longing for some kind of primeval, acultural world. A society perhaps in which humans are not circumscribed by systems of knowledge they themselves promulgate (CS:40).

Is Baudrillard really looking for an authentic humanity ? In my judgement, one can find in Baudrillard's later writings, such as *America*, a similar concern in the guise of a search for the pure simulacrum, or a pure modernity. Racevskis' reading of Baudrillard in *L'échange symbolique* interprets him as opposing the "accumulation of systems of knowledge, the generation of signifying practices" which are nothing more than the rationalization and aggrandizement of human scientific endeavours, and have only succeeded in obscuring "a common and authentic experience of our humanity." (CS:41).

In my judgement, Baudrillard attempts to idealize the category of the primitive, by presenting the primitive society in stark contrast to the alienation experienced in Western society:

Le statut du double en société primitive (et des esprits et les dieux, car ceux-ci sont aussi des autres réels, vivants et différents, et non une essence idéaliste), est donc l'inverse de notre aliénation: l'être s'y démultiplie en d'innombrables autres, aussi vivants que lui, alors que le sujet unifié, individué, ne peut que s'affronter à lui-même dans l'aliénation et dans la mort. (ES:217)

The identity of the primitive person has no essential unity or idealized essence, rather a plurality of differences and realities. Baudrillard contrasts, and indeed privileges, the identity of the primitive person with the Western person and his or her unified and reduced static identity -- an identity which in Baudrillard's judgement renders the Western individual incapable of confronting his or her alienation and death. In the primitive society death is part of the ritualized symbolic exchange in the common fabric of life. But are we to take seriously the implied suggestion by Baudrillard of a solution to the problem of postmodern identity through some move towards the primitivization of Western society ? Should we replace the

differentiated world of Western culture with the undifferentiated, but highly ritualized and hierarchical, world of the primitive culture ?³⁹

I would like to argue that Baudrillard employs a hermeneutic of post-illusory primitivism in order to disengage himself from the Western cultural setting. The communal way of living that Baudrillard sees disappearing centuries ago, and which is only to be found now in primitive cultures, is certainly anathema to the religiously guarded individualism of Western cultures and thought. But can symbolic exchange and the primitive really provide a solution to the ills of late capitalism ? Must we primitivize in order to escape our dilemma of extreme differentiation and hyper-development ? In my judgement, there is a connection to be made between Baudrillard's theory of symbolic exchange and his theory of simulation. Simulation is the sum total of a hyperreal culture, and the implication is that all of culture is comprised of freely floating signs -- a total sign world with simulation as *modus operandi*.

Could it be possible that simulation is another way of talking about symbolic exchange -- given that symbolic exchange has to do with overcoming restrictions of production and reference ? Simulation would also seem to go along the same kind of lines as a theory of symbolic exchange in that a third

³⁹Stanley Diamond in "Primitive Society in Its Many Dimensions," The Critical Spirit: Essays in Honour of Herbert Marcuse, ed. Kurt H. Wolff and Barrington Moore Jr. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), has usefully delineated ten interrelated and typical attributes which apply to an historical account of primitive society. Briefly those attributes are: economic communalism, with a focus on gift and sacrifice; communal and traditional leadership; custom governs society and not law; equilibrium characterizes the society; integration of the various modalities of culture; control over the processes of production; social structure based on kin or tribe; primitive thought is focused on context and existence; ritual drama provides an outlet for individual and group expression; a sharp focus upon community as a social, natural and supernatural setting. Diamond also stresses the difference between primitive society and archaic civilization. As one reads Baudrillard's writing it is not too difficult to see that some of Diamond's attributes can be found as a part of Baudrillard's radical critique of Western culture, and likewise for some of his contemporaries.

order hyperreal sign world is radically disjunct from the signifiers of reference and production. Baudrillard has written extensively of how our culture is saturated with media images. The impression gained from Baudrillard's prognosis is that there is very little we can do about the proliferation of images. My hypothesis might be correct if simulation is in fact a coded word for symbolic exchange, and that Baudrillard somehow sees some reversible logic at work in the process of image saturation.

Implosive Stratagems of the Image

Baudrillard has argued for successive stages of the image: stage one, the image reflects a basic reality (a theology of truth, or realism); stage two, the image masks and perverts a basic reality (ideological); stage three, the image masks the absence of a basic reality (the Nietzschean assault on truth and representation); stage four, the image bears no relation to any reality and becomes its own pure simulacrum (the screen)⁴⁰ For Baudrillard, there is a decisive turning point from signs dissimulating something to signs dissimulating nothing (SI:17), and hence the need for a semiurgical analysis. Semiurgy is Baudrillard's term for an analysis of the changes which have evolved within the modern and postmodern sign world, from signs signifying something to a situation of non-signification. Against nostalgic attempts to produce objectivity, authenticity, myths of origin, we are ineluctably catapulted into strategies of the real, neo-real and hyperreal (SI:17).

⁴⁰Jean Baudrillard, Simulacres et simulation (Paris: éditions Galilée, 1981), 17. Hereafter cited in parentheses as SI.

Within Baudrillard's hermeneutic of the image the dialectical relation between reality and images, which holds for all stages of the image until the last one in Baudrillard's schema, has been taken over by the imposition of an "immanent ephemeral logic," (EDI:23) in a "logic" which, Baudrillard argues, is beyond good and evil, beyond truth and falsity. Baudrillard understands the "meaning" of the image as an implosion of image and reality -- a "telescoping into reality." (EDI:27) The traditional way of perceiving the ontological meaning of images as distinct from reality and having representational value in aesthetic, critical and dialectical terms, is radically denied by Baudrillard.

Baudrillard stresses over and over the indistinguishable nature of "real events" and the screen which invades those real events and implodes them: an implosion which is the "ideal constellation of simulation." (EDI:20) There are connections between the image and the real, but not a causal logic, rather "those relations of contagion and unspoken analogy which link the real, models and simulacra." (EDI:20) Baudrillard maintains that it is naive to attribute some meaning, moral, pedagogical use, or informational value to the image -- because the image itself is revolting against this positive attribution. The image works to implode and denegate meaning, events, history, memory (EDI:23). Here, one telling example of Baudrillard's contention would be the recent televised coverage of the Gulf War. In fact it was announced on CBC Radio that this was the first war to start on television, just as *Operation Desert Storm* began.

An important question to ask is whether Baudrillard does in fact make a universal claim for images as simulacra? If he does, then one might give an alternative, and plausible suggestion which goes against such a universalizing claim, in order to show that image production is relative to

a cultural context. The important point to remember is that Baudrillard tends to view the mass media as having an all-pervasive effect. For Baudrillard the effects of the screen in the third order have catastrophic consequences for the social world and that world's historical and cultural bearings. The image has effectively imploded the social, and thus removed any semblance of the banal strategies of imposing historical or cultural contextual claims. Baudrillard's universal claims for the postmodern image/screen would seem to negate the importance of historical, cultural, and social contexts of image productions and effects. However, as I signalled towards the end of chapter I, Baudrillard's claims can be seen as a consequence of the social and historical context of postmodernism.

Baudrillard considers television and film to be media of dissuasion which divert attention away from the realities they depict, in order to achieve absolute self-referentiality. However, Baudrillard makes a distinction between television and film, in that television is no longer an imaginary, and that its form as screen has a magnetic effect of going through the viewer. On the other hand, cinema, although increasingly influenced by television, "still carries an intense imaginary." (EDI:25) Cinematic film has the status of myth, belonging to the sphere of the double, phantasm, mirror, dream (EDI:25).

Baudrillard favours cinema, in a "brute fascination for images," (EDI:28) above and beyond social or moral determinations. For Baudrillard, modern media images do not enable us to dream or imagine, because they are not sites of production of meaning or representation, but rather "sites of the *disappearance* of meaning and representation, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgement of reality, thus sites of a fatal strategy of denegation of the real and of the reality principle."

(EDI:29) Baudrillard admits that other images (painting, drawing, theatre, architecture) are better images for dreaming and imagining: language is even better (EDI:29). For Baudrillard we have reached a situation where postmodern media images signal "the equal impossibility of the real and of the imaginary." (EDI:29) But might it be the case that for Baudrillard cinema is somehow outside of the media, if it is still a site for the imaginary to work effectively apart from media implosion ?

The proliferation of images is, according to Baudrillard, potentially infinite, whilst the extension of meaning is limited by referentiality -- meaning is still tied to something. For Baudrillard, images have upset the balance between real and imaginary:

a definitive immanence of the image, without any transcendent meaning, without any possible dialectic of history The fatality lies in this endless enwrapping of images (literally: without end, without destination) which leaves images no other destiny than images. (EDI:30)

Baudrillard studies cinematic images from the perspective of one attempting to connect the entropy and envelopment of society by the image. For Baudrillard, cinema attempts an absolute coincidence with the real and with itself: a collapse into the form of pure simulation (EDI:33). The philosophical import of this "simulation/coincidence" is the Baudrillardian premise that hyperreality has radically disturbed the epistemological and ontological conditions of a postmodern culture. These changed conditions would also mean the destabilizing of all theories which propose materialist or reason-centred notions of referentiality.

History, for Baudrillard, is no longer a matter of events or linear narratives, because history and myth now find their refuge in cinema (SI:69). History and myth invade or overrun cinema, with history resurrected on the

screen in what becomes for Baudrillard "the screen/image is history." Myth invades cinema as a suppressed imaginary, and history is the lost referential in the third order. Myth and history then entwine within a total cinematographic experience. The key to Baudrillard's hermeneutic of post-historical *scénario rétro* (history as fashion scene), is the loss of referentiality: "L'histoire est notre référentiel perdu, c'est-à-dire notre mythe." (SI:69)

But then could we make the conjecture that fiction, in the form of film, becomes the point of reference ? It seems that Baudrillard is attempting to make clear what has taken place in terms of "history," the "social," and the general conditions of a postmodern world. But his fascination for film could be an attempt to locate another point of reference within fictional forms. This conjecture would tie in with Baudrillard's idea of the screen as reality -- or at least attempting to negotiate reality. I would also say that unless one is to adopt a position of complete incoherence and disintegration, then referentiality is still operative in any discourse. Baudrillard's pronouncements on the end of all referentiality and stable meaning is his entry into a mode of analysis based upon an intrinsically fictional-interpretive framework. Nobody can survive for very long without some way of accounting for reality, and that is precisely what Baudrillard is up to in my judgement.

Together with the complete disjuncture of reality from its referent, there is a radical denial of rationality traditionally understood: "Le grand événement de cette période, le grand traumatisme est cette agonie des référentiels forts, l'agonie du réel et du rationnel qui ouvre sur une ère de la simulation." (SI:70) The violent (historical) events of this century, the catastrophic proliferation of images, have given rise to the eclipse of

history and reason. History, according to Baudrillard, is indifferent to the flux and vagaries of its own events; emptied of all referentiality history is denied any validity or significance (SI:70).

The traditional notion of "history" becomes for Baudrillard a question of "historiosynthèse": a loss of referentiality and the entwinement of myth and history in film. For Baudrillard, culture now reflects an incredible montage of special effects, in sum, an implosion of the social world. But can we in fact say that film lacks any referentiality? Baudrillard's answer to this is that film tends more and more towards the perfection of itself as a virtual reality. Film moves increasingly closer to the perfect hyperrealism in its attempt at absolute coincidence with itself: "le cinéma se rapproche aussi d'une coïncidence absolue avec lui-même. . . . C'est même la définition de l'hyperreal." (SI:75)

Cinema is perceived by Baudrillard as "a lost object" precisely because the relationship between the real and referentiality has broken down: cinema can only be fascinated by its own lostness as an object without reference. There is no longer any specificity to the difference between real, imaginary, film; they are all contained within the hyperreal -- an implosive process of hyper-simulation exemplified by the screen. For Baudrillard, film takes on a cinematographic power which seems to overshadow and negate social reality. Or perhaps the magnitude of human suffering and calamity exemplified in *Apocalypse Now* is for Baudrillard so heightened that "social reality" is no longer of any consequence in the film. In Coppola's film, war becomes film and the film becomes the Vietnam war (EDI:17). But in the television film *Holocaust*, according to Baudrillard, there is the replay of extermination by artificial memory in which the Nazi mass murders become completely de-historicized "via a medium which is itself cold, radiating oblivion,

dissuasion and extermination." (EDI:23) Television, rather than educating and raising consciousness, merely serves to perpetuate the same processes of forgetting, liquidation, and extermination.

It would seem that the form of television and film is very important in Baudrillard's estimation of the effects of human suffering and insanities of human evil, and in particular the examples of *Holocaust* and *Apocalypse Now*. The television film *Holocaust* is quite straightforward, almost documentary in its form, and with a linear plot and structure -- perhaps for Baudrillard the film in a negative sense attempts to replicate reality. *Apocalypse Now* is quite a different approach to a "real event," and of course is derived from another fiction, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The film could be interpreted as an attempt to understand reality through intense surreality via the interpretation of other fictions in a meta-parallel way. I think there is a sense in which Baudrillard is working at a level whereby there are a number of realms of fiction to interpret reality. I do not think his discourse on film can have any force without employing such an interpretation of his ideas

With Coppola it is a question of "the dazzling paranoia in the mind of the creator who, from the beginning, conceived this film as a world historical event for which the Vietnam war would have been no more than a pretext, would ultimately not have existed." (EDI:17) One way to read this exaggerated prose is precisely in terms of Baudrillard's fascination for the fictional form of film. The Vietnam war becomes "mass spectacle" in Coppola's film: "the sacrificial, excessive deployment of a power already filming itself as it unfolds, perhaps expecting nothing more than consecration by a superfilm, which perfects the war's function as a mass spectacle." (EDI:18) The film is indeed a fictional entity which creates its own kind of identity, negating and overshadowing social reality.

The contemporary situation of hyperreality leads Baudrillard to maintain that we now inhabit a world of "post-illusion," where previous states of illusion have been radically negated by reality itself: a "philosophical principle of the negation of reality has now pervaded everyday 'reality' itself."⁴¹ In my judgement this statement by Baudrillard is at the crux of his theory of simulated identity and the crisis of reality. He indeed broadens the meaning of hyperreality as "an obscene saturation of an experience," (HP:140n) so that Coppola's film conforms to Baudrillard's theory in terms of war becoming hyper-war spectacle, within a purely fictional setting.

Baudrillard's conception of the world in third order hyperreality is of an order "where illusion or magic thought plays a key role, the signs evolve, they concatenate and *produce themselves*, always one upon the other - so that there is absolutely no basic reference which can sustain them." (IN:47) Baudrillard offers a radical semiurgy, whereby the traditional semiotic approach is radicalised in favour of the sign as disjunct from any signifying reality. This is an anti-representational approach which posits a fundamental disjuncture between sign and reality (IN:48).

In this chapter I have discussed Baudrillard's most fundamental ideas concerning what he calls the third order of hyperreal simulation. Baudrillard's work in *L'échange symbolique et la mort* and *Simulacres et simulation* brings to our attention what he perceives to be a crisis of reality and the instantiation of simulated identity. I have discussed these ideas in detail because the following chapter depends on a good understanding of those ideas. I will now explicate and formulate Baudrillard's position in relation to the seductive strategies of fatal theory.

⁴¹ "An Interview with Jean Baudrillard," The Evil Demon of Images (Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1987), 51. Hereafter cited in parentheses as IN.

CHAPTER III

BAUDRILLARD'S SEDUCTION

Active and Seductive Nihilism

Baudrillard's writing traverses the time-scale of a periodization strategy which is firmly located within the moment or time of postmodernity. Modernity brought about the radical destruction of appearances and the disenchantment of the world and its abandonment to the violence of interpretation and history. Postmodernity brings on the immense destruction of meaning itself, equal in force to the preceding destruction of appearances. These are the two revolutions which loom large in Baudrillard's interpretive framework, and form the basis for his "historical" understanding in philosophical terms (SI:231-2).

Baudrillard also offers two possible forms of nihilism. The one as a negation of any idea of an end, which he argues is the Western view and its own form of nihilism. The other is the complete negation of any idea of an origin or an end, which is the most extreme form of nihilism (SI:232). I interpret this last form of nihilism in terms of Nietzsche's revaluing of all values, and particularly the values of Western culture exemplified perhaps by the ideas of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. In other words Baudrillard engages in a radical questioning of the inheritance of Platonic distinctions. In this section the thrust of my argument will be that Baudrillard's extreme nihilism is both active and seductive. However, I also want to stress that Baudrillard's extreme and active nihilism is not a

straightforward translation of Nietzsche's overman.

A striking feature of Baudrillard's theorization of late twentieth century (Western) culture is what he calls "une Weltanschauung de la catastrophe." (SI:232) It is Baudrillard's contention that there is a radical indifference towards the system of objects; an indifference which brings on a sense of bewitchment by the disappearance of all objective understanding and rationality: "Nous sommes fascinés par toutes les formes de disparition, de notre disparition." (SI:231) For Baudrillard, this situation is indeed nihilistic and one of radical uncertainty amidst the obliteration of rational meaning and sense in a world of simulation eternally recurrent.

The secondary sources that I have consulted on Baudrillard's nihilism tend to view him as a passive or reactive nihilist. Paul Foss, for example, argues that Baudrillard is heir to the spiritual condition prophesied by Nietzsche, and that Baudrillard occupies the role of the "last man." Baudrillard is, according to Foss, the cynic who is nothing but a rhetorical ironist and ascetic at that; Baudrillard engages in an "all-exteriorized form of criticism" which has lost any teleological principle which might give it the foundation for challenging and repudiating reality. According to Foss, negative or reactive nihilism characterizes Baudrillard's position, a position grounded in the hope of hopelessness.⁴²

It is important to distinguish between Nietzsche's "last man" and the "overman," because I think Foss has misjudged Baudrillard in this regard. In my judgement it is difficult to fit Baudrillard neatly into either category,

⁴²Paul Foss, "Despero Ergo Sum," Seduced and Abandoned: The Baudrillard Scene, ed. André Frankovits (Glebe, New York: Stonemoss and Semiotext(e), 1984), 9-15. Julian Pefanis also tends to view Baudrillard as a passive nihilist (HP:114), despite the fact that Pefanis has noted the influence of the active nihilism of Alfred Jarry on Baudrillard, an important point that I raised in chapter II, p.38 n.35.

and a lot depends upon the interpretation one wishes to give of Baudrillard's nihilism. For Nietzsche the overman is the creation of a new kind of human being with extensive powers for transcendence via a will to power. On the other hand, the last man is for Nietzsche a negative and dissolute human being who can no longer transcend nihilism. My judgement on Baudrillard's position is that he is caught somewhere between the two, perhaps one could call him a semi-overman. There is definitely a transcendental element in Baudrillard's thought, and a good example is his own espousal of an "ironic metaphysics." (MPB:153) For my part I would say that Baudrillard is an active nihilist, and I think that this claim can be substantiated by a closer look at what active nihilism might mean in Baudrillard's work.

I would like to consider Heidegger's comments on "completed" and "incompleted" nihilism, because in my judgement such comments add clarity to Baudrillard's position.⁴³ Heidegger writes that Nietzsche's pronouncements on "God is dead" are aimed at the supersensory world in general: the realm of Ideals and ideas (WN:61). Nihilism for Nietzsche is the fundamental event of Western history and completed or classical nihilism must get rid of the place of value and the realm of the supersensory understood in the Platonic sense. The revaluation of values must take place in a different fashion altogether (WN:69). Complete nihilism is the revaluing of all previous values, and this kind of nihilism unlike "incomplete" nihilism does not merely replace the old values with new values. There is a complete overturning of valuing, and a new principle of value has to be found. Baudrillard's principle of simulation

⁴³Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'," The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland, 1977). Hereafter cited in parentheses as WN.

over against a principle of reality is, I think, a good example of this attempted complete overturning.

It is also of crucial importance in understanding Baudrillard as an active nihilist that he claims to be issuing a "challenge" and "seduction" to reality. Baudrillard's claim is not based on a teleological principle but on a fatal strategy of seduction. Yet one might ask, what is a "fatal strategy of seduction"? Baudrillard developed his concept of seduction via an interrogation of Kierkegaard's story, *Diary of a Seducer*.⁴⁴ According to Baudrillard's reading of Kierkegaard, and his own idiosyncratic development of the idea of seduction, I would say that such an idea contributes to the active nihilism in Baudrillard's thought. For example, Baudrillard says, "seduction is destiny. It is what remains of a magical, fateful world, a risky, vertiginous and predestined world; it is what is quietly effective in a visibly efficient and stolid world." (SN:180) Seduction is still active in a world that has become overdetermined and administered.

However, there is also something "impersonal" and "ritualistic" in seduction. Seduction might also be seen as a mythical and metaphysical experience (SN:100). In Baudrillard's writing seduction is intrinsically ironic, and in the game of seduction there is a continuous sense of the ironic. The irony of seduction, it seems to me, is that seduction is a process of enchantment whereby the seducer always wishes to resemble and take on the appearance of the other. Seduction is ironic because there is no straightforward relationship between seducer and seduced, but rather the play of appearance, disappearance, and metamorphosis. Seduction is neither linear,

⁴⁴Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (London: Macmillan, 1990). Hereafter cited in parentheses as SN.

nor does seduction wear a mask: seduction for Baudrillard is oblique (SN:106). In fact Baudrillard believes in a "true" seduction as opposed to a "vulgar" seduction, whereby the true form of seduction is the creation of a "high intensity." (SN:108). The fatality in seduction is precisely its inevitability, but not its passivity. A fatal strategy of seduction is therefore both active and ironic.

Baudrillard's "game of theory" is active and ironic, in "the form of criticism as a literary genre akin to poetry." (HP:71) Again we may look to Heidegger for some clues as to how Baudrillard's writing functions as a poetic and philosophical discourse. For Nietzsche art is the essence of all willing that opens up perspectives, and then takes possession of those perspectives (WN:85). For Baudrillard this "willing" is performed by theory in making things appear, disappear, and then for those things to enter into a state of metamorphosis. Baudrillard attempts to produce a form of theory which concerns itself with the disappearance of critical thought, in order that thought might become transparent, unmediated, and ultimately a pure form of metamorphosis.

In my judgement it is extremely important to remember that Baudrillard's aim is to create a world out of thought alone. This aim is an attempt, I think, at gnosis: the idea of a special kind of knowledge to which only the initiated can have access. The initiate is in my judgement the specifically Baudrillardian production of the semi-overman -- that special breed of person who is ready to transcend nihilism. Heidegger also shows how Nietzsche's understanding of the will to power as the reality of the real enables him to assert that art is "the great stimulant of life." (WN:86) If Nietzsche's "will to power" serves as some kind of ground and criterion for the really real -- as against the merely supersensory world of Ideals

-- then perhaps in a similar manner Baudrillard's project of self-creation and self-poiesis is also another form of will to power. In my judgement Nietzsche's affirmation of becoming through self-creation and self-poiesis is indeed revisited in Baudrillard's idea of metamorphosis. We may be amiss in saying that for Baudrillard art is the great stimulus of life. Perhaps "seduction" is the correct substitution for "stimulus." I am convinced that Baudrillard's nihilism is both active and seductive, particularly in the way that he asserts the power of seduction and the issuing of a challenge to reality.

Baudrillard's nihilism is active because it means participation in the catastrophic destruction of meaning within postmodernity. According to Baudrillard there has been a catastrophization of the modern which is the rapid disappearance of referentiality in political, aesthetic, economic, sexual, and social terms. This active nihilism is certainly destructive and a strategy of theoretical violence. The following section engages in a discussion of such a theoretical violence and its links to aesthetic fascination, another important feature of Baudrillard's nihilism.

The Spectacle of Theoretical Violence and Aesthetic Fascination

Baudrillard's theoretical violence is related to his radical conception of the death drive: for Baudrillard the "principle of death must be turned against the entire interpretive machinery." (HP:113) It is important to remember that Baudrillard is concerned to meet the giants of theoretical discourse head on, in order to oppose their strategies with a theoretical violence:

Baudrillard's writing is an enactment of a symbolic violence, and an escalation of the stakes in his exchange with contemporary discourse -- unmasking the simulacra one by one, first Marx, then Freud, and all of their derivatives: libidinal economy, schizoanalysis, and deconstruction -- by smashing their mirrors. (HP:114)

Pefanis has argued that this kind of strategy is linked to an archaism with Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange playing a determinate role. Pefanis also contends that Baudrillard's propensity for the primitive and archaic is integral to his theory of symbolic exchange.

I agree with Pefanis' judgement, with the qualification that primitivism has to be distinguished from archaic. I would want to sharpen my own assessment of Baudrillard in saying that his desire to leave behind the "enlightened consciousness" of Western culture is more primitive than archaic. The primitive society has attained to "a certain level of history and a certain mode of cultural being." In other words the primitive society has attained to a level of social organisation, and the archaic civilisation has not.⁴⁵ My interpretation is that Baudrillard wants to find an alternative mode of cultural being, and this alternative would seem to be heading towards primitivism rather than the archaic. Perhaps this move towards primitivism is also connected to Baudrillard's stance as poet-philosopher, if one understands the poetic as a purer form of discourse, and the idea of fiction giving a better view on reality. There is also a hint of romanticism in the idea of a poet bringing the truth to bear in a world from which truth has withdrawn. Romanticism and primitivism often seem to go together, particularly when Western artists or philosophers take hold of such ideas.

⁴⁵Stanley Diamond, "Primitive Society in its Many Dimensions," *ibid.*, 21-22.

In a section called "Why Theory ?" from *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Baudrillard has clearly set out the course theory should take as an act of theoretical violence. Theory can no longer reflect the real or engage in critical negativity, for that was the project of the Enlightenment (EC:97) - a project Baudrillard's writing deflects in a melancholic fashion which is not too far from Adorno's own style.⁴⁶ According to Baudrillard the role of theory is to "seduce" and to force things into "an over-existence" in order to combat the principle of reality -- this role is what Baudrillard calls a "prophetic autodestruction." (EC:98) But in order for theory to fulfill this function it must take on the form of that which it speaks about. If theory is to be concerned with simulation, then theory must become simulation. If theory is to be concerned with seduction, then theory must become a seducer. The task is always for theory to issue a challenge to whatever its subject of discourse might be, in order for theory to become its very object (EC:98). According to Baudrillard theory must always challenge the real,

⁴⁶The connection between Baudrillard's fatal theory and the Frankfurt school's critical sociology is perhaps not always so apparent. However, Pefanis has made such a connection by referring to a place in Baudrillard's writing where he mentions Adorno and Benjamin, who also show a concern for the disappearance of the "real," "history," the "social," and "meaning." (HP:71) See Jean Baudrillard, "Sur le nihilisme," *Simulacres et simulations* (Paris: éditions Galilée, 1981), 234. The theme of "melancholy" is strong in Adorno's writing, and for Baudrillard it is precisely melancholy which characterizes the mood of our present age: "La mélancolie, c'est la qualité inhérente au mode de disparition du sens, au mode de volatilisation du sens dans les systèmes opérationnels. Et nous sommes tous mélancoliques." (SI:234)

I might also add that Baudrillard gives the general feeling of melancholy a distinctly postmodern interpretation, together with the accompanying feeling of nostalgia. According to Baudrillard, Adorno's nostalgia for the dialectic is a melancholic gaze over the disappearance of socio-philosophical categories. However, it would seem that the major difference between Baudrillard and Adorno on melancholy is the role of the dialectic in history. For Adorno the dialectic is of paramount importance in understanding socio-philosophical categories, whereas for Baudrillard those categories just disappear with the dialectic. One could also sum up the difference by saying that Adorno's melancholy is both produced and mediated by a negative dialectics, while Baudrillard's melancholy is not mediated in any sense, and indeed perhaps melancholy receives reification in his thought.

just as the real also challenges theory in a duel. The philosophical import of this idea is that reconciliation and mediation are impossible. The only possibility is for theory actually to become what it describes, and even then that is only a possibility.

Baudrillard's challenge to the real is certainly a complex formula, and one which has to be understood not in the sense of analysis but rather in terms of a poetic and philosophic discourse on the irreality of theoretical endeavour. The issue for Baudrillard is not whether we can talk of "reality" or "illusion," because the real is no longer possible (SI:36). Simulated events and actions are the most dynamic threat to the principle of reality. The transgression or violation of a law is, according to Baudrillard, less serious than the simulated transgression or violation. The real is threatened by the transgression of law, but that kind of violation of reality is not as serious, according to Baudrillard, as the simulation of transgression -- a violation which indeed threatens the very foundations of what constitutes the principle of reality (SI:36).

It is important to keep in mind the fundamental situation that Baudrillard continually alludes to: catastrophe. Therefore, theoretical violence is Baudrillard's way of dealing with catastrophe, and indeed an attempt to accelerate the catastrophe even further towards the complete overturning of values. I would argue that an integral part of Baudrillard's theoretical violence is a positing of the aesthetic as a fascination for disappearance. If we recall that the third order of simulation is constituted as a hyperreal condition, then we can also say that hyperrealism is constitutive of what Baudrillard calls an "aesthetic fascination."⁴⁷ One

⁴⁷Mark Poster, ed., Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Polity Press 1988), 146. Hereafter cited in parentheses as SW.

way of understanding such a "fascination" is through the notion of spectacle, or as Pefanis says, an "aesthetics of the spectacle." (HP:112/114) Just as Jean-François Lyotard has an aesthetic of the sublime as an interpretation of postmodernism, Baudrillard also has an interpretation of the postmodern as an "aesthetics of the spectacle." (HP:112) According to Pefanis, Baudrillard's symbolic violence directed towards the giants of theory is in the form of an aesthetics of the spectacle (HP:114).

I would like to suggest that Baudrillard produces an aesthetic spectacle in his writing through theoretical violence, whilst pushing his theory to the limits as aesthetic fascination. It is important to remember that the category of the aesthetic in Baudrillard's work takes on a radically altered meaning as a concern for art's disappearance⁴⁸, and for the disappearance of reality in general. The aesthetic takes on a broader meaning as "a mode of perception," in which there is an art of making things appear in the play of seduction, challenge, and conflict. We may also note the importance of the word "ecstatic" in Baudrillard's understanding of aesthetic fascination. Ecstatic describes, as I understand the term, the way in which postmodern culture has become imploded by information and communication networks. Baudrillard in fact maintains that there has been a shift from a consumer to an ecstatic society where things tend to be transparent and ruled by information and communication networks (EC:21-22).

According to Baudrillard the work of art, in the society of the ecstatic, redoubles itself in a manipulation of the signs of art. This

⁴⁸"Revenge of the Crystal: An Interview with Jean Baudrillard by Guy Bellavance," Jean Baudrillard. Revenge of the Crystal. Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny 1968-1983, ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London, Concord Massachusetts; Pluto Press, in association with the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney Australia, 1990), 22.

redoubling is an effect of aesthetic fascination which is governed by the sign of art (SW:147). The result of such manipulation by art of its own signs -- the canvas, the sculpture, the film, the novel, the play, the video -- is "tactical simulation" and a radical parodic spirit pervading reality itself.⁴⁹ Aesthetic fascination is complicity with the screen as a cultural montage of infinite spectral forms. For Baudrillard, the signs of art have actually become a part of everyday reality, and we may recall in this context his earlier formulation of such a claim in the essay, *Mass Media Culture*. Therefore, the aesthetic is not an independent category as such, indeed Baudrillard might retort that it never was. Everyday life is itself aesthetic, and especially in the absolute space of simulation (EC:16). If Baudrillard maintains that the everyday world has become aestheticized, then perhaps we can now understand more clearly his insistence on the disappearance of the aesthetic. The world must actually become aesthetic in true seduction, and hence the aesthetic disappears as an independent category via a fatal strategy of seduction.

At issue within Baudrillard's polemical and poetic account of the role of theory is the radical absence of truth. In the absence of truth and indeed the principle of reality, the "game of theory" can only engage in

⁴⁹In another attempt to understand postmodernism, Richard Kearney maintains that "Like a character in a Pynchon novel or Wenders film, the postmodern artist wanders about in a labyrinth of commodified light and noise, endeavouring to piece together bits of dispersed narrative." (13) For Kearney, the core of philosophical thinking about the postmodern is characterized by the self-parodying inversion of the mimesis model of representation and image construction:

"Postmodernism may thus be said to return us to Plato's cave of imitations, but with this crucial difference: it is no longer the inner world of mimetic images which imitates the outer world of truth, but the contrary. And this, of course, amounts to saying that the whole Platonic hierarchy of the imaginary and the real is finally dissolved into parody." (291) Richard Kearney, The Wake of Imagination: Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture (London: Hutchinson, 1988).

challenge and seduction as a game of manoeuvre. For Baudrillard, in a world where truth has withdrawn there is a basic antagonism at work. On the one hand the world will seek slowness and inertia in order to counter the acceleration of communication networks; and yet on the other hand the world also seeks something more rapid than communication in a challenge and a duel (EC:101). In the following section I will be giving close attention to Baudrillard's self-confessed Manicheism, for it is clear that he regards his position on theory as a Manichean challenge to the real. With this position there is also a space for negation -- a negation of the real world, which Baudrillard maintains was the strength of heretical religion (Manicheism) (FB:124). Theory, for Baudrillard, is basically in an endless antagonism with the real.

The Fatal Theory of a Manichean-Nihilist

Baudrillard's work since *L'échange symbolique* has been increasingly focused upon what he calls "seduction" or a "fatal theory." In this fatal theory one can observe Baudrillard's fascination for the disintegration of all systems of thought, which tend towards the banal in their preoccupation with reference, rationality and truth. But we must not automatically conclude from this radical stance by Baudrillard that he has no interest in truth or an order of things. A Baudrillardian fatal strategy is designed to outlast and outwit all systems as a seductive playing with the disintegrating pieces; and it may be concluded from the seductive premises of a fatal strategy that a far greater "truth" awaits us beyond the hyperreal and all forms of banal strategies.

Let us recall Baudrillard's contention that social reality has been enveloped by the image: simulation is the reality of our third-order world, and the hyperreal is its coextensive mode. Baudrillard's theory of a world caught up in simulation and hyperreality is undergirded by the notion of a principle of intrinsic evil, and in my judgement Baudrillard's adoption of a position of Manicheaism is fundamental to any serious philosophical understanding of his work. The heretical tradition of Manicheaism is no longer apparent by that name in specific movements or groups, and therefore it is important to make a distinction between the spirit and the tradition at work in Baudrillard's thought.

The spirit at work in Baudrillard's thought manifests itself at a particular time and place, and as I have shown earlier in this chapter the spirit guiding and informing Baudrillard's thought is extreme nihilism. It is not very clear in Baudrillard's writing as to the tradition he might be thinking of in terms of Manicheaism, because he will often only make slight references to previous expressions of this tradition (IN:43-44). The Manichean Baudrillard is not necessarily the same as previous movements or individual instances of Manicheaism. The tradition ended as a visible movement in the fourteenth century but there are still expressions of that tradition in different cultural and social contexts since the fourteenth century.⁵⁰

⁵⁰For an excellent discussion of the resurfacing of Manicheaism, as a major intellectual issue during the Enlightenment, see Richard Popkin's "Manicheaism in the Enlightenment," The Critical Spirit. Essays in Honour of Herbert Marcuse, ed. Kurt H. Wolff and Barrington Moore Jr. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967): 31-54. Popkin's essay concludes that Manicheaism during the Enlightenment was only acceptable as a form of demonism, particularly in the case of the Marquis de Sade. I am also struck by Popkin's rather startling conjecture:

Manicheism is often referred to as a consistent form of Gnostic dualism. Manichean theology was the basis for a syncretistic religion, founded by a man called Mani, that flourished from the third to fourteenth centuries. Mani believed that orthodox Christianity was completely erroneous in its teachings. The basic tenets of Manichean theology are that two opposing forces originally governed the universe: both of these forces were originally separate and antagonistic to one another. Mani called these two governing principles God and Hyle (matter), and he believed that they found their expression through light and darkness. Mani said that the boundaries between darkness and light had been broken; and the result was that the whole world, including all humanity, became subject to a mixing of darkness and light. The original doctrine of Manicheism was that the two forces would find an ultimate separation, and above all that evil would be rendered harmless.

Baudrillard's claim to be in the tradition of Manicheism is of course quite different from the original doctrinal position, especially in the goal of eliminating evil. However, the essential dualistic and gnostic framework are to be found in Baudrillard's thought, and the idea of there being a basic antagonistic duel between good and evil in existence since time immemorial. Baudrillard's identification with Manicheism also puts him in company with many in history who have sought an explanation for evil in Manichean theology. It is clear to me that Baudrillard's identification with the Manichean tradition is consistent with his interest in *maléfique* as a primary adjective by which to describe the world (EDI:44).

"Perhaps, after the catastrophes of the twentieth century have shaken our Pelagian confidence to its roots, and the strength of theological and metaphysical monism has been further eroded, a new Bayle will appear to show how really plausible Manicheism is in the context of recent history." (54)

If Baudrillard can be seen as adhering to a form of Manicheism, then I am persuaded that one may legitimately read in Baudrillard's work a subtext which contains a theological significance. One may also observe in Baudrillard's consistent engagement with notions of the real and unreal, more than a passing interest in what might be seen as theological questions, or the metaphysics attributed to his recent work. Metaphysics and theology tend to be regarded as either irrelevant or dangerous manifestations of reactionary thought by some working within contemporary neo-Marxist perspectives.⁵¹ But in my judgement, the rejection of metaphysics and theology as legitimate concerns closes the door prematurely on certain of Baudrillard's key notions. What I am trying to get at is that Baudrillard cannot be written off by the accusation of "metaphysical thinking." (MPB:177-8) Douglas Kellner is right to point out that poststructuralism and deconstruction have engaged in a critique of metaphysics. But this is metaphysics of a particular kind -- logocentrism (Derrida), meta-narratives (Lyotard), the meta-subject of humanism (Foucault) -- and does not imply that metaphysics must be ruled out of court.

Kellner has raised some important questions regarding Baudrillard's intellectual trajectory, and his basic criticism of Baudrillard's theoretical strategies is that he ends up with "a postmodern metaphysics." (MPB:154) However, Kellner does tend to dismiss Baudrillard on account of being "metaphysical." (MPB:232) The real issue, in my judgement, at the heart of

⁵¹One example of this kind of tendency I found in a paper given at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London, England on 26 January 1991 by Andreas Huyssen, who ascribed to Baudrillard's orders of the simulacrum a theological-periodizing strategy. Baudrillard's position was contrasted implicitly to the more "correct" Marxist notion of history as dialectical. It should also be noted that a certain haziness and impatience characterized Huyssen's presentation, in what was a glib sweep through some of Baudrillard's ideas.

all repudiations and dismissals of "metaphysical thinking" is the idea of a transcendental. For the committed neo-Marxist Kellner, the idea of a transcendental is anathema to a basic allegiance to social and historical determinations of culture and thought. Any notion of a "metaphysis" (the transcendental) is regarded as having to do with "religion" or "idealist philosophizing."

Such a position could be tenable if one resolutely condemns all claims for a transcendental position. It is worth pointing out that Kellner on the one hand condemns metaphysical thinking, but on the other hand his own position is laden with utopian ideas and a neo-Marxist vision which can be assessed as a transcendental position. Therefore, in my judgement, Kellner's position itself is closed off from truly engaging with Baudrillard's metaphysics precisely because Kellner refuses to admit that his own perspective might just be another transcendental position. Kellner's theoretical perspective remains dogmatic because he fails to be critical of his own position which disables him from engaging in an immanent critique of Baudrillard's metaphysical position.

However, I do think that Kellner's insight that Baudrillard ends up proposing an "ironic metaphysics" (MPB:153) is accurate, and a strategic reversal of the poststructuralist critique of metaphysics. Baudrillard, in my judgement, does posit simulation as the universal feature of contemporary cultures, and especially the Western world. The irony of his strategy is to invert the Platonic hierarchy of Idea-Representation-Simulacrum⁵², and he uses the twentieth century mass proliferation of media images in order to

⁵²An interesting question worth considering is to what extent does Baudrillard's inversion still remain within a Platonic problematic? To what extent is Baudrillard's own problematic still informed by a Platonic hierarchy?

instantiate his concept of simulation. Simulation is a metaphysical principle which topples the Platonic Idea and Representation. It is also important to remember in this context Baudrillard's refusal to be known as either a philosopher or a sociologist, preferring instead the title of "theorist and moralist." This refusal is in keeping with his attempts to achieve a theory of objective irony which aims to go beyond traditional intellectual categories.

Kellner engages in an insightful and challenging critique of Baudrillard's ideas on subject/object relations. He argues that Baudrillard has wrongly separated subject and object, refusing to see any mediation or dialectical movement between them. It is also Kellner's contention that Baudrillard has given reification a place of supremacy in his fatal theory. Kellner's alternative is to suggest both a Kantian and deconstructive approach to the subject/object problem. The Kantian and neo-Kantian argument is that "it is impossible to envisage a world of objects without human subjectivity, because it is impossible to gain access to objects or to perceive or conceive of them apart from our subjective modes of perception and cognition." (MPB:166) It appears that Kellner holds to a form of neo-Kantianism in this regard, but he is also willing to propose "a contemporary deconstructive argument" in which the focus would be on an analysis of subject/object interaction, or ways in which "subjects and objects interact in the constitution of experience, society, [and] the external world." (MPB:233)

I do have some problems with Kellner's philosophical approach, and the way in which he decides to deal with Baudrillard's "metaphysical imaginary." Kellner insists upon a neo-Kantian view of metaphysics -- as a projective imaginary -- in which it is the subject's own categories, desires, hopes,

fears, which are ultimately projected upon the world. Kellner indeed claims that this is precisely what Baudrillard is up to -- "ascribing his own privileged subjective experiences to the being of the object world itself in a typical imaginary of idealism." (MPB:179) Kellner describes Baudrillard's attempt to construct a pataphysical theory as one in which he, Baudrillard, is the ultimate source and creator of the imaginary solutions -- "the pataphysician Baudrillard aspires to the status of a god, and desires to usurp God's power of creation and judgement." (MPB:163) According to Kellner, the major difference between Alfred Jarry, who first developed a theory of pataphysics, and Jean Baudrillard, is the role assigned to the subject. Jarry still has subjects who attempt to reshape and influence the world, whilst Baudrillard regards the disappearance of the subject as the *sine qua non* of his work (MPB:163).

Andrew Wernick in a recent essay argues for Baudrillard's "metaphysics" to be interpreted more broadly as "religious," but not in a traditional or restricted sense.⁵³ Wernick perceives in Baudrillard's recent texts such as *America*, *Cool Memories*, and *Forget Baudrillard*, the hints of a transcendental ontology which is not exactly affirmed or denied. Baudrillard seems to implicate himself within a form of transcendental thought which hovers over the ever recurring moment of indecisiveness. In my judgement there is a "depth dimension" to Baudrillard's work, as Wernick points out, but it is also a "strategy" and a form of seduction which is always refusing any one strategy or line of thought. The interesting point, in my judgement, with Wernick's thesis is that Baudrillard is concerned with describing a "real

⁵³Andrew Wernick, "Post-Marx: Theological Themes in Baudrillard's *America*," *Postmodern Testaments* (forthcoming). Hereafter cited in parentheses as TT.

scenario" or extreme conditions which are actual in his speculations. This basic factor in Baudrillard's work would indeed support some kind of transcendental ontology, however vague or indecisive that ontology might be.

As we have already noted, Baudrillard's writing is preoccupied with the disappearance of the social, political, aesthetic, sexual, and in fact the whole mirage of what he deems the banal and the real. But what has to be stressed is that Baudrillard is obsessed with disappearance and the search for an alternative principle, despite an often touted deep sense of fatalism. This search is begun most clearly in *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, and although the idea of symbolic exchange is not to be found explicitly in his subsequent writings, it still remains a part of Baudrillard's fascination for the primitive, especially in *America*.⁵⁴ As Wernick has shown, Baudrillard is still concerned to posit some form of counter-gift and a sacrificial form of response to the system of objects, in a double fatal reversal of simulative theory (TT:13-14).

Wernick argues that Baudrillard's theory -- which offers itself as a form of theology in an era of intense secularity -- stands midway between a playful immoral stoicism and the hope for something redemptive to appear (TT:26). Baudrillard oscillates, one might say, between a theorising which is "constative and resigned," and one which is "performative and ecstatic." (TT:26) Wernick claims that this latter side of Baudrillard's theorising is specifically concerned with the "missing transcendental" of Western thought and postmodern culture. I would also add that Wernick's insight into

⁵⁴Pefanis maintains that although symbolic exchange is not explicitly mentioned after *L'échange symbolique et la mort* the idea is still retained in the concept of a fatal strategy (HP:114).

Baudrillard's oscillating position supports my contention that Baudrillard inhabits a difficult and uneasy position between the "last man" and the "overman." According to Wernick there have been two death's of God -- the first in Nietzschean terms, and the second a repudiation of Marxist teleologies under the guise of "history," "the social," "the political" -- and these death's are a constant preoccupation for Baudrillard's "aristocratic irony" which hovers with deliberate undecidability over the false closures of choice (TT:26).

Anarchic Energies and Resisting the Real

Baudrillard writes of an "objective irony" which is now dominant within the system. This objective irony contains the principle of evil, which is for Baudrillard infinite in its power. In fact one might hazard the observation that for Baudrillard "the Evil Principle" is at least equivalent, or on the same level as God or some divine principle.⁵⁵ We have seen centuries of the reign of the subject, now it is time for the object to assert its dominance via a principle of evil. Kellner has shown that Baudrillard's fascination for the object is the culmination of a theme which has been in his work since *Le système des objets* (MPB:159). In Baudrillard's work there is the increasing sense of the all-pervasive "effect" of the object in everyday life, via the media, commodities, fashion: the media as an ecstatic, hyperreal, and transparent mode of operations. Kellner offers his

⁵⁵Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (New York and London: Semiotext(e)/Pluto 1990), 72. Hereafter cited in parentheses as FS.

interpretation of Baudrillard's metaphysics of the object as a "'reversible imminence' [which] projects a cyclical view of the world which breaks with linear temporality and posits a cycle of appearance and disappearance that valorizes metamorphosis." (MPB:162)

Baudrillard seeks out that "deeper energy" (FS:73) which pushes things even further against rational systems and structures, against evolutionist societies and linear cultural formation. For a principle of evil, Baudrillard seeks to find that which is most immoral and in a state of debauchery -- of images, signs, and ideas (FS:72-3). The only position that is not immoral, argues Baudrillard, is cynicism. To be cynical is to be in touch with the "objective view" of what is happening in society and systems of thought (FS:73). The "energy" that is pushing society and thought is itself cynical and immoral.⁵⁶ So one must adopt an objective irony in relation to the system, in order to become a part of the system and somehow to put oneself beyond the system's cynicism and immorality. One must duplicate and mimic the system in order to overcome it, and through that process of duplicity and mimicry the system will be seduced by objective irony.

⁵⁶In "Intellectuals, Commitment, and Political Power: An interview with Jean Baudrillard," Thesis Eleven 10-11 (1984-5), 166-74, Baudrillard laments the passing of an "energy" which was the motivation for social movements in revolt during the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, Baudrillard feels the loss of a "socio-intellectual energy," and in the context of his idea of a fatal theory it would seem that "energy" for him is now dependent upon something outside of society. There really is a disdain and incredible pessimism on Baudrillard's part for social and cultural change; thought and analysis have become highly questionable modes of discourse for Baudrillard, together with the role of the intellectual. Perhaps one finds a kind of faded optimism in Baudrillard when he speculates on "a radiant and transparent world where there is no longer any need for thoughts, analyses." (173).

For Baudrillard, the "real world" is opposed by the principle of evil, which can be traced to "magical and archaic energies." This principle generates omnipotence of thought which pushes against the rational boundaries of systems and structures and releases "immoral energy that shatters meaning, that traverses facts, representations, traditional values, and electrifies societies blocked in their Platonic images." (FS:74)

Baudrillard posits a deep energy of immorality and an evil principle motivating everything. Indeed, for Baudrillard, the "diabolical" becomes the motor of all change in the world. For Baudrillard "the social" is an impoverished energy, and it is not the real energy, or the real dynamic which drives things and people:

We need to reawaken the principle of Evil active in Manicheaism and all the great mythologies in order to affirm, against the principle of Good, not exactly the supremacy of Evil, but the fundamental duplicity that demands that any order exists only to be disobeyed, attacked, exceeded, and dismantled. (FS:77)

So, what can we infer from this emphatic and definitive statement from Baudrillard? It is clear that he cannot accept a given order, or some normative idea of the world's being intrinsically good. We are to be continually in combat with any existing order, to engage in excessive subversion tactics -- and in my judgement this is an anarchism informed by the powers of the principle of evil. Baudrillard maintains that evil is not supreme, but if evil is not supreme, then it seems that evil must become supreme if Baudrillard's fatal strategy is to be successful. But, it could also be possible that Baudrillard, like his predecessor Nietzsche, is engaged in an endless duel with Christianity. It seems to me that much of secularized thought and neo-pagan philosophy is either involved in a reaction to

christian thought or an active repudiation of christian thought in the Nietzschean sense.

It seems that Baudrillard is pushing for a pure abstract form of thought, or what he perceives as "the omnipotence of thought." He maintains that there has been a legacy of movements and individuals who have sought to deny the world as real, who have rather sought to affirm the world's fundamental unreality and its derisiveness (FS:80). It is Baudrillard's thesis that in the process of denying and defying the real there is the possibility for "making a world out of thought alone." (FS:81) Fatal theory is offered by Baudrillard as the initiator of that process of defying the real, and yet it remains to be seen where that fatal theory will take us. My concluding chapter to this thesis will interrogate Baudrillard's fatal theory and the way in which identity serves as the basic philosophical problem in Baudrillard's thought. In my judgement the problem of identity is at the heart of our historical moment and cultural logic of postmodernism.

CHAPTER IV
FOR A CRITIQUE OF IDENTITY

Whither Fatal Theory ?

For Baudrillard alienation is a defunct category, a mere residue from a productivist model of society and an echo of Marxist philosophy now regarded as quite irrelevant. Baudrillard contends that we can no longer talk about a human nature and social essence existing somewhere as transcendent categories (FS:91). But if there is no longer any possibility for alienation, why talk about a principle of Evil or the need to affirm something against the principle of Good -- or to suggest attacking the order that exists ?

It seems to me that Baudrillard would have to admit to some form of alienation, according to the logic of his own fatal theory. If there really is a pressing need, as he assumes there is, to dismantle, attack, disobey, exceed, any current order, then such an urgent task must imply something to escape from which is either repressive or alienating. I am aware of the fact that Baudrillard repudiated "alienation" as a concept, along with productivist anthropology and an essentialist theory of needs in his earlier work.⁵⁷ However, I contend that Baudrillard is still driven by some notion of alienation, which is evident in his claims that there is something wrong with the present order and how the system of late (*néo*) capitalism

⁵⁷See particularly For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), and The Mirror of Production, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975).

exerts powerful controls and programming upon individuals. In my judgement the idea of alienation can still be operative in Baudrillard's thought despite the earlier repudiation of a stricter economic and productivist notion of alienation. If Baudrillard denies that there is in fact something to escape from, then his claim to be Manichean has to be regarded as suspect. However, I am prepared to argue that Baudrillard does imply in his work a certain form of alienation and repression, from which he seeks to escape. The next question is whether his fatal theory can accomplish this escape, and where would it take him and us ?

Baudrillard wants an ironic theory which is also fatal instead of critical theory, because he perceives the current conditions of a postmodern culture in terms of a collective ironic existence (FS:92). If the masses are turning increasingly towards a posture of indifference, it is because the questions of existence, identity, and difference have become occluded by a spectacle of disappearance (FS:94). The collective ironic existence of the masses is perceived by Baudrillard as a conspicuously silent pure object:

the massive obscenity of this enormous silent antibody . . . which in effect feeds its inertia on all the accelerating energy of the system with the myriad pieces of information that the system secretes to try to exorcize this inertia and absence. (FS:95)

Again, Baudrillard's writing on the masses, like the social, is preoccupied with the Bataillean notion of excess: "the radical antibody, inaccessible to all political subjectivity and therefore perfectly useless and dangerous." (FS:95) The masses are therefore a useless and silent body who cannot be manipulated or used for any purpose. But is this view of a collective ironic existence a responsible theorization of identity ? Or is such a view

dangerously open to malevolent political forces, and the opportunism of charismatic leaders of destiny ?

In an extended diatribe directed towards post-Socratic Western philosophy, Baudrillard radically questions the traditional assumptions of the philosophy of the subject (FS:96-99). He argues for a reversible theory of the masses in which power and responsibility are to be delegated to the system, thus leaving the masses with a massive de-volition and withdrawal of the will (FS:97). For Baudrillard such a reversible theory does not mean "alienation or voluntary servitude," but rather a philosophy of "unwill," anti-desire, the expulsion of choice and will (FS:97). Baudrillard is suggesting that the masses engage in "ironic challenge" -- a game of irresponsibility, a "joyous expulsion of all encumbering superstructures of being and will." (FS:99) It still seems to me that Baudrillard is holding on to excess as his liberatory concept, a concept which in Baudrillard's employ is rather nebulous and could easily end up in any one single political court or strategy. Does a Baudrillardian conception of excessive expenditure result in pure anarchism ? Or is the notion of excess more an aleatory and reversible solution to the intensification of the screen in everyday life ?

Baudrillard's solution is to follow the object, to become one with the object. In Baudrillard's thought the object is a destiny -- to follow and become one with the object in an order of fatality. A distinction has to be made between Banal, Ironic, and Fatal strategies. Baudrillard wants to go beyond banal strategies (a belief in referents, power, the subject, revolution, the real, desire), and to an extent adopts ironic strategies in valorizing appearance, artifice, signs, seduction -- over and above the real, nature, and production. Baudrillard's "ideal" strategy is a fatal one, in order to take thought and action to their extremes. A fatal strategy pushes

at the boundaries of signs and significations to find new and more extreme conceptual fields in which to pursue the logics of the object world (MPB:159-60).

The object "knows" the rules of the game which are infinitely ironic (FS:181). We move to an order of fatality, where the principle of Evil is inescapable -- the object allows evil to penetrate it and "shine" through it. It is important to note that Baudrillard's whole fatal theory is grounded on the presupposition that the world was seduced from the beginning. Subversion is immanent to the very structure of reality (or unreality as opposed to the imposed reality of rational logic, or Western subject-centred philosophy), from the beginning. It really does seem that Baudrillard is attempting to align himself, as Manichean-nihilist, with some essential (un)reality that the history of Western thought has repressed. In this anarchic move Baudrillard also celebrates the inhuman -- inanimate objects and gods. Again we can see the primitivism at work in Baudrillard's fatal theory begun in his earlier work in *L'échange symbolique* -- a belief in the superiority of the primitive (FS:183).

Baudrillard concedes that to adopt the position of objective irony is to risk absurdity. However, I would argue that Baudrillard has no choice but to adopt such a position, because his basic premise is that the order of things is structured in such a way as to be fatal and enigmatic (FS:191). A position of objective irony is one step nearer to Baudrillard's ideal of a fatal strategy. Maybe Baudrillard's position is absurd, but it is an absurdity which does in fact make philosophical sense. Baudrillard does not suddenly conjure up his fatal theory out of nowhere -- despite indications that he would like theory to be just such an enigma. A fatal theory, as

constructed and deconstructed by Jean Baudrillard, is based upon certain questions and answers to fundamental problems of human identity. A question such as, what is the origin of the world ? Answer: it was seduced from the beginning, and must be challenged by a principle of unreality in Manichean fashion. Or take another question that is posed by Baudrillard's thought, what is our identity as social creatures in postmodern culture ? Answer: we have become silenced by the acceleration of the system of mass media networks, and the infinite proliferation of images which produce retinal intensity and hyperreal models of simulation bringing on catastrophic consequences for human identity.

Autonomy, Identity, and Difference

The third order of the simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, is saturated by media and communication networks resulting in serious changes for the subjects of postmodern culture. A precarious sense of identity ensues from this saturation effect of media, and Baudrillard maintains that the prime motivation of human beings amidst all of this tumultuous change is still the authentication of existence, to save identity from identity's loss (EC:29).

The desire for identity takes precedence over everything else. However, for Baudrillard, resemblance is no longer concerned with the other, but rather the individual's resemblance to him or herself in the reduction to his or her simple elements. This is a radical narcissism resulting in a "fractal subject," which is the diffraction of a multitude of identical miniaturized egos (EC:40). "Difference" in Baudrillard's terms is the

"internal, infinite differentiating of the same." (EC:41) In other words Baudrillard's idea of "difference" is firmly located in self-programming. In my judgement Baudrillard's ideas on identity and difference are tied to a strong urge for a self-referential individual -- an individual who will be able to deprogramme and reprogramme at will.⁵⁰

Baudrillard's ideas on identity and difference make sense in the context of his pronouncements on the "total" nature of a third order which continually bombards the individual with a glut of identity formulas and techniques for image construction. The only way people will be able to avert this bombardment is to evolve their own inherent defences and offenses in terms of programming efficacy. It is also worth noting that the development of self-programming is at least one proposed way of overcoming alienation.

Although Baudrillard recognizes the intense crisis of Western ego-identity and the collapse of traditional metaphysical assurances, there seems little room for the subject in a world where the object reigns supreme. Baudrillard can only perceive a situation of individuals becoming more and more withdrawn into themselves, attempting to find their own sense of difference in a world of radical indeterminacy. If Foucault's "l'homme s'effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable,"⁵¹

⁵⁰For an interesting essay on this very theme, see Scott Bukatman, "Who Programs You ? The Science Fiction of the Spectacle," Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema, ed. Annette Kuhn (London and New York: Verso, 1990): 196-214. Bukatman explores the extent to which technology has impinged upon individual subjectivity in "the constant flow of images, sounds, and narratives." (197) Bukatman also highlights the way in which Baudrillard's writing has become preoccupied with the electronic media as a means of ultimate social control. The similarities between David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1982) and Baudrillard's ideas on simulation, particularly the four stages of the image, are given close attention by Bukatman.

⁵¹Michel Foucault, Les Mots et Les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 1966), 398.

then Baudrillard's individual is part of that conspicuous silence of the masses as they wait at the fin de siècle, which is "like an empty beach."⁶⁰ The idea is that the masses have withdrawn and become inert in terms of social intervention and cultural endeavours, but individuals are still searching for the locus of their own identity and difference only within themselves. Perhaps, for Baudrillard, this can only be a melancholic and nostalgic search.

The question of difference becomes crucial, argues Baudrillard, because pleasure and the celebration of sex have now become overshadowed by the increasing search for identity. A good example of this change is the desire for specific identities: female identity, masculine identity, black identity, homosexual/lesbian identity, youth identity. Baudrillard sums up this kind of situation with poetic and perceptive insight:

This "into" is the key to everything. The point is not to be nor even to have a body, but to be into your own body. Into your sexuality, into your own desire. Into your own functions, as if they were energy differentials or video screens. The hedonism of the "into": the body is a scenario and the curious hygienist threnody devoted to it runs through the innumerable fitness centres, body-building gyms, stimulation and simulation studios that stretch from Venice to Tupanga Canyon (AM:35).

The priority would now seem to be placed on the particular rather than a universal once associated with such ideals as "liberation" and "emancipation." However, I am aware of the increasing support for such "global" concerns as espoused by the ecology movement, a movement which tends to present an ideal in terms of universal human identity with regard to

⁶⁰Jean Baudrillard, "The Year 2000 Has Already Happened," Body Invaders. Sexuality and the Postmodern Condition, ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (Oxford: Macmillan, New World Perspectives CultureTexts Series, 1988), 44.

the environment. Baudrillard contends that liberation, a rather subdued cause for the postmodern subject, tends to leave everyone in an undefined state. This "challenge of undefinedness" is taken up by pop idols such as Boy George, Michael Jackson, and David Bowie, who play at mixing genres and genders. But the central point, for Baudrillard, is that a differentiating feature has to be found (AM:47).

Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary society describes the passing from a nostalgic remembrance of modernity to the indeterminate situation of postmodernity. This indeterminism can be specified in the areas of sex roles and sexual liberation, with the latter, for Baudrillard, a determinate feature of modernity (AM:46-7). The absence of a defined sense of identity in terms of difference introduces the need for a play or aesthetic of difference. The idols of popular culture in the postmodern scenario are contrary to the modern idols of sex and pleasure; the postmodern idols play up on difference and its indeterminacy and lack of defined status in sex roles. Difference is therefore the key leitmotif in the popular culture of postmodernism according to Baudrillard (AM:47).

Postmodernism and popular culture do often seem to circulate around an overriding concern with difference as a question of identity, and a clamour for the authenticities of identity. The body is offered as a prime site for the contestation of sexual difference and the problematics of identity: a popular culture saturated with the detail of body, appearance and style. Perhaps one could begin to formulate the cultural scenario of the search for difference in terms of the search for identity. There is as an overt and yet often sublimated libidinal intensity, sublimated by the demands of a rapacious third order or stage of capitalism which seeks repetition and simulated desire in order to keep on functioning as a system. I think there

are indeed legitimate claims for the assertion of identity and difference, particularly in the face of increased levels of homogenization in the capitalist system and the now defunct socialist bureaucracies of central and eastern Europe. However, I also think that Adorno and Horkheimer's insights are worth bearing in mind with regard to the way in which the culture industry can offer stereotypical identity (CI:131), and that one must be careful not to fall into the illusion of pseudo-individuality. I think that these remarks are relevant for today, especially with regard to some of the more arcane political and religious movements for the assertion of difference in terms of identity.

In my judgement there are definite social and political implications involved with the push for specific identities in terms of difference. However, I do not think that mere assertion and the dictates of fashionable rhetoric will produce a healthy public discourse on such matters. Baudrillard's conclusion is that the logical end of the push for difference in the culture of postmodernism is "a dissemination of individual sexes referring only to themselves, each one managed as an independent enterprise." (AM:47) Baudrillard speculates about the possibility for alternative symbolic systems and cultural formation, but the most likely scenario for him is the one where human subjects develop their optimum levels of self-programming, with personal codes, formulas, and images (AM:48). It would seem that Baudrillard is resigned in the face of increased autonomy as a response to more intense levels of indeterminacy in cultural, social, and historical identity. However, there are other theoretical options and I would like to return and consider Fredric Jameson's ideas on identity in postmodernism.

In Jameson's theory of postmodernism as a break with the dominant culture and aesthetic of modernism, there is the appearance of a new cultural system and reality. Jameson attempts to formulate a critical position which will constitute or reconstruct an alternative aesthetic subject.⁶¹ As I understand it, Jameson's ploy is to attempt a reconstruction of Jacques Lacan's description of schizophrenia as the breakdown of the signifying chain; this breakdown is for Jameson a primary feature of postmodernism. In the Lacanian view the signifying chain is the movement from signifier to signifier, with the signified now understood as the meaning-effect, an "objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves." (PM:26) As I understand this, the tenuous and fragile stability of the signifying chain is broken in postmodernism, and the result is schizophrenia with the attendant rubble of psychic fragmentation and disintegration due to the unrelation of signifiers.

Jameson's concern is with the way in which schizophrenic fragmentation is an aesthetic and cultural style, and for him such schizophrenic fragmentation is not the same as a clinical diagnosis. Jameson's interpretation of schizophrenia in the cultural space suggests "joyous intensities" and a displacement of the older affects of anxiety and alienation (PM:29). Jameson presents the argument that, when what he calls "schizophrenic disjuncture or *écriture*" takes on the features of a general cultural style, it really ceases to have any connection to the negative connotations usually associated with schizophrenia. Jameson's account includes a notion of "the difference which relates," in that the best of postmodernist art works display a more positive concept of relationship and

⁶¹ Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, with a Foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), vii.

restore a "proper tension to the notion of difference itself." (PM:31)

Jameson's strategy is to immerse himself within the perplexing changes wrought by postmodernism concerning questions of human identity, and then to propose an immanent critique of those perplexing changes. The signifying chain is broken in postmodernism, resulting in fragmentation for human identity. Yet according to Jameson, schizophrenic fragmentation as an aesthetic and cultural style may have a positive side: "the difference which relates." Jameson contrasts two types of viewers, who operate under very different aesthetic codes of reference, as an example of the positive side of difference in postmodernism. He illustrates this contrast by citing the example of Nam June Paik's work with scattered television screens positioned amidst lush vegetation:

The older aesthetic is then practiced by viewers, who, bewildered by this discontinuous variety, decided to concentrate on a single screen, as though the relatively worthless image sequence to be followed there had some organic value in its own right. The postmodernist viewer, however, is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference; such a viewer is asked to follow the evolutionary mutation of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (who watches fifty-seven television screens simultaneously) and to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: something for which the word *collage* is still only a very feeble name. (PM:31)

However, for Baudrillard the effect of the broken signifying chain is somewhat different:

What develops around the video or stereo culture is not a narcissistic imaginary, but an effect of frantic self-referentiality, a short-circuit which immediately hooks up like with like, and, in so doing, emphasizes their surface intensity and deeper meaninglessness (AM:37)

Jameson's strategy is somehow to retain a sense of meaning in postmodernism, while for Baudrillard there is only surface and increased levels of meaninglessness. In a recent essay, David Bennett reads Jameson as proposing a "cartographic aesthetic" which will provide the necessary epistemological and ontological conditions for the reconstruction of a subject -- a subject who will be able to inhabit "the symbolic representation of postmodern space."⁶² For Baudrillard there is no such cartesian rationality available. Despite Jameson's sympathy for a Baudrillardian understanding of culture saturated by images, there tends to be significantly different theoretical conclusions drawn from such an understanding. In light of the above citation from Baudrillard's *America*, it is important to note that Jameson sees video/television in particular, and postmodernism more generally, as leaving no room for memory -- instead a "peculiar historical amnesia." (PM:69)

It is perhaps on this single theme of historical amnesia -- what could be called an incredulous and remarkable forgetting -- that postmodern thought can be most sharply brought to task. Jameson's strategy has been to give detailed analysis of certain postmodernist phenomena -- video art, architectural styles, and the philosophical question of identity in postmodernism -- and then to work back from the analysis and details of those phenomena towards a reconstituted cartesian subject, and an explanation of postmodernism in terms of a dialectical model of reification. Baudrillard's position should be clear by now, as the adoption of extreme nihilism and an

⁶²David Bennett, "Postmodernism and Vision: Ways of Seeing (at) the End of History," Postmodern Studies 3. History and Post-war Writing, ed. Theo D'Haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 269.

engagement with historical amnesia -- or put in his terms, the disappearance of socio-philosophical categories -- as the "game of theory."

In my judgement Baudrillard's theorization about identity in terms of difference is accurate as a description for certain prevalent tendencies, and there are moments when his perception of the contemporary situation is very astute. However, as a potential theory for a constructive social and aesthetic reconstruction of the postmodern subject it is sorely lacking. I think it would be possible to derive an intensely self-programmed individuality from Baudrillard's theory, but from my own perspective I would need to have more critique of the conditions that engender such individuality in the first place. In other words, how and why have we arrived at such a situation in which the individual has to retreat into his or her total self-absorption ?

Philosophical Theory and Identity

Baudrillard proposes seduction as the fundamental condition of the world. The world was seduced from the beginning. The Manichean idea of a fundamental antagonism which governs the order of things occupies a central role in Baudrillard's thought. Perhaps in Baudrillard's work the culture of postmodernism brings this fundamental condition of seduction to its apotheosis -- the third order of simulation is seduction *par excellence*. We have always been seduced, but never as intensely or with such abandon as in the third order of simulation. Baudrillard admits that he also is seduced, although we soon realize that this is no admission borne out of humility or modesty. To admit complicity and duplicity with the existing state of things is, for Baudrillard, precisely to begin a fatal strategy and to become more

seductive than the seduction that already exists.

The Manichean-nihilism and anarchic thrust of Jean Baudrillard proposes a story of the world which could be seen as a derivative of another story. We might say that seduction was initiated at a particular moment in history, although we might also say that seduction was not the founding moment of our history. Mythopoeia has almost become a genre in its own right within postmodernism, perhaps as a way of filling the empty space vacated by that so-called demon, History. I suggested in chapter III that Baudrillard has taken up the stance of a poet-philosopher in the Nietzschean tradition, and I would now add to that suggestion the claim that Baudrillard's conception of origin, identity, and future is fundamentally mythopoeic.

I would also say that Baudrillard's adoption of a poet-philosopher stance, in good Nietzschean fashion, is essentially a way of relating to the real. Baudrillard has become preoccupied with the poetic, virtual reality, hyperreality, simulation -- and all of these are in essence fictional attempts to interpret the real. But it also has to be understood that these fictional approaches to reality are not all attempting the same thing -- some replicate reality, others twist and mutate it, and others attempt an invasive virus-like logic into the real. Perhaps we could sum up Baudrillard's struggles with the real by saying that sometimes reality is too complex and therefore fiction gives it form.

I have no doubt that Baudrillard's contention that contemporary society has been imploded by the image is to a large extent correct. However, as I have endeavoured to show in this thesis, there is a lot more to Baudrillard's thought than this one single contention. I suggest that Baudrillard's attempt to describe "real events" and the operations of media moves rapidly into a discourse of mythopoeia in terms of the over-all framework he projects in his fatal theory. I also want to stress that in

making this claim about Baudrillard's philosophical framework, I am certainly not dismissing the insights that might be gained from his writing on the media and image culture. However, I am concerned with the over-all ramifications of Baudrillard's fatal theory.

In chapter I of this thesis I gave a contextual reading of Baudrillard in terms of the critical theory tradition, as represented by Adorno and Horkheimer. I do not wish to recapitulate the themes of the culture industry thesis, or sink Baudrillard by invoking the dialectics of critical theory. However, Adorno's thought, amongst other things, is largely concerned with the role of theory and philosophy -- and more precisely the charge of "resignation" levelled at those wishing to maintain a high level of respect for theoretical work.⁶³ It has become clear to me that Baudrillard's project has depended upon the project of "theory" and in a recent interview such as "Forget Baudrillard," he has appeared very anxious when speaking of theory and its place in society. Adorno's concern was with the charge of "resignation" in the face of pleas for revolutionary praxis, and Baudrillard has also commented upon the role of the intellectual in this regard.⁶⁴ Adorno perceived the unharnessed desire for revolutionary praxis at all cost, including theoretical work, and what he called the "pseudo-activity" of some political acts of violence, as the return of a ghostly apparition -- anarchism (R:174).

Adorno is quite willing to maintain the idea that thought must go beyond itself, but not for the sake of a repressive intolerance towards theory in the name of direct action. Baudrillard, in my judgement, has also

⁶³Theodor W. Adorno, "Resignation," The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture, 171-175. Hereafter cited in parentheses as R.

⁶⁴See "Intellectuals, Commitment, and Political Power: An interview with Jean Baudrillard" *ibid.*

clearly displayed his impatience with theory and that somehow it must go beyond itself. Although Baudrillard's impatience is informed by a wish to make a world out of thought alone, something quite different from Adorno's position. The charge has often been made towards Baudrillard that he is indeed a resigned and utterly pessimistic thinker, and Adorno's charge for the "uncompromisingly critical thinker" is that he not give up (R:174). Perhaps the real difference between Baudrillard and Adorno in their common anxiety of "resignation" is that Baudrillard no longer has the vision or hope for changed social conditions and potential freedom of human identity, whilst Adorno pursues the task of philosophy and theory in the hope of changing social conditions "through undiminished insight." (R:173).

As I signalled early on in this thesis, much of the philosophical theory developed over the last two decades under the rubric of postmodern thought has been concerned with the problematic question of identity. Cartesian rationalist certainty has most surely been dealt some very substantial critique in this regard. However, the question of identity persists as perhaps the most perplexing of philosophical problems. Adorno's stipulation that culture and administration are always in a relationship with "living subjects," is also a keen meditation on the "dialectics of identity."⁶⁶ The problem, as Adorno sees it, is that human beings wish to maintain identity as an ultimate goal and therefore feel the need to maintain identity at all costs; and yet on the other hand there is also a feeling amongst us social creatures that identity is a "universal coercive mechanism." In other words efforts at securing the primacy of identity actually results in domination, coercion, and unfreedom. As I understand it,

⁶⁶Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 146-148.

Adorno's main problem with identity is that human beings become objectified and external to themselves with a resulting loss of integral individuality. In fact it is Adorno's contention that only through non-identity can identity be found, as a goal of ridding human identity of objectification.

The problem, as I see it, in postmodernism is that a firm sense of exteriority is lacking. In the previous section to this chapter I discussed the intense clamour for autonomy, identity, and difference. Baudrillard has some perceptive things to say about this clamour, and Jameson offers his idea of "the difference which relates." Perhaps the key to identity is in fact "relation" or more precisely "relationship." Jameson hints at this key, and Baudrillard may know it but cannot bring himself to say anything substantial in what he perceives as "deeper meaningless." One could always engage in seduction, but as I understand it this kind of engagement is not conducive to relationship as the key to identity. So what about relationship and a firm sense of exteriority ?

If we are to believe the prophets of postmodernism, whether they be true or false, then we ought to be feeling an acute sense of disintegration and fragmentation. As creatures living at a particular time in history perhaps we can feel the disintegration and understand it -- but do we live that disintegration as if today may be our last ? Drink, eat, and be merry for tomorrow we may die ! Or do we propose alternative ways of theorizing and living in postmodernism ? Perhaps we could understand the culture of postmodernism as a historical conjuncture of exteriorities. The concept of exteriority is clearly an extension of the word "exterior," meaning situated on the outside of something, or coming from outside. Our responsibility for this particular historical moment is to engage in a relationship with those exteriorities. We as "living subjects" are to be in a relationship with our

historical moment, which includes social, cultural, and aesthetic ways of being in relationship to the particular historical moment known as postmodernism. The exteriorities are precisely those historical conditions and possibilities made available to us as living subjects who modify and take responsibility for those conditions and possibilities.

There is a dynamic interdependence between human beings as social creatures and the exteriorities of postmodernism. We may illustrate this interdependence as one characterized by social relations, a responsibility for the physical environment, artistic endeavours, economic practice, educational practice, and juridical practice. The living human subject is always in a relationship with the exteriorities of a particular historical moment. This does not always mean a settled and peaceful existence, for as we have seen disintegration and fragmentation tend to characterize our particular historical moment. However, I would argue that relationship is our responsibility and we can only work and play at such a task.

I began this thesis by suggesting that the prevalent condition of our twentieth century is nihilism, and that the work of Jean Baudrillard is carried out in full knowledge of this condition. I also suggested that thought, or what we can also call philosophical theory, could mediate this condition of nihilism. By mediation I mean the extent to which it is possible for theory to engage itself and the world of living human subjects in a plausible explanation for things. My particular interest in philosophical theory is that it might engage itself at the level of historical, cultural, and social conditions. As the reader will appreciate I believe that philosophical theory has a decisive role to play in the affairs of human beings, and I can only hope that such theory has brought some light to bear upon the work of Jean Baudrillard.

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