

Is There a Subject in Hyperreality?

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses a dominant trend in postmodernism toward the dissolution of subjectivity into something vague, unstable, fragmented, amorphous, and always impersonal. In line with the ethical appeal of Lyotard's idea of the inhuman as a resistance to the tyranny of subjectivity, Baudrillard defines the fatal or the inhuman as an expression of the enigma of the world, its resistance to metaphysics. What makes Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal problematic is the possibility for confusing the hyperreal with the pure or the impersonal (i.e., with the fatal) since both are defined as the collapse of the subject/object distinction. On one hand, the impersonal is the elimination of human perception as an external, privileged point of view. However, the hyperreal is also defined as the elimination of the subjective point of view, the suppression of the look, the fact that the object of perception is always already there, already seen, thus preventing the act of seeing. Obscenity then has two mutually exclusive meanings: it signifies either the absolute triumph of subjectivity (the world has been preempted by consciousness, objects are merely extensions or reflections of the subject) or the complete objectivization of the world (everything becomes objective because what is already seen is, for that very reason, no longer accessible: it cannot be manipulated by the subject). The de-realization of reality is the destruction of subjectivity but, as Baudrillard notes, the crime is never perfect. If the real is still preserved--as the trace of what has been murdered--the subject also survives its annihilation or dispersal; its destiny passes into the object. By subjectivizing or de-realizing the world, the subject has revealed its ability to appear and disappear--to lose itself in multiplicity--which is, in fact, the strongest proof that there is still a subject since Baudrillard himself defines the constitutive illusion of the world as the possibility of things to appear and disappear. Subjectivity includes its own annihilation, its pseudo-sacrificial self-reduction to objective (fatal) reality.

FULL TEXT

1.

The discourse of materiality or objective reality today is, first of all, a discourse of ethics. Objective reality is either treated as a victim that has been wronged by subjectivity (the latter must, therefore, be brought to justice) or is regarded as "fearful," "fatal," or "revengeful" (as in Baudrillard's work). This new discourse of materiality aims at getting rid of subjectivity, which it naïvely stereotypes as a puppeteer grown too controlling and tyrannical, oversignifying the world instead of letting the world express itself. In an attempt to surmount what it regards as the inherent anthropocentrism of centuries of philosophy and aesthetics, contemporary philosophy has taken it upon itself to dissolve subjectivity into something vague, unstable, indeterminate, unidentifiable, fragmented, amorphous, and always *impersonal*. Hence the lively recent interest in Henri Bergson's philosophy of becoming. While the discourse of materiality claims to be an attack on metaphysics, Jean-François Lyotard insists that it is actually a revival of the very essence of metaphysics, "which [is] a thinking pertaining to [*impersonal*] forces much more than to the subject" (Inhuman 6, emphasis added). The question arises: How can the subject annihilate itself completely or, conversely, as Deleuze puts it in Cinema 2: The Time-Image 2, how can the object become a point of view in its own right?

2.

Jean Baudrillard has often been criticized for his bleak interpretation of postmodern culture. In place of Baudrillard's "sour' post-structuralism," we are urged to accept "a 'sweet' post-structuralism...for example, Derridean post-structuralism, with its emphasis upon the delirious free play of the signifier" (Coulter-Smith 92). Supposedly, Baudrillard cannot be of any help to us in this technological age because he is too scornful of it, too nihilistic, incapable of overcoming his "romantic concern for the loss of the real, the natural and the human" (98), which makes his writing sound both melancholy and apocalyptic. Others feel we ought to be warned against Baudrillard's seductive but insubstantial ideas and style. It's been said that too much of the criticism on Baudrillard is written by his devoted fans and that his works can "be regarded as little more than strings of aphorisms, and thus not worthy of critical engagement" (Willis 138). There is a strange incongruity between these two critiques. According to the first, Baudrillard is not sufficiently postmodernist; according to the second, he is too postmodernist, as his fragmented, aphoristic style testifies. Rather than discrediting Baudrillard's work, these criticisms actually present it as worthy of critical attention, especially now that postmodernism is drawing close to the brink of self-exhaustion. It is far more interesting to ask "What is there beyond the sweet and delirious free play of the signifier?" than to keep juggling the clichés of postmodernism. This is why, as I seek to demonstrate below, it is important to consider Baudrillard's texts as articulating an ontology rather than an epistemology.

3.

In many respects Baudrillard's theory of images is a reformulation of Bergson's imagistic ontology developed in *Matter and Memory*. Although both Bergson and Baudrillard are interested in the ontological and epistemological significance of light as the prime guarantor of the real, their notions of the image differ significantly. Bergson does not distinguish an image from a thing: things do not have images, and neither do we produce their images. Things, insofar as they are made of light vibrations, are already images. Or, taken more metaphorically, a thing is an image (or a representation) of the totality of images from which perception isolates it like a picture. Baudrillard, however, conceives images as capable of detaching themselves from things and either preceding or following them. What he really means is that things have lost their solidity and have been dematerialized into images, reduced to their pre-given meanings. Images are neither exclusively visual nor exclusively mental; rather, Baudrillard emphasizes their "pre(over)determination," their extreme proximity to us, which makes them virtually invisible. In Baudrillard's work, the image becomes a metaphor, and a deliberate misnomer, for the end of visibility. When everything has been rendered visible, nothing is visible any more and we are left with images. The image is a sign of overexposure or oversignification. Whereas Bergson describes the "production" of images as a process of *dissociation* or *diminution* (in which the image is dissociated or isolated from something bigger), Baudrillard describes the reverse process: the image is produced through a process of *intensification* or *saturation*, which overexposes a thing into an image. Both resort to photography to illuminate the nature of the image: the Bergsonian image is produced by *obscuring* rather than by throwing more light on the object, whereas Baudrillard's image is produced by *overexposing* the object, throwing excessive light on it, making it more visible than visible.

4.

Although Bergson's critique of cinematographical perception, in *Creative Evolution*, appears illogical in light of the fact that the description of natural perception in *Matter and Memory* is precisely a description of cinematographical perception, it is also true that in the same work Bergson underscores the necessity of overcoming the limits of natural perception through the "education of the senses" (49). The "education of the senses" seeks "to harmonize my senses with each other, to restore between their data a continuity which has been broken by the discontinuity of the needs of my body, in short, to reconstruct...the whole of the material object" (49). The continuity of objects of perception is broken by the discontinuity of our needs, by the selectivity of conscious perception. The restoration of

the continuity of the object of perception requires a sacrifice of the selectivity and discontinuity of perception. Conscious perception has to be "corrected." For Bergson, however, conscious perception is the difference that tears apart the original neutrality of matter. To reconstruct the continuity of the aggregate of images is to surrender the difference which, by breaking that continuity, has given birth to conscious perception. Bergson demands that we educate our perception so that it approximates that of a material object. We must reconstruct the totality of external images that our perception (and our consciousness which is born in the delay of perception) has torn apart in being born. We must annihilate the very discernment through which difference enters the material world. We must reconstitute the very continuity whose break we ourselves are. The multiplicity and discontinuity of our needs must be reduced back to the uniformity and continuity of matter. The radical meaning of Bergson's doctrine of the education of the senses is that the evolution of consciousness is measured precisely by the degree to which our perception approximates that of a material point. To educate our senses is to try to compensate for the limits of perception as a selection and organization of a small part of the actual, to attempt to *enlarge our perception*. However, given that our perception is a narrowing down of "universal consciousness" or matter (for Bergson they are the same thing), the enlarging of perception would require a descent to matter: "To perceive all the influences from all the points of all bodies would be to descend to the condition of a material object" (49). Precisely those states that are deprived in the greatest degree of the discernment of conscious perception best reconstruct the reality of an object. To carry this line of argument to its logical conclusion: the further away we move from consciousness--for example, in sleep or unconsciousness--the more sides of an image we perceive, until our perception reaches the extreme point where it barely manages not to collapse back into matter. Intermediary states, such as sleep and hallucination, approximate total perception.

5.

Baudrillard, however, does not concern himself with the question of reconstructing the real: the real, he believes, never takes place, since it is determined by, and varies with, the speed of light. The essential immateriality of the world is a result of the very nature of light, which makes things distant or absent from themselves:

The objective illusion is the physical fact that in this universe no things coexist in real time--not sexes, stars, this glass, this table, or myself and all that surrounds me. By the fact of dispersal and the relative speed of light, all things exist only on a recorded version, in an unutterable disorder of time-scales, at an inescapable distance from each other. And so they are never truly present to each other, nor are they, therefore, "real" for each other. The fact that when I perceive this star it has perhaps already disappeared--a relationship that can be extended, relatively speaking, to any physical object or living being--this is the ultimate foundation, the material definition...of illusion. (Perfect 52)

Paradoxically, both the objectivity and the illusion of the world are functions of light.¹ Bergson had suggested something similar when he observed that since perception is never pure but always pregnant with memory, there is always a delay between the world and our perception of it so that what we actually see is only the past. From the very beginning things are already absent from themselves (not contemporaneous with themselves) and absent from other things (distant from them). Both time (contemporaneity) and space (distance) are, originally, unreal.

6.

In addition to stressing the role of light in determining the scope of the real, both Bergson and Baudrillard attribute ontological significance to the virtual. However, their ideas of the virtual are strikingly different. From Bergson's point of view, Baudrillard's virtual would be a false concept as it relies on the erroneous though common identification of the virtual with the merely possible:

Once, the two terms were linked in the living movement of a history: *the actual form emerged from the virtual, like the statue emerging from the block of marble*. Today they are entwined in the notorious movement of the dead. For the dead man continues to move, and the corpse of the real never stops growing. The virtual is, in fact, merely the dilation of the dead body of reality--the proliferation of an achieved universe, for which there is nothing left but to go on endlessly hyperrealizing itself. (Baudrillard, Perfect 47, emphasis added)

For Bergson, the virtual is an aspect of the life of the real precisely because the real is never fully realized. The discussion of the difference between the possible and the real occurs in *The Creative Mind* where Bergson challenges the illusory belief that the possible is less than the real, that the possibility of things precedes their existence "in some real or virtual intelligence" (22). This illusion is almost unavoidable since "by the sole fact of being accomplished, reality casts its shadow behind it into the indefinitely distant past: it thus seems to have been pre-existent to its own realization, in the form of a possible" (23). Nevertheless, the possible cannot be represented before it becomes real since the possible is what *will have been*: "we find that there is more and not less in the possibility of each of the successive states than in their reality. For the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind which throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted" (118).

7.

It should be emphasized that Baudrillard does not identify the hyperreal or the virtual with the imaginary or the unreal. The latter are forces of negation whereas the pathological involution of the real in the hyperreal puts an end to negation. For Baudrillard, the virtual or the hyperreal is the fulfilling of the dialectic. The imaginary is not produced but destroyed by the surpassing of the real. The virtual/hyperreal results from a reversal of causality, the introduction of the finality of things at their origin, the accomplishment of things even before their appearance. Things become excessive when they appear as already accomplished, when there is no gap between their appearance and their realization. However, Baudrillard describes the constitutive illusion of the world also in terms of a disturbance of causes and effects. The event is not determined: it appears as an effect without a cause. Just as the world is illusory insofar as it is uncaused, unintelligible, the hyperreal does not have a cause either: its end functions as its cause. Baudrillard clarifies the difference between illusion and hyperreality/virtuality thus: "The great philosophical question used to be 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' Today, the real question is: 'Why is there nothing rather than something?'" (2). Although in both cases the cause as such no longer exists, the results are different. The illusory is that which exists though it could have just as well not existed (the possibility of disappearance, of nothingness) whereas the virtual is that which has always already existed and cannot be destroyed (the impossibility of disappearance). In the first case, nothing is given that could not be taken away at any moment; in the second case everything has been given from the beginning and, therefore, nothing remains to be given. It is essential, however, that there always be something to be revealed because the real exists only as long as it reveals itself as illusion.

8.

The virtual/hyperreal threatens to destroy illusion precisely through its perfection:

Virtuality tends toward the perfect illusion. But it isn't the same creative illusion as that of the image. It is a "recreating" illusion (as well as a recreational one), revivalistic, realistic, mimetic, hologrammatic. It abolishes the game of illusion by the perfection of the reproduction, in the virtual rendition of the real. (Baudrillard, "Objects" 9)

The Bergsonian virtual, on the other hand, does not threaten to extinguish the real or to become confused with it.

This virtual is also the double of the real but it does not drive the real toward an identification with itself that would attenuate it, collapse it into a perfect reproduction of itself. The virtual is the sign of difference that can always infiltrate the present moment or the real: not to question it but rather to enrich it. Bergson insists on a distinction between images and virtuality, arguing that images themselves are not virtual but are merely the actualization of virtuality and, thus, its degeneration. The virtual cannot be exhausted in an image: one can follow the self-actualization of the virtual in images but one can never reconstitute the virtual from images. For Baudrillard, however, the difference between virtuality and image has collapsed. There is no more virtuality: there are only virtual images, perfect copies of the real which have supplanted the real. The virtual is the annihilation of representation, illusion, distance, time, and memory. Baudrillard's virtual is the ultimate threat: absolute self-identity, absolute self-contemporaneity, absolute proximity. By contrast, the Bergsonian virtual expresses the fact that everything is larger than itself, that nothing coincides with itself because the past is preserved in everything without being actualized.

9.

That the postmodern notion of the virtual is inconceivable within Bergsonism becomes clear in Bergson's critique of the concept of absence: "The idea of absence or of nothingness...is...inseparably bound to that of suppression, real or eventual, and the idea of suppression is itself only an aspect of the idea of substitution" (Creative Mind 115). Absence--whether it is the absence of matter or the absence of consciousness--is an illusion for "the representation of the void is always a representation which is full and which resolves itself on analysis into two positive elements: the idea, distinct or confused, of a substitution, and the feeling, experienced or imagined, of a desire or a regret" (Creative Evolution 308). Baudrillard's virtual foregrounds the impossibility of determining whether an object still exists or has disappeared, leaving behind its virtual ghost. Yet Bergson would argue that even a virtual existence is still an existence insofar as it is thinkable: "Between thinking an object and thinking it existent, there is absolutely no difference" (Creative Evolution 310). The problem with declaring an object unreal or virtual is that we tend to focus on the exclusion of this object from the real when in fact we ought to focus on that which excludes--on the real.

10.

Baudrillard's description of virtuality stresses the poverty of the virtual, of which one can only say "it exists, I've met it" (Perfect 28). The world is virtual or poor because "referential substance is becoming increasingly rare" (29-30). One is reminded of Lyotard's description of the intrinsic poverty of the postmodern sublime. Like the poverty of the virtual, the poverty of the sublime lies in that it neither signifies nor is it the object of signification. Lyotard notes that the only response the sublime provokes is "Voilà!" or "Here I am!" However, it is difficult to differentiate between *poverty as excess* (something *is*, and that is already more than what was expected) and *sheer poverty* (the only thing we can say of something is that it merely exists). It is as if at any given moment the sublime object--the image that does not signify--could slide into the hyperreal/virtual. There are no criteria for distinguishing between the sublime as non-signification and the virtual/hyperreal as non-signification, between "good" self-referentiality (an image drawing attention to itself, thus underscoring its autonomy) and "bad" self-referentiality (the hyperreal drawing attention to its own reality and thus surpassing it, making itself dubious) i.e., there is no way to distinguish between event and simulacrum. In the first case, it is a question of affirming the autonomous existence of something other than the mind by eliminating ourselves as a privileged point of view. In the second case, just the opposite is at stake, the affirmation of the connection between mind and reality. Reality is virtual or hyperreal when it operates independently of us, when we cannot determine whether it is real or not. Whatever exists independently of us has withdrawn absolutely and we can no longer affect it. It develops according to its own laws: it has become "obscene."

2

11.

By "obscenity" Baudrillard means the annihilation of duration, of the slightest delay or lag in the existence of a thing, which makes it different from itself and thus impossible to decode or appropriate. What happens in virtual time is not an event, because it is instantly telegraphable, already containing its double. However, what is memory other than the instant replication or telegraphability of each moment? If, as Bergson argues in *Matter and Memory*, the photograph is already snapped in matter (perception is already "in" matter), couldn't we say that the photograph is always already snapped in conscious perception--that is, the memory-image is already inherent in the perception-image? Could the memory-image be simply the unreflective (latent) consciousness of the present moment, while the perception-image is the manifest, reflected consciousness of the moment? Could we conceive the relationship between image and memory-image, or between perception and memory, as that between reflective and unreflected consciousness? According to Bergson, all unreflected consciousnesses are preserved in duration and they are constantly enriching our mental life. However, for Baudrillard it is precisely the richness of memory that is dangerous, the fact that each moment already has its double--the (unreflected) memory-image that accompanies it rather than following it. This preservation of the past in the present threatens the present by making it instantly telegraphable. Unlike Bergson who credits memory as a sign of our transcendence, our difference from matter, Baudrillard holds memory responsible for the loss of transcendence. The difference in their views of memory accounts for their contrasting interpretations of the virtual. In Baudrillard's texts memory is associated with the de-realization of each instant, the collapse of distance, the turning of the present into a memory. As the memory-image supplants the present, the image becomes a repetition of itself and the past coincides with the present. What Baudrillard's works record is the obsolescence of time. Time is the indetermination of things, the possibility for a thing to appear and to vanish. The real exists only as a limit. Things are real only as long as they keep crossing the limit, constantly appearing and disappearing. Once disappearance--i.e., illusion--is no longer possible, the world is de-realized.

12.

Baudrillard's view of illusion remains ambivalent. On one hand, he considers it a resistance to total simulation. Illusion is the possibility of things to disappear, but also to appear: only that which is destructible or which has not appeared is capable of appearing at all. On the other hand, however, "illusion" signifies the possibility of passing beyond matter into the realm of the virtual. Perhaps Baudrillard's ambivalence toward illusion has something to do with his reconceptualization of the role of memory in perception. If Bergson is right that the duration of a given perception represents the work of habit-memory, and if that work is a variable, then it must be possible to influence or control it, thus controlling perception as well. Indeed, Bergson's belief that every perception is already a memory is intricately connected to Baudrillard's idea of the disappearance of the real as a result of the slowing down of the speed of light. Since the real depends on the speed of light, if the speed of light changes--if, for example, it drops very low--images will start reaching us with greater and greater delay that will be impossible to measure precisely because of the change in the speed of light, which was before the criterion for establishing the reality of a phenomenon. While Bergson considers memory a source of spirituality, Baudrillard is much more suspicious of the work of memory. For Bergson, habit-memory works to facilitate perception--that is, memory has a pragmatic significance; however, Baudrillard finds that the work of memory has gone beyond mere condensation: perceptions have become memories in the more dangerous sense of being predetermined (not spontaneously recollected). Perceptions have become neutralized, habitualized, but not in the harmless sense of habit as condensation for the purpose of action.

13.

If the virtual is the pathological involution of the real, the "fatal" is a resistance to the virtual. Toward the end of *Fatal*

Strategies Baudrillard introduces the idea of the fatal object as a way of thinking beyond metaphysics. "Radical" or "fatal" thought assumes the point of view of pure objectivity or what Baudrillard calls "the principle of Evil" (Fatal 182). The object is Evil or inhuman because of its resistance to interpretation, its secrecy or seductiveness. The inhuman is beyond causality and accident, even beyond negativity. In line with the ethical appeal of Lyotard's idea of the inhuman as a resistance to the tyranny of subjectivity, Baudrillard defines the fatal or the inhuman as an expression of the enigma of the world, its resistance to metaphysics:

Metaphysics...wants to make the world into the mirror of the subject....Metaphysics wants a world of forms distinct from their bodies, their shadows, their images: this is the principle of Good. But the object is always the fetish, the false...the factitious, the lure, everything that incarnates the abominable confusion of the thing with its magical and artificial double; and that no religion of transparency and the mirror will ever be able to resolve: that is the principle of Evil. (Fatal 184)

The "fatality" of things lies in their excessiveness, which can never be represented. Existence is always already a surplus. Only through the threat of annihilation, through the return of the annihilated, and thus ultimately through repetition, does a thing appear at all:³

From a certain moment on, these second comings comprise the very design of existence, where consequently nothing happens by chance; it's the first coming--which is not meaningful in itself and loses itself in the banal obscurity of living--that happens by chance. Only by redoubling can it make of itself a true event, attaining the character of a fatal happening....Predestination eliminates from life all that is only destined--all that, having happened only once, is only accidental, while what happens a second time becomes fatal; but it also gives to life the intensity of these secondary events, which have, as it were, the depth of a previous existence. (Fatal 187)

For Baudrillard repetition is not an external addition to some original substantial reality; rather, the real *is* only insofar as it is repeated. What happens only once is merely an accident, but if repeated it is an event. The real is produced, dissociated, repeated, represented, predestined, but none of these terms have their usual negative connotations. For example, "predestination" does not signify unfreedom or overdetermination; on the contrary, it underscores the irreducible singularity of the predestined object or event. More generally, representation--a key metaphysical concept--is no longer a "bad word." Representation--the second coming of something--makes it significant in itself, absolute, singular. Representation is not an act performed by the subject on the objective world but a law presiding over all beings. Baudrillard challenges metaphysics by enlarging the concept of representation well beyond the realm of subjectivity and turning it into an ontological law: everything (both subjects and objects) is a representation. Refusing to think representation in terms of agency, he implicitly posits an impersonal force that indiscriminately represents everything. From this point of view, the image is not a threat to the real but its ground.

14.

Such a positive interpretation of the image, however, is the exception rather than the rule in Baudrillard's work, which generally treats the image as an epitome of the simulacral or the hyperreal. The critique of obscenity in *The Perfect Crime* is based on a notion of the simulacrum as transparency, excessive visibility, overexposure, supersaturation of the real with itself, which leads to the production of the hyperreal. In *The Ecstasy of Communication* Baudrillard notes that the "simulacra have passed from the second order to the third, from the dialectic of alienation to the giddiness of transparency" (79). The notion of the simulacrum as a threat to the material illusion of the world is based on a still-existing belief in a subject and its discourse, while the idea of a third-order simulacrum constituting the illusion of the world, its infinite reversibility, is already developed from a point of view beyond that of the subject and its discourse, from the point of view of the object itself:

The object itself takes the initiative of reversibility, taking the initiative to seduce and lead astray. Another succession is determinant. It is no longer that of a symbolic order...but the purely arbitrary one of a rule of the game. The game of the world is the game of reversibility. It is no longer the desire of the subject, but the destiny of the object, which is at the center of the world. (Ecstasy 80)

While transparency is the absolute proximity of the object to the subject, the object rendered more visible than visible, fatality is the absolute inaccessibility of the object, which is "always already a *fait accompli*...In a way, it is transfinite. The object is inaccessible to the subject's knowledge since *there can be no knowledge of that which already has complete meaning*, and more than its meaning, and of which there can be no utopia, for it has already been created" (Ecstasy 88-89, emphasis added). The illusion of the world is preserved even in a simulacral world, though with a slight twist: originally, illusion is the possibility of meaning (things are meaningful insofar as they are different from themselves), but in a world where things have become themselves, illusion exists only as the absolute meaninglessness of everything, as indifference and inertia. Even after the disappearance of the subject there still remains a world, the world of pure events (70), in which the subject appears and disappears, following the rules of the game just like any other object (Forget 76). At this stage, there are only effects, no causes; things metamorphose into other things "without passing through a system of meaning" (78). Baudrillard refers to this process as "panic," "ecstasy," or "speed."

15.

Although in Forget Foucault Baudrillard calls "ecstasy" the liberation of effects from causes, the originary meaninglessness (or the objective illusion) of the world, in *The Ecstasy of Communication* he uses the term "ecstasy" as a synonym for "simulation," placing it on the side of the virtual/hyperreal. From Baudrillard's point of view, the postmodern sublime--as theorized in Lyotard's *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*--is an example of "ecstasy" in this second sense of the term. The sublime is a kind of simulation, because it draws attention to the sheer existence of something, "verifying to the point of giddiness the useless objectivity of things" (Ecstasy 31-32). The intentional poverty of the postmodern sublime might be compared to that of pornography, which desperately draws attention to "the useless objectivity of things" (32). The postmodern sublime is obscene because it tries not to signify or rather to signify only its own existence. But is not the reduction of a thing to its existence, its *quod*, the most extreme case of the miniaturization of things, the denial of the possibility of transcendence? The impossibility of true sublimity is due to the disappearance of transcendence into immanence, the eclipse of "seduction" by "production."

16.

Baudrillard's distinction between "seduction" and "production" in many respects parallels Sartre's distinction, in *Being and Nothingness*, between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness and, more generally, poses the question of the relationship of reflexivity or self-referentiality to authenticity. There are two types of non-reflective consciousness. First, there is a pre-reflective consciousness that is immediate and non-signifying from the very beginning. Second, although it sounds counterintuitive, a kind of non-reflective consciousness can be attained through an excess of self-reflexivity or self-referentiality. Even though the gesture of self-reference begins "in" a subject, greater degrees of self-reference eventually tear it away from the subject. Self-reference becomes an absolute, no longer an attribute: it no longer presupposes a consciousness in which it would be reflected. Insofar as self-reflexivity presupposes a self only to tear itself away from it, it is absolutely unreflexive, self-sufficient, operating according to its own laws rather than manipulated by a subject who is now external to it. When the description of an object replaces the object absolutely, when there is nothing left of the real object except the description referring to

itself, the object has become virtual (in Baudrillard's sense): the object is most real precisely when we can no longer tell whether it is still there or all we have is its description.

17.

This virtual object, this absolute self-reference, does not differ from itself. What Sartre missed when he articulated the distinction between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness is that reflective consciousness is capable of producing or at least simulating the pre-reflective or, to put it more broadly, that consciousness is capable of producing the real while hiding from itself this act of production. Baudrillard is well aware of this when he distinguishes subjective from objective illusion. Subjective illusion is the possibility to mistake the unreal for the real or the real for the unreal: "So long as an illusion is not recognized as an error, it has a value precisely equivalent to reality. But once the illusion has been recognized as such, it is no longer an illusion. It is, therefore, the very concept of illusion, and that concept alone, which is an illusion" (Perfect 51). Objective illusion, however, is the very nature of the physical world insofar as it is *not* what it is: it is never contemporaneous with itself and thus never contemporaneous with our perception of it.

18.

In Sartre's view, consciousness is the only de-realizing force; the world itself cannot be a source of illusion. Since the image is possible only when its material analogue is absent or non-existent, a material thing can never be transformed into an image. The image, warns Sartre, must not be confused with an aesthetic attitude: one cannot apprehend an existing object imaginatively. When one tries to contemplate real objects, the result is not an image but an intensification of the nauseating disgust that characterizes the consciousness of reality (Psychology 281). The object then appears as an *analogue* of itself; its materiality or the absence of anything transcendent in the object is underscored. An image, on the other hand, is beautiful precisely because it is not bound by its material analogue, because the analogue points to something transcendent that does not show itself. The doubling (analogue of an analogue) that occurs when one contemplates real objects is the de-realization of the real: the real appears too real and, namely because of that, as falling short of something essential or transcendent that would have made it real. Because it is real, it appears now as *only real*.

19.

Sartre's description of the degradation of things to their analogues anticipates Baudrillard's account of the de-realization of the world as a result of its increasing immediacy. In the same way that one cannot contemplate a real object because it is not sufficiently distant from us (contemplation requires distance), things that are too immediately available are no longer real (we cannot look at them because "looking" requires distance). But while Sartre refuses to call real objects "images," thus preserving the honorific connotations of the term "image," Baudrillard describes this degradation of looking--the obscene immediacy of the world--precisely as a proliferation of images. The image, Sartre argues, demands the absence of the material world; the image, Baudrillard objects, epitomizes the inescapable immediacy of the world.

20.

What makes Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal problematic is the possibility for confusing the hyperreal with the pure or the impersonal (the fatal) since both are defined as the collapse of the subject/object distinction. On one hand, the pure or the impersonal is the elimination of human perception as an external, privileged point of view. However, the hyperreal is also defined as the elimination of the subjective point of view, the suppression of the look,

the fact that the object of perception is always already there, already seen, thus preventing the act of seeing. Obscenity then has two possible and mutually exclusive meanings: it signifies either the absolute triumph of subjectivity (the world has been preempted by consciousness, objects are merely extensions or reflections of the subject) or the complete objectivization of the world (everything becomes objective because what is already seen is, for that very reason, no longer accessible; it cannot be manipulated or relativized by the subject but exists independently).

21.

The difficulty in distinguishing between the Absolute and the hyperreal, between real immediacy and manufactured immediacy, is also evidenced by Baudrillard's slippery distinction between "seduction" and "production." "Seduction" designates difference or otherness; thus, a sign that "fall[s] from seduction into interpretation" (Ecstasy 61) loses its otherness, its secret, is completely exposed and, once exposed, can be produced over and over again. The distinction between seduction and production (obscenity) is far from clear since both are a form of immediacy, the only difference between them being that the sign that seduces is *immediately undecipherable*, whereas the sign that has lost its seductive power is *immediately--always already--deciphered*. The confusion stems from the fact that both the immediately undecipherable and the immediately pre-deciphered resist us to an equal degree: both appear "unknown" and inaccessible to us. This point is usually missed, since we assume that overinterpretation and reflexivity are always connected to subjectivity, which has produced them and is now in control of them. The truth is that the products of such self-referential acts eventually separate themselves from the subject, assuming an independent existence. In fact, whatever the subject produces in its least self-reflective states remains bound to subjectivity, while the more self-reflexive production becomes, the greater its independence from subjectivity.

22.

As counterintuitive as this sounds, the absolute replacement of things with their descriptions does not make the world subjective. On the contrary, the absolute victory of artifice is the very definition of objectivity and the law of nature is precisely obscenity and self-identity. Nature is obscene since it is too obvious, glued to itself, with no mystery, no transcendence, absolutely transparent, more visible than visible. Only illusion can protect things from the obscenity of absolute resemblance to themselves: "There exists a terror, as well as a fascination, of the perpetual engendering of the same by the same. *This confusion is exactly that of nature, the natural confusion of things, and only artifice can put an end to it. Only artifice can dispel this lack of differentiation, this coupling of same to same*" (Fatal 51, emphasis added). Nature is always already a threat to the constitutive illusion of the world, which is preserved only through artifice. Baudrillard suggests that nature is obscene and that it takes the highest levels of artifice (self-referentiality, self-reflexivity) to reveal things as they are. Contrary to common sense, the more we manipulate things (through artifice), the more they become pure expressions rather than representations. Nature, insofar as it is the constant engendering of the same by the same--"the natural confusion of things"--is already virtual. Artifice is our only resistance against nature's inherent obscenity.

23.

The confusion over the real nature of self-reflexivity accounts for a number of inconsistencies in Baudrillard's texts. For instance, Baudrillard's privileging of "seduction" as the space of "surface and appearance," of the "giddiness of reversibility," over "production" as the space of meaning, depth, truth, is surprising in the general context of his critique of simulation and of the infinite proliferation of images, which are characterized precisely by superficiality, lack of referentiality i.e., by their *seductiveness*. If production is the space of meaning, signification, referentiality, and if, on the other hand, obscenity is the threat of losing referential material, why does Baudrillard assure us that

"THERE IS NEVER ANYTHING TO PRO-DUCE" (Ecstasy 64)? If there is nothing to produce, nothing to refer to, then the world is devoid of illusion from the very beginning. But this is not what Baudrillard has told us about illusion, which, he insisted earlier, is constitutive of the world and whose disappearance renders the world obscene. This is a fundamental incongruity in Baudrillard's thought. On one hand, the material illusion of the world makes meaning possible, while simulation seduces us into a world without illusion (hence meaning is "good" and simulation "bad"). On the other hand, the production of meaning is "bad" for trying to make everything signify, while simulation is "good" because it resists the mad urge to expose all things. In this second sense, seduction is actually identified with illusion: "Seduction is not the locus of desire...but of giddiness, of the eclipse, of appearance and disappearance, of the scintillation of being. It is an art of disappearing, whereas desire is always the desire for death" (Ecstasy 66).

24.

Accordingly, whereas earlier Baudrillard conceived the image as pure presence, as the death of illusion (32), now he identifies image with illusion, insofar as illusion is the ability of a thing to appear and disappear. The image is now credited as a source of illusion and thus of the real, which exists only as long as it is seduced or challenged by the image: "All these things [the truth, the real, God] only exist in the brief instant when one challenges them to exist; they exist...precisely through seduction, which opens the sublime abyss before them--the abyss into which they will plunge ceaselessly in a last glimmer of reality" (Ecstasy 69). The strategy of the image is absence, not the saturation of the real with itself. Now the image is completely on the side of the material illusion of the world rather than illustrating its degradation into an obscene proliferation of images. Indeed, now Baudrillard suggests that originally the entire world must have consisted of images insofar as things did not coincide with themselves but were infinitely substitutable and reversible (reversibility is the nature of the image, what distinguishes it from a "thing"). Almost imperceptibly, Baudrillard has transformed the image from the epitome of obscene self-identity into a manifestation of originary difference:

The principle of reversibility, which is also the one of magic and seduction, requires that all that has been produced must be destroyed....Seduction is party to this: it is that which deviates...that which makes the real return to the great game of simulacra, which makes things appear and disappear. It could almost be a sign of an *original* reversibility of things. One could maintain that before having been produced the world was seduced, that it exists...only by virtue of having been seduced. (Ecstasy 71-72)

Here the simulacrum is defined as the originary difference of things from themselves and from one another rather than as the obscene, total realization of the real, the annihilation of originary difference. The world turns out to be, originally, a simulacrum but in the good sense of "simulacrum"--continually dissimulating and dissembling rather than identifying, revealing, or verifying itself.

25.

In its "bad" sense, the simulacrum is the de-realization of the objective world, which has become predetermined, reduced to a mere representation of the subject. Yet this is a one-sided view of the matter because it rests on the assumption that the subject's de-realization of the world has left the subject itself unchanged. The fact that Baudrillard also uses the term "simulacral" to characterize the constitutive illusion of the world (Ecstasy 71-2) makes sense only if it is acknowledged that by dispersing itself, by making the world coextensive with itself, the subject too has changed: it has objectified itself. Baudrillard's discourse of the murder of the real is, in fact, a discourse of the subject and its new destiny. The de-realization of reality is the destruction of subjectivity but, as Baudrillard notes, the crime is never perfect. If the real is still preserved--as the trace of what has been murdered--the subject also survives its annihilation or dispersal; its destiny passes into the object. By subjectivizing or de-realizing the world, the

subject has revealed its ability to appear and disappear (to lose itself in multiplicity) which is, in fact, the strongest proof that there is still a subject: after all, Baudrillard himself defines the constitutive illusion of the world as the possibility of things to appear and disappear. By disappearing, by eliminating itself as a point of view, the subject has proven itself even stronger and more real than Baudrillard might have expected. Subjectivity includes its own annihilation, its pseudo-sacrificial self-reduction to an object.

26.

To sum up, the simulacrum should be understood not only as the de-realization of the world by the subject but, simultaneously, as the subject's self-objectification. The "event" is not the absolute annihilation of subjectivity, only its modification. The subject cannot disappear, just as the real cannot disappear. Despite the fragility of the real, it can never be completely negated because negation itself takes place on the foundation of the real. Even in the extreme case that all reality is negated, there will remain the memory of that annihilated reality. The paradox of the real is that it is never real enough--never self-sufficient, never a full positivity--but, at the same time, it is never annihilated and remains to haunt the unreal. The real derives its power from its own powerlessness. Something that never was in the first place remains: this is the real.

27.

Does the real exist only as its own end? Baudrillard considers the real as already sublated in the hyperreal. Although he suggests that the real, whose disappearance he laments, emerges only within a certain time frame as it depends on the difference between causes and effects, he remains fascinated precisely by events that do not belong to a subject and therefore cannot be reduced to causes. On one hand, the real depends on causality, on the lag between causes and effects, on time as a source of difference; on the other hand, the event, which Baudrillard credits with the power to restore the real (the constitutive illusion of the world) is the very elimination of time. The real is possible only if nothing is contemporaneous with itself or with other things but *the event*, which Baudrillard posits as an access to the real after it has been threatened by the hyperreal, is precisely the negation of time, the triumph of contemporaneity or simultaneity.

28.

Baudrillard cannot decide whether the event is on the "good" side of illusion or on the "bad" side of hyperreality. First, insofar as it collapses time and space, the event belongs to the hyperreal or the virtual: in the event, there is no delay, no distance, and both delay and distance are essential to thought. The event illustrates best the obscenity of the immediate and the contemporaneous. The event cannot be integrated in our mental life, because it has no beginning and end. And since it cannot appear and disappear--precisely because it has no beginning or end--it is also the end of illusion. However, occasionally Baudrillard uses the term "event" to designate the material illusion of the world. The world is illusion only to the extent that it is an *event*, a creation *ex nihilo*, which is also to say to the extent it is *unintelligible* (the assumption being that only that which can be inscribed in a cause-and-effect sequence--that is, that which has a history, is intelligible). The unintelligible cannot be annihilated because it can never be realized, never fulfilled. Things are illusory to the extent that they appear suddenly and without cause. The value of the event lies precisely in this absence of reason, in its absurdity:

This suddenness, this emergence from the void, this non-interiority of things to themselves, continues to affect the event of the world at the very heart of its historical unfolding...Nothing gives us greater pleasure than what emerges or disappears at a stroke, than emptiness succeeding plenitude. Illusion is made up of this magic portion, this accursed share which creates a kind of absolute surplus-value by subtraction of causes or by distortion of effects

and causes. (Perfect 58)

Yet, how are we to reconcile this glorification of the event as a surplus-value with Baudrillard's critique of the drive to exhaust all possibilities, a drive that is responsible for the annihilation of all "reserves of uselessness?" "These," Baudrillard continues, "are threatened with intensive exploitation. Insignificance is under threat from an excess of meaning. Banality is threatened with its hour of glory. The supply of floating signifiers has fallen to dangerous levels" (49). Supposedly, the event's significance derives from its poverty, and its effect of suddenness from its non-anteriority, from a simple *that*. But is there anything more banal than the fact that something exists? Isn't the banality of the *quod* now threatened "with its hour of glory"? Is not the event part of the dangerous drive to "greater visibility, transparency and hypercoincidence" (62)? Does not the event announce the end of surpassing insofar as the event declares itself to be a transcendence but a transcendence that is immanent to things or works of art, their very existence or facticity having become a transcendence? Is transcendence in immanence still a transcendence or is it rather an artificial transcendence similar to that achieved by Andy Warhol's images, which Baudrillard gives as an example of "the elevation of the image to pure figuration, without the least transfiguration" (76)? If the event as a sublime experience attains the absolute, the distinction between real and ideal, between facticity and transcendence disappears, making negation impossible. From Baudrillard's point of view the postmodern sublime experience is an excess of being as it partakes of the obsession with immediacy he condemns. In the realm of the hyperreal every event has become as inconsequential as a catastrophe:

Beyond this point there are only inconsequential events (and inconsequential theories) precisely because they absorb their sense into themselves. They reflect nothing, presage nothing. Beyond this point there are only catastrophes. Perfect is the event or language which assumes its own mode of disappearance, knows how to stage it, and thus reaches the maximal energy of appearances....The event without consequence--like Musil's man without qualities, the body without organs, or time without memory. (Fatal 17)

In the event origin and end coincide. The event remains equally indifferent to every interpretation because none ever makes it intelligible. Lyotard interprets the event's meaninglessness as liberating, stressing not its indifference to various interpretations but rather the fact that it refuses to be explained away (by being made intelligible). Far more reluctant to give up meaning, Baudrillard laments the inconsequentiality of the event. He compares its unsettling immediacy to the sense of instantaneity characteristic of a schizophrenic's experience:

The schizo is deprived of all scene, open to all in spite of himself, and in the greatest confusion....What characterizes him is less his light-years distance from the real, a radical break, than absolute proximity, the total instantaneousness of things, defenseless, with no retreat; end of interiority and intimacy, overexposure and transparency of the world that traverses him without his being able to interpose any barrier. For he can no longer produce the limits of his own being, and reflect himself; he is only an absorbent screen... (Fatal 69-70)

Like an object or an image in pure perception, the schizophrenic subject is open on all sides to all things: no discrimination, no choice, no discreteness, no conscious perception to delimit or isolate a part of the world of images. Clearly, Baudrillard would like the subject to preserve its boundaries, not to dissolve in the objectivity of the world as the schizo does, but at the same time he celebrates what he calls "the revenge of the crystal," which is supposed to overthrow the tyranny of subjectivity. This description of the schizophrenic subject corresponds very closely to Deleuze's account of Bergsonian pure perception or, in Deleuze's own thought, to the idea of a "crystalline regime of images" in which images exist only for one another without varying for a human consciousness. In Bergsonian pure perception, images are neutral to one another: they do not act on one another, do not appear to one another but merely reflect one another. Similarly, Deleuze's "time-image" or "crystal-image" is a schizo-image insofar as it does not reflect a privileged point of view but is dispersed amongst multiple points of views across the

aggregate of images. Both the schizo subject and the pure object (the "crystal") are characterized by their anonymity: they are "whatever-subjects" or "whatever-objects."

29.

It must be pointed out, however, that what Deleuze, in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, calls "hallucinatory perception" has nothing to do with the schizo subject's peculiar perception. Rather, it is natural, ordinary perception that Deleuze designates "hallucinatory." Starting from the premise that consciousness is "a matter of threshold" (Fold 88), Deleuze posits that conscious perception--the perception of qualities--takes place when the "differential relations among...presently infinitely small [perceptions]...are drawn into clarity" (90). The filtering of an infinite number of inconspicuous perceptions results in the extraction of the remarkable or the clear (the finite) from the obscurity of the infinite. This discrimination or selection, however, is never simply a reaction to an external excitation: "*Every perception is hallucinatory because perception has no object. Conscious perception has no object and does not even refer to a physical mechanism of excitation that could explain it from without: it refers only to the exclusively physical mechanism of differential relations among unconscious perceptions that are comprising it within the monad*" (93). The idea of hallucinatory perception seems to pose Baudrillard's problem of the impossibility of distinguishing reality from simulacra. Nevertheless, an important distinction should be made between Baudrillard's notion of the virtual as a perception without object, a perception that reifies the real into the simulacral, on one hand, and Deleuze's hallucinatory perception, which affirms the indetermination of the subject by material reality, on the other hand. The deep-seated nostalgia for the real that permeates Baudrillard's description of the virtual or the obscene is completely foreign to Deleuze's account of the free monad, whose perceptions are not grounded in the objective world. The "resemblance" posited between what is commonly called "the object of perception," on one hand, and the perceived, on the other hand, is key to understanding this self-sufficiency of the perceived:

In the first place, Leibniz is not stating that perception resembles an object, but that it evokes a vibration gathered by a receptive organ: pain does not represent the needle...but the thousands of minute movements or throbs that irradiate in the flesh....Here the relation of resemblance is like a "projection": pain or color are projected on the vibratory plane of matter. (95)

Perception is comprised of "affective qualities" or "natural signs" (96), which do not represent a corresponding object but instead resemble the vibrations produced in matter. Any kind of "affective quality," such as pain for example, is taken not as representing or implying an object in the world but as resembling the vibrations produced in the material body: "Pain does not represent the pin in extension, but resembles molecular movements that it produces in matter" (96).

30.

Deleuze's seemingly backward way of thinking is made possible by his reversal of the understanding of resemblance whereby "resemblance is equated with what resembles, not with what is resembled" (96). The conclusion Deleuze does not himself draw, but which follows logically from his argument, is that perception is always already virtual--in the sense that it has no object--because the fact "that the perceived resembles matter means that matter is necessarily produced in conformity with this relation, and not that this relation conforms to a preexisting model" (96). Deleuzian perception is virtual or hallucinatory in two complementary senses: first, the perceived resembles the vibrations projected in the material body and, second, these vibrations resemble an object in the world. This is how Deleuze imagines the relationship of the monad to the world:

(1) clear-obscure perception manifests a relation of resemblance with a material receptor that receives vibrations; (2)

such receptors are called organs or organic bodies, and as bodies they constitute the vibrations that they receive to infinity; (3) the physical mechanism of bodies (fluxion) is not identical to the psychic mechanism of perception (differentials) but the latter resembles the former. (Fold 98)

To simplify things: the material world resembles my material body, and my material body resembles the soul. Although "the monad draws all perceptive traces from itself" (99), it does not perceive without having a body that resembles what it perceives. Deleuze does not deny the existence of the material world; he only insists that the world does not determine my body, just as my body does not determine the perceived (subjectivity).⁴

31.

In his Introduction to Deleuze's *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, Constantin Boundas rightfully notes that Deleuze's "struggles for subjectivity" (4) and his critique of phenomenology are always "marked by the tension created by a radical critique of interiority and a simultaneous quest for an inside deeper than any internal world" (11). This tension results in the elaboration of "a line of subjectivity" and a "line of objectivity" in Bergsonism. The line of subjectivity is that of memory "which puts us at once into the mind," while the line of objectivity is that of perception "which puts us at once into matter" (Bergsonism 26). These two "lines" differ in kind. However, Deleuze later posits that all differences in kind fall on the side of subjectivity or memory, while all differences in degree fall on the side of perception or matter. Since the difference between perception/matter and memory/mind is a difference in kind, it falls on the side of subjectivity. Therefore, the line of objectivity (matter, perception) is part of the line of subjectivity or, put differently, the difference between object and subject is subjective: in fact, the subject is nothing else but this difference.

32.

The purpose of *The Fold* is to reconstruct the line of subjectivity *before* the constitution of a subject. Deleuze attempts to do this by redefining point of view in terms of the line of subjectivity rather than identifying it with the subject. The tension of which Boundas speaks accounts for the co-existence of two mutually irreconcilable tendencies in Deleuze's understanding of "perception in the folds": on one hand, the reconceived notion of point of view (the subject is not a privileged, essentializing point of view on the object; the object itself is undergoing a continuous variation) and, on the other hand, the idea of the perceived as absolutely enclosed in the monad, "the pleats of matter" resembling "the folds of the soul." Deleuze situates himself in a line of philosophers--Nietzsche, Whitehead, William and Henry James--whose perspectivism he hastens to distinguish from the common-sense notion of relativism: "It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject" (Fold 20). Indeed, William James's idea of "pure experience" already anticipates Deleuze's reconceptualization of point of view:

Experience, I believe, has no...inner duplicity; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition. . . . Just so, I maintain, does a given undivided portion of experience [whether perceptual or conceptual], taken in one context of associates, play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of "consciousness"; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective "content." In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing, And since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective both at once. (James 7)

Since consciousness "connotes a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being" (14), pure experience is "only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet.

33.

Deleuze calls the new object "objectile," arguing that "the new status of the object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mold--in other words, to a relation of form-matter--but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form....The object here is manneristic, not essentializing: it becomes an event" (Fold 19). The subject, on the other hand, is never given *before* its point of view:

Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pre-given or defined subject; to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or rather what remains in the point of view....Just as an object becomes objectile, the subject becomes a superject. A needed relation exists between variation and point of view: not simply because of the variety of points of view...but in the first place because every point of view is a point of view on variation. The point of view is not varied with the subject, at least in the first instance; it is, to the contrary, the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation (metamorphosis).... (19-20)

Deleuze attempts to do away with the notion of point of view as belonging to or being embodied in a subject with respect to an object and thereby determining or immobilizing the object. His strategy is to conceive both the object and the subject as going through a continuous variation so that the variation of the object is as much determining the point of view as the point of view is determining the object.

34.

What remains implicit in this new conception of the subject/object relationship is, first, that the object's variation is a variation from itself (it does not vary for a subject) and, second, that point of view or subjectivity can only be a point *within* the temporal modulation of the object, since the object is not "essentializing." Therefore, *point of view or subjectivity is only a point in the continuous variation of matter*. This conception of subjectivity combines Deleuze's idea of "a practical subject" (Empiricism 104) with Bergson's theory of perception as a process of selection and condensation of the aggregate of images that constitutes the material world. Deleuze's debt to Bergson becomes clear in the example he gives of a point of view on variation which excludes any notion of a privileged center or configuration: "The most famous example is that of conic sections, where the point of the cone is the point of view to which the circle, the ellipse, the parabola, and the hyperbola are related as so many variants that follow the incline of the section that is planned" (Fold 20-21). The point of view from the summit of the cone provides a point of view on a series of variations, instead of a separate point of view corresponding to each figure. Similarly, to illustrate the "architecture" of the human mind in *Matter and Memory* Bergson chooses precisely a cone turned upside down so that the point of the cone cuts into the plane of perception (the present) while the bottom of the cone recedes in the infinite world of pure memory (the virtual).

35.

Like Baudrillard's philosophy of "the fatal object," Deleuze's redefinition of the relationship between subject and point of view denies the subject its status of a master of representation. Instead, it is the object that imposes on the subject its own random form and discontinuity. Neither Deleuze nor Baudrillard seem to acknowledge the fact that the call to stop signifying, to return to pure perception, to let things express themselves is meaningful only from the point of view of the subject's destiny. Even if there was "an inhuman"--a pure object--we can only talk of it in human terms: "master," "power," "representation," even "inhuman." The inhuman is not the end or "death" of the subject but simply another point of view from which the subject can look at itself: becoming-object, becoming-animal, or

becoming-inhuman are all human projects. Nothing can eliminate subjectivity underneath these anti-subjective projects, whether the subject disperses itself in a multiplicity of points of view for noble, ethical reasons or just out of boredom. The power of representation is absolute: if the subject has this power when it represents the world to itself (from its privileged, external point of view), it wields the same power when it renounces its privileged position. Power is not to be confused with truthfulness: the subject's power as a master of signification does not consist in the truthfulness of its representation; conversely, the inhuman point of view cannot be "more" truthful or objective. The notorious "death of the subject" that has been proclaimed on more than one occasion now is nothing more than an outburst of melodrama in a philosophical trend--postmodernism--predisposed to pseudo-apocalyptic generalizations.

36.

Baudrillard welcomes what he believes to be the end of the order of representation, the beginning of a pre-human or non-human reality:

All metaphysics is in effect swept away by this reversal of situation where the subject is no longer at the origin of the process, and no longer anything but the agent, or the operator, of the objective irony of the world. The subject no longer provides the representation of the world (I will be your mirror!) It is the object that refracts the subjects... ("Objects" 14)

Nevertheless, he cannot help but scorn "pure objects" that have been stripped of any secret or illusion (or of any relation to subjectivity), elevated to "pure figuration, without the least transfiguration [by a subject]. No transcendence any more, but a potentialization of the sign, which, losing all natural signification, shines in the void with all its artificial splendour...an image...without quality, a presence without desire" (16). In the end, Baudrillard is not so much concerned with getting rid of the subject as he is with recovering ways in which the world can still *affect* the subject. The subject must be sacrificed not because the objective world has to avenge itself but because it is necessary to assure ourselves that the subject is still alive. The subject can testify to its existence, to its difference from inanimate things, only by sacrificing itself and thus proving that it is still capable of being affected.⁵ In the end, it is not the object but the subject that is the endangered species in Baudrillard's philosophy.

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Notes

1. It would be interesting to read Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum as the precession of images over things against Einstein's theory of relativity, to inquire to what extent the phenomenon of the simulacrum (the decline of representation) is due to certain identifiable physical laws, such as the speed of light, for instance. In his novel *Einstein's Dreams*, Alan Lightman imagines the different conceptions of time Einstein might have come up with before he formulated the theory of relativity. See also Mullarkey, 112-17, for an illuminating comparison between Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity and Bergson's theory of time. Mullarkey distinguishes between Einstein's partial relativism (in Einstein's theory the idea of a privileged frame of reference is preserved despite the acknowledgement of other frames of reference) and Bergson's "full-relativism" (117), in which all frames of reference--or as Deleuze will later say, all points-of-view-whatever--are equally valid.

2. Baudrillard is not particularly consistent in his writings on the notion of the virtual, to which he attributes both a destructive and preserving potential. The virtual stands either for total realization or for a strategy of escape from the threat of total realization; it has either already happened or it is a premonition, a warning against the danger of hyperreality.

3. Compare this notion that of repetition in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*. According to Kierkegaard, repetition has been wrongly called mediation, whereas in fact it is the liberation of the particular from its subsumption under the universal. Opposing the Greeks' idea that all knowledge is recollection (what is has been), Kierkegaard claims that being is not immediate or given; rather, things come into existence only through repetition--only through repetition can an event detach itself from the original confusion of things. Repetition is impossible when one seeks it consciously: then it inevitably degenerates into recollection. Recollection inscribes events; repetition is the coming of things into being.

4. It is another question whether the notion of resemblance upon which Deleuze's whole argument rests is sufficient to overcome determinism. After all, resemblance is not part of the given but a kind of *relation* that becomes possible only with the transition from mind (associations) to subject (differential relations), as Deleuze argues in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. Resemblance does not ground the relation of subject to the world but is simply a relation the subject establishes between its idea of itself and its idea of the world. In fact, in his essay on Hume Deleuze acknowledges that relations are never given but are only established by a subject. Having distinguished between "mind" and "subject"--the former is merely a collection of discernible perceptions while the latter spontaneously establishes differential relations between them--Deleuze notes that "the mind is not the representation of nature either" (88). The positing of a relation with nature--a *relation of resemblance*--is possible only after the mind has been transformed into a subject, because "the question of a determinable relation with nature has its own conditions: it is not obvious, it is not given, and it can only be posited by a subject questioning the value of the system of his judgments..." (88). Therefore, inasmuch as "relations are external to ideas" (98), resemblance remains a subjective reconciliation of the subject with the world.

5. See Readings, 97-101, for a discussion of the event as "affect"--that which cannot be conceptualized or signified.

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