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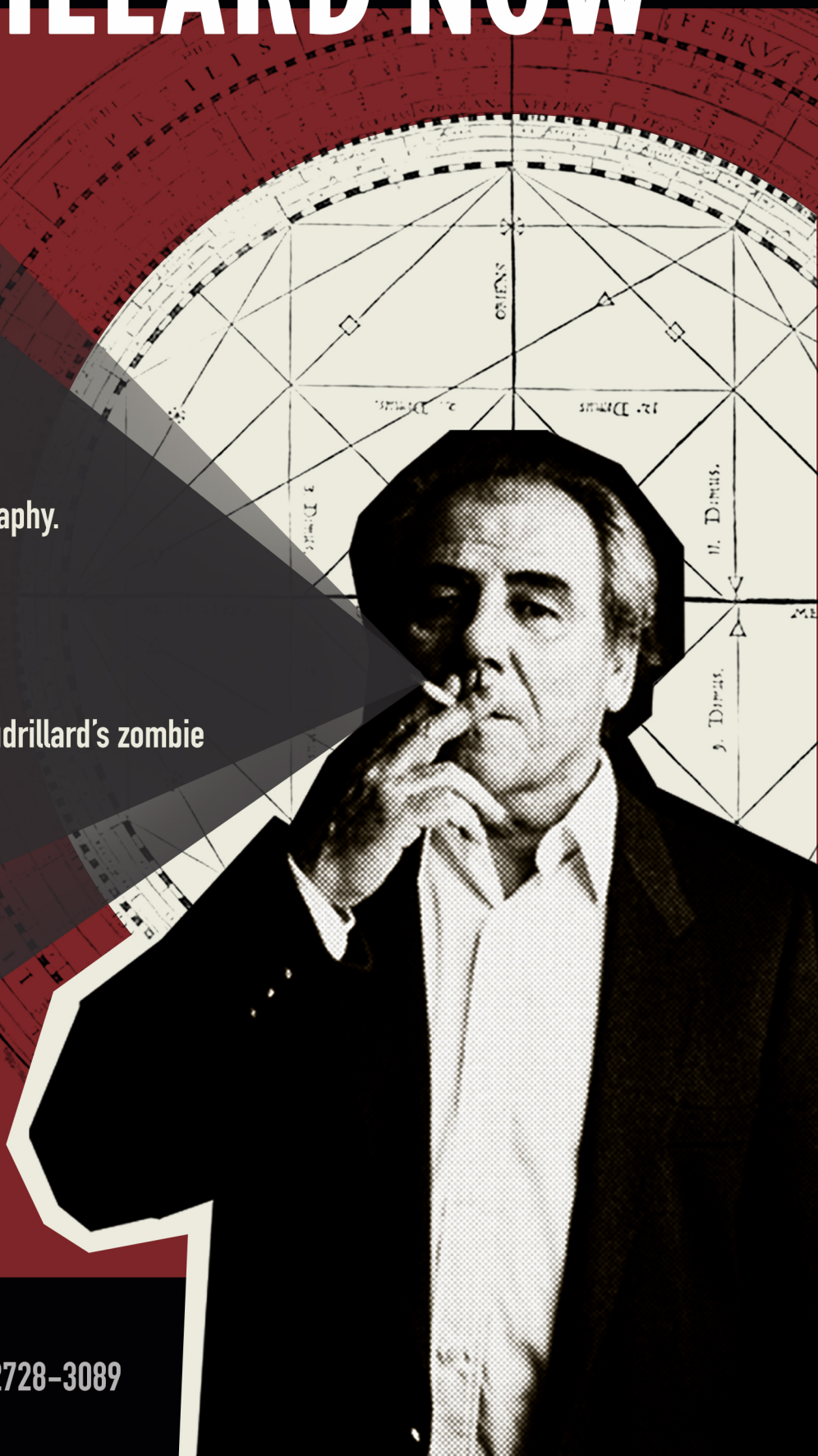

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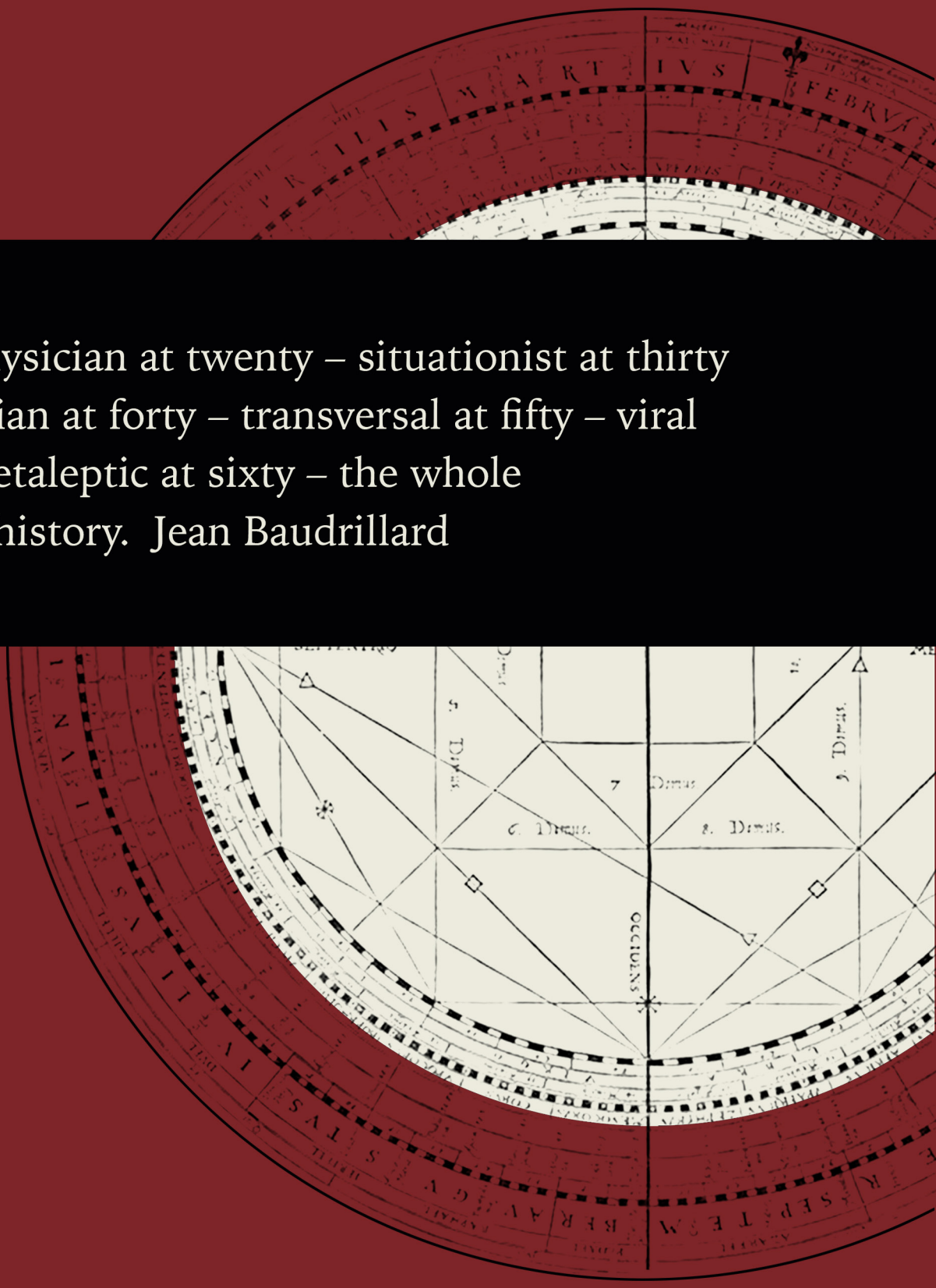

”Pataphysician at twenty – situationist at thirty – utopian at forty – transversal at fifty – viral and metaleptic at sixty – the whole of my history. Jean Baudrillard

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Bernardo Alexander Attias
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Baudrillard Now: But when, now? The title and timing of this charter issue in the Summer of 2020 calls out for comment. Not because the question lacks answers — if anything, there are today too many potential responses. In fact my phrasing of this question is inspired by the question asked by another continental philosopher and social theorist at a likewise deeply cathected global moment.[1] During Spring (and especially May) 1968, significant events in disparate locations around the world — most obviously Paris, but also Saigon, Chicago, Prague, Rome, Baltimore, Belgrade, Beijing, Biafra, and Port-au-Prince — confronted intellectuals and activists with the sudden realization that the social theory they had inherited was largely inadequate to the worlds they found themselves suddenly thrust into. The moment was both fraught with danger and portent with possibility; for some, revolution seemed closer and more realistic than ever before; for others, established power dropped its mask to reveal the naked face of a menacing brutality. That, of course, was the milieu from which Jean Baudrillard emerged at Nanterre, among a handful of scholars who arguably set out to rebuild and reimagine social theory to better engage the world they found themselves in.

I believe that we find ourselves at a similarly torrid historical juncture. Around the world we face uprisings, violences, social upheavals, human and natural cataclysms that we barely begin to understand before the next crisis emerges. While the underlying conditions giving rise to these crises are hardly new — racism, climate change, terrorism, neoliberalism, viral pandemic, and the failure of democratic institutions worldwide — they have emerged in manners uniquely peculiar to the current moment. The role of new media formations in the materialization of these crises, the conditions of "global immanence" within which we experience them,[2] and the sense of doom that hangs in the air around them like droplets of breath in a bar conversation, invisible but always already potentially deadly, suggests to scholars that we may be running out of time to once again develop theoretical tools to make sense of it all.

Simultaneously, and paradoxically, there is an almost paralyzing sense of banality inhabiting this moment, captured beautifully in a cartoon — frequently shared on social media — that features a dog sitting at a table nonchalantly enjoying a cup of coffee while the house burns around him. Text on the photo typically reads "This is fine." In many ways this is a spectacularly Baudrillardian moment: dark and surreal, catastrophic and banal, deadly and ridiculous. Of course, Baudrillard is not here to guide us through these times, but we have seen his thinking return not only in recent scholarship but perhaps more poignantly in popular culture.

It seems eminently appropriate that this first issue is pointedly situated in this historical moment. The topic is Baudrillard now, yet these pieces span 20 years: it is telling that besides the new essays that appear here for the first time, the others date back to precisely two dates: 2007, when Baudrillard passed away, and 2000, a year that Baudrillard 15 years earlier, with characteristic finality, famously announced would not take place at all.[3]

Truls Lie introduces his 2000 interview with Baudrillard with a summary of Baudrillard's meditations on mediation and war: we "allow the TV screen to envelop us in a closed circuit. In this hyper-reality we stop experiencing with our bodies and essentially become symbol processors for these media machines." The interview takes us directly into the way Baudrillard conceives his own work not just philosophically but rhetorically. I have always found Baudrillard's interviews useful correctives against those who would willfully misinterpret Baudrillard as some kind of solipsist or sophist, and

1 "But who, we?" asked Jacques Derrida at a philosophical conference in May 1968. His comments were published in "The Ends of Man," trans. Edouard Morot-Sir, et al., Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 30:1 (September 1969): 31-57.

2 Susan Buck-Morss, Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left (London: Verso, 2003): 34.

3 Jean Baudrillard, "L'an 2000 ne passera pas" Traverses, 33/34, 1985, pp. 8-16. Translated as "The Year 2000 Has Already Happened" by Nai-Fei Ding and Kuan-Hsing Chen in Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, eds., Body Invaders: Panic Sex In America (NY: St. Martin's, 1987) 35-44. The "year 2000," of course, had circulated for years in popular culture as a sign not only of anxiety about the future but of the end of the world.

indeed he warns careless readers that his writing is filled with purposeful hyperbole as a kind of "thought experiment." What goes deeper here is the acknowledgement and explanation of his writing as rhetorically engaged in a way that performs rather than explains in any linear fashion a specific set of ideas about the world. Baudrillard's engagement with death in the interview (which took place in 2000 but was published in 2007 to mark the occasion of his death) is particularly significant as he reveals his understanding even of death itself as performative, a disappearance from the world whose timing and form can themselves be read as artistic choices.

Douglas Kellner's essay in this collection introduces readers to some of Baudrillard's thinking on the role of art in society, with a focus on his latest work. Reading Kellner can be quite maddening for Baudrillard fans not simply because he is often antagonistic to Baudrillard's arguments but because he is also one of the few such critics who takes the time to get those arguments right. In fact, I often direct students to his 1989 textbook less for Kellner's own position and more for what Jacques Derrida would have called his "doubling commentary"—the patient expository restatement of an author's main points that must precede any rigorous critical work on the author.[4] In particular Kellner is quite aware of the role of what I above called purposeful hyperbole.

In Kellner's essay here, first presented at a conference in 2007, Kellner calls attention to this hyperbole specifically in Baudrillard's commentaries on the role of art in the modern world. Kellner argues that Baudrillard vacillates between a kind of "deeply reactionary" art-is-dead approach at one extreme and a "highly radical" critique of contemporary art. Kellner counterposes Herbert Marcuse's aesthetic theory to Baudrillard's, concluding that "if Baudrillard is right, then there is no aesthetic dimension today in Marcuse's sense and no radical and emancipatory potential in art." Kellner offers an imagined interlocution between Baudrillard and Marcuse finding paradoxically that they would likely agree about most modern artistic production itself while disagreeing fundamentally on how to approach its theoretical role. Kellner acknowledges that the distance between them might be more stylistic than substantive, and finds neither "adequate" as an approach to modern art and popular culture.

Peter Weibel's essay, first published twenty years ago, introduces us to Baudrillard the photographer in the context of Baudrillard the theoretician. As Weibel notes, Baudrillard explicitly photographed objects he chose not to write about, but he nevertheless made a point of photographing objects, and his career was devoted in so many ways to a theory of the object. His dissertation project was, indeed, a system of objects, and his analysis of that system was infused with the expansive radicality of the moment (1968), a radicality perhaps tamed only by the intellectual apparatus from whence his writing emerged (an apparatus framed most generally by the convergence in France of phenomenology and anthropology as well as psychoanalysis and Marxism, but far more specifically in Baudrillard's case with a committee that was already pointedly steeped in systemic thinking about consumer objects: Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes, and Pierre Bourdieu).

Weibel considers Baudrillard's photographs of objects through his philosophical thinking about objects in order to interpret both as part of a common project. As in his published philosophical work, Baudrillard's photography inverts the hierarchy of subject and object on which the framework of western metaphysics depends. When considering photography as apparatus, we see not only the subject (photographer) choosing, framing, and presenting their object, but also the ways in which "the object succeeds in putting its stamp on the subject." As we revisit Baudrillard's work today, Weibel's essay helps ground our understanding of this work in a larger context. The camera, like the pencil or keyboard, is a tool through which the artist and writer expresses themselves. But like all technologies, these tools are not innocent: critics going back to Socrates have warned of the danger that even as humans use technologies, those technologies also use us. Weibel's exploration of Baudrillard's work behind the camera may help us reconsider Baudrillard's published writing in terms yet to be unpacked.

Readers of this collection will likely take particular interest in Brett Nicholls' resurrection of "Baudrillard's corpse" through his foray into "zombie theory." Nicholls uses the 2014 zombie film Wyrmwood to pursue Baudrillard's ideas about ecology and general economy in Transparency of Evil (1993). The figure of the zombie (on a bicycle of all things) appears in Baudrillard's essay on energy as an illustration of the unproductive expenditure that characterizes Georges Bataille's "general economy." While most zombie films are characterized by post-apocalyptic conditions of scarcity, particularly of energy, Wyrmwood seems to build on the insights of early 20th century anthropologists who unearthed a political economy that operated not on principles of scarcity

4 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967, 1976): 159. Derrida was, of course, outlining deconstructive reading specifically rather than critical work generally, but the concept is the same.

but on conditions of abundance. Under such conditions the "total social fact" is not the money commodity (per Marx) but instead the gift, within which can be found the entire social relation.[5]

What is important from this perspective is less the manner in which a society distributes scarce resources but more the ways in which it disposes of its excess. Marcel Mauss famously found two categories of prestation, or gift-giving: the kula, in which the society recuperates such waste productively through exchange, and the potlatch, in which it instead destroys this waste unproductively, bringing the notion of productive political economy itself to crisis.[6] For Nicholls the zombie film illustrates the ways in which productive societies recuperate this waste, but also how the waste may return "in the form of revenge."

Nicholls also cites Baudrillard's example of New York City, which draws "abnormal energy" from its own reputation for excess, and the city's waste becomes "essential for the system to function." I'm reminded of the story of the city's "poop train," a literal manifestation of this recuperation of waste in economic terms: the train carried human waste from New York's waste treatment plants to farms in the southern and midwestern states so that it could be useful to the agriculture industry.[7]This return of waste as revenge was miasmically made manifest when a town in Alabama refused a trainload of waste. The train itself, which had almost reached its destination, sat waiting on the tracks for months while legal proceedings ensued, enveloping the town with an "unbearable stench."[8]

For Nicholls, the zombie characterizes Baudrillard's view of systemic catastrophe when the accursed share escapes its recuperation into productivity. As with the poop train, catastrophe may be brief, but for a moment it brings the system to crisis: this was the moment of Bataille's notorious laughter.[9]

But beyond the deadly creatures who act with murderous collective agency in this genre of film, there is a more mundane manifestation of the "zombie" trope in the colloquialism that characterizes the consumer of mass media as figuratively catatonic. Indeed, when zombies are specifically named in Baudrillard's work, they appear as "lobotomized" rather than as active carriers of catastrophe and implosion.[10] In the networked society, where everyone is a content creator as well as consumer, Baudrillard's zombies represent less the appearance of an undead species of subhuman brain-eaters, and more the disappearance of the human entirely into a node in the network. He wrote in 2001, for example, of a couple who "continuously projects its conjugal life in real time over the Internet… Soon there will only be auto-communicating zombies that only have the umbilical connection of image-feedback — electronic avatars of defunct shadows that wander beyond Styx and death, each for itself and spending its time perpetually telling its story."[11]

From death and disappearance we move to terror and pandemic. Andrew McLaverty-Robinson's exploration of counterinsurgency as suicide finds in contemporary international events a nuanced illustration of Baudrillard's theories of terrorism as catastrophic reversal. Following Baudrillard, McLaverty-Robinson suggests a general theory of terrorism that reaches beyond left/right and Islamist/Eurosupremacist narratives to understand terrorism and related activities as emerging out of "a formation of desire generated by the context of cybernetic meaninglessness"—the very context Baudrillard attempted to capture in the figure of the "auto-communicating zombie."

While the psychoanalytic grounding for this claim in the work of Klaus Theweleit might be controversial in recent counterterrorism studies, it's actually quite consistent with more sociological scholarship over the past several decades that has approached religious and political violence from a comparative perspective.[12] But even there the approach remains at the margins, while dominant scholarly narratives tend to follow the counterinsurgency model unpacked by McLaverty-Robinson, treating violence as mere consequence of faulty information processing at specific network nodes

5 Marcel Mauss, The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies (1925; London: Cohen & West, 1966). An outstanding account of Mauss' influence on Baudrillard through Bataille is Julian Pefanis' Heterology and the Postmodern: Bataille, Baudrillard, and Lyotard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), from which some of these insights are drawn.

6 In Pefanis' explanation, the structuralist reading of the gift economy privileges the kula, and can be found in such examples as Lévi-Strauss' traffic in women, which articulates the productive activity of the incest taboo, while a poststructuralist reading that privileges the potlatch, a completely unproductive expenditure that by its very nature cannot be returned in kind. It is this latter reading that emerges in Bataille.

7 See Michael Specter, "Ultimate Alchemy: Sludge to Gold; Big New York Export May Make Desert, and Budget, Bloom," New York Times (25 January 1993): B1; and Radiolab, "Poop Train" WNYC (24 September 2013): https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/poop-train.

8 Jeff Martin, " 'Poop train' finally empty; sludge gone: Alabama mayor," Associated Press (19 April 2018).

9 See Georges Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," trans. Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr., Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939 (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985): 116-129; see also Georges Bataille, "Un-Knowing: Laughter and Tears," trans. Annette Michelson, October 36 (Spring 1986): 89-102.

10 See Baudrillard, "The Violence of Images, Violence against the Image," trans. Paul Foss, ArtUS 23 (Summer 2008): 39. See also Cool Memories II: 1987-1990, trans. Chris Turner (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996): 66.

11 Baudrillard, "Telemorphosis," (2001) trans. Ames Hodges, in Sylvère Lotringer, ed., The Conspiracy of Art (New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2005): 191.

12 A key text would be Mark Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, Fourth Edition (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2017). Of course, as McLaverty-Robinson notes, questioning the role of the unconscious in such factors tends to be a recent development that follows a pattern Freud might have recognized as denegation.

that must be disrupted or devivified. Underlying this faulty approach is a denial that this processing "take[s] place at the level of symbolic exchange."

For Baudrillard, symbolic exchange value plays the role in the modern political economy of the sign that use-value played in Marx's political economy. Under conditions of symbolic exchange, the exchange of the object mediates and facilitates a relationship between people. Baudrillard criticizes modern society for having usurped symbolic exchange for sign exchange, wherein relations among people appear as relations among signs. Baudrillard's social theory places the "sign" in the place that Marx put the "commodity," that Mauss put the "gift," and that Debord put the "spectacle"—a total social fact that contains within it the entire social relation that is constitutive of the system itself. Just as in Marx's notorious table-dancing passage the commodity moves from object to subject (and "evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas"),[13] Baudrillard's sign becomes the agent while human symbolic interaction becomes secondary to the interaction between signs, whose relations determine social hierarchies.

McLaverty-Robinson shows that the founding error of counterinsurgency scholarship is its refusal to acknowledge the central role of symbolic exchange in the rise of terroristic violence; terrorism is an attempt to intensify "the logic of devivification … to the point of implosion." The piece is a remarkable demonstration of the way in which Baudrillard's theoretical constructs may help illuminate human attempts to grapple with real world problems, but I think it also illustrates how theory is inadequate when it fails to emerge from or at least respond directly to those attempts. Readers may struggle, as I did, with several of the specific claims, such as his conclusions regarding "ecstatic media events," particularly when his comments seem out of touch both with the events themselves as well as with Baudrillard's own discussion of them. The idea that audience paralysis while "glued to their screens" undermines the reproduction of the system of signs will certainly have the reader revisiting, for example, the role of "silent majorities" and the "end of the social."[14] And the claim "those who distrust the mainstream media" are immune to the power of such events will seem downright naïve, as if "distrust" of the media had not itself been manufactured and deployed in such openly manipulative contexts. Attacks on "fake news" in the United States, for example, have themselves become a performative ritual, but one with potentially devastating consequences ranging from calls for censorship to deadly terror attacks.[15] But McLaverty-Robinson nevertheless offers a productive opening for understanding the function of contemporary global crises at the level of symbolic exchange. This opening should be taken seriously by scholars and analysts who otherwise continue to perpetuate a discourse — even when responding to a natural crisis such as COVID-19—that ultimately calls not for the restoration of symbolic exchange but for an expansion of an ultimately suicidal securitization and militarization of these crises.

Disparate though they are, what unites the pieces in this collection is a sense of engagement, vital particularly in the current crises. This may seem quizzical to those who — and we know there are many — insist upon interpreting Baudrillard as an oblivious intellectual in an ivory tower, engaged in academic word play as a playful but politically detached form of art pour l'art. Yet as even Kellner, one of his fiercer critics, demonstrates in this volume, Baudrillard's seeming vacillation on such questions as the meaning of modern art may be inadequate and even maddening, but it remains provocative in ways that force readers to grapple with that meaning. The error lies with those who would seek in Baudrillard a sort of critical theory cookie cutter to apply to popular cultural texts.

Baudrillard, ultimately, is much more than a "media theorist," but to the extent that such categories are meaningful, what we discover in this collection is a Baudrillard who remains one of the few scholars who took seriously Marshall McLuhan's critique of the "rear-view mirror" approach to mass media.[16] McLuhan, we will recall, famously argued that the problem with media theory is that the theorist was always looking backwards, engaging new media on the terms and through the epistemologies laid out by those of the previous era rather than experiencing and evaluating them on their own terms. We criticized television for not living up to the standards of reason that had emerged from a culture of print. Even today we still tend to experience networked technologies as if they were new categories of television. Baudrillard always resisted this rear-view mirror tendency; if anything, he tried to reinterpret past events through a lens of emerging technologies — recall, for example, his interpretation of New York's World Trade Center as the effigy of American capitalism, some decades before those towers would become

13 Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: The Modern Library, 1906): 81-2.
14 Jean Baudrillard, In the Shadow of Silent Majorities or, The End of the Social and Other Essays trans. Paul Foss, John Johnston, and Paul Patton (NY: Semiotext(e), 1978, 1983).

15 For just two examples, see Jack Tate, "Mail bomber Cesar Sayoc obsessed with Trump, Fox News, chilling new court filings show," ABC News (22 July 2019): https://abcnews.go.com/US/mail-bomber-cesar-sayoc-obsessed-trump-fox-news/story?id=64500598 and Tom Jones, "Attacks on media covering the protests are simply following the president's rhetoric," Poynter (1 June 2020): https://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2020/attacks-on-media-covering-the-protests-are-simply-following-the-presidents-rhetoric.
16 Marshall McLuhan, "The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," Playboy (March 1969): 56.

the target of terror's fatal strategy.[17] It is thus apt that Baudrillard's book of postcards from America began with the quotation from actual rear-view mirrors that Peter Weibel's essay concludes with: "Caution: Objects in this mirror may be closer than they appear!"[18]

17 Jean Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London, Thousand Oaks, California, and New Delhi: SAGE, 1976, 1993): 69-70.

18 Jean Baudrillard, America, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1989): 1.

The art of disappearing

Jean Baudrillard, Truls Lie
Chief Editor of NY TID and Modern Times Review
17 April 2007

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) gave us the tools to understand the media society and counteract the total assimilation into capitalist overproduction. Truls Lie finds a previously unpublished interview he made when Baudrillard visited Oslo in 2000. "Disappearing", says Baudrillard, "should be an art form, a seductive way of leaving the world. I believe that part of disappearing is to disappear before you die, to disappear before you have run dry, while you still have something to say…"

Jean Baudrillard and his wife Marine — an unassuming and approachable couple, not exactly the sort of people you would call arrogant, Parisian intellectuals. It was the spring of 2000 in Oslo. Disorganized as usual, I arrive half an hour late to take them to dinner.

They stand there smiling, waiting for me in front of the French embassy. During the meal, I ask them about the present intellectual climate in Paris. Is it still characterized by past activists like Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Foucault, or is it better characterized by heated political discussions in cafes or the homes of well-known philosophers? Baudrillard and his wife shake their heads. He says that the years after the highly active 1970s and 1980s were more professionally driven, state intellectuals did not stray beyond the confines of their offices or their writings, hostility and arrogance bred division amongst them.

Now the last of the great French philosophers of the 1970s is dead, joining the ranks of Foucault, Lyotard, Guattari, Deleuze, and Derrida. Jean Baudrillard succumbed to cancer in March. To mark the occasion, we present an excerpt from a previously unpublished interview that I made with him at the time of his last visit to Norway in 2000.

Jean Baudrillard is probably the most significant media philosopher we have seen in recent years. A "prophet" whose hard-hitting descriptions and analyzes were validated by the emerging media society of the 1970s. It is no mere coincidence that it is Baudrillard's "Simulations" that the character of Neo (Keanu Reeves) uses as a hiding place for a precious CD in the 1999 film *The Matrix*. Baudrillard himself was not a great mediaconsumer or IT geek, he used a typewriter for most of his life, avoided mobile phones, and subscribed to Bob Dylan's "500 channels and nothing on". But he knew what was happening. He noticed what was playful in us become functional; how sport, work, and leisure time have become structured and computer games do away with much of the charm of old-style team games. He noticed saw how it all went wrong for us adults: Baudrillard pointed out that we dream with our eyes open, thus explaining how wars such as the Gulf War seemed unreal to us, perceived simply as events on TV. We can recognize this also today, in the case of the Iraq war.

Who actually experiences war as real? The problem is that with our "TV shudders" and aestheticizing of the war's catastrophic effects, we fall instead into a kind of amnesic trance, a realm of virtual responsibility where we consume experiences, absorb pain, and allow the TV screen to envelop us in a closed circuit. In this hyper-reality we stop experiencing with our bodies and essentially become symbol processors for these media machines. Such a game (or play, to refer to Guy Debord's social critique) achieves prominence in our hyper-realistic world, where reality is a symbolic dimension that has broken away from the real. It is precisely the rules of the game, the room for manoeuvre, the opportunities, and the absurdities in this broken-away reality that Baudrillard tackles.

He researched regimes of sign value and the unfeasibility of symbolic exchange in the late-capitalist system of production. He eventually turned away from Marxism — which still held on to use-values, needs, and shortages — and towards an analysis of media consumption. With *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981) he went even further by acknowledging that "reality is no longer possible". Rather than criticizing illusion, he tried to dispel hegemonic symbols and images. Baudrillard's style became more playful, seemingly exaggerated and provocative, in line with his self-declared, Nietzschean "active nihilism," which aims to challenge a symbolic and material overproduction that has displaced reality.

A magnificent game

Truls Lie: *How are we to understand the relationship between the playful game and the dominant value-regime's insistence on production and consumption? One could of course say that today's production satisfies a positive and playful desire to create. Even though there is overproduction of virtually everything, there may just be a "playful human" behind the scenes. You convey it as problematic that people play an active role in today's overproduction, but why shouldn't this be based on play, on a productive desire, as Gilles Deleuze would have it?*

Jean Baudrillard: Think of it all as a magnificent game, where certain things come to represent more and more other things. Playing and games have several dimensions that have been categorized by the sociologist Roger Caillois: Mimicry (the game of representation), Alea (the game of chance), Agon (rivalry and competition), and last but not least, Ilinx, the vertiginous, delirious dimension inherent to some games. Our modern production, overproduction, and overabundance of communication and information correspond to a vertiginous, delirious game. This dimension is given a higher status than the others. Consequently, according to Caillois' typology, we have a one-dimensional development of one category. We have to have a combination of all four dimensions in order to produce a really comprehensive game.

TL: *You say somewhere that when desire has been satisfied, people experience a kind of mental death. To what extent is this an exaggeration and how do you understand the rhetorical function embedded in your style of writing?*

JB: I am very aware of the paradoxical rhetoric in my writing, a rhetoric that exceeds its Page 2/5 own probability. The terms are purposefully exaggerated. If truth does not exist, then we have to proceed behind the metaphysical scenario of subjects and objects. I like to explore in my writing what happens after the demise of different things and truths, and this can only be done through the use of thought experiments. Of course this is not a discourse on truth — not everything can be verified, there is no pretence about that. The same goes for the question of desire. To say that all desires are satisfied is nonsensical because desire as such cannot be satisfied, quite the opposite. But in this world of production, desire is at one and the same time productive and a means of satisfaction. Consequently we have lost touch with the whole concept of desire, desire as metaphor, desire as promise, as something that cannot be satisfied or made a reality. I don't use the term "desire" very often. The term had its day in the 1960s and 1970s. I suppose it's the same for me with the term "symbolic". Many of these paradigmatic terms were coined for other eras. "Desire" still clings to the world of the subject. Even Deleuze thinks of desire within a sphere of production, albeit a different and higher type of production. Molecular production was a big step for Deleuze, but even this proliferation and fractalization of the term "desire" kept its original form and was never developed further. I like to explore in my writing what happens when something ends.

Postmodern?

Baudrillard, together with a range of other French thinkers, has often been presented as a leading postmodernist, with all the negative and misleading characteristics that the term implies. Right from the initial spread of postmodernism in the 1970s, the meaning of this term has always been ambiguous: An epochal term? Descriptive of a way of thinking? Or a kind of intellectual style connected to a certain approach and form of writing?

TL: *How do you perceive "postmodernism"?*

JB: I have nothing to do with it. I don't know who came up with this term. It comes from architecture, doesn't it? I never understood why I was supposed to be a postmodernist. But when it comes to the book Simulacres et Simulation, why not? It does not deal with a modernity that has a progressive finality or a technological development with clear boundaries that depicts an aftermath where nothing happens. We have always had simulation and simulacra, and perhaps also another level of virtuality. But I have no faith in "postmodernism" as an analytical term. When people say: "You are a postmodernist", I answer: "Well, why not?" The term simply avoids the issue itself.

TL: *Could the term "transmodernism" better describe our time?*

JB: This is a far more interesting term. I am not the only one to use it, for example, Paul Virilio uses the term "transpolitical". The term analyzes how things develop after the principles of political realism have disappeared. When this happens, we have a dimension where politics always has and always will exist, but it is not the real political game. What happens afterwards calls into play the same problematic, but is specifically connected to defined areas; we have transaesthetics, transeconomy, and so on. These are better terms than "postmodernism". It is not about modernity; it is about every system that has developed its mode of expression to the extent that it surpasses itself and its own logic. This is what I am trying to analyze.

TL: *Nevertheless, the age we live in has its labels or defining characteristics. You have written that the epochal characteristic of the romantic era was replaced by surrealism, which was in*

turn superseded by transparency. You describe transparency as a nihilistic situation. What kind of nihilism are we talking about here?

JB: I'm not talking about transparency in the sense that you see everything on television, but that television is watching you. It is all about reversibility, in the worst sense. It is about visibility, the total disappearance of secrecy. Everything has to be visible, not in a panoptical way where everything is visible to the naked eye. Transparency is more than just visibility, it is devoid of secrets. It is not just transparent to others, but also to the self. There is no longer any ontologically secret substance. I perceive this to be nihilism rather than postmodernism. To me, nihilism is a good thing — I am a nihilist, not a postmodernist.

For me, the question is precisely this: why is there nothing, rather than something? To search for nothing, nothingness or absence is a good type of nihilism, a Nietzschean, active nihilism, not a pessimistic nihilism.

Seduction and death

One can ask oneself why nothing should be something to search for. But when the norm is for children in Norway to have 500 things each and for the meaning of life for many to revolve around the purchasing of more and more new things — be it the latest mobile phone model or a designer staircase — then capitalist production may well benefit from someone like Baudrillard, someone who adopts defence mechanisms against this type of overproduction. One of two defence mechanisms Baudrillard adopted was, remarkably, his fascination with seduction. In an overstated and overproductive consumer world, seduction has a quality that *leads away* or *pretends* — a counterweight to capitalist production that simply puts *forward* and *presents*. The other defence mechanism was directed at a subject-centred way of thinking, at theories that assert the freedom and autonomy of the subject. Baudrillard referred to the world of the object. This is something he also did in Oslo in 2000 when he exhibited his photographs of a range of objects and surfaces caught in the trap of objectivity. In the resistance put up by things, Baudrillard found a counterweight to restrictive control — in unpredicted events, in stock market crashes, computer viruses and AIDS: where the world changes course and phenomena speak their own language.

Baudrillard was also concerned with the relationship between symbolic exchange and death — the title of his 1976 book. Here he develops an array of themes from Georges Bataille and the aforementioned Caillois in the context of production and destruction as mutually dependent forms of exchange; language production and the dissolution of meaning; life and death. At one time, these lent a comprehensive shape to existence, but they have lost their relevance. Reality is absorbed in a fluid hyperreality, which gives finality and the limitations that are set by death a completely new kind of uncertainty. But where does Baudrillard himself stand on death?

TL: *The director Ingmar Bergman once said that when he is dying, he does not want to be a vegetable in a hospital bed, but would like to control the process of his death, to avoid becoming a thing. You have written extensively about death. Have you formed any thoughts about your own death?*

JB: I would say that it remains an issue very much connected to disappearing. There has to be an art of becoming visible as well as an art of disappearing. Disappearing cannot be a factual coincidence; it has to be an art. This can have several facets in writing or in drama. There may be an art to the biological aspects too, a seductive way of leaving the world. If it's a complete accident, it's a negative death.

TL: *The French philosopher Michel Foucault died of AIDS. Was that a type of art of disappearing? What do you think about the way he disappeared and the legacy he left behind? Has he really disappeared as long as his work lives on?*

JB: He clearly accepted the challenge of death. He knew the risks and made a choice. In a sense, this is another way of disappearing. He used the art of discretion, a safeguarding of confidentiality that was incredible — without in any way claiming that this is a good way to withdraw from the world! I would say that part of disappearing is to disappear before you die, to disappear before you have run dry, while you still have more to say. Many people and intellectuals are already dead but continue, unfortunately for them, to speak. This was not the case with Foucault.

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Sociology of Art, Baudrillard and Marcuse

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Oakland, PSA, April 2007[1]

When asked to contribute to this forum on art and sociology I was working on a paper on Baudrillard and his book *The Conspiracy of art*, a collection of essays of recent work on contemporary art, and on a book *Art and Liberation,* the fourth volume of Collected Writings of Herbert Marcuse that I'm editing for Routledge, and after some reflection decided to compare both theorists for this presentation; to some extent Baudrillard and Marcuse represent antithetical positions on the potential of art to aide human emancipation in the contemporary moment so I'll briefly play them off against each other and then comment on how they both contribute to in different ways to the sociology of art in the contemporary epoch.

To begin with Baudrillard: In the interview "Game with Vestiges" (1984), Baudrillard claims that in the sphere of art every possible artistic form and every possible function of art has been exhausted. Furthermore, against Benjamin, Adorno and other cultural revolutionaries, Baudrillard argues that art has lost its critical and negative function. Art and theory for Baudrillard became a "playing with the pieces" of the tradition, a "game with vestiges" of the past, through recombining and playing with the forms already produced.

From the late 1980s into the 1990s, Baudrillard sharpened his critique of the institution of art and contemporary art. In The Transparency of Evil (1994), Baudrillard continued his speculations on the end of art and transaesthetics, projecting a vision of the end of art somewhat different from traditional theories that posit the exhaustion of artistic creativity, or a situation where everything has been done and there is nothing new to do. Baudrillard maintains both of these points, to be sure, but the weight of his argument rests rather on a metaphysical vision of the contemporary era in which art has penetrated all spheres of existence, in which the dreams of the artistic avant-garde for art to inform life have been realized. Yet, in Baudrillard's vision, with the (ironical) realization of art in everyday life, art itself as a separate and transcendent phenomenon has disappeared.

Baudrillard calls this situation "transaesthetics" which he relates to similar phenomena of "transpolitics," "transsexuality," and "transeconomics," in which everything becomes aesthetic, political, sexual, and economic, so that these domains, like art, lose their specificity, their boundaries, their distinctness. The result is a confused and imploded condition where there are no more criteria of value, of judgment, of taste, and the function of the normative thus collapses in a morass of indifference and inertia. And so, although Baudrillard sees art proliferating everywhere, and writes in The Transparency of Evil that "talk about Art is increasing even more rapidly" (1994, p. 14), the power of art — of art as adventure, art as negation of reality, art as redeeming illusion, art as another dimension and so on — has disappeared. Art is everywhere but there "are no more fundamental rules" to differentiate art from other objects and "no more criteria of judgment or of pleasure" (1994, p. 14). For Baudrillard, contemporary individuals are indifferent toward taste and manifest only distaste: "tastes are determinate no longer" (1994, p. 72).

And yet as a proliferation of images, of form, of line, of color, of design, art is more fundamental then ever to the contemporary social order: "our society has given rise to a general aestheticization: all forms of culture — not excluding anti-cultural ones — are promoted and all models of representation and anti-representation are taken on board" (p. 16). Thus Baudrillard concludes that: "It is often said that the West's great undertaking is the commercialization of the whole world, the hitching of the fate of everything to the fate of the commodity. That great undertaking will turn out rather to have been the aestheticization of the whole world — its cosmopolitan spectacularization, its transformation into images, its semiological organization" (1994, p. 16).

[1] This paper was presented as "Art and Society: Baudrillard vs. Marcuse," Panel on Sociology and Aesthetics, Pacific Sociology Association, Oakland, March 2007. It is published here for the first time in the same form that it was presented at the conference.

In the postmodern media and consumer society, everything becomes an image, a sign, a spectacle, and a transaesthetic object. This "materialization of aesthetics" is accompanied by a desperate attempt to simulate art, to replicate and mix previous artistic forms and styles, and to produce ever more images and artistic objects. But this "dizzying eclecticism" of forms and pleasures produces a situation in which art is no longer art in classical or modernist senses, but is merely image, artifact, object, simulation, or commodity Baudrillard is aware of increasingly exorbitant prices for art works, but takes this as evidence that art has become something else in the orbital hyperspace of value, an ecstasy of skyrocketing values in "a kind of space opera" (1994, p. 19).

The Art Conspiracy

Perhaps as a result of negative experiences with people exploiting his ideas for their own aesthetic practices and his own increasingly negative views of contemporary art, Baudrillard penned a sharp critique of the art world in a "The Conspiracy of Art," published in the French journal Liberation (May 20, 1996) which is the center piece of his 2005 book with the same name that collects his most significant writings on art, and interviews concerning art, from the 1990s to the present[2]. Baudrillard argues just as pornography exhibits the loss of desire in sex, and sexuality becomes "transsexuality" where everything is transparent and exhibited, so too has art "lost the desire for illusion and instead raises everything to aesthetic banality, becoming transaesthetic" (Baudrillard 2005, p. 25). Just as pornography" permeates all visual and televisual techniques" (ibid), so too does art appear everywhere and everything can be seen and exhibited as art: "Raising originality, banality and nullity to the level of values or even perverse aesthetic pleasure… Therein lies all the duplicity of contemporary art: asserting nullity, insignificance, meaninglessness, striving for nullity when already null and void" (Baudrillard 2005, p. 27).

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

Yet Baudrillard also wants to argue that art also historically has nullified itself as a transcendent aesthetic object, as something different from everyday life, by becoming part of everyday life, whether as found object in a museum, or by being ornamentation, or prestige value, in a home, corporation, or public space. Art could also be null because if aesthetic value is everywhere, it is nowhere, and has leaked out of its own aesthetic realm which, of course, museums, galleries, and the art establishment try to reestablish creating the illusion that art does exist as a separate and especially valuable realm. Thus, for Baudrillard contemporary art does not really create another world, it becomes part of this world, and thus is null in the sense of not not producing aesthetic transcendence. In a later text "Art… Contemporary of Itself" ((2003) Baudrillard writes:

The adventure of modern art is over. Contemporary art is only contemporary of itself. It no longer transcends itself into the past or the future. Its only reality is its operation in real time and its confusion with this reality.

Northing differentiates it from technical, advertising, media and digital operations. There is no more transcendence, no more divergence, nothing from another scene: it is a reflective game with the contemporary world as it happens. This is why contemporary art is null and void: it and the world form a zero sum equation (Baudrillard 2005, p. 89).

Baudrillard goes on to indict the "shameful complicity shared by creators and consumers" and is especially put off by the discourses of the art world that continue to hype new artists, exhibits, retrospectives, as fundamental events of cultural importance. There is a "conspiracy of art" because at the moment of its disappearance, when art has simply disappeared into the existing world and everyday life, the art establishment conspires to hype it more and more with spectacular museum and gallery exhibits, record prices for art works at auctions, and a growing apparatus of publicity and discourse. The audience is part of this conspiracy, because it plays along, exhibiting interest in every new banality, insignificant new work or artist, and repetition of the past, thus participating in the fraud.

Now obviously, to make these claims, Baudrillard is operating with a very extravagant notion of what art should be and I've noticed tensions in his normative ideal of art. Some of his utterances seem to relate his normative concept to traditional concepts of avant-garde revolutionary art in which art is supposed to create another world, entry to an aesthetic dimension that transcends everyday life, and could even be an event which is a life-altering phenomenon, as in the passage I just cited above from "Art… Contemporary of Itself."

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

Yet his ideal of art has twists and turns of its own. Some hints in the texts collected The Conspiracy of Art, however, indicate what ideal for art Baudrillard also has in mind. In a 1996 interview he distinguishes between aesthetic and form and notes: "I have no illusion, no belief, except in forms — reversibility, seduction or metamorphosis — but these forms are indestructible. This is not a vague belief, it is an act of faith, without which I would not do anything myself" (p. 59). For Baudrillard, his notion of form goes beyond Clive Bell and the Bloomsbury notion of significant form — which encodes aesthetic value, meaning, taste. Rather, for Baudrillard: "Art is a form. A form is something that does not exactly have a history, but a destiny. Art had a destiny but today, art has fallen into value, that can be bought sold, and exchanged. Forms, as forms, cannot be exchanged for something else, they can only be exchanged among themselves" (2005, 63).

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

This could explain Baudrillard's attraction to photography where the subject disappears and the object emerges in its strangeness as pure form, at least in Baudrillard's ideal and imaginary of the art of photography[3]. Yet Baudrillard claims that he is not interested in art as such but "as an object, from an anthropological point of view: the object, before any promotion of its aesthetic value, and what happens after" (2005, p. 61). This notion of the singularity of the object or event might explain why Baudrillard was so taken with the 9/11 terror attacks on the Twin Towers, since this was obviously a world historical event, but it was also an astounding aesthetic spectacle. Possibly Baudrillard secretly agreed with Karl-Heinz Stockhausen that 9/11 was one of the greatest acts of performance art ever, but could not say it since Stockhausen was so violently condemned for aestheticizing a major tragedy.

I have argued before that the terror act of 2001 provided an event that shocked Baudrillard out of his world-weariness and cynicism and that has given much of his post-2001 work a compelling immediacy, sharp edge, and originality[4]. Yet, quite frankly, the magnitude of the 9/11 event might have been so great that it confirmed his view that theory and art had no possibility of significantly capturing contemporary reality that was now going beyond any expectations, concepts, or representations. As Adorno asked, how can there be poetry after Auschwitz, Baudrillard might ask, how can there be art after 9/11?

The Conspiracy of Art enables us to strive for an overview of Baudrillard's insights on art and what now appears as his anti-aesthetics[5]. In his collection of key essays on art, Baudrillard is more of a critic of art and a cultural metaphysician than an aesthetic theorist. He uses art to theorize general trends of contemporary society and culture, and to illustrate his metaphysical views and theoretical positions rather than analyzing art on its own terms or to do aesthetic theory a la Adorno or Marcuse.

While writing this paper I did the final copy-editing of a volume Herbert Marcuse, Art and Liberation which valorizes the aesthetic dimension and with Adorno could be read as the antipode to Baudrillard[6]. I often find it useful to play off opposites against each other to see if I can find yet another position, or to test who do I really believe and agree with, in this case, the position of art in the contemporary world. In my aesthetic moments, I want to go with Marcuse and Adorno on this one, but in my darker theoretical moments I wonder if Baudrillard is not right, or is at least a needed antidote to excessive aestheticism.

Baudrillard thus emerges in my reading of his writings of the past decade as deeply anti-aesthetics in his current incarnation and a powerful critic of the contemporary art scene. Baudrillard is deadly serious, albeit ironic and some-

[3] On Baudrillard's analyses and practices of photography, which go beyond the parameters of this presentation, see the material in Art and Artefact, edited by Nicholas Zurbrugg. London: Sage, 1997. There have also been many studies of his engagement with photography International Journal of Baudrillard Studies.

[4] Douglas Kellner, "Baudrillard, Globalization and Terrorism: Some Comments on Recent Adventures of the Image and Spectacle on the Occasion of Baudrillard's 75th Birthday," International Journal of Baudrillard Studies, Volume 2, Number 1 (January 2005) at http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_1/kellner.htm.

5 Hal Foster titled his collection of writing on postmodern culture, one of the first and most influential in the postmodern debates of the 1980s as The Anti-aesthetic (Port Townsend WA: Bay Press, 1983). The collection included Baudrillard's "Ecstasy of Communication" which I always took as signaling a radical postmodern break and rupture in history, signaled by his discourse of "No longer," "no more," "Now, however," evoking throughout "this new state of things," and yet some critics want to claim Baudrillard has nothing to do with the adventures of the postmodern…

6 See Herbert Marcuse, Art and Liberation, Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Vol. IV. (forthcoming 2006), edited by Douglas Kellner. New York and London, Routledge and T. W. Adorno, Äesthetische Theorie (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), translated as Aesthetic Theory, by C. Lenhardt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.

times playful, in condemning the contemporary art scene, appearing as what Nicholas Zurbrugg termed the "angel of extermination, yet he also appears as Zurbrugg's "angel of annunciation," blessing the perhaps hopeless attempt to find alternatives in art and theory in a fallen (i.e. imploded) world[7]. Likewise, sometimes Baudrillard appears deeply reactionary, rejecting or eviscerating distinctive cultural phenomena of the present age, yet is at the same time highly radical, criticizing the very roots of contemporary cultural, political and theoretical pretension. He is at once a strong theorist and an anti-theorist, making reading and interpreting him a challenging enterprise.

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

Baudrillard is as well as a provocateur who often presents radical negations to his readers, as with his end of art and art conspiracy analysis, or his analysis of the disappearance of reality, the perfect crime, to which he alludes to at 2006 Swansea conference in his address "On Disappearance" (2006). As I've argued, Baudrillard's work on art is especially challenging and provocative, quite original, and hard to sum up. But since reference to Duchamps and Warhol run through the texts of The Conspiracy of Art, and have long been Baudrillardian reference points, I'll conclude by suggesting that Baudrillard is the Duchamps and Warhol of theory, mocking it by emptying it of messy content, deconstructing its problematic aspects by simulating it, putting on the audience by enigmatically repeating previous gestures and positions, but then making new ones that confound the critics. Although Duchamp, Warhol, and Baudrillard can often appear banal and repetitive, yet they often create something original and compelling, often with unpredictable effects. And so I conclude by evoking the triad of Duchamps, Warhol, and Baudrillard as objects, or strange attractors, of profound irony and provocation that continue to challenge our views of art, culture, and reality itself today.

It is relevant to note here that Baudrillard is appraising art today largely from a sociology of art perspective and finding art in contemporary society to be generally null for the reasons outlined in the book *The Art Conspiracy*. By contrast, Herbert Marcuse generally takes a more philosophical approach to art and aesthetics, although grounded in his critical theory of society and thus Marcuse too produces something like a sociology of art, which appraises the role of art in contemporary society.

Marcuse's doctoral dissertation on *The German Artist-Nove*l was rooted in Wilhelm Dilthey and the historicist school, reading the German *Kunstlerroman* from Goethe to Thomas Mann in the context of the developing German society of the modern epoch; in a sense, this is a sociology of art approach, but not a Marxian one such as would characterize George Lukacs' Marxist works that situates, say, German literature in the context of the development of the German bourgeois and capitalism, whereas the early Marcuse had a more general sociological historicist perspective (and he was generally a critic of Lukacs' Marxist approach as too reductive and occluding of the aesthetic dimension).

It is interesting that Marcuse had very different appraisals of art in its contemporary moment at different periods of his life; in his ultra-Marxist period when he began working with the Frankfurt School his essay "On Affirmative Culture" tended to critique bourgeois art as a vehicle of ideology and affirming the world as is, although he recognized that there were some utopian moments. In *Eros and Civilization* (1955), by contrast, that represented his most comprehensive perspectives on art and liberation, in his final book *The Aesthetic Dimension*, and in the papers I collected in the Routledge volume *Art and Liberation*, Marcuse had, by contrast, an extremely high evaluation of art's potential for emancipation. Great art contains a vision of a better world of freedom and happiness than the present one; and for Marcuse, the aesthetic dimension that preserves the otherness of art, its alternative ways of seeing, hearing, imagining, and so on, is different from the existing world by virtue of its aesthetic form. So if Baudrillard is right that there is no qualitatively different art with an aesthetic dimension other than advertising, media and consumer culture, and other cultural forms since for Baudrillard art has imploded into existing culture, society, architecture, fashion, politics and the economy — if Baudrillard is right, then there is no aesthetic dimension today in Marcuse's sense and no radical and emancipatory potential in art.

Marcuse famously finds the aesthetic dimension in the great works of the bourgeois tradition as well as the modernist avant garde tradition, and has been criticized by younger radicals for overvaluating classical bourgeois art and not seeing the radical potential in contemporary oppositional art. I once asked Fredric Jameson — a longtime

7 See Nicholas Zurbrugg, "INTRODUCTION: 'Just What Is It that Makes Baudrillard's Ideas So Different, So Appealing?'" in Art and Artefact, op. cit., pp1ff.

friend and colleague of Marcuse and major contemporary Marxist aesthetic theorist — if he'd ever discussed postmodernism in any form with Marcuse (who died in 1979) and Jameson said no, he hadn't and I never found anything on postmodernism by Marcuse in letters or texts, so we probably wouldn't be able to have a discussion of contemporary art with those who think postmodernism is the dominant mode of culture and modernism is a thing of the past.

Still, I think we can use Marcuse's notion of the aesthetic dimension to appraise different forms of contemporary art and do not myself believe that contemporary art is without value or emancipatory potential. However, I wonder if Baudrillard and Marcuse were sitting here today if they would totally disagree on contemporary art's aestetic potential or agree that "Once upon a time art had oppositional potential, but today…"

Indeed, Baudrillard cryptically has a distinction between form and aesthetics and valorizes the former at the expense of the latter; Baudrillard has told interviewers that he appreciates as much as anyone the great classics of bourgeois culture, but apparently thinks that the form-creating capacity of artists is exhausted, although he valorizes form and events as such and has written that the 9/11 terror attacks are the only event of the contemporary era, although he has not aestheticized it as far as I know. Marcuse just might agree with Baudrillard that much contemporary art is null and void, lacking the aesthetic dimension that Marcuse thinks is the mark of great art.

Further, Baudrillard supposedly went to the Venice Biennale in the mid- 1990s and thought there was just too much art, it was too derivative and all cancelled each other out, with no really outstanding works. Possibly Marcuse would agree with that although I doubt he would be as totalizing, cynical, and perhaps ironic as Baudrillard. For Marcuse, art was far too important to make jokes or dismissive remarks about, while Baudrillard sometimes seems to scandalize for the sake of scandal, to make extreme statements, like all art is null and void today, for the sake of extreme statements, to be a provocateur and put deeply held views in question.

Also Marcuse was open to new art and like some forms of avant garde music, painting and the works of Bob Dylan; although when I queried him once about popular culture, he answered that the only film that had the aesthetic dimension in his sense was Eisenstein's *Potemkin* and he was generally dismissive of the aesthetic potential of most popular culture — as was Baudrillard who is infamous for his theses of the implosion of meaning in the media.

So to conclude, although Baudrillard has perhaps the most radical critique and dismissal of art in the contemporary moment and Herbert Marcuse the most elevated and hopeful concept of the aesthetic dimension where there are visions and images of another world of freedom and happiness that can help emancipate individuals and even change society and culture, neither, I would argue, provide adequate perspectives for a sociology of art today that needs to contextualize and interpret, and appraise and evaluate, a wide spectrum of art ranging from so-called high art to so-called popular culture[8] — or as I would prefer *Media Culture*. Both Baudrillard and Marcuse are too dismissive of the latter and so we have to go to theorists like Fredric Jameson or Ernst Bloch for a more robust critical sociology of art and aesthetic theory for the contemporary moment..

8 I was told, however, that Marcuse enjoyed the 1970s TV cop show Kojak because it revealed that police were pigs, a sentiment that might echo with Black Lives Matter militants and those militating for social justice in the Great Global Uprising of 2020, still going on as I prepare this 2007 talk for publication.

Kairos and contingency in photography: Jean Baudrillard's photographs

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The extraordinary impact of Baudrillard's theoretical work on the development of art in the entire world is well known. Little known is the fact that Baudrillard himself is an artist. Twelve years ago he started to take occasional photographs during his many travels. In the past six years this activity has become especially intensive. Baudrillard does not see his artistic activity as being directly connected with his philosophy. On the contrary, he takes pictures of what he does not want to comment on, and what he photographs escapes writing. But obviously the theories of Baudrillard are a background we cannot deny while we are looking at his pictures. In this respect, the title of this book and of the exposition of the Neue Galerie in Graz (1999) already gives a hint: "Within the horizon of the object" echoes the title of his dissertation of 1968, "Le systeme des objets"[1], which he wrote while he was the assistant of Henri Lefébvre, the author of a sociology of everyday life."[2] Baudrillard was thus very early attracted by objects and has claimed the equivalence of subject and object in a radical theory. Reading the texts to his photographs and looking at the photographs in this book makes it obvious that he has made this theme the basis of his artistic work. This artistic work shares a common space of ideas with his theoretical texts. Yet Baudrillard's analysis of the system of objects is not a phenomenological one, but a semiological one, looking at it as a system of signs. Baudrillard's photographic practice is also situated in this field of a semiotic system. Therefore, a brief reference to Baudrillard's theory of signs. In 1972, Baudrillard published "Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe", a reply to Marx's "A Critique of Political Economy" (1859). In this work, as in his later writings, "Le miroir de la production" (1973) and "L'Echange symbolique et la mort" (1976) Baudrillard tried to show an extension of the law of commodity value at the level of the sign with a "political economy of the sign". This structural revolution basically relies on the illustration of how the Marxian splitting of the commodity into use value and exchange value was repeated by the Saussurean splitting of the sign into signified and signifier. The exchange of linguistic signs in the circulation of meaning follows the exchange of commodities in the circulation of financial capital. The exchangeability of all commodities corresponds to the exchangeability of all signs. In this total and general interreference and exchangeability, combination and simulation, the signifiers turn into exchange values and the signified takes the role of the use value. The free floating signifiers correspond to the abstracted and complete exchangeability of commodities under capitalism. The signified and the signifier can form a chain of signs out of links which refer to each other and can lead to a semiotic catastrophe. Baudrillard's Photographs are flights out of these catastrophic sign zones, that Baudrillard the theoretician has analyzed. There is no more real, since the signs of the real have replaced the real. Like the exchange value the signifiers can thus float freely. Thereby he created the ground for a semiotic aesthetics, which looks for its melancholic foundation between the "godlike absence of the referent of the image" and an "aesthetics of disappearance."

This is why his aesthetics of absence deals with the appearance of objects. Baudrillard's obsession with things is an obsession with absence. But this absence is not to be understood as an emptiness or lack. Quite the contrary: As writing for Sigmund Freud is the original medium of absence (cf. "Civilization and its Discontents", 1930), for Baudrillard photography is the medium of absence. Freud understood writing as a medium that can bring closer or back objects and events that have passed in time or are far away, thus as a medium that can overcome temporal or spatial distance or deficiencies. In a similar way, Baudrillard uses photography as a medium to ban the disappearance of things into time. His photographs ban the disappearance of things through the image. They drive away the curse of time, at least for the moment of the image. The coincidence (of the moment, of the presence of the photographer) is favorable to the appearance of things. Contingency is the core of Baudrillard's aes-

1 The system of objects, Verso, 1992.
2 Henri Lefébvre, Critique of Everyday Life, Verso, 1992, as well as Everyday Life in the Modern World, Transaction Pub., 1994.

thetics of appearance/disappearance (apparition/disparition) because it is in the coincidence that it overcomes the disappearance of things. The unreal moment of an accidental encounter of subject, apparatus, light and appearance is the product and the aim of Baudrillard's photography. For the image resulting out of this accidental encounter bans the disappearance of the world by transferring the objectual world into a world of signs. The aesthetics of absence turns into a rescue of presence. The object itself cannot be rescued, but its trace can be saved as sign in the image. Only as images can the objects be rescued from disappearing. Images thus ban time and banish disappearance. The images themselves, however, have deficiencies that have been analyzed in Baudrillard's theory of signs. In his photographs, he nevertheless takes on the risk to break through the ban of the images, that is the ban that images speak out, but also the ban that turns against the images themselves. Does this produce a strategy of seduction or trust? The photographs might offer lines of flight out of the semiotic disaster zone. The philosopher's eye, tied to a complex brain that has reflected on the semiotic catastrophe, the free floating chains of signs, the agony of the real and the hyperreality of simulation, is excited, awakened and only sharpened by the appeal of the objects lying beyond or before analysis, reflection and critique. Baudrillard is searching for the primal scene of the image, for the image lying before the image, for the paradox of the presemiotic state of the sign. The image before or after the sign, politics, and art is the aesthetic illusion. Perhaps we can call this the longing for the pure intuition of the object. If it is not us looking at the objects but the objects looking at us, as Lacan said, when the objects attract the attention of the eye of the philosopher, then they reach the level of images. This is the moment of the image, the photographic moment in which the object by itself reaches the level of the image. its ability to be an image. Precisely when the objects are not philosophical, not of a philosophical nature or of philosophical relevance, when they lie before analysis and meaning they form the primal scene of the image. In his photographs, Baudrillard tries to make appear the singularity beyond meaning, beyond the social, beyond art. His photographic world is a world where everything can Still come into appearance. This is the line of flight offered by photography; it is its magic, its illusion perhaps, the irony of technology, that it should be photography which claims and makes possible that not everything just passes away, but that everything can still come into appearance. With his momentary shots Baudrillard tries to capture the moment, this unique, singular moment which attracts his attention and which without photography would disappear forever in the solitude of an individual experience or in the black hole of the universe. The picture and the experience are chained together by the coincidence of the appearance. Coincidence and appearance of the object are chained together by the image. The image rescues the appearance from disappearing. The contingency of a moment, a picture, beyond politics and the social, the precious nature of the moment, the singularity of the instance between appearance and disappearance are captured with photographic means. The pictures serve to prevent the disappearance of a unique moment, this unique encounter and linkage of the appearance of the things, with the possibility of an image and with the subject. At a superficial glance, Baudrillard's photographs seem like stereotypical snap-shots, like holiday or traveler's pictures, like calendar photography. But for Baudrillard, they are rather about an evolution of the possibilities of photography, themselves a condition for the possibilities of the gaze and of the observer, during his/her encounter with the world. Baudrillard thus analyzes the "Photographic condition" (Rosalind Krauss). He is interested in the appearance of things, *horama*, under the conditions of photography. But he does not strive for a view of everything, an overview, a panorama of objects, the whole (panorama understood as a combination of pan, everything, and *horama*, the view, what is being seen, appearance). He does not strive for the spectacle of reality in droves, the reconstruction of a collective reality. To the contrary, Baudrillard looks for the one (*hén*) in photography, the particular, the individual experience of the singular, the "hénorama", the experience of the one, or the *ouden ti horama*, the almost nothing of the appearance. Baudrillard is the photographer of the appearance, of the accidental appearance of the one, of the experience of the accidental appearance of the one by an individual for one unique moment (now). Baudrillard is a photographer of the *kairos*, not of the chronos, of the here and now and not of time. He reacts to the instance, the elusive moment, the coincidence of the image, or of colored objects that arrange and offer themselves as image, and the coincidence of the presence of the photographer. What is the focus of the eye of the photographing philosopher after the end of history? Baudrillard's attention is raised by "the system of objects". Baudrillard's eye strolls along the world of objects. The phenomenology of perception (M. Merleau-Ponty) extends itself to the phenomenology of objects. But as he is trained in semiotic critique, he does not look for dramatic or decisive moments. but for the parerga, as Kant called the trivialities of aesthetics. The parerga represents the building elements of his aesthetics. This places Baudrillard in the French tradition of understatement, from Cartier-Bresson to Doisneau, who also resisted the temptation to analyze and comment human

situations with their photographs. Baudrillard, however, does not even take pictures of social relations, but of objectual relations. It is amazing how he shows, as a matter of course, a world of objects resting in itself. At the same time, one feels a certain melancholy accompanying the laconic photographic gaze. The laconic character prevents the transformation of the everyday object into the magic of poetry, this well known danger to which most photo artists succumb to. Baudrillard encounters the almost hostile take over of photography by art in the 20th century with the imperturbability of the neutral object. Unobtrusively, the photographic apparatus lends to the objects their appearance profile and character to the images. Thereby that remainder of the world that normally escapes the excited eyes of the artists and the sensationalist photographers but that forms the main part of the universe, gets the colors and the formal urgency which it deserves. The photographic gaze literally rests on the surface of the objects and celebrates the appearances for the eye. This results in very colorful, very composed extracts of reality offered by reality itself, without the arrangement and the mise en scéne of the photographer. In this brightness of the objects which simply photography, better than the natural eye, can sometimes produce it, glistens Goethe's adoration of the moment: "Verweile doch, du bist so schon." ("Linger awhile! so fair thou art."). The most irrelevant and random objects inflame libidinal energies. The apparatus of photography alone yields the arena to the objects in which they fascinate (often fatally) and seduce us. The desire of the gaze is wakened just by the inconspicuous and the random. This is the photographic trap both of Baudrillard and of the object.

The lingering and the seduction is followed by the disappearance. The appearances of the objects mirror simultaneously their disappearance. An aesthetics of appearance parries an aesthetics of disappearance. The exorcism of things, the trust in the world of things is followed by the collapse, the distrust of the image. The appearance of the signs rescues the appearance of the things from disappearing. In Baudrillard's photography, the epiphany triumphs over phenomenology and phenomenology forms the frame for a melancholic Critique of epiphany. The laconic character of things is the reason for their beauty. Baudrillard photographs this beauty in a laconic way. In art, it is traditionally the subject that puts its stamp onto the world. It directs and constructs. It places everything on expression. The subject arranges the world of objects into a form in which the perception of the objectual world does not express the qualities of the objects, but the qualities of the subject. The photographic image is the expression of the subject, not of the object.

Baudrillard turns this historical condition of photography around. The quality of the objectual world to be an image is not defined on the level of the subject, but, as it was already said, on the level of the object that, so to speak, comes to itself through the image. The pure object is the primal scene of the image, and this primal scene, in reality, is without image, at least without a *leitbild*. This apparent antinomy of the pictorial quality of objects before the state of being a picture, an art before art, can be illustrated by the metaphor of a "langue sans parole" (F. Picabia). Here, as in many other cases, Baudrillard's position is closer to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School as it is usually supposed. His aesthetics of the image correlates with Adorno's aesthetics without *leitbild*, a paradox aesthetics, "parva aesthetica".[3] Baudrillard interprets this aesthetics without leitbild as trans-art, as art without or after art. The longing for a trans-art corresponds to Baudrillard's longing for a politics after politics, for a trans-politics. There is a peculiar form of ecstasy in his photographs, as every ecstasy is determined by its element of transgression or transcendence. This ecstatic enjoyment through the photographic image is precisely this moment beyond politics, beyond the social, beyond the media, beyond art, precisely this moment of enlightenment through transgression which is promised by the primal scene of the image, the perception before the image. Baudrillard resolves the paradox of an image without *leitbild* by referring to the fourth instance of the encounter of image, object, and subject, namely the photographic apparatus. For him, the possibility for the object to be an image and the power of the subject over the image are equally determined by the technical virtuality of the photographic apparatus, which has in theory already been laid out by Vileém Flusser.[4] The image is an acting out of technology, an exhaustion of the technological possibilities and thus the virtuality of the photographic apparatus. The automatic of the virtual produces the image. The person, the subject, is nothing more than an operator of the program, of the apparatus. With this definition of the image as the virtuality of the machine and as an elaboration of its technological possibilities the object succeeds in putting its stamp on the subject and its perception. The object mirrors itself in the subject.

In the mirror of photography, the objects come closer, like in the warnings that we can read on the rear mirrors of American cars: "Objects in this mirror are closer than they appear". Objects in the mirror of photography are closer

3 Theodor W. Adorno, Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main 1967.

4 Vilém Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, European Photography, Göttingen 1985, as well as *Towards a Philosophy of Photography,* European Photography, Göttingen 1984.

than they appear. The distance between subject and object is smaller and narrower than our illusion makes us believe. By insisting on the role of object and apparatus, Baudrillard escapes two notorious traps of photography: the art trap and the technology trap. The art trap consists in the expressivity of the subject at the cost of the object. The technology trap consists in the expressivity of the apparatus at the cost of the subject. In both cases, we deal with forms of hegemony: the conditions and qualities of the subject and of the apparatus dominate and distort the conditions and the qualities of the objects. Photography turns into a distorted mirror of the object. By escaping the art trap as well as the technology trap, Baudrillard becomes the photographer of the world of things par excellence.

Without the pathos of history, without the constructed objectivity or mise en scéne of art photography he produces a photography of things that, for the first time, is adequate for the things themselves. Through its reduced aesthetics, his photography of things does, for the first time, justice to the things. Do the photographic portraits form a horizon in whose mirror the objects appear distorted? It is at least significant for the perception of the philosopher that he should have chosen one sentence which can be read on everyday automobiles as a warning, as a leitmotif for the perception of images. Of what nature is the mirror of photography? Do the photographic portraits form a mirror in which the horizon of objects appears distorted? Is the human being a mirror and are the objects thus closer as they seem or do they just seem to be closer to us than they are? Does Baudrillard survey not only the horizon of the objects with his photographs, but also the distance between the human beings and the objects? Are Baudrillard's photographs the beginning of the end of antropomorph photography and pictorial art?

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The fate of energy — Wyrmwood: Road of the dead, ecology, and Baudrillard's zombie

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This paper offers a reading of the Roche-Turner brothers film, *Wyrmwood*: Road of the dead (2014), in terms of Jean Baudrillard's work on the fate of energy. Crowdsourced with a budget of $160,000 (Harvey 2015), it took the Roche-Turner brothers four years, working only on weekends, for the film to be completed (Internet movie database). What makes this a notable zombie film, is that a new form of zombie use-value emerges. The film opens with the familiar genre trope of a meteor shower that brings with it a virus that changes people into zombies, depending on their blood type (though once bitten everyone becomes a zombie regardless of blood type). And then via two intercut lines of action, we find the main characters (Brooke, Barry, Benny, and Frank) caught up in a struggle against the undead zombies in the post-apocalyptic Australian bush. One line of action consists of the conflict between the zombies and Barry, Benny, and Frank, who pool their mechanical skills to battle against the zombies for survival. They discover that zombies can be used as an energy source for fueling cars (one of the effects of the meteor shower is that conventional fossil fuel, such as petrol, is no longer combustible). On the other line of action, Brooke (Barry's sister) discovers she can control the zombies with her mind.

The post-apocalyptic zombie film often engages with the problem of energy, and the reconfiguration of the social world around scarce resources — fuel, food, water and other supplies. Generally, these filmic worlds are riven with conflict over the control of these resources (Hamilton 2103; Bishop 2015). *Wyrmwood* takes a novel approach to this theme. The virtue of a low budget film, such as *Wyrmwood*, is that it pares back (necessarily) the essential elements of the genre — no *World war z* (Pitt and Forster 2013) casting level here — and, in the process, the zombie is represented as a form of surplus energy. I want to develop here what Erik Bohman calls zombie theory. This will involve Baudrillard's corpse — the zombie Baudrillard — reanimated and returned not quite like he is remembered. As Bohman puts it, "Yes, that's Zombie Baudrillard — another Johnny — at the boarded-up window with his dark, speculative eyebrows and cigarette stains between his fingers, but there's something different about him" (2014, p. 152). What I want to do is animate and redevelop the zombie Baudrillard in relation to *Wyrmwood*, and the *Wyrmwood* zombie in relation to Baudrillard. The upshot will be a useful way of situating Baudrillard in relation to the question of ecology. As I will show, Baudrillard warns against, what we might call, the convenience of ecology, convenient in the sense that ecology relies upon a rational system of accounting.

I will follow the trajectory set forth in what is already an emerging and rich literature in the film-as-allegory tradition on the zombie and Baudrillard. Among this literature, the following stand out. In a suggestive reading, Datta and Macdonald traverse the familiar ground of the zombie as undead consumer, and contend that the figure of the zombie "mythologize[s] a central temporal contradiction facing the working class" (2011, p. 77). Romero's reconstruction of the zombie in *Night of the living dead* (Russo and Savini 1990), and subsequent series of five films is, of course, the precursor text in this argument. The temporal contradiction that they outline, consists of the plight of the contemporary capitalist subject, "borrowing on time" by using credit cards to buy commodities. Contemporary subjects buy now and pay later, and this means that they become all the more subservient to the dead labour time of capitalism. The zombie as Datta and Macdonald put it, depicts the "undead life of consumption" that is "left over after work" (2011, p. 85). They explain via Baudrillard, in this capitalist context the commodity-sign becomes the "definitive feature of culture." This means that collective representations that will give people their soul and so give them a life, are also commodities in the capitalist nexus" (2011, p. 86). But rather than see consumption as a form of zombie behavior, they contend consumption is, "a response to mindlessness, rather than its cause". Following Bataille's claims about excess and expenditure in relation to consumption, they claim subjects buy "in order to signify sovereignty" (2011, p. 87). And in an interesting, albeit bizarre, conclusion, they read the brain eating appetite of the zombie

as a form of politics. In a twisted echo of Baudrillardian hyperlogic, they contend that the zombie "penchant for eating brains is suggestive of what might be done to return zombies to the human world" (2011, p. 78). "You are what you eat", it seems, and "to eat the brains of capital" — the brains of capitalist subjects — is to consume the Geist that gives 'life' to capitalism" from within. This is characterized as a *"sacrificial politics"* (2011, p. 91), in which the mindless zombie returns as a dangerous product of capitalism to consume in final acts of sovereignty. The zombie has, from this perspective, a strange political life.

In a second take, in "Undead is the new green", Greg Pollock makes a similar argument about zombies, in the case of *World war z*, as an image of environmental politics. He draws Baudrillard's earlier work on the remainder, from *Simulacra and simulation* (1994), into a discussion on ecological disaster. For Pollock the zombie corresponds "to the threat of ecological collapse". The crucial point is that the zombie, as the remainder, no longer functions as an object, in the conventional object/subject relation. Instead we find a figure, the zombie, that is neither subject or object, dead or alive, and a figure against which resistance has no meaning (apart from survival). The zombie is a remainder, the residue that subsists once everything including life has been subtracted. For Pollock, the zombie is a "monster built on temporal disjunctions" (2011, pp. 175–176). Temporal disjunctions emerge in both the movement of Zombies, conventionally where despite a relentlessly slow pace they still manage to catch up with fleeing humans, and in *World war z*, where zombie infection moves incredibly quickly and overwhelms anyone caught in its way. As Pollock puts it, the zombie threatens "not as symbols of a taboo difference made flesh, but as non-difference between life and death in a general economy of motion (like fluid dynamics)" (2011, p. 176).

And in a third take on the zombie Baudrillard, Sconce employs his *Fatal Strategies* work to understand the figure of the zombie. The argument is as follows. In the context of postmodernity, an excess production has emerged, both of signs and objects. This proliferation of signs and objects presents subjects with two options. The first involves perpetuating the illusion of Cartesian control, a 'banal strategy', as Baudrillard calls it. The second is to adopt, what he calls, a 'fatal strategy'. This strategy involves accepting that objects have won. Objects, Baudrillard tells us, "have always been regarded as an inert, dumb world, which is ours to do with as we will. […] But for me, that world had something to say which exceeded its use" (2003, p. 4). The point here is that objects exceed systems. In Baudrillard's terms, objects proliferate "indefinitely, increasing their potential, outbidding themselves in an ascension to the limit" (1990, p. 25). The zombie represents this excessive object. Sconce writes, the zombie film consists of "narratives that are explicitly concerned with tracing the line between the subject and a hyperactive multiplication of encroaching objects, a band of humans fighting to preserve their precious illusion of autonomous self versus zombies who have passed over into the 'evil genius' of the object" (2013, p. 100).

In the aforementioned literature, with the zombie Baudrillard we encounter the zombie as revenge, the zombie as remainder, and the zombie as an untamable object. As can be seen, the term "object" is rightly understood in this literature in Baudrillard's terms. In this context, objects have very little to do with objectivity, with the idea of objective reality. The object, in this view, exceeds thought. Objects are uncontainable. As Baudrillard puts it, "something has changed now: the world, appearances, the object are bursting out. The object, which we have tried to keep in a kind of analytic passivity, is taking its revenge" (2003, p. 91). In many respects, the figure of the zombie is an apt Baudrillardian object taking its revenge. I want to explore *Wyrmwood* in these terms, but the crucial point is that something different emerges from the typical zombie threat that marks the genre. Of course, we find the usual problem of the zombie object as a threat to social life in *Wyrmwood*, but this is an object that also embodies nature as energy. Indeed, this is an object with a use-value that opens up, at the same time, a new form of what Baudrillard calls a vital destiny. This exploration of the post-apocalyptic bush, as such, goes beyond social collapse and the scarcity of energy in films such as *Mad Max* (Kennedy and Miller 1979). The consequent power struggles of men against men and men and their machines– clearly referenced throughout the film — is transformed by the appearance of the zombie in *Wyrmwood*. I will turn to the zombie Baudrillard's later work on the fate of energy to explore this point. In this essay, he discusses the inertia of the dead as a source of energy. We can stretch this argument to the Australian context of the film, where a jocular and 'matey' tone, along with a knowing (and perhaps dubious) play upon aboriginality, coincide around a struggle for the control of zombie energy as fuel and as weapon.

I turn to this energy problem because, as I have suggested, this is a major theme in filmic explorations of social life in post-apocalyptic contexts. In such filmic contexts, the scarcity of energy tends to be a key line of action, as warring factions struggle to gain control of resources. Animated by a contemporary social fear of depletion and lack, the post-apocalyptic film presents the Hobbesian nightmare of the war of all against all. This is, perhaps, no accident. As Baudrillard points out,

for Western culture energy is vital. Energy "is the first thing to be 'liberated', and all forms of liberation are founded on this model. […] Energy is a sort of phantasy projection which nourishes all of modernity's industrial and technical dreams" (Baudrillard 1993, pp. 100–101). With a lack of energy this dream surely collapses. It is no surprise, then, that the capturing and unleashing of energy to keep the dream alive is a dominant theme in the post-apocalyptic world of *Wyrmwood*. In this world, the zombie takes on a new role. In typical fashion, they threaten the living but they also emit a flammable gas that can be harnessed as fuel. The zombies are, in fact, a self-producing form of energy. They are the "energy of the accursed share", in Bataille's terms, and a violent expression of what Baudrillard calls, the principle of evil.

The principle of evil is an abstract term Baudrillard uses to explore the fundamental rule of duality and reversibility. What he notices is that modern 'advancement', technological and cultural, tends to proceed on the basis of the good, that is, on the basis of improvement, increasing benefit, efficiency, certainty, and comfort. Within modernity, as opposed to symbolically managing evil, good practices simply work to *eliminate evil*, that is, dispel uncertainty, suffering, decay, inefficiency, and so on. However, this drive to *eliminate evil* in the name of the good perilously overlooks the true relationship between good and evil. As Baudrillard is at pains to remind us throughout his work, good and evil are inseparable. Life's imperfections, that dimension of evil, is what animates the good in life, and eliminating defects merely allows evil to flourish with a greater force. Below Western modernity's systems of control lies "the tenacity, obsessiveness and irreducibility of the evil whose contrary energy is at work everywhere" (Baudrillard 1993, p. 106). I would contend, the zombie figure reminds us that this process of elimination is fraught and, ultimately, fails. *Wyrmwood*, I think, is a poetic take upon this problem.

To undertake this discussion, I will briefly focus upon what I think are three significant aspects of the film. The first is the story of the coming of the zombie apocalypse; the second, the discovery of zombie energy; and the third, the rise of paranormal control. These aspects revolve around three spaces — the bush, the shed [garage], and laboratory — and three characters: Benny (Leon Burchill), Barry (Jay Gallagher), and Brooke (Bianca Bradley).

The film self-consciously plays on the trope of aboriginality and the mystical 'dreamtime'. Through the aboriginal tropes of the bush campfire and knowledge of the mysteries of nature, the Benny character explains the mysterious origin of the zombie virus. He tells the story of *Wyrmwood*, a meteorite that crashed into the Earth and unleashed the virus that gave rise to the zombie onslaught, as well shut down existing fossil fuel energy systems. On the first line of action, battling to survive this onslaught, through the usual hack and slash method that marks the genre, Benny meets Barry in a shed full of machinery, owned by Frank (Keith Argius). Barry had managed to escape the zombies attacking his family home and found his way to the shed, but, as is typical of the genre, was agonizingly compelled to kill both his wife and daughter, who had been infected and were beginning to 'turn'. Under siege but protected, momentarily, in the shed the men accidently discover that zombie breath is a fuel that can be harnessed to power machinery. The shed scene is marked by what would be familiar for Australian and New Zealand audiences, the jocular tone of representations of Australian masculinity. Amidst jokes about beer, the characters work together to capture zombies to harness this fuel and escape the scene of the zombie siege.

On the second line of action, Brooke (Barry's sister), is captured by the character Doc's (Berynn Schwerdt) militaristic henchmen and taken to a makeshift laboratory to experiment upon her and other captured zombies. Doc runs tests on the blood of captured zombies, and phallically injects Brooke with this experimental blood. The unintended result of these inoculation experiments is that Brooke becomes-zombie, that is, she transforms into a hybrid human/zombie and learns how to control the zombies with her mind. With this mind control marshalling the support of zombies, she escapes the laboratory. In a showdown between Benny, Barry and Doc's henchmen, and with Doc's henchmen with the upper hand, she utilizes zombies as weapons. Brooke and her brother thus emerge as victors in this new post-apocalyptic world.

Significantly, though, in this final scene two forms of zombie energy are employed. In this scene, Doc's henchmen manage to recapture Brooke and capture Benny and Barry. It seems all hope is lost. However, in the first form of zombie energy, a captured and injured Benny sacrificially allows himself to be bitten so that he would become zombie. In zombie form Benny is able to free himself from the chains by cutting off his now unfeeling arm. And seizing a weapon, he frees Brooke from the Doc's men. Unsurprisingly for the supporting hero, in the process he is shot in the head (the only means for killing zombies). In the second form of zombie energy, Brooke, now freed through the heroic sacrifice of Benny, fully discovers the powers of her mind control over zombies. She employs the zombies as weapons against Doc's men. With this zombie energy at her disposal, she and Barry emerge as victors.

It is significant that the horror evoked by the figure of the zombie, in the context of this film at least, is the loss of

control over natural energy systems. The threatening zombies are the revenge of nature, the catastrophic result of a viral pandemic with no known origin. *Wyrmwood* is a low budget, negative (in the photographic sense) version of *World war z*. In *World war z*, the zombie takes an overwhelming fluid form. The sheer speed in which the crowded social space of the city becomes zombified is impossible to contain or harness. Instead, protection against infection comes only in the form of a kind of vaccination. The zombies prefer to bite and infect only healthy subjects, so injecting humans with an unhealthy, non-lethal dose of a virus sends zombies away. In the world of *World war z*, subjects must, paradoxically, become ill to stay well. In *Wyrmwood*, in contrast, zombies move at the genre's standard slow yet relentless speed in the space of the bush. However, inoculation does not protect against the zombie; it transforms the subject into a hybrid human/zombie form. So while *World war z* protects the subject, *Wyrmwood* finds ways to harness and connect with zombie energy.

The key text here, as I have suggested, is "The fate of energy", from The *transparency of evil* essays. Baudrillard's argument in this essay surely points us to the logic of the zombie. We find, in this essay, Baudrillard engaging with the problem of ecological thinking in the context of runaway processes such as Nuclear disasters (Chernobyl) and, by extension, global warming. Questioning ecology, he writes the "dangers threatening the human species are […] less risks of *default* (exhaustion of natural resources, dilapidation of the environment, etc.) than risks of excess: runaway energy flows, chain reactions, or frenzied autonomous developments" (1993, p. 103). So rather than scarcity, that preoccupation of the post-apocalyptic film, the contemporary moment is one of excess. Here the figure of the zombie, as vertiginous and threatening energy, is fitting. Zombies are the revenge of nature in the *Wyrmwood* film, the nightmare of an excess of energy that is out of control. The film thus presents a nightmarish vision of the concrete effects of western modernity upon the objects of earth. Baudrillard understands these effects, these unavoidable processes, as potentially catastrophic. As he puts it in *Impossible exchange*, "Nature reduced to an energy source takes its revenge in the form of natural catastrophes" (2011, p. 58).

The idea of catastrophe comes from the French mathematician and topologist René Thom. As Thom puts it, the "cardinal merit (and the greatest scandal!) of CT has been the claim that provides for a theory of accidents […] essentially grounded in qualitative discontinuities one finds in the world" (2016, pp. 18, 31). When dynamic systems speed up uncontrollable forces can be unleashed. As Baudrillard puts it, the "dynamics of disequilibrium, the uncontrollability of the energy system itself […] is capable of getting out of hand in deadly fashion in very short order" (1993, pp. 101). This problem is precisely the focus of "The fate of energy" essay. The essay makes three provocative points, which, I might add, underscore key characteristics of Baudrillard's more sociological ideas.

If we follow Baudrillard, it would be absurd to think that the earth would always behave obligingly relative to the liberating processes of modernity. This is because the extraction of energy, both physically and culturally, is built into the fabric of modernity itself. Physically, cheap fossil fuels power machines designed to increase the productive capacities of the human body. Culturally, the dynamics of the human will is liberated to accommodate this liberation of energy. The human subject rose above the dark, mysterious forces that characterize life before the enlightenment and became the prime mover of history, master of destiny. No doubt, with the advances of science and rise of democracy, life in the post-enlightenment world for many, though not all, became more tolerable and comfortable. At the same time, though, the post-enlightenment world has now entered a phase in which the climate, as a consequence of burning fossil fuel for energy to drive advancements, is becoming more extreme and less inhabitable, where viruses wreak havoc upon populations, and economies move from one crisis to the next. In Baudrillard's language, the liberation of energy comes with an unavoidable condition. It also unleashes, as the aforementioned passage contends, catastrophic and reversed processes.

Ecology is clearly the most rational response to the depletion of resources. This view is, by now, well entrenched. However, if we follow Baudrillard, rationally limiting expenditure, restoring balance, and so on, are dangerously reductive. The problem is that ecology takes a one dimensional view of the world (we might read, in fact, Baudrillard's entire corpus as a critique of one dimensional thinking). "While risks of default", he writes, "can be addressed by a New Political Ecology […] there is absolutely nothing to counter this other immanent logic, this speeding up of everything which plays double or nothing with nature" (1993, pp. 103–104). In more scathing moments he describes ecology as "the prolongation of pollution" (2006, p. 225). In other words, ecology merely allows established systems, industrial or otherwise, to appear to be ethical while potentially catastrophic processes continue unabated. We should note that Baudrillard's is not an anti-enlightenment position here. His contention is not that ecology is useless or that energy should not be harnessed, it is that like the drive for good, which must always contend with the indelibility of evil, ecology must always contend with

reverse, potentially catastrophic effects. What image would offer a more apt characterization of potential catastrophe than the zombie? What marks all zombies, from the zombie consumer in the shopping mall in *Night of the living dead*, to the zombie as excessive, overpowering wave in *World war z*, to the zombie as the relentlessness of nature in *Wyrmwood*, is the vertiginous processes of energy systems

It is precisely the figure of the zombie that appears as an exemplar of vertiginous processes in "The fate of energy" essay. Along with the example of New York City, which "feeds on its own hubbub, its own waste, its own carbon-dioxide emissions — energy arising from the expenditure of energy" (Baudrillard 1993, p. 102), the zombie carries on through sheer inertia. He writes:

In The Supermale, Alfred Jarry describes a superfused energy of this order in connection with sexual activity, but it may also occur in the cases of mental and mechanical energy: as Jarry's *quintuplette* crosses Siberia in the wake of the Trans-Siberian [train], some velocipedists die, yet carry on cycling. *Rigor mortis* is replaced by *mobilitas mortis*, and the dead rider pedals on indefinitely, even accelerating, as a function of inertia. The energy released is boosted by the inertia of the dead (1993, p. 102).

In this scene, five cyclists compete against the Trans-Siberian train in a Ten-Thousand-Mile race. The cyclists are testing the efficacy of "perpetual motion food', invented by the novel's main character, André Marcueil, who was convinced of the "limitlessness of human strength" (Jarry 1999, p. 51). Crucially, Baudrillard is struck by the *mobilitas mortis* of the zombie-like rider, who is dead but continues to pedal indefinitely. The scene sums up perfectly the argument of "The fate of energy" essay and reveals two crucial points.

First, the waste byproducts of expenditure — such as carbon emissions, plastic bags, food, illicit economies, and so on — continue to be "productive", that is produce effects. Waste, of course, is unavoidable and, in some instances, desirable. Take the example of New York City. In this city, waste byproducts are essential for the system to function. New Yorkers draw an "abnormal energy from" the "vices, ills, and excesses" of the city (Baudrillard 1993, pp. 102–103). Excesses are what characterize this place. And Jarry's velocipedists enjoy the benefits of the excess energy of the pedaling of the zombie rider in the Trans-Siberian race. In both instances, excess energy is fed back into the system. Yet, and here we get to the crux of the argument, modern rational logics and practices, as Baudrillard contends, fail to adequately account for the excessive effects of waste. Excess is generally passed off as a loss and no longer productive. It thus disappears from official economic and social calculations. In Baudrillard's terms, this passing off characterizes modernity. "All previous cultures", he contends, "have depended on a reversible pact with the world, on a stable ordering of things in which energy release certainly played a role, but never on the liberation of energy as a basic principle" (1993, p. 100). In contrast, with modernity comes the one-sided logic of liberation as an end itself (New York City would thus be more pre-modern than modern).

Second, as the logic of liberation implies, ignoring waste is risky. It can return in the form of revenge. Better to symbolically embrace excess and waste, and allow it to perform its productive function. As Baudrillard maintains:

Once certain limits have been passed there is no relationship between cause and effect, merely viral relationships between one effect and another, and the whole system is driven by inertia alone. The development of this increase in strength, this velocity and ferocity of what is dead, is the modern history of the accursed share. It is not up to us to explain this: rather, we must be its mirror in real time. We must outpace events, which themselves long ago outpaced liberation. The reign of incoherence, anomaly and catastrophe must be acknowledged (1993, p. 108).

Catastrophic systems, such as New York City, are vital and alive when waste energy continues to be productive; we might say when the accursed share is incorporated into the system. However, some systems can gather strength and speed up and flip into a catastrophic condition. In this condition of "superfusion", energy defies the rules of regular operation. Instead, it exceeds the principles of this operation, becomes unpredictable and threatens the very system that liberated it in the first place. This is why, I would maintain, Baudrillard's work continues to be vital. The question that confronts the planet, and these days a broad term such as 'the planet' is appropriate, is how to respond to both physical and cultural runaway processes.

This idea of a system exceeding the rules of its own principle is central in Baudrillard's work. I want to suggest that Baudrillard's work can thus be best characterized as engaging with the problem of the zombie rather than the ghost. The figure of the ghost haunts us with the deeds of the past, while the zombie figure confronts us with the problem of energy. Derrida takes up the problem of the ghost in *Specters of Marx* with his hauntology of the present. As he puts it, to be is to inherit. "All the questions on the subject of being or of what is to be (or not to be) are questions of inheritance" (Derrida 1994, p. 54). The problem, however, is that the past does not appear for us in a straightforward fashion. The past, for Derrida, is like a ghost whose appearance can be easily dismissed as a mere aberration or trick of the light. Derrida

thus enjoins us to consciously adopt an ethical relationship to the ghosts of the past, to believe in them and be committed to them like Shakespeare's Hamlet. In contrast, with the zombie there is no doubt about existence. The ethical relationship with the zombie is one of necessity. Kill or be infected. The zombie is an object that looks analytically familiar to us, but, at same time, is utterly foreign. If the ghost's existence is to be inferred through light and shadows or moving objects (the slamming door, for example. Is it the wind?), the zombie exists as relentless and threatening energy moving at varying speeds (usually slowly). The zombie represents the brute and unavoidable existence of destiny.

To return to *Wyrmwood: Road of the dead* by way of conclusion, we find two means for coping with the zombie pandemic. One is to develop a vaccine to limit zombie effects, as is undertaken by Doc. The other is to harness zombie energy and ride along with the catastrophe. *Wyrmwood* is thus a replay of the fantasy of control, a banal strategy perhaps, in which the zombie becomes a useful object for the controlling modern subject. It is significant that it is the aboriginal subject, the character Benny, who sacrifices himself to further this aim. To be sure, this is a heroic sacrifice, but in this post-apocalyptic context, it seems that aboriginal death — or in this case the undead submission to control — remains essential for the white community to overcome nature. However, in order to effectuate this fantasy of control, the film also crosses the line that divides good and evil. The character Brooke has been transformed by the experiments and become a powerful intermediary between the human and zombie. She is both human, in the conventional sense, and zombie. She is both alive and dead at the same time. The relation between subject and object collapse. *Wyrmwood* is thus a notable film. The paranormal intersects with the zombie genre and produces the beginnings of what Baudrillard surely means by a "vital destination" (1993, p. 104), a destination that is a total risk but which opens up a form of beyond good and evil. The human would thus be a species that is experimental-like and without future guarantees.

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Fatal Fascination, or, Counterinsurgency as Suicide

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The post-9/11 counterinsurgency project was meant to establish full-spectrum dominance in a permanently deterred reality. Yet it has not only failed to prevent insurgency; it has also created the conditions for the system to come close to destroying itself. Baudrillard already saw this in his writings on terrorism in the 1980s and after 9/11. This article will explore his theories from several points of view. After summarising his general analysis and his views on terrorism in particular, it will examine the field of insurgency and counterinsurgency to show how his analysis has been borne-out. Finally, it will show how the current COVID-19 crisis marks a moment of attempted suicide, where the system deploys its counterinsurgency techniques in a way which cuts off its own lifeblood. Baudrillard's analysis is thus shown to be prescient.

Baudrillard, Terror and the Collapse of Meaning

On my reading, Baudrillard broadly adheres to the Situationist view of capitalism-as-Spectacle (Vaneigem, 1967; Debord, 1970). In Situationism, the system stands for death or living-death, against the forces of life, joy, love, and creativity. The system requires a constant supply of lifeforce which it can vampirise and recuperate as a source of value, and tends to drain or exhaust this source through its endless life-destroying and meaning-destroying activity. The system dominates by reabsorbing (not exploiting) previously excluded and emergent phenomena into the code. This leads to a constant back-and-forth of escape (*detournement, derive*) and capture (recuperation). Other examples of this approach include Bey (nd.), who sees recognition of art in the Spectacle as sapping its vitality, and Perlman (1983), who sees the system as a kind of death-machine. For Baudrillard, the production of affective meaning through symbolic exchange is particularly important. The system "milks" the masses of their capacity to produce affective meanings, similar to the way so-called narcissists "milk" victims for "narcissist supply", or support for their grandiose ego-construct, or sadistic authoritarians "milk" subordinates through pain. However, it also needs to resist symbolic exchange so as not to become reversible itself. The system flees its own death by shutting down symbolic exchange — placing people in ever greater solitude, facing their own death. The system relies on a non-reversible aggression which accumulates power and wealth because it cannot be reciprocally returned.

Baudrillard cross-breeds Situationist neo-Marxism with strands from existentialism, psychoanalysis, and anthropology. Like most French writers in the 1970s, Baudrillard was a firm believer in the unconscious, if not in its Freudian incarnation. (Today's critical scholars, psychologists, and radicals are mostly in denial about the unconscious, or at best disavow it). His vision of the functioning of affect and meaning — focused on his concepts of "symbolic exchange", "seduction", and "reversal" — draw variously on Lacan, Bataille, Nietzsche and Mauss. Baudrillard's lifeforce is darker, more Lacanian, than the Situationist variant; it is tightly entangled with the death-drive. Symbolic exchange is the sole source of enjoyment (*jouissance*), and it allows signs to "mean" something by connecting them to the level of lifeforce.

It is hard to unpack what Baudrillard means by symbolic exchange, though it clearly relates closely to gift economy and reversals of the Clastrean kind (see Mauss, 2002; Clastres, 1980). Simulation is an exchange of signs with other signs. Symbolic exchange is an exchange between signs and "the real" (presumably in the sense of the unconscious, or the Lacanian Real). A social world which does not repress symbolic exchange looks like indigenous societies as depicted by Mauss: excess rather than accumulation, initiation into affectively intense social meanings, events are destined and meaningful (not aleatory/random), playfully inventive, operating as groups (not individuals or masses), and making cyclical returns for whatever is taken (eg. from nature). Symbolic exchange also causes the breakdown of binaries, as in Turner's (1967) accounts of liminality. It breaks down subject-object relations; for example, an observed object always stares back.

The ability to carry out exchanges with death, or between life and death, is the main thing which is repressed. "Death"

here encompasses metamorphoses, ego-loss, and returns to indeterminacy, as well as literal deaths. The first of the many exclusions from society was the exclusion of the dead — of the social nature of death and of exchanges between living and dead. Capitalism and modern bureaucracies do not know how to die — or how to do anything except reproduce themselves.

At the symbolic level, opposites are identical. Excluding death also brings it close. It has put down a kind of transparent veil which prevents symbolic exchange among humans. Like Vaneigem (1967), Baudrillard argues that the system replaces the goal of *life* with *survival*. One is compelled to survive in order to be useful, unless one's death is decided by law or medicine.

Symbolic exchange is the exclusive source of meaning. *Meaning* should be understood here in an affective rather than a representational sense: something "has meaning" when it is cathected with libido, when a relation is formed between the affective and social worlds. Baudrillard is often hard to follow because he uses terms like "meaning" and "the real" in different senses — sometimes to refer to the code and representation, sometimes to symbolic exchange and affect. Capitalism *has* to destroy affective meaning because meaning contains the possibility of its own death.

For Baudrillard, symbolic exchange is is missing in consumer capitalism. The system functions as a cybernetic code which operates at a surface level, generating assemblages from blueprints and plugging individuals into the resulting systems as outward-directed nodes. The system stops providing "use-values" oriented to concrete humans (who are necessarily *within* symbolic exchange), and focuses on its own endless reproduction. This, in turn, involves the denial of its own mortality and the possibility of reversal — a denial built deeply into the capitalist drive for endless growth and accumulation.

Consumerism is not a hedonistic practice which provides pleasure for concrete humans; it is a compulsory status-ranking system which involves puritanical self-regulation of bodies to conform to external systems (Baudrillard, 1998). Baudrillard is here entirely in line with the Situationist view. People are alienated from their bodies, which are managed for performance. What appears to be hedonism is actually a crafted, compulsive role-performance. People are also encouraged to identify with a doubled version of themselves which only exists as an image. An increasingly radical gap appears between the meaningless field of representations and the emotions of concrete people. In the classic Situationist view, this leads to a rupture in which the system's irrelevance to real pleasures is a basis for revolution. In Baudrillard, it takes a more ambiguous form. The system constantly drains lifeforce from everything, but implodes in two ways. Any meaning it allows or generates — such as the fascination and ecstasy produced by the media — threatens a return of symbolic exchange. But the destruction of meaning causes a collapse through loss of energy.

Capitalism traps desire through ambience — a diffuse, mobile experience of life with a lack of situatedness and territories. The sign-values attached to objects partly compensate for this, making people object-like. The code, a relation among objects and nodes, replaces symbolic language. People are excluded from history. This is rendered bearable through simulations of participatory activity, and through a televised presentation of history as scary and exclusion from it as security. This is not so much repression as forced participation sustained by the (perceived) absence of any way of saying no.

Without signs which symbolically "mean", passion is lost. Instead, people are tied to the system through various other affects: fascination, ecstasy, etc. When things are reduced to their surface appearances or external performances/operations, they lose the meaning and cathexis which otherwise attaches to them. They become equivalent signs, unable to produce intense emotions. Fatigue and boredom corrode the consumerist system, destroying its aura of producing meaning or reality. The system needs to constantly regenerate this aura by generating emotional responses. If it can't do this through the appeal of commodities, it needs spectacular media events or recuperates forces from the ever-shrinking outside. Portraying everyday consumerism as threatened is a way to revive its aura, its grandeur and sublimity. In the Gulf War for instance, audiences consented to be gently terrorised without losing their basic indifference. This was enough to save the appearance of war and politics for awhile.

The system cannot understand the psychosocial forces operating within it. It only understands its own survival. This is why changing its contents is so ineffective in generating real change. The system keeps working in the same, oblivious, superficial, self-reproductive way. People are commanded to communicate, desire, enjoy, and reveal their (symbolic) secret (eg. through surveys, polls, consumption choices, social media), even when the system's lack of affect prevents this, when generalised simulation means there is nothing there to reveal, that responses are simply "correct" answers implied in the question, etc. This process effectively involves a demand for an endless reproductive labour of supplying meaning and affect to the system so it can keep reproducing itself. The system 'hounds out' negativity, singularity and conflict, establishing a viral violence which operates by contagion (2002:94). This provokes a general resistance of all singularities, without any unifying agenda. People secretly desire a return to ex-

istential territories where symbolic exchange operates — a reestablishment of cathexes in the world. Shadowy figures sometimes seem *Unheimlich* and threatening because they remind people of the repression of symbolic exchange and the forgotten dead.

The system would not survive if it was *entirely* without meaning. It relies on certain "cool" types of meaning, such as ecstasy and fascination. Ecstasy characterises the fashion system, providing an almost vertiginous sense of peering into an abyss of excess. Ecstasy tends to metastatise and spread across different social fields. People seek ecstatic excess of almost anything — even boredom or misery. Fascination occurs when symbolic exchange reappears, through an entry of an opposite term into a primary term — of truth with the power of the false, reality with unreality, etc. The system is a kind of violence without consequences which survives through fascination with its operations and generalised disempowerment (deterrence). Ecstasy and fascination are "cool" or "cold" passions, with little intense connection. There is also a general panic arising from the collapse of meaning. However, this capture of the masses through fascination is a Pyrrhic victory. The masses are a 'stupefied, hyperreal euphoria' (1994:91–2) which absorbs the system's energy in inertia and quiet resistance, denying it the meaning it needs. The masses supposedly struggle to neutralise or distort the meanings the system tries to permeate through society. They are *fascinated*, but in an active, destructive way which involves symbolic exchange. They undermine the system by withdrawing their will from it — refusing to know, will, or desire anything.

Baudrillard suggests a political goal of "catastrophe", or complete decathexis of the system. We need to 'become the nomads of this desert, but disengaged from the mechanical illusion of value' (1994:153). We need to avoid becoming fascinated with the system's death-throes, and thus giving it more meaning. He also seeks a return to symbolic exchange, as found in practices such as graffiti. Sometimes he suggests a need to raise the stakes to the level of symbolic exchange or symbolic disorder so as to "outbid" the system, making a bid it can only meet with its own death. 'The secret is to oppose to the order of the real an absolutely imaginary realm, absolutely ineffectual at the level of reality, but whose implosive energy absorbs everything real and all the violence of real power which founders there' (1983:119). This is not an insurrection which explodes the system — a metaphor appropriate in the growth phase of capitalism, as the system was still expanding — but an implosion which abolishes meaning, value and the real (1983:120).

The system is incapable of symbolic death and symbolic killing. But it perpetrates a kind of cold-blooded extermination by means of devivification (see below). The difference has to do with whether it recognises a symbolic relation to an other in its conflicts. For Baudrillard, the dominant western regime has an inability to contemplate Evil or the Other (2002:65–6). It only ever recognises one subject: itself.

Death, along with madness, violence and sex, is (or was) repressed rather than exchanged. This makes it fascinating. Most deaths are carefully managed and concealed, and do not disrupt society. Accidental and violent deaths are the only type talked about, and thus, a source of fascination. These particular deaths (the victims of 9/11, Bataclan, COVID-19…) become the last refuge of symbolic exchange, sacrifice and ritual, a potential revolutionary force because of their uselessness. Suicide is also a revolutionary act. And people resist health and safety rules, because this seizes back power at the expense of risk — restoring symbolic exchange.

The system tries to plan everything so as to avoid any disruptive "event", to prevent accidental death by generating planned death. But crises continue to proliferate at grassroots levels, almost like a continual state of disaster. Deterrence does not prevent this low-intensity crisis; it prevents it from having system-level effects. People are subject to an anonymous terror which might exterminate them, not to kill them, but because they don't matter statistically. A split thus emerges between a quasi-real world of precarity, crisis and survival, and an alienated system of signs insulated from it. In a simulated world, events are prevented because no social logic or story can be deployed according to its own logic. A social force risks annihilation if it tries this. This leads to an evacuation of any historical stake from society. Since the system identifies itself with reality and meaning, it encourages types of reality-checking which in fact check against the system, and it blackmails people with loss of meaning and with threatening chaos if they go outside it.

The system is involuting or imploding, collapsing in on itself. The weight of its own simulations swallows the energy it predates on; the snake eats its own tail. Too many simulacra destroy meaning and the reality-effect. Signs stop meaning or motivating; people stop caring about them. Meaning circulates at high-speed, without any guarantees. Functions replace meanings. But this turns functional failings into existential disasters. The system wants responsible subjects but mass-produces irresponsible ones. The media have become a means of manipulation in all directions at once. They carry both the system's simulation and the simulations which destroy it. They amplify terrorism at the same time as condemning it.

It is in this context that Baudrillard theorises terrorism.

For him, terrorism is a kind of "overbidding" — offering the system a gift it cannot reciprocate except by collapsing. It puts an end to the situation of deterrence, but actually *doing* what is usually deterred. Initially, Baudrillard has in mind primarily the Baader-Meinhof group, and thus leftist and not far-right or Islamist "terrorism". But he repeats his analysis regarding 9/11. What is important for Baudrillard is not the element of mass-murder (the system also murders) or the ideologies involved (for Baudrillard, the effects are anti-ideological), but rather, the return of symbolic exchange *inside* the system's terrain of simulation. 'In the terrorist act there is a simultaneous power of death and simulation' which must not be confused with a 'morbid taste [for] death' or with the Spectacle (1983:113). Terrorist acts are acts of reversal which return 'the "political" order to its nullity' (1983:113). Terrorism offers 'the purest symbolic form of challenge', a 'condensed narrative' which disrupts the appearance of reality with 'the purest form of the spectacular' (1983:114). It does not succeed through political victory. Rather, it makes everything ambivalent and reversible (1983:115). There is never a clear victory or defeat. The illogical methods and errors, the difficulty telling if suspects were murdered or committed suicide, all add to the effect. 'It is this uncontrollable eruption of reversibility that is the true victory of terrorism' (1983:116).

Counterinsurgency becomes caught-up in the symbolic effect of terrorism. The media seek to narrate 'the victory of order' but cause its opposite to reverberate (1983:113). Repression does not reverse the rupture, because it 'traverses the same unforeseeable spiral of the terrorist act' — nobody knows where it will end or what setbacks it will face (1983:115). Both media and terrorism produce a 'fascination without scruples… a paralysis of meaning' to the benefit of singular events (1983:114). This 'paradoxical' mix of symbolic and simulation/Spectacle is the only novelty of recent times and 'subversive because insoluble' (1983:115). 'Around this tiny point, the whole system of the real condenses, is tetanized, and launches all its anti-bodies. It becomes so dense that it goes beyond its own laws of equilibrium and involutes in its own over-effectiveness' (1983:120). Terrorism is thus a kind of fatal seduction, which provokes the system to collapse under an excess of reality (1983:120) — forcing the system to face the possibility of its own death.

In many ways, terrorism simply makes explicit the terror underpinning the system — but as a real event rather than a threat. The system is terroristic in four ways. It holds the masses hostage through their dependence on it. People are held hostage by being held responsible for the system's survival. The system threatens to take the world with it if it collapses; people are 'psychologically programmed to destroy ourselves' if it does (1990:60). It offers a kind of deferred death. Baudrillard (1975) had earlier argued that the masses are already hostages, because proletarian status and forced labour are substitutes for a deferred death (an argument based on the origins of labour in enslavement of prisoners-of-war). It gently terrorises people with images of real history and symbolic exchange as terrifying insecurity, depicted both in news and fiction (Baudrillard sees the adverts between TV shows as the consumerist offer of security, contrasted with the affectively intense but *undesirable* content of the shows). Finally, it operates a kind of terrorism through mutually assured destruction, in which it "deters" war by making it too costly, and threatens to take everyone with it in the event of its destruction.

But this is a one-way terror which stops short of the act and is disempowering. The system is saturated with terror, in 'homeopathic doses' (2002:59). Securitisation is 'a veiled form of perpetual terror' (2002:81). Terrorism forces the west to terrorise itself, in a 'war of armed security, of the perpetual deterrence of an invisible enemy' (2002:82). Baudrillardian deterrence is a simulated conflict which exists to preclude a real conflict or real antagonism. Instead of mobilising energies in conflict, it mobilises or demobilises them in inertia. Terrorism can be subversive in two ways: it passes from the deterred threat to the event, and it reverses the one-way violence of the system. It reinvests social space with symbolic meaning — even if this meaning is suffering, horror, etc. Baudrillard is worried about attempts to interpret the event, rendering terrorists just another node in the system. Interpreters try to 'exterminate them with meaning' (1983:117). Baudrillard is particularly worried about debates on "what really happened" becoming so fascinating as to mobilise, pacify and dissuade — thus serving the system (1983:123).

Baudrillard's response to 9/11 follows from this analysis. 9/11 was the first event that was a setback for globalisation in a long time (2002:4). It was revolutionary because it managed to combine the symbolic logic of sacrifice with the 'white light' of Spectacle (2002:30). The outpouring of responses is a giant 'abreaction' — a cathartic acting-out — of the fascination caused by the event (2002:5). Everyone dreams of destroying American hegemony because of its excess, but admitting this in the west is forbidden (2002:5). Such a desire is reactance, rather than a death-drive. "Good" cannot destroy "Evil" because it necessarily provokes it as a kind of blowback. Ideology is irrelevant; enemies play the system's game only to disrupt it. By monopolising power, the system forced its enemies to change the rules. The system is powerless against the terrorist reversal which is like its shadow, because it is viral (2002:10–11). The event unfolded as if the towers themselves

committed suicide in reply to the attackers' suicides. It creates a tiny void around which power gazes, fascinated, then perishes (2002:18), which contrasts with the huge effort and derisory effects of the system's non-wars (2002:23).

Today's terrorism means turning one's own death into 'an absolute weapon against a system that operates on the basis of the exclusion of death' (2002:16). The system has no reply available, since it cannot outbid death. Such a death, given as a gift, is symbolic and sacrificial. The only proportionate reply would be its own death (2002:17). 'The terrorist hypothesis is that the system itself will commit suicide in response to the multiple challenges posed by deaths and suicides' (2002:17). Terrorist suicides both mirror the system's violence and model a symbolic violence forbidden to it: its own death (2002:18). The fascination with one event intensifies subsequent panic and jumping to conclusions as following events are attributed to the enemy (2002:33).

Crucially, terrorism is a return of symbolic exchange. Terrorists are united in a pact with sacrificial obligations, not an employment contract (2002:22). The true point of terrorist acts is to reverse and overturn power, not for a higher truth, but simply because such a global power is unacceptable. The fundamental rejection, not specific fundamentalist beliefs, is central (2002:73–4). 9/11 caused an economic but also a *moral* recession (2002:31–2), a victory for the terrorists because it reduces the west to their level and reduces its soft power. The slippage from "freedom" to police-state globalisation is a defensive self-regulation by the system which internalises its own defeat (2002:32–3). Terrorism is similar to viruses: both are everywhere, both threaten the system's disappearance, and both render the system powerless (2002:11). Conspiracy theories and fake news are also feared because they destroy the illusion that the dominant system is itself "real" rather than denialist (2002:80–1).

This happens in the context of what Baudrillard calls a Fourth World War in which western capitalism seeks to conquer the globe (Coulter, nd:3; Baudrillard, 2002:11; cf Bey, 1996). Terrorists kill because they are fighting in the Fourth World War — a war started by "globalisation" (2002:10). This is a war of globalisation against itself (2002:11), 'a fractal war of all cells, all singularities, revolting in the form of antibodies' (2002:12). Today's terrorism is directed mainly against globalisation, hypermobility, and homogenisation. For example, tourism is targeted because it imports simulation. Perpetrators are reacting not to deprivation, but to humiliation — to receiving the system's supposed gifts without an opportunity to reciprocate (2002:100–1). It is not simply madness, and not the impotent rage of the oppressed (2002:53).The WTC was primarily targeted for symbolic reasons; its fall symbolises the collapse of global power (2002:43–4). The attacks did not damage political, economic or military power. They struck a symbolic blow at the system's credibility and image (2002:82).

The point of counterinsurgency is to substitute simulated non-events and non-wars for real, unique, unforeseeable events, and thus retain the precession of simulacra (2002:34). Set-piece wars like Afghanistan are attempts to restore the idea of war, but in fact, the Fourth World War is everywhere, dispersed (2002:12). The response thus fails. Violent responses to terrorism retaliate for the aggression, but not the symbolic challenge (2002:101). The system tries to exterminate adversaries, whereas terrorism is a kind of tit-for-tat, a genuine antagonism (2002:26). A terrorist act cannot be traded, it has no equivalent (2002:74). This is why, for Baudrillard, terrorism tends to bring about the system's suicide. One needs to think of this in terms of the *unconscious* impact of terrorism. In the unconscious, reversibility is always active; things are fluid and ambivalent and opposites are reversible or equivalent. There is also a constant interplay of repressed wishes with other forces. Hence the traumatic effect of giving people what they secretly want (or more accurately, what a *component* of their desire-structure wants or wanted, but has put aside or repressed due to opposing desires or fears) — which is what Baudrillard thinks happened on 9/11. Terrorism restores symbolic exchange because of its emotional intensity, the almost carnivalesque interchangeability of meanings, the "romantic" group affiliations (even in the form of larger-than-life supervillains), the autoproduction of emotional meaning without reference to the code, the "gift" of suicide (which stands for symbolic exchange), and the symbolic importance of death which can stand for life. Hence Kellner (2005) suggests that Baudrillard saw 9/11 as a return to strong events, which ruptured the previous period where only weak, deterred events occurred. Similarly, Kampmark (2002) suggests that bin Laden became hyperreal. His body and image were constantly suspect as to whether he was present or absent, living or dead. His supporters do not need his body, since he continues to operate as a phantasm.

In relation to the current situation, it is also important to remember that any rupture can have a similar effect, even without a "terrorist" actor. To the system, natural disasters are equivalent to terrorism, as is the existence of any refractory culture which contradicts its appearance as obvious Good (Baudrillard, 2002:98–100). McCallam (2012) follows up this analogy by suggesting that terrorism works in a similar manner to earthquakes, exploiting faultlines the system relies on. 'To what degree', he asks, 'might the Earth itself be conceived of as "terrorist"?' (2012:216). Fascination is

associated with the sublimity of nature, and by extension, by its horrifying power.

Reactive Networks and the Return of Meaning

The system cannot see the level of symbolic exchange, and therefore, can only process insurgency and armed opposition (which it labels "terrorism") on the level of its surface expressions and effects. Yet it is primarily an affective phenomenon. There are shadows of Baudrillard's "imaginary realm" in all the small-world networks (Sageman, 2004) which construct distinct worldviews without reference to "society", worldviews which are emotionally powerful but often entirely irrational. They often use initiations, rebirth metaphors, and intense symbolism. There is not necessarily anything politically radical about them (many are far-right or fundamentalist); however, they carry a charge of symbolic exchange which renders them threatening to the system. There is always a danger that they will simply be captured and used as sources of meaning to prolong the system's halflife. In small wars, the unwinnable nature of "terrorism" creates hurting stalemates which can defeat powerful adversaries or force compromises; "terrorism" here overlaps with the field of "deterrence", where the power of several forces to destabilise structures is the source of peace or war among them.

As "society" implodes, fails to produce meaning, and suppresses or casts out growing swathes of people, the tendency to form "counter-societies", to regenerate symbolic exchange and meaning without reference to the dominant system, becomes prevalent. I have discussed this elsewhere (Robinson, 2018) in relation to ASMs. However, it is equally true of groups such as gangs (Charles, 2002) and armed opposition groups (Sageman, 2004). The system thus contains a strong tendency to throw off fragments on lines of flight away from it. The containment of the 1960s/70s revolutionary wave (which drew strongly on this tendency) has taken the form of systematic *antiproduction* of the reproductive power of countersocieties — attempts to destroy their means to proliferate and survive, such as territorial power, moments (such as protest) where control breaks down, reproductive practices such as squatting, and cultural expressions. In cases like state collapse in Somalia, the process of dispersal is sufficient to collapse systemic power (see Menkhaus, 2007; Lewis, 2008). The system has tried to keep its implosion within manageable limits through antiproduction and devivification. Such loss of vital force affects ASMs worse than RSMs, and drives RSMs to become increasingly nihilistic and misanthropic. Antiproduction has limited leeway in suppressing forces rooted in the death-drive, ie. the same forces as itself.

What is being returned in mass atrocities is historical trauma. The system functions without meaning except on the surface. But below the surface, everyday violence arising from historical traumas and persistent scarcity is very common (see Fanon, 1963; deGruy, 2005; Duran and Duran, 1995). The cluster of meaning-seeking/thrill-seeking activities driven by desperation and self-deadening range from reckless actions to addictions. There is also a latent rage born of humiliation. The reversal of such violence in spectacular atrocities is *in fact* a systematic effect of the dominant system, what it is and what it does, but it seems to come from nowhere because the everyday suffering it "reverses" is invisible (and in any case, is not of a kind that the system could "see", since it is *non-cybernetic*, affective, unconscious).

If one cross-reads different works, there is an emerging "class structure" in Baudrillard's theory. The shrinking included layers (including much of the left) continue to believe the system has meaning and to contribute reproductive labour to sustain it. The masses resist in a sense, but passively. Finally, the desert of meaning creates a new wilderness in which more actively inclined groups reconfigure as neo-tribes, seizing back bits of symbolic exchange. Here, things get complicated, because neo-tribes may or may not be politically radical. I have previously attempted to theorise this issue in terms of the Deleuzo-Nietzschean distinction between active and reactive forces (Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2009). However, autonomist neo-tribes have declined of late, leaving much of the field to the reactive variant. As Baudrillard suggests, most of the left has become complicit in the self-reproducing logic of the Spectacle, providing free reproductive labour in keeping up the illusions of production and meaning. This has worsened since Baudrillard's day; social media pile-ons are a perfect example.

The pursuit of meaning continues on a grassroots level. Without left or autonomous channels, this pursuit often takes either rightist or apolitical forms. For example, Middle East scholars generally recognise that Islamism has captured much of the affective power which was previously held by left-populist Arab nationalists, but lost by the latter through a mixture of betrayals and historic defeats (particularly neoliberalisation). It draws on the restive youth stratum with no place in the dominant society, but also on emergent, subordinate fractions of capital which rely on moralised networking for success, and on poor and middling rural groups excluded from modernist ideology. The "relative surplus population" (Clover, 2016; Karatasli et al., 2015) with no stake in "society" are particularly drawn to countersocieties.

In his Gulf War essays, Baudrillard recognises that symbolic forces are still partly active in the Middle East. In his theory of the masses, Baudrillard is talking about conformist

people in the global North and possibly the middle-classes of the South. What are sometimes called the "popular classes" are not yet fully part of the masses. It should also be noted that the Southern popular classes were not so easily drawn into lockdowns during the COVID-19 crisis. They are not as spectacularly "managed" as "the masses".

The armed opposition groups and aggrieved "lone wolves" who are classified as "terrorist", generally belong to the broader field of reactive social movements (Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2009). These are groups which actively cathect desire, producing a kind of group phantasy and symbolic exchange, but which are also expressive of the reactive structure of desire which is produced by conditions of scarcity and the loss of meaning. This echoes Reich's (1940) observation that fascism is ambiguous and contains an anti-capitalist component. Counterinsurgency discourses of "radicalisation" and "conveyor belts" — which treat people as cybernetic nodes who simply receive and duplicate signals, and seek to stop the process by escalating repression against unwanted signals — must be dispensed with. People become part of social movements (including RSMs) because these movements provide channels for desires, needs, aspirations, and forms of life. RSMs provide the "relative surplus population" or "restive youth stratum" with a source of meaning, recognition, political power, status, fellowship, and in some cases money

The structure of desire in reactive social movements may well be similar to that theorised by Theweleit (1987, 1989). It must be emphasised that this is *not* the standard "toxic masculinity" theory, though it overlaps with it; the standard theory has much in common with counterinsurgency ideology, in that it *remains on the surface*, focuses on bad ideas, and emphasises self-change. Instead, Theweleit uses dynamic models of the psyche, with a strong focus on bioenergetic flows and the unconscious. Just as a blocked river does not disappear, but is rerouted or increased in force, so psychological damming does not make forces disappear. There is a particular soldier-male type who turns to fascism, and probably to fundamentalism, ethnopolitics, or gangs, because of a formation of desire *generated by the context of cybernetic meaninglessness which Baudrillard theorises.*

It is useful to cross-read Baudrillard with Theweleit, so as to situate armed opposition in a reactive context. The soldier-males who turns to fascism (and possibly all the reactive ideologies) do not develop 'autonomous life-sustaining functions' such as scrutiny and sublimation, insread outsourcing these via their body-armour to institutions and rulers (1989:259). There is not a natural death-drive, as Freud thought; rather, the apparent death-drive is the form taken by the desire for release from chronic bodily tension in a pain-body structure.

Their root personality is symbiotic (1987:45; 1989:211), or what is elsewhere called schizoid (Klein, 1996; Lowen, 1967). This is what happens when there is too little pleasure or the body shuts down to avoid feeling unbearable displeasure. Egos are either weak or fragmentary (1987:204). They are not "Oedipal" and seem incapable of object-relations. They use language mainly to annihilate others (1987:215). Unable to form standard egos based on the body surface, they form substitute egos based on *external* structures, constituted through bodily pain, and taking the form of an armoured body which fits easily into similarly-armoured aggregates (1989:164). This kind of ego is literally beaten into people through harsh punishment or education. The person's interior is saturated with aggression, which is generally kept in some degree of check through character-armour. But there is also fear that these boundaries will dissolve through contact with outer intensities or "floods" (1989:220). They identify their id with ego and chaos, and further identify these with any external forces which threaten their rigidity. This is not an illusion; Theweleit believes they literally *do* succumb to ego-decomposition in the face of outer "floods".

These reactive actors fear annihilation, and thus both internal desire and engulfment by the other. With pleasure blocked, a fragile secondary ego is created through the experience of the body as a site of pain. Their metaphors contrast the rigid rock they wish to be with all kinds of floods, flows and morasses, experienced as threats. Flows which might otherwise bring pleasure are perceived as a threat of destruction, of "going under", and thus to be dammed (1987:266). Images of rigidity — of becoming a rock or iceberg — are commonly valorised (1987:322). These images reflect a standard response to terror: freezing up to prevent feeling. When aroused, they become afraid and make themselves rigid to master their emotions (1987:199). They both desire and fear collision with threatening "floods" (1987:233–4). Sexual desire barely appears. Instead there is a desire for fusion with others and for altered consciousness (1987:206). Denied symbolic exchange through the pleasure-principle, they develop a pain-principle which is a kind of fatal revenge of the drive for release. They form asexual male brotherhoods as an alternative to sexuality, an anti-sexual alternative (1987:54–6), seeking ecstasy in violence. This leads to the replacement of sex by violence, which is often described in sexualised terms (1987:43–4). 'The principal goal of the machine seems to be to keep itself moving. It is entirely closed to the external world' (1989:154).

They operate mainly through devivification — stripping the threatening life-force from anything which lives and

flows, including themselves. This can include idealisation and negative stereotyping, as well as killing and controlling. Prejudice is not the driving force, but a side-effect of the fear of flows and life. They do not simply project onto others, but imaginatively annihilate what they perceive and replace it by fixed ideas (1987:87). The targets are typically those which are full of life or affect, and thus threaten rigidity.

They seek a kind of negative orgasm in experiences of destruction. They scan the environment for threats (life, flows), deanimate these with their gaze, then destroy them (1987:217). Hence, 'the soldier male's activity is constantly directed toward the attainment of three perceptions: the "empty space", the "bloody miasma", and the inundation of consciousness in "blackout"' (1989:271). These means operate precisely as *substitute forms of symbolic exchange for people denied exchange in the sexual and social fields* — and is thus the internal defeat of devivification. In a massacre, the body-armour hammered into the fascist dissolves 'to allow his emotions to erupt with all their true intensity' (1989:38). This involves trying to become an ego, by destroying the unconscious identifies with the other (1989:384). However, it is also a symbolic experience of fusion, and a release for the hated id. Killing or devivifying a threatening, living thing brings a sense of relief (1987:191). Killing satisfies contradictory desires to penetrate or be close, and to push away. It is described in mystical terms, and carried out in a trancelike state which escapes guilt and responsibility, because it involves one's own ego-dissolution (1987:190, 197, 204–5).

The current capitalist code is a machine for moulding soldier-males, much like the drill-camps discussed by Theweleit. Today it is not drill-camps so much as *psychological* abuse which produces pain-bodies. A comparison with Berardi (2015) shows how similar today's processes are. Experiences of petty discipline, disposability, rejection, and a tide of banality and sadism, produce reactions of rage, misanthropy which echoes the system's own indifference, and a desire to mean something by becoming a "hero" through death. This explains the return of fascism, but also more. People who cannot become fascists due to race, nationality, and suchlike may form other male brotherhoods with a similar libidinal structure. Antifascism all too often counterposes its own emotionally plagued, pain-body reactions with their own fascisant logic to those of fascism; fascists, "terrorists", macho gangs, channers and fandoms, can all too easily be seen as threatening flows of desire and affect (hatred, anger, sexuality, pleasure…) against which others must turn to stone.

Dominant theories wrongly think about reactive ideologies as cybernetic *signals* or narratives, to be blocked or silenced. In fact, reactive ideologies are effects of a pre-existing *reactive mode of being*, which they rationalise or channel. Misanthropic violence is not an error in *thinking*, but a set of *feelings* — at root, the fact that pleasure is replaced or supplemented by negative feelings (1987:416–17). One needs to be able to feel how the desiring-machine works to fight it (1987:226). One cannot simply *disrupt* these movements. Take them apart and the egos collapse, but the pieces 'go flying across the landscape like shrapnel' (1989:207). And there is a *deep complicity* between the fascist body-type and counterinsurgency ideology itself. Counterinsurgency is an ideology of devivification, and it is highly disruptive of the active movements which produce pleasure-type symbolic exchange.

Systems which decompose pleasure-bodies and build pain-bodies are fascogenic. The code saps pleasure and encourages fear; this is embedded in the micro-control mechanisms of performance management in policing, schools, workplaces, etc. The post-9/11 police-state globalisation process is fascogenic; it matters little if it also touts "inclusion" and uses counterinsurgency methods against fascists. In any case, counterinsurgency is also fascisant in its antiproductive distaste for life, and its preference for sterile controlled spaces. Cybernetically-informed social movements operate like the code's own control systems, relying on outer nudges, feedback mechanisms, spatial control, and shaming to coerce "behaviour change" on the assumption that people are effects of outer relations. Psychoanalytically-informed social movements look more like those of the 1960s-70s — disinhibitory, tolerant of idiosyncrasy, suspicious of rules and institutions, and productive of flow-states and peak experiences. This is the kind of movement which can destroy fascism, since it offers something — pleasure — which the enemy cannot outbid.

The Absurdities of Counterinsurgency Ideology

Counterinsurgency theory blames armed opposition attacks on "radicalisation", which they blame in turn on "extremist ideology". Their working model is that "vulnerable" individuals (who differ only marginally from the norm) are injected from outside with bad thoughts joined together in a bad narrative, which become habitual and preconscious (there is no unconscious in this theory), and eventually generate "behaviours". The response is to seek to cut off the process of "radicalisation" either by stopping exposure to bad thoughts (using censorship and criminalisation), by cutting the process off before it reaches its conclusion, or by isolating the bad actors from the population so as to contain "radicalisation" to manageable levels. People are assumed to be cybernetic nodes who exist entirely on the surface and on the outside of the body; insurgency is a problem of controlling which

signals are sent and received. The grievances (individual and collective) underlying opposition are downplayed; they are recognised in the COIN literature, but may not be voiced in public, since this fuels the bad "narrative".

This theory does not recognise affect or symbolic exchange; there is no inner self, only cybernetic nodes. This leads to a contradiction of insisting that people are entirely effects of external cybernetic systems and yet *nonetheless fully responsible for their "behaviour"* (a claim generally appended to the end as if to contain the implications of what went before — as if this is some kind of secular/religious split where scientists must be careful not to debunk dogma). In COIN, the system *does* act as if it is in a constant war; whoever is in power falls in line with the same rhetoric and model, and the opposition, judiciary, and media imitate it. That Baudrillard is right about global war is clear from the responses: in peacetime, only normal laws apply; since 9/11, securitised exception is the norm. Rebels are *treated like* enemies — in fact, usually worse than prisoners-of-war — and media coverage follows the counterinsurgency script in a wartime manner. Of course, part of this script is denying that there's a war on.

There is also a standard Third Way strategy which seeks to manage the meaninglessness of the system's reproduction and/or its inhuman effects through the addition of an ethical, educational, therapeutic, or spiritual/religious level which acts as a supplement to the system's functioning, requiring of individuals a work of self-change and mutual policing (with social credit as the end-point). This self-change work is unremunerated reproductive labour which serves to recreate a sense of meaning which attaches itself to, and thus sustains, the system, but which the system itself does not have to generate.

Counterinsurgency ideology does, however, correctly see and respond to the *symbolic* force of "terrorism", even without understand it. The term "glorification of terrorism" — a thought-crime in Britain — suggests fear of the *symbolic* dimension of prohibited beliefs, their ability to develop romantic, sublime or passionate affects. (Recognising the sacrificial, "martyrdom" aspect of suicidal attacks is one of the prohibited statements). Draconian practices of seeking to deny "terrorists" or their sympathisers a media "platform" using censorship, special laws, closed trials, closures of social media accounts, prison communication bans, supermax regimes, suppression of "manifestos" and so on, suggests an awareness that these discourses possess symbolic force. Yet such measures also involve a fundamental denialism. They are a fundamental threat to the right of the public to study and understand terrorism, and to the historians of the future, as well as to the people directly silenced. (Had this regime existed in the past, we would be denied the works of Gramsci, Negri, Bakhtin and others; Theweleit's work would also have been impossible). It is effectively an attempt to "shoot the messenger", to prevent the effect without looking at why particular discourses have symbolic resonance — to devivify and not to resolve. One can compare the similar absurdity of police killing people to prevent them from committing suicide, which has happened, at least, in Tibet — and in America, if one includes cases where police kill during "welfare checks" on suicidal or self-harming people. (China also covers-up spree-killings); not to mention the treatment of hoaxing, and innocent practices which trigger security alerts (such as protests at airports), as "terrorist" simply because of the overreaction to them.

Counterinsurgency theory ignores two particularly large elephants in the room: firstly that drastic (and often suicidal) acts are motivated by extreme suffering and desperation, and secondly that reactive desire-structures are cathexes of libido in particular circumstances of suffering and scarcity. *The root causal logics of insurgency take place at the level of symbolic exchange*. Having studied Baudrillard, it is hard not to see "reversibility" in the gesture of meeting mass-murder with mass-murder, of meeting the ruination and disposability of one's own life by returning ruination and disposability onto "society". It does not escape from the logic of devivification; it intensifies it to the point of implosion. It does not prefigure a better society, but it does fatally reverse the concentration of power. It might continue to fascinate and horrify, but it is not in any sense *mysterious*. The system wants to have *causes without consequences*, an endless one-way violence which wages war without its ever being returned.

Ecstatic Media Events and Devivification as Counterinsurgency

The main counterinsurgency method in the information sphere is the treatment of "terror" attacks and disasters as ecstatic media events (Chouliaraki, 2006). Ecstatic media events are created by covering a particular crisis with the highest intensity, encouraging identification (not just sympathy) with others' suffering, and creating an imperative to act. The suffering depicted is constructed as "our" suffering, with a sense of 'everywhereness' lacking localisation, extensive live and discontinuous coverage, and an emotive tone (Chouliaraki, 2006:10–11, 158). It appeals strongly to emotions, but dresses itself up as 'hard evidence', concealing the emotions to which it appeals (2006:169–70). It *singles out* particular sufferers as the privileged objects of compassion, care, and retaliation, despite the much larger suffering elsewhere (2006:180). To the extent that people fall for it, they become participants in

a managed emotional plague (cf. Reich, 1945) in which the powerful monopolise the means of emotional production. It thus has an event-like quality of interrupting normal time (Dayan and Katz, 1992:60–1). In ecstatic events, "forced to permit" disappears; there is only "unable to prevent".

The script is all too predictable: a massive attack generates an ecstatic media event, which creates a climate where exceptional "lockdown" measures are tolerated and even bayed-for; this climate is used as a shield for real counter-insurgency measures (roundups of "suspects", violent raids, house-to-house searches, terrorisation of minorities, frame-ups…) which take place with little scrutiny. Securitisation rests on a distinction between exceptional and normal spheres (Waever, 2003). Ecstatic media events thus make it easier to securitise particular issues, and even generate *demands* from the masses to securitise, in excess over the system's needs. There is always disproportion involved which seems absurd to anyone who is *not* part of the emotional outpouring; few die from "terrorism" compared to car accidents, suicide, domestic violence, poverty (and few die of COVID-19 compared to curable diseases like tuberculosis and AIDS). Ecstatic media events operate through a focus on a single, hypervisible, emotionally compulsive issue, as if it trumps everything else.

I have previously argued that panics and securitisation involve a kind of madness in the social hivemind (Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2019). This reflects Virilio's observation: 'We are facing the emergence of a real, collective madness reinforced by the synchronization of emotions… We have entered a time of generalized panic' (Virilio, 2012:75). This is fuelled by a "communism of emotions", a synchronisation of emotional responses brought about by telepresence, and the resultant ability for people worldwide to feel the same (manipulated) emotions. 'The hivemind is watching; failure to register the correct emotional response in personally tailored self-expressions is taken as sympathy with the attacker, and therefore as risk. Social credit, western style.' (Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2019: np)

Atrocities and disasters in the global South are not typically ecstatic media events in the North. Of course, they also attract widespread coverage which is criticised for racism, Orientalism, colonialism, essentialism, and exterminatory imagery (Mirzoeff, 2005; Dabashi, 2008: ix-x; Said, 2003:206, 1981; Razack, 2004; Malkii, 1996). This can also lead to western atrocities and localised disasters. However, the resultant disaster tends not to affect the west itself. The entire framing of the situation rests on the contrast between the deterred, secure, managed North and zones of chaos "outside" it. Critiques of the racialised nature of the frame, its elision of Northern "complicity", and its ahistorical mythmaking, generally overlook the important *Baudrillardian* fact that it also repeats the standard media cleavage involved in the split between programming and advertising. Zones of crisis have to be "othered", not primarily to reinforce western egos, but to create the illusion that the system's reproduction is providing something meaningful. The viewer is encouraged to invest the scenario, not as a superior rational ego, but as a hostage who is passively protected from such horrors.

The media largely determines whether a given event becomes ecstatic. It does this in line with news values which are implicitly (but indirectly) politicised. However, it seems to need some degree of cross-partisan appeal, and support from the political establishment. Police murders of black people never become ecstatic events. Chouliaraki theorises three frames or coverage styles within a hierarchy of pity: adventure news (short, emotively light coverage), emergency news (standard to faraway crises, evoking pity and some degree of call for action), and ecstatic news. There is a 'hierarchy of pity' as to which suffering is ecstaticised (Chouliaraki, 2006:189). 30 deaths in Paris are worth more ecstatic outcry than 500 in Mogadishu. But the response must not be to further expand ecstatic fascination to more and more people so as to render them grievable (the standard leftist tactic today); this aids the system's counterinsurgency structure.

People generally will not accept exceptional responses, or comply with requests for extensive participatory self-management, in relation to ordinary events. They will do so on a huge scale in ecstatic events. In the COVID-19 emergency one sees how easily people sacrifice long-held commitments (from religion to friendship to sexual freedom to the right to protest); in Brussels one saw how people will curtail their own social media posting and even spam and disrupt others, in line with police requests for a media blackout. Yet the ecstatic nature of the event decreases with time; so, too, does "compliance" with COVID-19 lockdowns, and they begin to be outright ignored the moment the story is eclipsed in the news cycle.

One feature of ecstatic media events is that they impose norms of *compulsory emotional participation*. This is facilitated by the emotive force of social media and resultant 'mobile witnessing' (Reading, 2009; cf Papailias, 2016). It involves media coverage with a tone of 'emotional correctness' (Hume, 2020), in violation of earlier objectivity norms. There is an immediate, superficial classification of dissent as an emotional and moral failing — for instance, "not caring about vulnerable people or the health service"; or it is implied, very simplistically, that such a person is "in denial" about "reality" or "necessity". Certain claims are forbidden, either directly (criminalisation, social media censorship) or by

being placed outside the Overton window. This is certainly not an improvement on the old "objectivity". The discursive exceptionalism is overwhelming: there is a *denkverbot* on relativising, for example by comparing "terrorism" to war or COVID-19 to flu, "whataboutism", "conspiracy theories", questioning the veracity or official account, blaming "terrorism" on justified grievances or on "foreign policy", or saying "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter" are effectively off-limits. As a result, the *exceptional* response is shielded from scrutiny — whether rational or emotive. The moral decision is made, not by each viewer, but by the media hivemind (see Berardi, 2016). This moral outsourcing (Nichilista, 2016) leads to an Eichmann-like moral idiocy, so effectively parodied in the NPC meme. Incidentally, the paragons of university ethics courses and left-leaning social science all too often embrace the tendency towards moral outsourcing under kitsch-Levinasian or relationalist cloaks (for example, the idea that it is possible and desirable to "teach values", rather than values arising from an embodied ethos).

Ecstatic media events *attempt* to neutralise the symbolic terror of "terrorism", but they only partially succeed. Baudrillard rightly argues that "terrorism" disrupts meaning because it fascinates. The audience may be terrified, enraged, condemnatory; the important point, however, is that they are glued to their screens, torn out of the normal cycles of everyday life, paralysed in terms of thought and action — and thus stop providing the reproductive labour the system needs in order to keep up the appearance of meaning. Ecstatic media events, with their compulsory emotional participation in counterinsurgency, are the recuperation of fascination by the code. The inactivity of populations (such as not posting on social media) becomes a source of meaning the system can use. But it can use it only indirectly: the paralysed population is useful because it clears space for an active agent (the police or similar agencies) to engage in active counterinsurgency. As Baudrillard already suggested, ecstatic media events involve 'general mobilization, dissuasion, pacification and mental socialization' through a crystalization of attention (1983:123). If fascination is held by *meaning* (in the sense of representation, not affective meaning), the system survives its near-death experience.

An ecstatic event is not simply fascinating — although it is fascinating. It is also managed in such a way as to produce a supply of meaning to the system and sustain its reproduction. In effect, these events "milk" the audience of its capacity to generate affective responses by triggering affects of terror and panic. The process of "milking" audiences as limited to strata which are fully massified, yet not fully deadened of their capacity for meaning. It is less effective among the global poor, or the more marginal strata in the North; it does not affect those who distrust the mainstream media. It also tends to decrease through time in relation to a given class of event. The more "normal" such events become, the less ecstatic they seem, and the harder it is to keep up counterinsurgency.

Ecstatic media events obtain visibility for armed opposition groups. They also serve as a channel or cathexis for desires to destroy or regenerate meaning, to avenge grievances on an epic scale, etc. It is no coincidence that the label "al-Qaeda" — apparently invented by America to give a false image of coherence to a loose network, and thus convert a belief-system into a fictional organisation — was rapidly taken up by a plethora of small groups, some of which (such as the Algerian GSPC) were previously unknown, as a way to increase their visibility. It seems likely that people now carry out mass-casualty attacks *because* they generate these kinds of events. Hence the significance of beheading videos. Islamist groups do not simply commit atrocities. That is common enough among states, but relies on invisibility; its appearance in the Spectacle (the Abu Ghraib photos, the Wikileaks revelations, videos of murders or beatings by police…) destabilises the system. Islamist groups are different. They display their atrocities as Spectacle, put them on display, boast about them. The idea of using atrocities as propaganda for recruitment purposes is unprecedented. Most viewers are no doubt horrified, but just as significantly, fascinated. Some, presumably, are fascinated and also inspired, to the point where the videos function as propaganda. Atrocities rae propaganda because they offer symbolic exchange, but in a reactive form.

Evidently the process is not well-controlled; there is a slippage (whether from the active securitisation of issues by political actors, or the news values of media) towards the extension of the "terrorist" exception to all kinds of other problems, from gang feuds to school shootings. It also tends to expand beyond human actions. For the system, natural disasters are not primarily humanitarian catastrophes, but threats to its control. The main issue is to stay rigid, to avoid an excessive proliferation of uncontained actors, to ensure operations are "coordinated" (with the weight of the fascist *Gleichschaltung*), so the system can keep disavowing its own collapse. The cost, however, is that the system stakes its existence more and more on devivification. And it corrodes more and more the reproductive labour it repleis on. "Society" is less and less the substance or even the illusion of life, but becomes something which is turned on and off at will. Aswe shall see, this is how counterinsurgency becomes suicidal.

The Failure of Counterinsurgency

Deviance amplification and reactance theories have long demonstrated that repression usually fails in its explicit goal. Repression may disrupt or displace temporary structures, and reduce the capacity to act, but it also increases the antagonism between deviants and the system and increases the will to act. The media plays a role in this: moral panics provide appealing models of symbolically effective deviance and tend to produce the problems they initially invent or exaggerate. Assessed in the short-term, a crackdown *will* often seem to "work" — a targeted form of deviance in a targeted area will statistically decrease — but in the medium-term, deviant actors will work around the blockage and in many cases "radicalise" (for example, the drug trade shifts from counterculture home-brewers to organised gangs).

The "war on terror" has failed in exactly this way. It never reduced the number of attacks (the US eventually stopped talling global figures for this reason); but it disrupted the modus operandi of existing groups and created an *appearance* of success. This appearance was broken decisively after 2011, as Syria, Libya and Yemen fell into civil war, and latent desires found sites of expression. ISIS may be more "extreme" than al-Qaeda, and closer to the western stereotype of what al-Qaeda was. And its pulling power was significant: thousands travelled to fight and die in Syria, far more than in Iraq and Afghanistan. By 2015, mass-casualty attacks were back on a huge scale, this time using tools and weapons (such as vehicles and knives) which get around the blockages created by counterinsurgency. They were soon to be joined by similar attacks by a much wider range of social actors outside the Islamist constituency: neo-Nazis, incels, militia members, radical individualists, apolitical individuals. The far-right and anti-Muslim component is particularly revealing in that it is in many regards Baudrillardian *overconformity:* an identification with, and following-through of, the fatal dimension of counterinsurgency reasoning itself (a Nazi who slaughters Muslims is in many regards *doing what the system told him to do*, but to an extent that is dangerous for the system — indeed, which is similar to what the system incited Islamophobia in order to *prevent*).

The tactical and affective similarities among the different classes of attacks shows the fallacy of the earlier focus on "extremist ideology" as the driver of armed opposition; ideology is a channel which renders insurgent affects ego-syntonic, a replaceable and unnecessary component. (The connection of mass killing to militarisation — the number of attackers of all types who have some connection, real or imaginary, to the army or police — is also clearly linked to the impact of post-9/11 securitisation and the growing militarisation and securitisation of society, *reinvested and given symbolic force*). There were, of course, far-right and apolitical massacres prior to securitisation, but they have become more frequent and more fragmentary. In the *longue duree*, this shows how counterinsurgency has failed, and indeed, made things worse. Yet part of the counterinsurgency script is its own naturalisation; the relationship between armed opposition, global inequalities, and war has been turned into a public secret. As a result, it is hard for anyone to recognise failure when it happens. Instead, people keep "escalating", deploying the same scripts (cf Illich, 1971). Counterinsurgency has been naturalised, and the duty not to undermine the narrative too often trumps exposure of such failings.People continue to believe in the "war on terror", but the idea of *winning* this war is increasingly absent; the real logic of the situation — a series of increasingly random and arbitrary acts of control (Negri, 2005:245) — is increasingly apparent.

The Implosion of Counterinsurgency?

Counterinsurgency has not only failed; it has turned into a kind of suicide of the system. This becomes clear in the COVID-19 crisis. An emerging issue obtains media salience; people bay for action. An ecstatic media event emerges. The system looks powerless. The system responds in the manner which has become habitual when faced with the threat of its own collapse: lockdown. In this case, it is widely recognised as devivification (Vaneigem, 2020; Agamben, 2020; Sanguinetti, 2020). But lockdown does not stop the crisis, and it drags on indefinitely. The system destroys the very bases for its simulation of meaning: the economy, everyday social life, regularity and order.

People are unable to take seriously a threat which comes through the media. When it arrives, they look to the system to "restore order". Then they struggle to handle the real consequences of devivification, to take responsibility for the new rules they demanded. Everyone is "for" the lockdown because the polls are just tests: to not be "for" the lockdown is to be beyond the pale. But people break and bend the rules in a million ways, sometimes oblivious to the fact that they are doing so.

I have suggested elsewhere (McLaverty-Robinson, 2020) that COVID-19 lockdowns are a kind of securitisation, which has crept across from the security field and not from inside biomedicine. The "new threats" discourse securitised a wide range of social problems, primarily for purposes of prevention and deterrence, but with the risk that any crisis in any of these areas could carry a charge of symbolic exchange (in state jargon, an "existential threat"). There is nothing logical in responding to a health crisis with police and troops.

Creeping securitisation, along with health cuts and moral panics, encourages a securitised response. Social distancing stems logically from the common tendency in the system to portray other people as risky or contagious. It is a type of devivification which shuts down life in general to stop unwanted, fatal exchanges. Yet securitisation of healthcare may be counterproductive even for the system. The timeframes involved are far greater than those in "terror" crises.

Baudrillard refers to the system blackmailing people into conformity by surrounding them with threats of their own death, metaphorically burying them in a sarcophagus to stop them from dying (1976:177). Lockdown is this logic carried out *literally* — and maybe fatally. Baudrillard suggests that the system may implode when it launches its antibodies at the one point of rupture which becomes so dense as to involute the system's effectiveness (1983:120). This seems a good model of what has now happened. Securitisation trumps other issues to such an extent that the system neglects its own survival, bringing about an immense economic collapse. As in terrorism, western populations are forced *into* history. This is experienced as insecurity, and the system attempts to restore simulation by shutting down life.

Lockdown would not be possible were it not for the fact that consumption practices are already undercathected, so that turning them on and off does not produce outrage. Yet suspending consumerism restores some of its value. The closing and reopening of McDonald's lead to queues and crowds reminiscent of Black Friday. The libidinal importance of televised sports or religious services is foregrounded by their absence.

Leftists have all too often defanged the disruptive effects by rallying to technocratic rule and focusing on point-scoring against populists such as Trump and Bolsonaro. Yet the populist style identified with Trump (but now common among world leaders) is also a form of paralysis-by-fascination: Trump is successful because he makes it hard to look away (Ott, 2017; Hall et al., 2016).

It has devastated the economy, making the economic crash (which was coming anyway) much larger in scale; it has deadened social life to the point where the minimal reproductive labour needed to keep up appearances is lacking; it has overstrained compulsory emotional participation to the point of psychological collapse. Just as significantly, it has produced a collapse of meaning expressed in suicides (Hollyfield, 2020). The crisis has been severe enough to "deter" social life as such. "Terrorists" have attacked concerts, tourism, mass gatherings — but never managed to shut them down for more than a few days (even then, mainly via the police-state reaction). Now the west has done to itself what its enemies dreamed of.

Conclusion: Where Now?

It remains to be seen how deep the damage to the system has been, whether it can revive some kind of meaning, and whether the immense repressive machineries built-up since 9/11 will be sufficient to keep some kind of structure in place. The system will have to find a new way to generate affective meaning if it is to recover into a new phase. But this suicidal gesture shows structural problems which may be insuperable. Whether it survives or not, the system will continue to fail to produce affective meaning. Baudrillard has previously called for a move beyond respect for life into respecting in the other and oneself 'something other than, and more, than, life… a destiny, a cause, a form of pride or of sacrifice', and a 'higher freedom' one can dispose of 'to the point of abusing or sacrificing it' (2002:68–9). Once more, this echoes Situationism — and especially the concept of *nima* developed in the anarchist work Bolo'Bolo (PM, 1983). Such grassroots recomposition is the way forward to recreate symbolic exchange and affective meaning.

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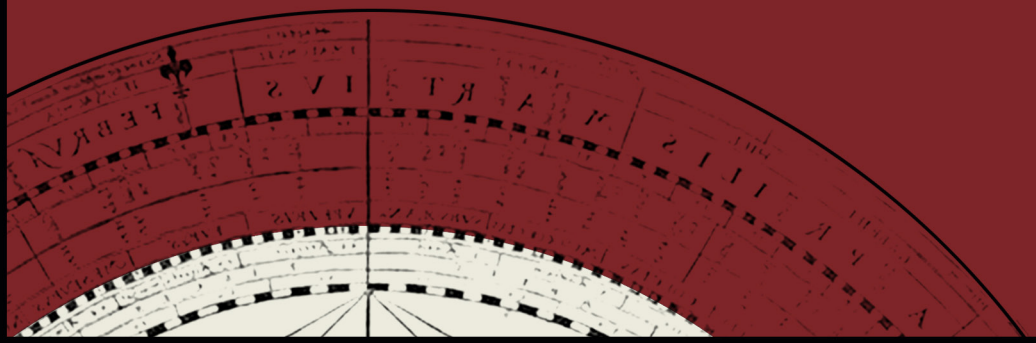

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