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Fatal Objects: Lacan in Baudrillard Part II (The third simulation stage: post-modernity)

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I. Introduction

Warning: objects in the mirror are closer than they appear!
(Jean Baudrillard).

If one goes along with Roger Callois' classification of games [...] then the movement of our culture will lead [...] towards an extension of the forms of chance (alea) and giddiness. These no longer imply any game of the scene, the mirror, challenge or otherness; They are rather, ecstatic, solitary and narcissistic (Jean Baudrillard).

The digital Narcissus replaces the triangular Oedipus. The hypostasis of an artificial double, the clone will henceforth be your guardian angel, the invisible form of your unconscious and flesh of your flesh, literally and without metaphor. Your 'neighbor' will henceforth be this clone of a hallucinatory resemblance, consequently you will never be alone again and no longer have a secret. 'Love your neighbor as yourself': this old problem of Christianity is resolved – you neighbor, it's yourself. Thus love is total. And so is self-seduction (Jean Baudrillard).

* * *

Years ago when [...] [Lacan] was fishing off Brittany, a friend pointed to a sardine can in the water and said laughingly, "*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*" Ruminating on the lesson his friend had drawn from the floating can, Lacan concluded that it was mistaken, for the can "was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically" (Lacan in Jay, 1993: 365).

When asserting that "it is the world that thinks us", Baudrillard shows a good deal of knowledge (and understanding) of psychoanalysis, and especially of the work of his French peer Jacques Lacan, whose original equivalent is expressed in terms of the chiasm occurring between the gaze and the eye. By stating that "the real stares back", not only did Lacan pave the ground for the theorization of the reciprocal interdependence affecting the object and the subject in advanced capitalist societies; but also provided Baudrillard with the background for the formulation of the

third simulation stage, a condition where, in effect, subject and objects exchange places. Just as, in Lacan, the subject is invested by the reifying power of the object, so, in Baudrillard, the object is invested by the humanizing characteristics of the subject. Hence, the third order simulation, where the 'object' (the image, the mirror, the mirror-imaged object of representation as such) prevails over the subject through "obscene proliferation" and impossible conceptualization (Kelner, 1989:155). And yet, despite the evident, if not obvious, links between Lacan and Baudrillard (Lacan's *Real*, *imaginary* and *symbolic* can be found specularly inverted into Baudrillard's *obscene*, *imaginary* and *real* respectively), little attention has been devoted to the topic. To the degree that attempts to expound on this relationship have not only made Baudrillard's work look fragmented, but has done so with misleading results.¹

Only recently, and after the pioneering polemics of Douglas Kellner and Mike Gane, Baudrillardian criticism has moved forward. A greater deal of unity can thus be found in Rex Butler, who astutely suggests a principle that may allow Baudrillard to be judged from the inner depth of his own logic ("To read Baudrillard in his own terms, then, what might this mean?" Butler asks [1999:15]); and Ashely Woodward, who brilliantly - and consistently - frames Baudrillard's work within the postmodern nihilistic legacy, and therefore within that current of thought that, Feuerbach to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger, follows the decline of Hegelian philosophy (Woodward, 2009:8).

And yet, if with Butler "it seems that Baudrillard only has one idea", with Woodward the stress is given on this 'outside' rather than the inner logic itself - the result being, again, a fragmentation or an inside/outside juxtaposition, in Baudrillard's theory, that simulation itself, as a theoretical principle, excludes, and that for this same reason requires a higher degree of accuracy, a least common multiple (LCM) that, like the Mobius' strip that so often appears in Baudrillard, may allow a duplicitous, continuous, and self-referential reading of Baudrillard (Woodward, 2009:89).

Such an LCM seems to me to be the Lacanian *mirror-stage*; i.e., that phase in the child's development where the narcissistic function of the mirror (*imaginary*) must necessarily be overcome by a challenge, by difference, by what seduces the subject because it is too similar (and, to the same extent, too dissimilar) from the subject

itself; and therefore that very paradox according to which the inner depth of one's personality - in other words what Žižek defined as being "in the subject more than the subject itself" (*agalma*) - can only be grasped when reflected by an *outside*, i.e. by a mirror, by an-Other, by the mirror-as-Other – by what, like the Mobius strip, is one thing and its opposite at the one and the same time (Zizek, 1999:23).

Encapsulated in the Italian expression "Che vuoi?" ("What do you want?") - the impossibility, for the (desiring) subject, to become that object of reflection of that Other which the subject is, in turn, reflected by – such enigma becomes, in Baudrillard, the challenge of appearances, the horizon of appearances, the ambiguity of representation in escaping any sensible and suprasensible determination and therefore designates that primary illusion that, alone, can endow life (and therefore death) with meaning. Getting close, too close to the mirror might ultimately undermine the symbolic dimension of reality and, alongside with it, the meaning of existence itself (nihilism) (Zizek, 2006).

For limitations of length, I will not be addressing such a relationship in full, but rather focusing on just one specific aspect of Baudrillard's work, i.e. the relationship occurring between his third order simulation and Lacan's *mirror-stage*; and, specifically, with the *object petit a* as that key concept, in Lacanian theory, which was first conceived and addressed by Lacan by fleshing out the theoretical implications of the *mirror-stage* itself.

By interpolating the work of the Italian philosopher Mario Perniola (*The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, 1996) and the Lacanian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati (*L'uomo senza Inconscio*, 2011), I will therefore enucleate not only the relationship occurring between the *object petit a* and Marx's critique of fetishism (i.e. the "idolatrous deceit" according to which the *surplus value* incorporated by money – M-M' - comes "from nature and not from society"); but also and foremost the implementation of Lacan's *objet-petit-a* into Baudrillard - the result being a condition of reality, in Baudrillard's theory, where mirror-images becomes as unpredictable, entropic, and exponential just as the Lacanian *objet-petit-a* (Perniola, 2004:57).

I hope, in so doing, not only to contrast that fragmentation that makes of Baudrillard's work an enigmatic conundrum so often banalized in contemporary critical thinking;

but also to make of such a LCD the grounds for reinstating an ambiguous unity to Baudrillard's corpus; as ambiguous - if ungraspable - as the theorization of simulation itself.

Part of a larger project also including the first simulation stage (see *The Invention of History*, where the same topic was addressed albeit with a focus on the mirror-stage), and the second (forthcoming), this paper thus addresses that specific feature of the mirror-stage that makes of the latter a metonymic particle of the former: i.e. the "reflexive, interchangeable relationship" with the ego of which the *objet-petit-a* represents the counterpart or specular image.

II. The *objet a*: Lacan's Underpinning

Petit objet a means "small object a" and, being the symbol *a* one of the first algebraic signs appearing in Lacan's work, it came to acquire, over the time, a variety of meanings, all depending on the specific order or category of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (*Symbolic, Imaginary, Real*) which the object was supposedly 'merged' within².

When posited in the symbolic order, the *object a* is thus the *agalma*, the precious, 'hidden', 'object' that the Other possesses and that the subject seeks for pleasure and plenitude; but also that unachievable object that the symbolic order itself, as what regulates desire in the Oedipus complex" ("realm of the Law"), makes unavailable³.

In the Imaginary order, the *objet-petit-a* is the "erect and platitudinous image in the mirror" – *a(i)* – which the child assumes to be the (symbolic) *phallus* of the mother's desire and that, for this very reason, the "child seeks identification with in order to make up for the mother's alleged lack, her apparent castration" (Jay, 1993:361). By connoting the narcissistic, visual and 'imaginary' (illusory) fusion enacted by the child to overcome a sense of incompleteness or organic insufficiency (postnatal "fetalization"), the *objet-petit-a* also connotes, in the imaginary realm, the child's rejection of symbolic castration from the father (Ibid.). Hence, Lacan's stress on the *no-du-père* (the father's "don't") as the symbolic, linguistic act that, by breaking through the dyadic relationship that the child establishes with the mirror-image (and, metonymically, the mother), opens the way to the recognition of a radical alterity (the

Autre, or 'big Other') distinct from the self⁴. This, in order for the child's self to be eventually built through *introjection* rather than by *projection*.

Finally, when posited in the Real, the *object a* is the *surplus jouissance*, the exceeding enjoyment that the subject experiences for an excessive proximity to the object itself and that, for this reason, also connotes the *objet-petit-a* in the most complex and peculiar of the ways (Evans. Op. Cit.:163).

Being the *Real* the unconscious – i.e. that aspect of the subject that resists symbolization and, as such, remains "impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way" – the acknowledgement of the presence of the *petit object a* in such a realm also marks the emergence of enjoyment as absolute imperative for the subject - enjoyment (*jouissance*), rather than repression, becoming the basic mechanism substantiating the psychic functioning of the subject.

Lacan did not formulate such a viewpoint either categorically or systematically; and yet, the 'discourse of the capitalist' (Milan, 1973) – and even more, the analogy that Lacan developed between the *object petit a* and Marx's criticism of commodity fetishism – not only highlights Lacan's interest in hypothesizing enjoyment (*jouissance*) - rather than repression – as the basic mechanism articulating the psychic functioning of the subject; but also, and consequently, the psychotic, rather than the neurotic, as the clinical model of reference of contemporary psychoanalysis. The result was a subject that, by stopping desiring inasmuch as deprived of the fundamental desire for the (m)Other, revolves around a narcissistic, dyadic relationship with the mirror-image as articulated by the capitalist spectacle, commodity fetishism etc., thus materializing enjoyment out of the very fantasy manifesting desire⁵. Put in the position of the agent, the (barred) subject becomes an ever more complex cipher.

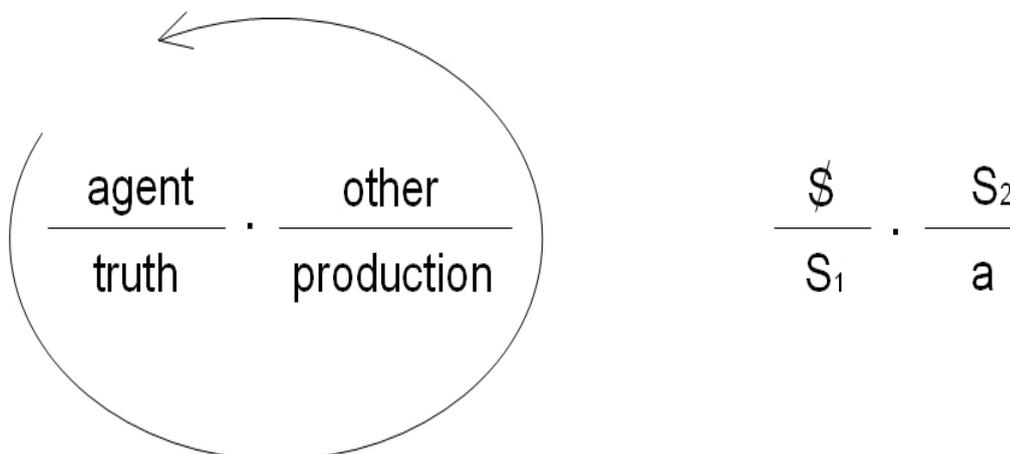
It is in this respect that the discovery of *the objet-petit-a*, which Lacan considered his greatest contribution to psychoanalysis, not only emphasizes the paradoxes of *surplus value*; but, in so doing, paved the way for the redefinition of the Freudian subject as transposed onto post-modern, hyper-consumerist times⁶.

III. The "Discourse of the Capitalist": from Surplus Value to Surplus

Jouissance

Lacan expressed this new, revolutionary condition of the subject in the *mathème* of fantasy ($\$ \leftrightarrow a$), where “the being of *a* is the ... surplus-*jouissance*”; but most of all in the *mathème* (or algorithm) of the capitalist discourse, where the position of production is finally occupied by the *objet-petit-a*: not only is the subject turned into an “industrial capitalist” that, as a resounding board, replicates both the functioning and the configuration of the capitalist discourse (s/he obtains, from the capital s/he is lent, a profit greater than the interest s/he has to pay); but, due to the nature of enjoyment itself, s/he is also haunted by impossible satisfaction: put in the condition to enjoy, itself produces more demand. Hence the paradox of the capitalist discourse that, by opening the subject to immediate enjoyment, also condemns him/her to endlessly and unsatisfactorily accumulation. Not only does enjoyment become what is “most highly prized or valued by the subject” (i.e. “that value he or she is seeking in all of his or her activities and relations”), but also what is accumulated in a regime of financial transactions - enjoyment now becoming “the value against which all other values [...] [are] measured” (gold standard) (Fink, 1995:6).

Mathemes I: Lacan's Capitalist Discourse



Note: Lacan's proposed 4 distinctive forms of “communication” or discourses: the *master's*, the *hysteric's*, the *psychoanalysis'*, and the

university's. The discourse of the capitalist (the 5th) was only added later. By maintaining their serial order, S1, S2, a, \$ rotate clockwise across a fixed field defined by four positions: agent, other, production, and truth. The position determined by such a rotation thus defines each of the discourse, discourse meaning (Donald Kunze).

It is for this reason that, in Seminar XVI, Lacan equates the *objet a* with Marx's concept of *surplus value*: so as, in capitalism, "surplus value corresponds in quantity to what [...] is called 'interest' or 'profit'" ("it is that which the capitalist skims off the top for him or herself, instead of paying it to the employees"), so in the *object-petit-a*, *jouissance* is that exceeding enjoyment that, escaping castration, "circulates *hors corps*"; the excess fruits – "above and beyond" - of the operating expenses of a property (Fink, Op. Cit.).

As "a totally abstract super-commodity, which by the sole fact of being lent, produces an increase proportional to the time after which it is surrendered", enjoyment is thus subjected to the formula M-M' (money creates money) in the most illusory form and, by cancelling and concealing the very agent responsible for the reproduction of capital (symbolic castration), gets an incremental, libidinal return (Perniola, 2004).

Following the Marxist formula according to which money creates money (M-M'), not only does the *object petit-a* become an autonomous and natural source of profit that reproduces spontaneously (commodity fetishism); but, stopping being a *lack*, turns into a *hole* whose peculiar functioning can be associated to the functioning of dead stars (black holes): no sooner is energy re-produced that it is also dissipated, being the enjoyment reproduced on the edge of the hole suddenly swallowed by the empty body of the hole itself⁷. Hence, the three conditions of the *object petit a*, the three paradoxes that make of the subject's *plus-de-jouir* the surplus, extra or supplemental *jouissance* extracted out of the annihilation of the father (Lacan, Le seminaire, Livre XVI, Op. Cit.):

First paradox: of the *impossible meaning* (empty signifier). Just as the Marxist fetish is capital without substance, so the *objet-petit-a* is an empty signifier that Žižek compares to caffeine-free diet Coke, "the Nothingness itself, the pure semblance of a property that is effectively merely an envelope of a void". In the same manner that labour and exchange disappear in commodity fetishism, so the *objet-petit-a* becomes as volatile and ungraspable as the subject's desire.

Second paradox: of the *impossible satisfaction* (balance). As in the Marxist formula M-M' (money creates money), "the logic of balanced exchange is perturbed in favour of an excessive logic of 'the more you give, the more you owe' (or the consumerist version 'the more you buy, the more you have to spend')", so too does the accumulation of enjoyment follow the logic of "the more profit you have, the more you want" (or, in Žižek's terms, "the

more you drink Coke, the more you are thirsty”).

Third paradox: of the *impossible possession* (grasp). So as financial capitalism appears self-generated, so too the *objet a* exist (or rather insists) in a kind of curved space in which, the more you approach it, the more it eludes your grasp. Exactly as it happens with the legendary figure of King Midas, who died of hunger as a result of his ability to turn everything he touched into gold: the greater the amount of gold (enjoyment) possessed, the greater the lack.

It is my aim here to show how the logic of the *object-petit-a* informs Baudrillard's third order simulation or, to a greater extent, the functioning of society in a regime of advanced financial capitalism, where this 'logic of excess' - or exponential growth - is put right at the heart of simulation and the fatal strategies enacted by the object in the fashion of those unpredictable and ever-growing events that, as mirror-images of reality – both re-produce and dissipate history at the one and the same time (see Baudrillard, 1992 "The Event Strike" in *The Illusion of the End*).

IV. Tertium non Datur: Baudrillard's Third Order Simulation

I have discussed elsewhere that Baudrillard's genealogy of simulation follows the logic of the *objet-petit-a*, of its "extraction", so to speak, from one of the three realms of the Lacanian discourse (Real, Imaginary and Symbolic); to the degree that simulation itself – its stage or intensity - looks like depending upon the degree of proximity of the viewer/object of representation to the representation itself.⁸ I have therefore approximated such representation to a perspective window, and for the simple reason that Lacan himself seems as having followed the logic of linear perspective. As made explicit by the double-mirror device (i.e. the mechanism underpinning Lacan's *mirror-stage*) the illusion provided by the mirror is only possible on condition that a given distance (from the mirror) and a given angle of vision are abided. As soon as they are disregarded, the illusion set-up by the double-mirror device vanishes. The third simulation stage should thus be seen exactly as the condition where the proximity of either the viewer or the object of representation to the mirror/perspective window is such that the latter is not only approximated but trespassed: so as in the *Real* the *objet a* is 'possessed' by the subject, so in the third simulation stage the object of representation is introjected by representation itself (mirror) - the viewer and the object becoming so close to (the source of) representation as to be swallowed by it⁹.

To the same extent, I have already stressed that this incestuous relationship between reality and its mirror-image is at the heart of Butler's understanding of Baudrillard. Just as in Lacan, the dyadic relationship between subject and mirror excludes the paternal metaphor, so too the relationship between the object of representation and representation itself, in Butler's analysis, can be seen to exclude the referent of reality: whereas, in the imaginary, the father's signifier (i.e. the Law, the Oedipus complex, the Symbolic Order etc.) only survives as an *imago* of the father, so too, in simulation, does reality only survive as an empty signifier. In both cases, either the Symbolic or reality only persist as a 'projection' of the (dyadic) system - the third term (the father, reality) being reduced to "another to itself" with the sole purpose of reinforcing the dyadic system itself [it is my understanding of Butler's work that a Lacanian model is here at stake]. Hence, Baudrillard's notorious examples (Disneyland, Vietnam war), where Butler's interpretation of simulation can be read as a watermark throughout the Lacanian dyadic system of the mirror-stage¹⁰.

And yet, it is through the logic of the *objet-petit-a* and its displacement within one or the other of the Lacanian realms that simulation reaches its peak, being *obscenity* but this excessive, *ob-scene* proximity, of either the subject to its mirror-image or of the object to the perspective window, which "eliminates the gaze, the image and every representation" whatsoever" - the Lacanian name *of-the-father* being by now excluded by the dyadic relationship between subject and mother, between the object of representation and representation as such (Baudrillard, 1988:22).

Let us take, at this purpose, the exhibition of hyper-realist artists held at the *Pompidou Centre* in Paris sometime over the 80s, that same exhibition with which Baudrillard associates the meaninglessness of third simulation stage:

I recall a particular scene of a hyper-realist exhibition at Beaubourg – Baudrillard writes - of flesh-colored, absolutely realistic and naked sculptures, or rather mannequins in unequivocal, banal positions. The instantaneousness of a body which is meaningless and which has nothing to say but simply exists, has a kind of stupefying effect upon its spectators. The reaction of the people was interesting. They leaned over to see something, to look at the texture of the skin, the pubic hair, everything, but there was nothing to see. Some even wanted to touch the bodies to test their reality, but of course that didn't work because everything was already there. The exhibition did not even fool the eye. When one has been visually deceived one takes pleasure in guessing, and even if there is no intent to deceive, to fool, the esthetic and tactile pleasure produced by certain forms involves a kind of divination.

All that remains here is the extraordinary technique by which the artist erases all the signals of divination. Not even a trace of illusion remains underneath the veracity of the hair. Precisely because there is nothing to see, people approach, lean over and flair out this hallucinating hyper-real resemblance, haunting in its friendliness. They lean over to see an astounding thing: *an image where there is nothing to see* (Baudrillard, 1988: 31-32).

And, to the same extent, the Japanese vaginal cyclorama, with which obscenity (*ob-scene* meaning *off-stage*, the annihilation of the distance between stage and the audience and therefore of the *theatrical* staging of appearances) is also associated (Baudrillard, 2003):

Prostitutes, their thighs open, sitting on the edge of a platform, Japanese workers in their shirt-sleeves (it is a popular spectacle), permitted to shove their noses up to their eyeballs within the woman's vagina in order to see, to see better – but what? They clamber over each other in order to gain access, and all the while the prostitutes speak to them gently, or rebuke them sharply for the sake of form. The rest of the spectacle, the flagellations, the reciprocal masturbation and traditional strip-tease, pales before this moment of absolute obscenity, this moment of visual voracity that goes far beyond sexual possession. A sublime pornography: if they could do it, these guys would be swallowed up whole within the prostitute [...] No lewdness, but an extremely serious, infantile act borne of an undivided fascination with the mirror of the female organ, like Narcissus' fascination with his own image. Beyond the conventional idealism of the strip-tease [...], pornography at its most sublime reverses itself into a purified obscenity, an obscenity that is purer, deeper, more visceral (Baudrillard, 1990:31-32).

In both cases, are we not presented with the paradox of the Marxist fetish? Or better, the paradox of the *objet-petit-a* as soaked into the contradictions of the financial aspect of capital? Not only is hyper-reality “Nothingness itself, the pure semblance of a property that is effectively merely an envelope of a void” (Zizek, 2001:22); but also, and conveniently, a super-object conforming to its ‘ideal’ model, i.e. that Lacanian *petit-objet-a* whose paradoxical existence is best described by the Marxist formula M-M': so as the more a Coke is drunk, the more it gets one thirsty, so, in Baudrillard, the more reality is given, the less reality is taken (*simulation*); so as, in Lacan, the more desire is approached, the more it eludes one's grasp, so, in Baudrillard, the more reality is scrutinized, the less reality is understood (*obscenity*); so as the more caffeine is extracted, the less Coke remains, so the more reality is represented, the less representation is real (*hyper-reality*). The fetishism of simulation: not only does the re-production of images become an autonomous and natural source of simulation that reproduces spontaneously, a surplus of representation that the

system skims off representation itself; but reality is only put forward by the system only to confirm the system all the more – or, in Lacanian terms, as the gold standard of the system against which all other values - the degree of simulation, in this case - are measured.

Let us take the *fatal strategies*, i.e. that very condition of simulation where the mirror-image - the narcissistic re-doubling of reality - takes revenge on both the subject and each and every one of his “splendid features” (“knowledge, freedom, creativity, imagination, certitude, objectivity”, etc.); and does so by proliferating and expanding to the *n*th degree, by becoming “superlative”, by surpassing itself, by growing in power and, most of all by becoming ecstatic (Kelner, Op. Cit.:157). Well, in such a condition not only is reality excreted, redoubled and intensified as if endlessly reflected – and therefore re-produced – by a double-mirror-device (the beautiful as the more beautiful than the beautiful in fashion, the real as the realer than the real in television, sex as the more sexual than sexuality in pornography, etc.); but the mirror itself is finally transformed into that unpredictable object of narcissistic identification that, meant to be seduced by the subject through obscenity (fully explicit, nothing hidden) and hyper-reality (“She can’t pass a mirror without seducing it”, people gossiped about Madame de Pompadour), ends up seducing the subject more, and better, than the subject itself. Reality becomes a mechanism of self-growth and endless accumulation where not only the ‘*more you have, the least you get*’, ‘*the more you scrutinize, the least you see*’, ‘*the more you are in control, the least you master reality*’, etc.; but also ‘*the least you master the object, the more you want to control it*’, ‘*the least you understand reality, the more you want to scrutinize it*’, etc. - simulation becoming a form of perpetual motion where *representation* is in excess of itself and, as *surplus representation*, both re-produces and dissipates itself.¹¹

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Endnotes

1. This is so for a number of reasons. Baudrillard's writing strategy in the first place: intending to contrast the homologating characteristics of simulation (which his own theory is supposed to be the mirror-image of), Baudrillard has pushed those same characteristics beyond every possible limit so as to turn theory itself into "an exercise in simulation" (and with the perfectly understandable result that it has taken decades to make sense of Baudrillard's intentions overall); secondly, the prevalent interpretation of Baudrillard's *oeuvre* within either the Marxist tradition or the structuralist legacy (semiotics); thirdly, the vastness - if variety - of Baudrillard's sources; finally, the evolution of his key concepts (such as simulation itself) into phases or keywords that have had the effect of his work being perceived as even more fragmented than it actually is (Jean Baudrillard, in Ashley Woodward (2009). *Nihilism in Postmodernity: Lyotard, Vattimo, Baudrillard*. Aurora: The Davies Group, p. 23).

2. See at this purpose: Jacques Lacan (2004). *Le séminaire, Livre X: L'angoisse* (Paris: Seuil). The *objet petit a* is always lower case to be differentiated from Other, with the capital 'O', which indicates a radical, irreducible alterity and was first addressed by Lacan as a leftover, or remainder, of the subject's greatest trauma: the separation from the body proper (the placenta) or, more in general, "the residue of division when the subject is marked by the 'unbroken line' of the signifier in the field of the Other."

3. Dylan Evans (1996). *An Introductory Dictionary to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, p. 214. "In the seminar of 1960–1, Lacan articulates the *objet-petit-a* with the term *agalma* (a Greek term meaning a glory, an ornament, an offering to the gods, or a little statue of a god) which he extracts from Plato's *Symposium*. Just as the *agalma* is a precious object hidden inside a relatively worthless box, so the *objet petit a* is the object of desire which we seek in the other" (Dylan Evans, *op. cit.*, 128).

4. Martin Jay, *op. cit.*, p. 355. In *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (1989, Stanford: Stanford University Press), Kellner discusses Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange* in terms of the Freudian castration theory: "Fashion, publicity, nude-look, nude theatre, strip-tease: everywhere, it's the scenodrama of erection and castration" (Jean Baudrillard, in Kellner, p. 99). Despite Kellner's interpretation, it is worth exploring this as an interesting application of Lacan's theory in terms of the capitalist discourse that is addressed later in respect to and the consequent vaporization of the father emphasized by Massimo Recalcati. The "fetishistic display of the phallus to alleviate castration anxiety" (Kellner, *ibid.*),

rather than been seen as a reflex of Freudian theory, should be interpreted in Lacanian terms, and in the specific manner as already anticipating simulation as the (successful) attempt at replacing the metaphor of the father with its 'simulated' image: the more the father disappears, the more the phallus (which for Lacan is the paternal signifier *par excellence*) 'appears' and re-appears; is in other words reduced to an empty signifier.

5. Jacques Lacan, "Il Discorso del Capitalista" (1978), in *Lacan in Italia, 1953-1978*. Milano: La Salamandra. In the so-called 'capitalist discourse', Lacan inverted the classic Weberian notion of capitalism as based on protestant asceticism and according to which only sacrifice and self-renunciation allow the accumulation of capital and the production of profit: rather than having the effect of renouncing pleasure, the capitalist discourse emphasizes enjoyment and, to the same extent, the consumption of enjoyment. The lack of enjoyment, a precondition for the accumulation of the capital, is ironically turned on its head so to become a diffused and generalized condition of "a pure avidity of enjoyment" (Massimo Recalcati (2010). *L'uomo Senza Inconscio*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, p. 23, *my trans.*). The capitalist discourse is thus a discourse that exceeds every other discourse because, being the Lacanian discourse what restrains enjoyment from the viewpoint of social boundaries, perverts the functioning of the social command.

6. So as Marx invented surplus-value so Lacan claimed to have invented the *objet a* by isolating the latter by homology with surplus-value. In the mathéme of fantasy ($\$ \leftrightarrow a$), the rapport between surplus-*jouissance* and surplus-value is the function of the *objet a* (Jacques Lacan (2006). *Le séminaire, Livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre*. Paris: Seuil).

7. Mario Perniola, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-8. *Surplus value* is to Perniola that character of financial capitalism "endowed with a life of its own" and for this same reason invested by the characteristics of the fetish, i.e. that "sensory quality" that makes capital appear as completely unconnected to the manner in which it is effectively used by the person to whom it is lent. As a result, not only do labor and exchange disappear from the movement of production and re-production of the capital; but the financial capital itself "takes on the appearance of a fetish, of a thing that has absorbed any social relation and that in this radical exteriorization erases and renders unrecognizable all transits, transformations and the mediation necessary to its growth". (Mario Perniola, *op. cit.*, p. 57-9).

8. In Lacanian psychoanalytic practice, the "extraction" of the *objet-petit-a* from one or the other of the three orders (*Symbolic*, *Imaginary*, and *Real*) allows the description of psychoanalytic phenomena. Such an extraction is a topological matter: its displacement or positioning in one or the other of the three Lacanian orders not only connotes the subject's desire, but in so doing also brings the fore the subject's pathology as a consequence of the degree of proximity existing between the subject and the object (far too distant, or unachievable, in the *Symbolic*; ambiguously close in the *Imaginary*; far too close in the *Real*). And does so by turning against the subject that same enigma that makes the subject exposed to the gaze of the Other; i.e., that "*Che vuoi?*" that, by placing the other in the (visual) field of the subject, also places the subject in the (visual) field of the Other.

9. One should note here two things: firstly, that in Baudrillard the object of representation (reality) and the viewer are interchangeable. I suppose this is primarily due to Baudrillard's criticism of anthropocentrism, when in effect it is the object that gains primacy over the subject; but also due to the simulation logic itself: at the very point where the object (reality) of representation and its simulation (representation/perspective window) match, one of the effects of simulation is

exactly the explosion of the binary opposition substantiating western categories. Among this, the inversion of poles between representation and reality, subject and object, etc. I will return to this point later. Secondly, that the Lacanian symbolic has no equivalent in Baudrillard's genealogy but appears, by inverting the logic of the *objet-petit-a*, in seduction (or symbolic exchange), where not only is the functioning of reality based on an ever-increasing challenge between reality and representation itself (rather than on the collapse of the former onto the latter), but also, and by virtue of this, on the *simulation* of the crossing of the distance separating the two rather than their effective proximity. The game of the real (the illusion of appearances) thus consists of preserving such a distance, although the illusion of the mirror/representation may suggest something different.

Baudrillard's simulation can thus be seen as the shift from the imaginary realm (i.e. the realm of utopia, the realm of the omnipotence of a new-born society as reflected by a narcissistic double) to the realm of the Real, i.e. the condition where such a dyadic relationship between original and double excludes the symbolic dimension of reality and therefore reality itself. It is for this reason, I suppose, that the second simulation stage has always been seen as having little relevance in Baudrillard's text and in effect, the 'equivalence' between reality and imaginary has consequently been assimilated either to the first order or, more poignantly, to the third, where obscenity is exactly the condition of the alleged 'continuity' between different orders or realms (aesthetical, political, sexual).

It would be extremely interesting to compare Baudrillard's second simulation stage to Lacan's use of the Mobius strip, a device which Baudrillard himself often quotes "as a metaphor for the proliferation of models and simulation", so that, "in a system where linear continuity and dialectical polarity no longer exist [...] then all determination evaporates, every act terminates at the end of the cycle".

10. [So as] with Disneyland, a special place of childhood is marked off to demonstrate that the rest of America is by contrast grown-up [-] whereas in fact it is the 'real' country, all of the 'real' America, which is Disneyland [...] [-] [, so] [w]ith the Vietnam world, there is a war only to hide the fact that a pact or accord between the two countries has been struck in which the 'real' enemy is neither side as such but a radical third, which must be excluded [...] [The Vietnam war] was only a crucial episode in a peaceful co-existence. It marked China's apprenticeship in a global *modus vivendi*. (Jean Baudrillard, in Rex Butler, 1999). *In Defence of The Real*. London: Sage, p. 45. In each of the above mentioned cases, not only does the system put forward its other as real (Disneyland, Vietnam war, etc.) only to exclude this other ("The real strategy of the system in putting forward its other is ultimately to get rid of this other", Butler writes), but this *excluded other* is clearly the Lacanian name-of-the-father in disguise. Rex Butler, *Ibid*.

11. On the other hand, the third simulation stage is not just what "eliminates the gaze, the image and every representation"; but also what, and for this very reason, causes the "absolute proximity to, and total instantaneousness, with all things". No distance, no gaze, no desire is therefore possible but the ecstatic overlapping of the mirror-image with the subject – a condition expressed by Baudrillard in terms of so-called hyper-reality. (Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, *op. cit.*, p. 22 and 27). Also note, at this purpose that, if to Lacan the subject is *alienated* due to subjectivity being permanently trapped into an 'imaginary order' – the *mirror stage* (as soon as the child recognizes himself in the reflection of a mirror, that moment his identity is forever split and outwardly constructed from his real body and being), to Baudrillard the subject is *obscene* due to reality stopping being the origin/referent of the mirror-image.

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