

November 2018

# The Mirror of Humanism; or, Towards a Baudrillardian Posthuman Theory

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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## Recommended Citation

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## Abstract

This thesis considers the relationship between Jean Baudrillard's thought and theories of posthumanism. I argue that Baudrillard's work is fundamentally posthuman, but that Baudrillard's posthumanism is one that stands in opposition to main currents of contemporary posthuman theory. Most contemporary posthuman theory, I argue, focuses on the dissipation of a liberal humanist subject--and celebrate its loss. Baudrillard's thought, by contrast, suggests that the posthuman figure only arrives in the age of hyperreality and is therefore intertwined with the oppressive logic of the simulacrum. In my consideration of contemporary posthuman theory, I focus primarily on the work of Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, and Rosi Braidotti to show how each fails to consider the implications of an oppressive posthuman figure and how each therefore mirror the same systemic modes of oppression they purport to challenge. In pursuing my critique, my debt to Baudrillard is both formal and substantial as I adopt his methodological approach, for example, in challenging Karl Marx and Michel Foucault to point to the ways in which these posthuman scholars's work mirrors, as opposed to challenges, the doctrine of the liberal humanist subject, all the while crafting and illustrating a Baudrillardian posthuman theory. I conclude my thesis by sketching a Baudrillardian theory of resistance to the oppressive posthuman figure of hyperreality by employing his theory of seduction as a challenge to the determinacy of the posthuman subject.

## Keywords

Jean Baudrillard; Posthumanism; Humanism; Cary Wolfe; Katherine Hayles; Rosi Braidotti; Seduction.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the myriad of supporters both directly and indirectly.

First and foremost, there are my parents, Lynn and Velma, who, with their unwavering support of my continuation through academia, have been integral in my maintenance of a positive demeanor for the duration of this, at times, tedious undertaking.

There is little doubt that I would have made it this far in academia if it weren't for the many teachers and professors that have shaped, not only what I think, but how I think. This is directed to the many professors of the English department at Bishop's University—Dr. Shawn Malley, Dr. Gregory Brophy, Dr. Linda Morra, Dr. Steven Woodward, and Dr. Jessica Riddell—as well as many from the Sociology department—Dr. Gerry Coulter and Dr. Mary Ellen Donnan—who have all been integral in shaping my relationship to the broad category of theory, and to the world.

Thanks to Dr. Tom Carmichael who has been instrumental in the timely completion of this project. It makes little sense to me how someone with as much responsibility as Tom managed to find the time to guide me through this project.

I would like to thank the Center for the Study of Theory and Criticism that has provided the basis for my pursuing this idea. And a very special thanks to Melanie Caldwell who has made everything as easy as it can possibly be.

And of course, thanks to my H el ene, who has been paramount in equipping me with the critical intellectual tools necessary to complete such a project.

*For Gerry*

A friend has died. The death of a friend finds its own justification *a posteriori*: it makes the world less liveable, and therefore renders his absence from this world less painful. It alters the world in such a way that he would no longer have his place in it. Others outlive themselves into a world which is no longer theirs. Some know how to slip away at the apposite moment. Their death is a stroke of cleverness: it makes the world more enigmatic, more difficult to understand than it was when they were alive – which is the true task of thought. (Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories IV*)

The task of philosophy is to unmask this illusion of objective reality - a trap that is, in a sense, laid for us by nature. (Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil; or, The Lucidity Pact*)

In the beginning, the mountains had great wings. Whenever they pleased, they would fly through the air and alight on the ground. Then the earth would tremble and quake. But Indra cut off the mountain's wings. He fastened the mountains to the earth, to steady it. The wings became clouds. Ever since that time, clouds gathered around the mountaintops. (Roberto Calasso, *The Ruin of Kasch*)

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## Introduction

A consideration of Jean Baudrillard's thought with posthumanism may appear, at first glance, to be a project not worth conducting. There are many reasons why, were one to state the contrary, they may be charged with proclaiming a truism. Given Baudrillard's theorization of hyperreality, and its consequential effect on humanity, there is little doubt that his work shares some indubitable affinity with posthumanism. The goal of this thesis is to argue that, in fact, Baudrillard's work stands opposed to many strands of posthumanism represented by the work of Cary Wolfe, Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti. I argue that in contrast to these posthuman approaches, Baudrillard's work refuses to accept that there has ever been a steady ontological notion of the human that has either vanished or is in the process of vanishing. Therefore, I propose that a Baudrillardian "posthumanism" does not theorize what follows the liberal human subject but considers the implications of a human fully realized in the wake of hyperreality. What we may observe is a chiasm of the traditional thesis held by posthuman scholars where posthumanism does not mark the death of the human but is the moment that the human is made manifest in its hyperreal form. In this respect, my thesis stands as something of a polemic against these seminal strands of posthumanism. The failure of these strands of posthumanism, I argue, may be observed in the extent to which their projects retroactively construct the human through its temporal negation.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which contributes to the consolidation of a Baudrillardian theory of posthumanism. The first deals directly with Baudrillard's work to describe a Baudrillardian posthuman theory. To conduct this analysis, I move through his work chronologically, beginning with his initial texts of the 1960s and 1970s. In his first books, Baudrillard establishes his mode of criticism of the sign object as subordinate to the physical

object in the construction of meaning. These initial texts lay the foundation for much of Baudrillard's later work of simulation because they emphasize the significance of signification as a point from which meaning, oppression, and culture may emerge. From his earliest texts, I move to his polemical work in the mid-1970s. These texts demonstrate his early critique of the humanism he believes present in Marxist and Foucauldian theoretical approaches. The seminal texts of this stage in Baudrillard's thinking are *The Mirror of Production* and *Forget Foucault*. The first is a critique of Karl Marx, and how his theory of political economy homogenizes and constructs a steady ontological human figure from which his theory of use-value may develop. The second is Baudrillard's critique of Michel Foucault. This text is not nearly as polemical as *The Mirror of Production*, given Foucault's malleability and self-reflection across each of his texts, but still points to the extent to which Foucault's work fundamentally relies on a liberal human subject capable of perceiving and interacting with power and knowledge.

I follow this exploration by engaging with his work in the late 1970s and 1980s and the development of his theories of simulation and seduction as models for his own form of theory, a theory that assumes the form of a "fatal strategy"—a strategy that drives thought to its (il)logical conclusion, forcing thought to develop, adapt, or disappear. I conclude the chapter by presenting the phenomenological implications of Baudrillard's work in his theories of diseases and viruses in the posthuman episteme. This discussion serves the purpose of illuminating Baudrillard's approach to the current state of a posthuman subject and to its future.

The second chapter moves from Baudrillard to the posthumanism scholarship of Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, and Rosi Braidotti. I begin with Hayles's *How we Became Posthuman*, a foundational text in the exploration of the posthuman and one that brilliantly consolidates the history of posthumanism from the Macy conferences to its broad impact on



academia and popular cultures. Hayles's text dissects the implications of technology on the human in the posthuman era. At the heart of her argument is a commitment to the notion of a "real" human figure that is at risk of disappearing as it falls into the proximity of technological advancements. My discussion mobilizes Baudrillard's theory of simulation to argue that the human has only ever manifested itself in the form of signs, which stands opposed to the attachment of a transcendental biologism to the human.

I then proceed to Cary Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?*, and his deconstruction of the human-animal split. Similar to the approach pioneered by Hayles, Wolfe explores the implications of advancements in scientific observation to reveal the overwhelming similarities between humans and animals. Wolfe then employs these observations to destabilize anthropocentrism, and to ultimately do away with the distinction between humans and animals. Wolfe applies Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction in *The Animal that Therefore I am* to supplement his argument. In response to Wolfe, and to point to the limitations of his argument, I mobilize Baudrillard's thoughts on the human/animal divide and the role it serves in maintaining a distinction between the two. For Baudrillard, a deconstruction of the human/animal divide will not simply result in the dissipation of the conflicts that arise from that division, but will operate to place the animal into the same oppressive schematic of humanism that Wolfe strives to destabilize.

I conclude this chapter by turning my attention to Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman*. Of all the texts presented, Braidotti's stands the most opposed to a Baudrillardian posthuman theory because of its celebration of the potential for a deterritorialized posthuman subject. For Braidotti, the posthuman is a figure to be enlisted in the service of destabilizing the homogenizing tendencies of advanced capitalism. Braidotti advocates for the "becoming" of the human so that

it disappears into the endless flows of possible resistance. For Baudrillard, any such potentiation of the human relies on the maintenance of a subjectivity indicative of hyper-consumption and globalization that acts as an extension of the traditional humanist subject. This is made apparent by Baudrillard's resistance to technology as a site of possibility, and his general reservations about the potential for "becoming" to enact any fundamental progress without being subsumed by the logic of advanced capitalism.

The third and final chapter changes direction from a critical method to a constructive one. Despite the resistance that Baudrillard's theories have to any form of pragmatism, I propose a Baudrillardian mode of resistance to the oppressive posthuman subject. To do this, I attempt to align his thought with contemporary discourse on Donna Haraway's conception of the cyborg. I argue that Baudrillard's theory of seduction serves as an integral supplement to the maintenance of a cyborg figure that would resist all attempts to ground it within a single ontological framework. This section of my argument runs alongside disability scholarship—as represented specifically in the work of Alison Kafer—that fears the implications of a cyborg figure grounded within the domain of prostheses and technology when, in fact, the potential of the cyborg is not to be found in its relationship to technology, but in its resistance to stability.

# 1 Baudrillard's Posthumanism

There has been no extensive analysis of Jean Baudrillard's ideas in relation to posthumanism. There may be many reasons for an absence of scholarly work in this area, and it is worth noting that the term "posthuman" does not appear in any of Baudrillard's text, but I will not address the lack of scholarly engagement here. Rather, this chapter will identify elements of Baudrillard's work that share affinities with posthumanism in order to trace a demonstrably coherent approach to the question of the human in Baudrillard's work. Although all of his books are, in some way, relevant to this chapter, I restrict my analysis to Baudrillard's extended discussions of theories of Marxism, power, mass media, technology, objectification, disease, and war in the contemporary episteme.

The method that I employ in this chapter may be characterized as an archaeological excavation in search of traces of the posthuman in Baudrillard's theories. Though my method may appear ironic given Baudrillard's polemic against Michel Foucault and Foucault's use of the genealogical method, my persistence in employing a theoretical strategy criticized by Baudrillard in order to analyze Baudrillard is important as it illustrates the unsteady nature of a "real" Baudrillardian theory. In the search for a *genesis of the posthuman* in Baudrillard's work, this chapter will, I hope, also remain faithful to his theoretical imagination in its refusal to outline a methodical Baudrillardian theory. Baudrillard's theories are famously elusive as they attempt to map a world where the "unreal has crept in and may have become the chief aspect of our reality" (Morin 87), or in which "everything eludes itself, [where] everything scoffs at its own truth" (Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Communication* 62). But in theorizing the arrival of the "unreal,"

Baudrillard was, in many ways, writing of a world that had disappeared into a sort of post-world: the perfect home for the post-human.

Many theories of posthumanism suggest that the posthuman turn marks an end to the human, and the arrival of a new mode of being. I argue, however, that this sequence is reversed in Baudrillard's thought, which pursues not a commitment to the unknown—or a commitment to the realization of uncontrollable possibilities—but a focused de-mystification of the depths of the corporeal body and the psychic body. Consequently, when we postulate a Baudrillardian theory of posthumanism, we must be careful not to suggest that Baudrillard's work verifies the existence of a pre-simulated human. Rather, I believe a faithful Baudrillardian theory of the posthuman demonstrates the realization of the human in the present episteme. In tracing the development of Baudrillard's thought pertaining to humanity, I consider the relation of the human to virtual technologies and the eventual death of the human as a consequence of its realization.

## 1.1 Deconstructing the Subject/Object Dichotomy

In his first book, *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard deconstructs the relationship between consumers and the objects that they consume. Baudrillard suggests that the “functional object is being transcended by a new kind of practical organization” (19). This practical organization, or the system of objects, marks a shift from the object as commodity, to the object as part of a greater system of relations. In this system, objects lose their singularity, forcing their worth not to be predicated on their functionality, but on their ability to communicate and function alongside other objects. Objects obtain their coherence “by virtue of their simplification

as components of a code” (23).<sup>1</sup> Objects abide by the code through their being rendered easily mappable and traversable by the consumers that organize them. According to Mark McLennan, “Baudrillard refers to this system as a ‘cybernetic code,’ and argues that reality itself is shut out from this system because the system is wholly self-referencing. This code creates ‘a functionalised, integrated and self-reproducing universe’ of meaning, controlled by simulacra and simulation” (McLennan). Moreover, Douglas Kellner makes the case that “just as our cells contain genetic codes, DNA, that structure how we experience and behave, so too society contains codes and models of social organization and control which structure the environment and human life” (*Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* 80). In many ways, this suggestion aligns the relationship between consumers and objects with the greater project of advanced capitalism that renders consumable not just objects, but the spaces in which those objects are to be found. If we accept this proposition, the relationship between the consumer and object has radically altered from the simple classification of objects as tools, gadgets or products in general to objects as communicating elements of a greater system. Objects communicate in this structure precisely because of the demand that they do. For spaces to be operational, there must be some communication between the objects that are found within them.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a profound ambiguity in Baudrillardian theory as to what actually constitutes and comprises this “code.” Translated from the word “code” in the original French, “code” may connote any number of meanings. It would be a heavy task to outline every possible translation of this term here, so I will posit one that captures the essence of the term in the context of this thesis. A synonym of this term in French could be “organisation” or “classification.” The most apt definition of the code in Baudrillard’s work is, ironically, not actually a definition at all. In the *Mirror of Production*, it can be found to qualify, in brackets, the “scientific and universalist discourse (code)” that haunts Marxism.

The objects do not communicate directly however, but speak through the consumers that map their trajectories in the living spaces in which they are found.

As Baudrillard observes of the individual, “instead of consuming objects, he dominates, controls and orders them. He discovers himself in the manipulation and tactical equilibration of a system” (*System of Objects* 25). Objects are not only utilized for the sake of consumption but exist in relation to other objects as cogs in a machine of human domination. In this framework, the system of objects mirrors human systems of communication and organization. For instance, the “house [...] is the symbolic equivalent of the human body, whose potent organic schema is later generalized into an ideal design for the integration of social structures” (27). At the level of the symbolic, there is no ontological difference between objects and subjects in this system. In fact, the ontological certainty of the human/object divide may only ever elucidate a moebius strip of designation, where human and object fold into one another in an endless cycle of signification, or total simulacrum. Ultimately, however, Baudrillard states that humans dominate objects. How can humans dominate, however, if they are on the same plane as objects?

It is in the *The System of Objects* that he approaches a solution to this question when he introduces the theory of the simulacrum, stating that if “the simulacrum is so well designed that it becomes an effective organizer of reality, then surely it is man, not the simulacrum, who is turned into an abstraction” (60). The simulacrum and the code are interlinked at this point in Baudrillard’s work, where each informs the other. Moreover, an affinity may be subsequently noted between the simulacrum and the meaning attached to objects as a consequence of advanced capitalism. These objects do not abide by a fundamental use value, but are determined by their location within exchange and their ability to float freely according to the logic of exchange. This theory of the simulacrum takes the previous proposition a step further by

suggesting that the human, at one time coherent and linear, experiences its demise as a consequence of the simulacrum. To navigate this simulacral terrain, Baudrillard suggests that “modern man” becomes a “cybernetician” (29), or a master of networks, systems, and communication. This conceptual turn in the ontological condition of humanity may be most easily accepted if we consider the phenomenological implications of this shift. Specifically, we may accentuate this point by turning, oddly enough, to Edmund Husserl’s writing of perception: “We, as living in wakeful world-consciousness, are constantly active on the basis of our passive having of the world; it is from there, by objects pregiven in consciousness, that we are affected; it is to this or that object that we pay attention, according to our interests; with them we deal actively in different ways; through our acts they are ‘thematic’ objects” (108). Our “having of the world” places us in a reciprocal relationship with the world where it shapes us to the extent that we shape it. The human’s becoming cybernetician then is simply in accordance with this phenomenological principle as a response to the world’s resemblance to networks and systems. Consequently, the human’s “mastery” over this simulated space is simultaneously a hierarchal elevation of the human over the world (as has been traditionally conceived), and a survival tactic to match and adapt to the pervading cultural logic of simulation.

As the cybernetician’s domination over spaces and the objects that inhabit them mirrors the ontology of the object and its command over other objects, the cybernetician’s relationship to other beings will mirror the object’s relationship to other objects. If we accept that the object’s designation as “object” exists within a larger system of objects, the singularity of any given object is predicated on its relationship and affinities with other objects. As Baudrillard explains, this “object does not assume meaning either in a symbolic relation with the subject (the Object) or in an operational relation to the world (object-as-implement): it finds meaning with other

objects, in difference, according to a hierarchal code of significations” (*For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* 64).<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the “code” is the sole responsibility for the oppressive manifestation of social hierarchy, but that it is one manifestation of it. We may only follow the syllogistic conclusion then when, as Baudrillard argues in *The Consumer Society*, there is “no longer an ontological struggle between the being and its double (its shadow, its soul, its ideal), whether divine or diabolic; there is logical calculation of signs and absorption into the system of signs” (193).

Baudrillard’s system of signs is, in many ways, an extension of the argument Foucault puts forth in *The Order of Things* where he writes that

It was this [sign] system that introduced into knowledge probability, analysis, and combination, and the justified arbitrariness of the system. It was the sign system that gave rise simultaneously to the search for origins and to calculability; to the constitution of tables that would fix the possible compositions, and to the restitution of a genesis on the basis of the simplest elements; it was the sign system that linked all knowledge to a language, and sought to replace all languages with a system of artificial symbols and operations of a logical nature (69-70).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The code is hierarchal because it does not abide by a homogenizing imperative completely but retains many of the oppressive manifestations indicative of the “real” world. This is echoed in the *System of Objects* when the very first chapter opens with the argument that “the arrangement of furniture offers a faithful image of the familial and social structures of a period. The typical bourgeois interior is patriarchal.” The degree to which pecuniary decency emulates the effectiveness of hegemonic and exclusionary standards of sociality (Thorstein Veblen) illuminates the susceptibility of the system of signs to those very manifestations of oppression.

<sup>3</sup> Whereas Foucault traces the development of the linguistic parameters associated with representation through the broad ages of our history, Baudrillard analyzes this system solely in



Foucault presents a historical narrative to account for this transformation of language across the broad historical age, and to account for the realization of the “system of signs.” But the absorption of language by a “system of artificial symbols” also presents an opening for Baudrillard to perform his own analysis that extends beyond Foucault’s project in considering the implications of simulation as the total dissipation of any connection to a “real” referent. In this case, the being and its double, like the subject and the object, have folded into each other in relation to the “functional simulacrum” (Baudrillard, *For a Critique* 32).

Baudrillard’s location of the cybernetician in relation to the system of signs allows him to develop his own critical evaluation of the conditions of the simulacrum. Baudrillard does this in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* when he places Thorstein Veblen in dialogue with classic Marxist analysis. Veblen’s interest in consumption rather than production provides the opportunity for Baudrillard to move away from production as the primary component of advanced industrial systems toward the role of consumption, and therefore the role of the consumer, a consumer who has now become the cybernetician. Veblen’s approach provides a critical “cultural analysis of class which, beyond the ‘dialectical materialism’ of productive forces, examines the *logic of sumptuary values* which assures and perpetuates through its code the hegemony of the dominant class” (Baudrillard 115). By examining sumptuary values, Baudrillard utilizes Veblen to engage with the symbolic meaning of objects as opposed to the Marxist move to locate objects in correspondence to their history in production. This move is necessary for Baudrillard because it implicitly conveys the significance of signs and signifiers in

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the contemporary epoch. In this way, Baudrillard’s work can very easily be read as an extension of Foucault’s theories of language and signification.

the search for meaning-- key concepts for his later analysis of simulation. I evoke the term “meaning” to convey the significance that signification may contain for some people. This is to say that Baudrillard does not want to merely disavow the experience associated with signification or signs as insignificant, but instead wants to consider the role they play in shaping identity, culture, and society. Moreover, Baudrillard’s commitment to semiotics serves as a foundational move for his analysis of symbolic exchange—a mode of exchange that recognizes the indeterminacy of objects and, more importantly, provides the ground for a “deconstruction of the sign” (*Symbolic Exchange & Death* 195).

In order to open the possibility for this approach, Baudrillard takes aim at psychoanalysis. For Baudrillard, psychoanalysis strives to uncover a fundamental characteristic of the human, which it locates in the unconscious. Moreover, the very notion of a fundamental human essence in the unconscious itself provides “the ideological solution to the problems of the unconscious” (*For a Critique* 100). However, as Baudrillard argues, this search for a singular and absolute human condition ignores the conditions of signification that operate outside the body. Some of these modes of signification may include the environment, history, and society (just to name a few). This suggestion does not destabilize the notion of a universal unconscious apparatus completely as it may be argued that it is the unconscious that processes these forces.

To tackle this issue, we may take an epistemological approach similar to the one employed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* when they question if Oedipus “merely expresses the history of a long mistake, throughout all its variations and modalities; the strain of an endless repression? What we are calling into question is the frantic Oedipalization to which psychoanalysis devotes itself, practically and theoretically, with the combined resources of image and structure” (53). Deleuze and Guattari make apparent, however, that even an

epistemological approach to the problem of the unconscious is in itself too far removed from the question of the unconscious at hand. As they argue, “one should not suggest vast considerations on analytic epistemology, but modest and rigorous topics such as the theory of maids or domestic servants in Freud's thought” (353). Following Deleuze and Guattari, we might suggest that by adopting the status of “Truth,” the unconscious undermines its radical potential. If the unconscious is credited with an absolute identity, there is an even greater move away from a possible “Truth” of the unconscious, and therefore there is an even greater move away from the nature of “Truth” itself. This is due to the unconscious’s maintenance of a depth hidden away from perception. If the unconscious is made available to perception, it no longer performs the same operation, and consequently ceases to be the unconscious. In proper Baudrillardian form, the only way for the unconscious to have been “discovered” then, is if its simulacrum was that which was discovered. Yet given the obscure nature of the unconscious, the only form that it has been able to assume has been a simulated form. This may be likened to the thesis put forward by Jacques Lacan when he states that the “unconscious is [...] in a discourse whose displacements, whose condensations are without any doubt the displacements and condensations to be recognized in discourse, namely metonymies and metaphors” (251). Lacan’s location of the unconscious within the codes of language wrest it from the confinements of a biological imperative that grounds and stabilizes the unconscious as an unchanging structure. It is this linguistic component of the unconscious that Baudrillard wishes, to some extent, to maintain.

For Baudrillard, this struggle for “Truth,” or the absolute referent, may be thought in terms of signification. As he argues, “Denotation maintains itself entirely on the basis of the myth of ‘objectivity’ [...]. Objectivity in this case is the direct adequation of an [signifier] to a precise reality” (*For a Critique* 157). “Truth,” for Baudrillard, is attached to a system of signs

without adequation, to simulation and artificiality rather than a fixed, biological human condition engendered by a universal unconscious apparatus. The distinction that we may observe between systems of signification and the unconscious is made manifest in their respective liturgical claims to something resembling a truth. Whereas the unconscious proclaims a fundamental human condition that transcends culture, society, and identity, systems of signification, while always already present, are open to evaluation, criticism, and deconstruction as a condition of their existence. Baudrillard's conceptualization of simulation as a specific mode of signification that is at once embedded in signification from its conception and simultaneously a product of a particular moment of signification, functions to deconstruct signification's/simulation's facile claim to either, effectively wresting the system of signification from any privileged position of ultimate referentiality.<sup>4</sup>

David Roden's presents a similar thesis in *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* when he writes that "becoming posthuman [...] presupposes that there is some matter of fact about being human in the first place" (6). Moreover, he puts forward the notion of "speculative posthumanism" that suggests that the posthuman is only a possibility, not a certainty. This theory of speculative posthumanism grounds the conceptual framework of the human within an already determined biological essence that the posthuman rejects. The cybernetician may be likened to Roden's conception of posthumans that "are hypothetical wide 'descendants' of current humans that are no longer human in consequence of some history of

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<sup>4</sup> In many ways, this is the same argument put forth by Derrida in "Structure, Sign, and Play" in which he, by pointing to the ambiguous position of the focal point around which there is made possible a hermeneutic, deconstructs the conventional claim of structuralism.

technological alteration” (22). Roden’s broad definition of the posthuman serves as the backdrop of my consideration of it in relation to the other posthuman scholars I present in my second and third chapter. However, as I argue in my second and third chapters, the brand of posthumanism that Roden puts forth relies on a fundamental notion of the human that functions to consolidate a humanist subject rather than destabilize it. While Roden’s work does provide an eloquent definition of the posthuman (as well as a number of subsidiary approaches), its attachment of a teleological attribute to the posthuman, notably as that which succeeds the human. This historical affirmation of the human, and its subsequent demise, does not, I argue mark the end to the human, but affirms it as a historical certainty from which everything else may be rendered derivative. Baudrillard begins to move past his own construction of the cybernetician, and therefore past Roden’s posthuman, as a teleological certainty when he considers the role of the fetish object.

Baudrillard accentuates this point by questioning the symbiotic relationship between the fetish object and the human. Historically, in the work of Sigmund Freud, the “normal prototype of fetishes is a man’s penis” (157). This approach attaches the fetish to a biological aura, where the fetish develops from nature. In response, Baudrillard states that if “fetishism exists it is thus not a fetishism of the signified, a fetishism of substances and values (called ideological), which the fetish object would incarnate for the alienated subject. Behind this reinterpretation (which is truly ideological) it is a *fetishism of the signifier*” (*For a Critique* 92). In this passage Baudrillard reverses the psychoanalytic proposition that “Truth,” or the location of the fetish in the biological, originates inside the human when the opposite is true. The fetish object is not transhistorical. The fetish object is always bound by a set of societal regulations that impose a restriction on the body and the possible actions the body might take, molding the body to the will

of a system of signification. The role of the unconscious in this structure is, for Baudrillard, a strategy to convince the modern human subject of the presence of an omnipresent naturalness. Thus, the unconscious operates as a sort of validation of the presence of a basic human nature. Our ontological condition as cybernetic beings, totally detached from a biological and natural certainty, is then gifted the “right to the unconscious, the *habeas corpus* of *homo cyberneticus*” (Baudrillard 100), even if the unconscious is only ever a mythic structure. The unconscious is only a strategic zone employed to convince the cybernetician that they conceal an unchanging, deep rooted structure which points to the existence of a fundamentally human attribute. Is it any coincidence that only two years before Freud published “The Unconscious,” Ford Motor Company introduced “the first large scale moving assembly line?” (etlsolutions). The cybernetician is then fully indoctrinated into the hyperreal model of organization, where they are gifted the simulations of the remnants of an already simulated humanity. The cybernetician is caught between the world of classic liberal humanism and total subjective dissipation in a liminal space left to the will of systems of objects and networks. There is only one option for Baudrillard, however, and that is a “strategy of indifference” (“Concepts and Catastrophes” Coulter) that sees a radicality behind accepting the loss of subjectivity for the cybernetician. I expand and develop upon this notion in the third chapter.

The unconscious is not the only strategic sight for the cybernetic being’s self-personification. Beyond a commitment to the perpetual self-assurance of our humanity with the unconscious, Baudrillard suggests that we have a “blind faith in radiating information” and in the “mystique of information services and media” (*For a Critique* 199). It is important to note here that, for Baudrillard, the human does not disappear as it meets advanced industrial and technological systems. Rather, this “ideology of communication becomes mistress, a myth in

which cybernetics presents itself as neo-humanism. The profusion of messages in a way replaces the profusion of goods [...] in the imaginary (*imaginaire*) of the species” (Baudrillard 199)

The cybernetician’s relationship with the media—the highest locus for the “profusion of goods” —should not be characterized as a causal one despite their coincidental coexistence and mutual influences. The role of the media is simply to display the signs that attest to a ‘real’ human subject in the spectacular representation of what has been culturally deemed “human.” Pornography, for example, serves an integral role in Baudrillard’s theorization of the media. As he argues, pornography, through its exaggerated, hyperreal representation of sex, convinces us that we are biological beings with “real” biological drives when pornography is, in actuality, “sex neutralized” (*Seduction* 27).<sup>5</sup> This is a sentiment echoed by Marlene Dietrich’s statement that sex is “In America an obsession. In other parts of the world a fact,” or Roland Barthes’s claim that in the “United States [...] sex is everywhere! except in sexuality” (29). These approaches highlight the fragility of sexuality—that which is often taken as a biological human fact *par excellence*—by accentuating its specificity as opposed to its universality. With respect to Baudrillard’s approach, there is clearly a degree of animosity for the role the media have played in disseminating pornographic images that do not operate to affirm the existence of a pure biological sexual drive, but rather to perpetuate and promote its simulation in the hyperreal version of that act.

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<sup>5</sup> Originally, this quote appears as “the violence of sex neutralized.” The implications of violence are many, given the potential that Baudrillard locates in sex as a resistive act, however, it would have been too great a digression here.

The media are an apparatus of social control in the service of consolidating a fundamental human condition to convince consumers of their corporeality, biological certainty, and, to be properly Baudrillardian, reality. Without the media, the cybernetician runs the risk of becoming aware of its own state and may therefore cease to be productive under the biological imperatives imposed by the mass media and advanced capitalism. However, because the media and the cybernetic masses are not inextricably linked (as their conceptions are not congruent), each may lay claim to a status of superiority over the other. For the cybernetic being, the media serve as their ideal playground given their association with signification and simulation. For the media, the cybernetic being justifies its presence through its continual revision, analysis, and operation. The vicissitude of the image of the human to the cybernetician testifies that “*people are no longer speaking to each other*, that they are definitely isolated in the face of a speech without response” (Baudrillard, *For a Critique* 172). The capacity for one to “speak” undergoes a similar conceptual transformation that befalls sexuality in the age of pornography: it disappears in its proliferation. The media promote the homogenized nature of the cybernetic being by disintegrating the remnants of communicative discourse in favor of the pure “ecstasy of communication” (Baudrillard, *Ecstasy* 26), or communication for the sake of communication. People in this era of communication are forced to adopt an identity that they can then consume in the images distributed by this media system.

In this section, I have sketched the foundation of Baudrillard’s work as it pertains to the posthuman. For Baudrillard, the clear dichotomization of human and object has dissipated. The cybernetician is not left to its own devices in the classic liberal sense anymore. Rather, the cybernetician is drawn to exaggerated forms of signification, or overt displays of simulation, that construct the human in its simulated form. The media fill this void, drawing the cybernetic being



toward its overt spectacular demonstration, which localizes the mutual realization for the cybernetician and media. The media are employed as a strategic compensatory machine by the auspices of an advanced industrial network that has been overwhelmingly complicit in the transitory transformation of the human. Baudrillard's theory of the cybernetic being and its place in a world governed by signs is limited, however. The phenomenological question of the world itself is missing from this conversation. Can it be that the cybernetic being, despite having lost its naturalness, exist in a world that is still natural? The following section will trace Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum to explore the question of phenomenology in relation to the human today. In other words, are we now living in a non-world or a post-world?

## 1.2 The Phenomenological Turn: From Nature to Simulation

The simulacrum—Baudrillard's most famous concept—has a rather complex and expansive history dating back to the Homeric Greeks. In *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, Roberto Calasso<sup>6</sup> argues that the Greeks were not without their own term for simulation. Calasso demonstrates that the term “*eidōlon*” in Greek is “at once the idol, the statue, the simulacrum, the phantom” (133) and argues that this “phantom” is Helen of Troy hiding “the simulacrum within herself” (130). Helen “imitates the world and at the same time subjects it to a frenzy of different combinations, confounding its forms in inexhaustible proliferation” (133). The Trojan war, then, “raged around an absent woman” (129). Following this example, we may therefore surmise that

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<sup>6</sup> There are many affinities between Roberto Calasso and Jean Baudrillard from their theorization of simulation to their reluctance to adopt a Foucauldian vision of power to their romanticism of myth, symbolism, and sacrifice. However—up to this date—it is unclear if they were intimately familiar with the other's work.

the simulacrum is transhistorical, a definitive condition of existence itself. Calasso's reading of Homer's illustration of *eidolon* challenges the platonic notion of simulation to the extent that "Homer foresaw his great future enemy: Plato" (130). The distinction between the Homeric notion of simulation (the one that is the most acutely aligned with Baudrillard) and Plato's is made apparent in their respective treatments of simulation. Whereas in Homer "body and phantom existed tacitly side by side," after Homer, "the knot that held them together in a single being was gradually loosened, until finally it came apart" (134). Deleuze echoes this characterization of platonic simulation in "Plato and the Simulacrum" when he writes that we "have proceeded, then, from a first determination of the Platonic motive: to distinguish essence from appearance, the intelligible from the sensible, the Idea from the image, the original from the copy, the model from the simulacrum" (47). These distinctions are not so clear in Baudrillard, as he resists the temptation to suppose that there was ever an original from which its simulation derives.

For Baudrillard, the third order simulacrum is the "generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (*Simulacra & Simulation* 1) and sketches the history of the simulacrum as follows:

The counterfeit is the dominant schema in the 'classical' period, from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. Production is the dominant schema in the industrial era. Simulation is the dominant schema in the current code-governed phase. The first-order simulacrum operates on the natural law of value, the second-order simulacrum on the market law of value, and the third-order simulacrum on the structural law of value. (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* 50)

In *Simulacra & Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that the advent of simulation, in the first and second order, have driven humanity, at least in the West, away from the natural world. In response to this problem, “every society looks” to “restore the real that escapes it” by “continuing to produce, and to over produce” (*Simulacra* 23). This process functions “to put decentered situations, models of simulation in place and to contrive to give them the feeling of the real” (124).

The loss of the real in Baudrillard’s analysis, however, does not denote a split between simulation and reality. Gerry Coulter, founder of the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, addresses this point when he states that “the real is not the opposite of simulation” (Coulter, “Simulation is not the Opposite of the Real”). Rather, simulation is the “panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 7). It is an abundance of “reality” intended to inject a semblance of reality into an age that has moved into third order simulacrum. Baudrillard turns to Disneyland to illustrate this phenomenon, arguing that the theme park operates as a microcosm of simulation; an exaggerated fantastical plateau that exists to convince us that the America that surrounds Disneyland is “real.” America relies on these locations (i.e. “Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain, Marine World”) to “feed reality, the energy of the real to a city whose mystery is precisely that of no longer being anything but a network of incessant, unreal circulation” (*Simulacra* 13).

Nevertheless, the implications and theoretical relevance of Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum extend much further than Disneyland. America’s role in global politics and globalization more broadly is an integral aspect of Baudrillard’s work. Baudrillard’s theorization of the Gulf and post-9/11 Iraq war builds off his theory of simulation to effectively argue that these wars are not “wars” as they have manifested themselves in the past but are movements

toward a “single world order” (*The Spirit of Terrorism* 12) governed by the global power of American hegemony. If we accept Baudrillard’s hypothesis concerning America’s simulated ontology, then we may deduce that this “single world order” will be an order of simulation, just like the America that crafts it.<sup>7</sup>

Baudrillard’s theorization of war has been heavily criticized for its failure to consider large-scale human suffering. For instance, Stjepan Meštrović makes the case that Baudrillard “referred to the Gulf War as unreal, because TV presented a simulation of reality” but the “mere fact that the actual sight of mutilated bodies was covered up does not mean that savage cruelty was not inflicted” (Meštrović 26). Douglas Kellner levels a similar critique when he writes that “Baudrillard does not help us to understand much about the event and does not even help us to grasp the role of the media in contemporary political spectacles. Reducing complex events like wars to categories like simulation or hyperreality illuminates the virtual and high-tech dimension to media events but erases all their concrete determinants” (“Jean Baudrillard After Modernity: Provocations On A Provocateur and Challenge”). Although these two perspectives are valid, and point to a glaring omission from Baudrillard’s work, they fail to recognize that Baudrillard is cognizant of the “100,000 Iraqi dead” (*The Gulf War did not take Place* 72). What is significant about these events for Baudrillard is the way in which they have existed as a spectacle as well as a real military conflict. It is not that Baudrillard is un-interested in expounding on this detail, but

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<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that Baudrillard’s work may be read as a disavowal of real suffering and experience. To this problem I would urge that we read Baudrillard as a thinker that moves beyond the auspices of traditional sociological analysis (as that was the department that he was affiliated with), toward an analysis of the representation of said suffering as being just as integral to the evaluation of contemporary manifestations of hegemony as common place structural analyses of oppression.

that in the context of his discussion of simulation, he decides to remain thematically consistent. Rather, Baudrillard is interested in the moment described by Paul Patton in his introduction to *The Gulf War did not take place* when “the CNN cameras crossed live to a group of reporters assembled somewhere in the Gulf, only to have them confess that they were also sitting around watching CNN in order to find out what was happening” (2). This overt example should not necessarily serve as the model for simulation but should at the very least illuminate the pernicious nature of a simulation that packages and disseminates events and information even to those that are physically present to said instantiations.

Baudrillard’s two books on war, *The Gulf War did not take place* and *The Spirit of Terrorism* propose that war has been engulfed by the mass media. According to Rick Roderick, in his eight-part lecture series: *The Self Under Siege: Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Baudrillard wanted to cover the Gulf War on “CNN where it would really happen” (Roderick), because as the “media promote the war, the war promotes the media, and advertising competes with the war” (Baudrillard, *Gulf War* 31). For Baudrillard, the degree to which these wars were broadcast over television networks attests to a transformation of the nature of war itself. As he explains, “when it has been turned into information, [war] ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war” (41). The system of war is not the only one affected by this turn toward virtuality. Those fighting, if on the side of the invader, find a great deal of safety in the war zone itself. As Baudrillard writes, “A simple calculation shows that, of the 500,000 American soldiers involved during the seven months of operations in the Gulf, three times as many would have died from road accidents alone had they stayed in civilian life. Should we consider multiplying clean wars in order to reduce the murderous death toll of peacetime?” (69).

Still, Baudrillard's remarks overlook the enormous casualties suffered by the losing side. In this case, the term "war" does not capture the essence of these military movements as well as the term "invasion," indicative of a form of neo-colonialism. The transformation of these wars from the domain of reality to that of the virtual performs a dual function for the neo-colonial efforts of the West. First, there is a virtual violence, a violence of the image. In this operation the real events of these wars are substituted for the image of these wars: "The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption" (Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* 27). This process not only replaces the real with the virtual, but filters which images and messages are distributed. The images distributed operate to convince the viewer of the reality of these wars, or, more precisely, their virtual reality. Second, these wars function to destroy the other, virtually and symbolically. The West's drive toward global hegemony "is a giant project meant to symbolically liquidate all values through consensus or force" (Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power* 67).

Global power, for Baudrillard, "is the power of the simulacrum" (66). Under the code of the simulacrum, where people are reduced to the status of cybernetician, the other poses an avid challenge to global hegemony. Global hegemony responds to this roadblock by declaring war on "the alterity of the other" by either converting or annihilating it (Baudrillard, *Gulf War* 37). The simulating machine dabbles in the affairs of reality when zones of resistance that do not subscribe to its oppressive logic emerge. In many ways, Baudrillard's theorization of war bridges the gap between simulation and reality, pointing to a *milieu*—the war machine—that simulation mobilizes in the service of eradicating difference.

Baudrillard's writing on war points to the erasure and eradication of those points on the globe that are outside of the purview of "our truth" where "nothing is true unless it is desecrated,

objectified, stripped of its aura, or dragged onstage” (*Agony* 67). The West strives to make everything seen, everything tangible, everything real through the “museification” (Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion* 40) of the other. The virtuality of the scenes of war exist to convince the viewer that the war is real; that there is something to be fought over, as opposed to neo-colonial genocide. The role of the museum in this process is, in a sense, to deliver the final blow to the objects of this neo-colonial effort. Those affected literally die from the bombardment of artillery strikes and drone strikes, but they also die “from being transplanted from a slow order of the symbolic, master over putrefaction and death, to an order of history, science, and museums, our order, which no longer masters anything, which only knows how to condemn what preceded it to decay and death and subsequently to try to revive it with science” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 10).

The political role war plays in relation to the consolidation of a global hegemony by the West over the rest of the globe is an extension of the same codes and regulations placed over the body in the technological episteme. Just as the body is mapped and rendered fixed by its consolidation in the form of the hyperreal, the world is rendered predictable and controllable by a process of “terrorist rationalization” (Baudrillard 37). These forms of violence are not all the same of course, and they should not be weighed against one another. It is important to note, however, that the systematic logic of demystification affects both the body and otherness, forcing each one to come to light and adopt a tangible form lest they suffer the immense power of the hegemonic West. The Gulf and Iraq wars were hyperreal examples of war where the only reality of the war for the Western consumer could be observed on the television screens where they

were displayed (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 37).<sup>8</sup> With his analysis, Baudrillard distinguishes war as it has been historically understood and these military conflicts being branded as “wars” to conceal their imperialistic motives. The media serve the purpose of delivering these messages back home to the cyberneticians who laid in wait on the home front to hear those war-affirming words usher from Bush’s mouth: “mission accomplished.”

The cybernetician takes another form when it is consolidated among other cyberneticians in a mass: that of the “silent majorities,” the mass complicit in the neo-colonial efforts of the West. In *The Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Baudrillard shifts his focus from the cybernetician to the masses. Baudrillard’s contempt for the masses finds its force in his disdain for their overall passivity. As he explains, “At no time are the masses politically or historically engaged in a conscious manner. They have only ever done so out of perversity, in complete irresponsibility” (37). The masses have no face and are not of the “order of representation” (20). Moving away from the “cybernetician” as the appropriate terminology for the modern human, the “masses” connote a removal from humanity even further than that of the cybernetician. The masses may be understood as the anticipated outcome of the cybernetic human as it makes contact with the mass media, the zone where “differences, conflicts and debates within the information that it processes become subservient to the ultimate power of the media system itself” (Murphy, “The Simulacra of Global Conflict”).

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<sup>8</sup> Baudrillard makes clear, however, that “the war is no less atrocious for being only a simulacrum—the flesh suffers just he same, and the dead and former combatants are worth the same as in other wars.”



The masses are an extension of the mass media here. They form an integrated circuit with the mass media. This relationship marks a total “end of the social” (Baudrillard, *Shadow* 25), where the beings that comprise the masses are not constituted by their relationship to other cybernetic beings, but by their inability to communicate. This “inability” is not predicated on a lack of communication, but on the “obscenity” of communication. The obscenity marks the “becoming-real, the becoming-absolutely-real, of something which until then was treated metaphorically” (Baudrillard, *Passwords* 27). The obscenity of communication, or the “ecstasy of communication,” which is “the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks” (Baudrillard, *Ecstasy* 30) and is the basis for the loss of the “social” among the masses, drives them to their position of political, social, and economic indifference.

Although the masses are characteristically different from the cyberneticians, they do fold into one another in more ways than one. For Baudrillard, the masses realize a paradox of “being both an object [...] and a subject of simulation, capable of refracting all the models and of emulating them by hypersimulation” (*Shadow* 30). At one and the same time, the masses are seduced by the media, and are called upon to perpetually confirm their retainment of a reality in the form of a hyper-real performative demonstration of said reality. This dual configuration marks an ambivalence in Baudrillard’s work. Perhaps the media and the advancements in technologies of the virtual open a new domain of being, a hyper-ontology in coordination with a hyper-world. This split between the mass and the cybernetician allows Baudrillard, in his later work, to oscillate between theories pertaining to both human as part of a mass and human as an autonomous, albeit cybernetic being.

### 1.3 To Forget Marx, Freud, Foucault: Baudrillard’s Challenge

Throughout Baudrillard's theoretical corpus he develops many polemical arguments against Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault. Baudrillard's move away from these theoretical giants signals his ostensible move away from critical theory. As Tilottama Rajan argues, Baudrillard's project is a "deeply utopian provocation of critical theory as its own destruction" ("Baudrillard and Deconstruction") Baudrillard's polemical style does not only place him outside of the realm of critical theory but attempts to push critical theory so that it be "telescoped and speeded up" (*Symbolic Exchange* 238). Baudrillard moves from critical theory toward a supposed radical theory which "can be based neither on their 'synthesis' nor on their contamination, but only on their respective extermination" (238). For Baudrillard, then, critical theorists occupy a "critical field" that is "buttressed by a nostalgia for the resurrection of the real in all its forms" (3). The "real" in this context should not be understood as a tangible 'reality,' or an outside to a system of representation and simulation. Rather, the 'real' is what is accepted as the general order of things--in this case, the Eurocentric logic of 'rationalism' and objectivity in the search for Truth.

I believe that Baudrillard's challenge to Freud, Marx and Foucault is an attempt to establish an anti-humanist radical theory that does not mirror the totalizing and universalizing humanist structures present in these thinkers' works.<sup>9</sup> Can the human, or humanity in general, be evaluated

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<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard's critique of Foucault can be difficult to accept because at no point does he consider the development of Foucault's work over time. For instance, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, when Foucault addresses the limitations of some of his work that precedes it, he states that "generally speaking, *Madness and Civilization* accorded far too great a place, and a very enigmatic one too, to what I called an 'experiment', thus showing to what extent one was still close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history." Baudrillard never considers these sorts of developments of Foucault's thought, but takes Foucault's work, ironically, as an unchanging, total, structure.

through the lens of traditional critical theory? If we accept Baudrillard's hypothesis that "the cybernetician" and "the masses" are as an ontological certainty for the human today, should we begin to theorize the next step of critical theory that adopts a more radical approach? This section will explore Baudrillard's theoretical relationship to these figures of critical theory and his challenge against their complicity with the "real," and with humanism more broadly.

It is with the *Mirror of Production* that Baudrillard departs from Marx's theoretical challenge to capitalism. Of Marxist thought, Baudrillard tells us, "[a]ll the fundamental concepts of [it] must be questioned" (21). The question that guides this criticism is to what extent Marxist thought operates not to challenge capital, but to reproduce its conditions in its mirror image. For Baudrillard, Marx essentially fails "to conceive of a mode of social wealth other than that founded on labor and production" (29). The "specter" that "haunts" Marxist analysis takes the form of production, that Marxism ultimately leaves as "a form intact" (17). Moreover, Baudrillard argues, Marx "changed nothing basic: nothing regarding the idea of man producing himself in his infinite determination, and continually surpassing himself toward his own end" (33). Marx's theory, devoid of any epistemological humility, universalizes the concept of "man" with a "'critical' imperialism as ferocious" (47) as the systems of human organization it purports to challenge. Marxist theory does this in order to "preserve the idea of an innate human rationality, a positive potentiality that must be liberated" (57). Marxism's reliance on the notion of a universal human condition, one that is sequestered by the weight of capitalist exploitation, presents a formulation of humanity that does not recognize epistemological pluralism, or as Baudrillard puts it, "the materialist missionaries have arrived" (81). Marx is in no way interested in how political economy might fall short when utilized in relation to historical manifestations of economic and social organization. For example, in the *Gundrisse*, Marx wonders to what extent

the *Iliad* is relevant to industrial society when he asks if Achilles is “possible with powder and lead?” (51). For Marx, the pre-industrial age takes the form of a “child” that “man cannot become,” a form of “naïvité” (51). This reduction of pre-industrial peoples and societies illuminates a dangerous precedent of Marx’s theory for Baudrillard. For Marx, there are two categories of this pre-industrial, “undeveloped stage of society”: “unruly children and precocious children” (51). We must be wary of Marx’s project because it functions as an erasure of societal variations under the “spectral light of political economy” (Baudrillard, *Mirror* 86). Baudrillard goes so far as to suggest that Marxism is “even more effective than capitalism in the liquidation of ‘savage’ and archaic pre-capitalist structures” (*Simulacra* 37). Baudrillard’s challenge to Marxism, however persistent, treads cautiously when faced with the Marxist formulation of anti-Capitalist resistance. In this context, Baudrillard’s project is not to disavow Marx, as Baudrillard himself is emmeshed in the lexical parameters of Marxist discourse but is to craft another approach that does not commit the same hegemonic faults that he believes Marxism to commit.

Lying at the core of Marxism, for Baudrillard, is a humanism that haunts the liberatory efforts of communism. This humanism, located in the synthesis of socialism and science, prefigures the human to be a rational entity, one that is open to the strategies illustrated by Marx. If the human is not a static entity, then what happens to Marxism? Does it crumble under the weight of its own homogenous construction of the human? “Marxist thought inherits the esthetic and humanistic virus of bourgeois thought, since the concept of quality is burdened with all the finalities - whether those concrete finalities of use value, or those endless ideal and transcendent

finalities” (Baudrillard, *Mirror* 39).<sup>10</sup> These finalities are wrapped up in the promise of liberation, or the promise of communism. Marx fails to locate the fundamental thread that connects his analysis to that of the bourgeois—notably a rampant anthropocentrism—which confirms and consolidates “humanism” as “an *idée fixe* which also comes from political economy” (22).

Baudrillard’s challenge to the universalism he finds in Marxism may also be observed in his critique of Freud and Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis. In *Symbolic Exchange & Death*, Baudrillard suggests that symbolic exchange, “a blind zone, in which everything is called into question again,” (*Passwords* 15) has disappeared in favour of the “law of equivalence,” where “one signifier and one signified facilitate the regulated exchange of a referential content” (*Symbolic Exchange* 8). The difference between symbolic exchange and the law of equivalences under “commodity exchange,” (Gane X) is that in the earlier system, the guiding principle of social organization was constituted by a “circular form, a circuit, reversibility” whereas now we are in an “irreversible, linear system.” (Baudrillard, *Passwords* 18). Baudrillard sketches this shift and its effect on the body. For him,

the entire contemporary history of the body is the history of its demarcation, the network of marks and signs that have since covered it, divided it up, annihilated its difference and its radical ambivalence in order to organise it into a structural material for sign-exchange, equal to the sphere of objects, to resolve its playful virtuality and its symbolic exchange (not to be confused with sexuality) into sexuality taken as a determining agency, a phallic

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<sup>10</sup> While Baudrillard’s approach is only one possible reading of Marx, we would do well to remind ourselves of the plethora of readings of Marx that do not attach to Marx a complicity with humanism, but that read Marx as vehemently anti-humanist.

agency entirely organised around the fetishisation of the phallus as the general equivalent.

(*Symbolic Exchange* 101)

In this shift from symbolic exchange to commodity exchange, or the law of equivalence, the body is constituted as a finalized structure, one with a clear history and essence. The “fetishization of the phallus” instills the transcendental properties of the phallic object as the guiding social drive of domination, maintaining patriarchal and phallogentric command over the social body as a whole. The psychoanalytic certainty of the phallic object, as opposed to the non-phallic object, retains an essence of social organization as a structure of patriarchal authority. Under symbolic exchange—as the form of exchange that sees neither accumulation nor debt—these terms fold into one another, neither occupying a transcendental or authoritative position over the other, where there is the perpetual “reversibility of one field onto the other” (220). The chiasmic condition of symbolic exchange nullifies any attachment of an authoritative privilege to a given cultural object.

In a similar capacity, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the “analyst talks about Oedipus, about castration and the phallus, about the necessity of assuming one's sex, as Freud says, the human sex” (*Anti-Oedipus* 356). The existence of a transcendental sexual subject finds its genesis in the phallus. The discovery of the phallus as the site for sexuality and power arrests the process of “desiring-production” which “now passes over into the Oedipal subaggregate” (363). The confinement of the space for desiring, that is, “the set of passive syntheses that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production” (26), in the phallic object, precludes the allowance of women into the same sphere of meaning. The subject of psychoanalysis, from where both the object of fantasy and the subject of consumption are conceived, is constructed around the figure of man. The psychoanalytic project of bringing to

light that which has been repressed, demands an even greater repression—the repression of women, and those people that do not subscribe to the same logic of the phallus.

Phallogocentrism is not the only structural consequence of the system of equivalence, or the project of bringing everything to light. In *Symbolic Exchange & Death*, Baudrillard writes extensively on the role of death in contemporary society. For Baudrillard, the dead “have just passed away and no longer have anything to exchange. [...] At the end of a lifetime of accumulation, the dead are subtracted from the total in an economic operation” (164). Under the law of equivalences, death poses an avid problem for the phallogocentric accumulation of power because when “death speaks, is spoken and exchanged in a symbolic apparatus, psychoanalysis no longer has anything more to say” (228). If death is granted a position in the circulation of meaning, then it loses its fantastical aura and is then of no interest to psychoanalysis. As long as death remains repressed, psychoanalysis may lay claim to its enigmatic potentiality. Consequently, death is “domesticated under the sign of the death drive” (153). Baudrillard furthers this argument when he states that “death proper has been abolished to make room for death control and euthanasia: strictly speaking, it is no longer even death, but something completely neutralised that comes to be inscribed in the rules and calculations of equivalence” (174), which is why “every death and all violence that escapes the State monopoly is subversive” (175). Baudrillard is suspicious of the value that may be ascertained or accumulated by Freud’s discovery of the death instinct because he regards it as an extension of the same oppressive mechanisms indicative of the law of equivalence. For Baudrillard, Freud’s discovery of the death instinct does not possess the capacity for a radical upheaval. Rather, Baudrillard believes that Freud gave death a face, solidifying it in the form of its ideal image—the death of the corporeal body—so that it may be contained by the general logic of the code.

For Baudrillard, to bracket off death from the realm of the living, to deny it its radical potential in the form of sacrifice, is to bracket off the human itself into a total admiration of life in the form of living. We have yet to totally do away with death, but we have exorcised it of its mystery by quarantining it off to specific zones under state control. This control over the second most fundamental human faculty, following birth, delineates and disturbs the human. This disturbance is not indicative of a loss, but a consolidation and affirmation of our obsession with life over death in the conjuring away of the mystery of death.

Baudrillard's challenge to Foucault in *Forget Foucault* shares many of the same positions as his challenges to Marx and Freud. Baudrillard insists that "Foucault's discourse is a mirror of the powers it describes" (30). Foucault's discourse and genealogical method invigorate the senses that his primary objects of study—prisons, hospitals, sexuality—are traceable, historical and, most importantly, present. Baudrillard asks of Foucault: "what if he spoke so well of sexuality only because its form, this great production (that too) of our culture, was, like that of power, in the process of disappearing?" (32). Rather than challenge the concept of history itself, Foucault's method reproduces the conditions of the Eurocentric logic of "historicism."

Released as a response to Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, *Forget Foucault* focuses on the contemporary location of sexuality. Can sexuality be considered in the same terms as it has been in the past, or has there been a fundamental shift in sexuality that delineates the teleological assumptions of its status? For Baudrillard, simulation overhauls the idea of sexuality: "Foucault cannot tell us anything about the simulating machines that double each one of these 'original' machines" (33), like sexuality. For example, pornography disturbs the essence of sexuality "with its immediate production of sex acts" (38). In the age of the hyper-sexual, where sex is no longer to be found in sex, but in pornography, the old formulations of the human



and its sexual agency disappear. Without theorizing the shift in sexuality from its location in the body to its location in the simulating machines, we run the risk of a “strange complicity with cybernetics which challenge precisely the same earlier schemas” (46). Baudrillard’s theoretical project moves us closer to a theory of these simulating machines that do not romanticize, or mistakenly assume the methodical and teleonomic transformations of humanity as remaining unaffected by media, communication and technology.

Foucault’s claim at the end of *The Order of Things*, that “man is an invention of recent date, [...] and one perhaps nearing its end” (422) identifies the temporal fragility of the concept of “man,” and then existence of forces that construct this figure of “man.” If the human, as a consolidated figure in the historical framework of modernity, is inscribed by the tenets of “Renaissance ‘humanism’ and Classical ‘rationalism’” (347), and “those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (422). Contrary to Foucault’s proclamation, in the age of simulation, the face is never washed away by the sea, but is maintained in the realm of the virtual. Just as pornography is not the effacement of sex, but the proliferation of sex, so too do we not observe the erasure of humanity, but its consolidation in its hyperreal performative iterations. Foucault’s proclamation of the “end of ‘man’” overwhelmingly gave way to the ‘resurrection of man’ with the overt display of our “superficial organs” as opposed to our “concealed ones” (249). The superficial takes the place of that which is hidden through the perpetual display of its image. We must be wary of Foucault’s location of the ends of humanism, as it is when humanism is relegated to the

shadows in its very negation that it commands more furiously than ever. Our only opportunity to challenge humanism demands that we “escape from the historical and moral confusionism that mixes the theme of humanism with the question of the Enlightenment” (Foucault, “What is Enlightenment” 45). Humanism is an adaptive force (an idea that I expand on in the following chapter), that must be analyzed as such, not as a historical force that may simply be washed away by the tide.

## 1.4 Navigating Today: Theory in the Age of Posthumanism.

Prior to writing *Seduction*, Baudrillard’s radical challenge to modernity’s fallout in the digital episteme was governed by reversibility. Baudrillard asks: “Do you think that power, economy, sex—all the *real*’s big numbers—would have stood up one single instant without a fascination to support them which originates precisely in the inversed mirror where they are reflected and continually reversed, and where their imaginary catastrophe generates a tangible and immanent gratification?” (*Forget Foucault* 54). In Baudrillard’s view, behind the absolute descriptions of power, as illustrated by Foucault, there is a hidden undercurrent, a remnant of the law of symbolic exchange that persists to this day: reversibility. According to Coulter, “an important part of Baudrillard’s understanding of reversibility is to see systems playing a central role in their own demise. In Baudrillardian reversal, problems are often the result of attempts to avoid them. In the age of simulation and simulacra we have gone past traditional forms of uncertainty and now our problem is made permanent” (“Reversibility: Baudrillard’s ‘One Great Thought,’”). To this example, Coulter supplements his argument with a crucial passage from *Fatal Strategies*: “what kind of state would be capable of dissuading and annihilating all terrorism in the bud

(Germany)? It would have to arm itself with such terrorism and generalize terror on every level” (Baudrillard 42). The principle of reversibility serves as a condition for the possibility of change. Reversibility does not serve hegemony well as it promises the demise of any locus of power.

Reversibility is not only an artifact of the pre-modern era that governs the institutions of power, sex, economy, and society at large, but also holds the key for the destruction of those institutions. Reversibility, in this context, shares a position with Derrida’s conception of the pharmakon where “it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/ outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.)” (*Dissemination* 127). Moreover, the position of reversibility as simultaneously constitutive of these tenets and a destructive force, aligns it even closer to the pharmakon that when “presenting itself as a poison, [...] may turn out to be a cure” (125). The similarities between Baudrillard’s reversibility and Derrida’s theorization of the pharmakon are certainly present and accentuate each other’s respective positions. However, Baudrillard’s theory of reversibility undergoes a rather interesting transformation in *Seduction*, where he becomes “armed with reversibility as seduction and a strategy of challenge” (Coulter, “Reversibility”).

There is a fundamental difference, both etymologically and conceptually, between reversibility and seduction. However, these terms may be easily conflated. Reversal, from the Latin word *reversus*, means to “turn back” (Harper), while seduction derives from the Latin word “*se-ducere*: to take aside, to divert from one's path” (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 22). Where reversibility is the act of returning to, or redirecting toward, an already traversed location, seduction opens up the theoretical possibility of going “aside,” to a different path altogether. Seduction “prevails in the long term because it implies a reversible, indeterminate order,” while

never being “linear” (106). Seduction may always employ reversibility, but ultimately breaks out of the linear, binary boundaries that confine the process of reversibility. In the moment of seduction, “you seduce yourself into the other's destiny” (Baudrillard, *Sophie Calle. Suite vénitienne* 76-7). Baudrillard makes clear that seduction is “against” desire, or against the possibility of mobilizing some libidinal force in the service of destabilizing hierarchal frameworks. Seduction opposes desire because it renders both the seducer, and the one being seduced, helpless to the will of fate.<sup>11</sup> The discourse surrounding seduction, even in Baudrillard’s work, makes heavy use of a subject position who is either in the pilot’s seat of the seduction machine, or is the plane being flown through the heavens. In either case, the distinction between desire and seduction is not clear. If seduction is what is always already present, then Baudrillard’s concern regarding the exorcism of seduction posits its concomitant relationship it has to people and things. This relationship takes seduction outside the realm of the transcendent (perhaps a place it never truly occupied) and places it into the domain of subjects and objects, where either one or the other mobilizes its mystic potential in the service of diverting the other from its path. Perhaps Baudrillard’s theory of seduction, when interrogated—an act of desire *par excellence*—reveals itself for what it truly is, the mirror of desire. The only way out of this conundrum, because Baudrillard does not provide a consistent account of this issue, is to take Baudrillard’s words on faith, and to read in his inconsistencies a form of seduction that invites the reader to withdraw from the linearity of their own subject position toward the realm of the unknown, the domain of seduction.

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<sup>11</sup> There is a resounding lack of secondary research that has considered seduction in relation to desire without tautologically quoting Baudrillard. In a sense, this was set forth by Baudrillard when he writes that “Seduction is enigmatic [...], it cannot be spoken or revealed [...], it is unexplainable evidence.”

Baudrillard's focus on the object over the subject in the moment of seduction as a radical position for subversion finds its roots in Marcel Mauss' theory of the gift. For Mauss, gifts "give the two sides an identity which is revealed in the taboo which from then on prevents them from visiting or addressing each other, and in the obligation upon them thereafter to make perpetual gift-exchange" (*The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* 18). The object of the gift then finds an inherent connection to the subject exchanging said gift: "the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them; the communion and alliance they establish are well-nigh indissoluble" (31). In the act of gift-giving, there is a consensual consignment to match the gift with a counter-gift—that which either matches or exceeds the value attached to the initial gift. The gift serves as an assemblage for the parties involved in the exchange, inscribing each respective party with an agency in the given social schematic. In this paradigm, the objects "have a virtue of their own" (37). The virtue of the object is contingent on the given socio-cultural paradigm in which it is found.

Thorstein Veblen, a thinker who was influential for Baudrillard's early work, speaks to this point when he states that to the "archaic man," for instance, "all the obtrusive and obviously consequential objects and facts in his environment have a quasi-personal individuality. They are conceived to be possessed of volition, or rather of propensities, which enter into the complex of causes and affect events in an inscrutable manner" (*The Theory of the Leisure Class* 171). While this example does not speak to every moment that people are confronted with objects, it does illuminate the individuality that objects may contain. Their value, in the case of Veblen, is acquired by maintaining an intimate relationship with "barbarity" that holds a deep connection to the leisure class. The object's value is determined by the given societal parameters of "pecuniary decency" that determines one's status and hierarchal privilege. The object then stands outside the

domain of human relationships as a constitutive condition for those relationships because not every object may perform any given function at any particular moment. The object has a history of its own—a proposition mirrored in the discourse around fetishism indicative of Marx and Freud—and therefore destabilizes the monopoly believed held by humans over history. It might be said then that the bifurcation of subjects and objects—“Nothing is more evident or better known to me than that the objects or actions that I perceive or believe or infer to be external to myself are so, veritably, really, while my percepts or ideas of them are within my unitary, self-conscious mind, or coherent with it. This distinction is fundamental, intuitive to the human intellect and habitual to common sense” (Bliss, “The Subject-Object Relation” 398)—is complicit in its own undoing precisely because, once probed, the distinction between subject and object grows increasingly transparent. The classic humanist distinction, in vulgarly simplifying the domain of human interactions between the easily quantifiable categories of subjects and objects, failed to account for the presence of each in the other. Just as Foucault speaks of humanity in *The Order of Things* as something that is mapped, understood, and quantified only at its *denouement*, so too may we regard the split between subjects and objects as occupying the steady terrain of classic humanism at the point of its downfall into what we may appropriately call a posthumanity.

To return, the object, in Baudrillard’s account, is demonstrably similar to the one illustrated by Mauss. In both cases, they recognize the autonomy of the object, wresting it from the clutches of the subject’s transcendental, omnipresent gaze. By contemplating the potential for the object to challenge the privileging of the subject position, Baudrillard presents a radical challenge to the rampant humanism present in the realm of “subjectivity.” In fact, Baudrillard sees no alternative then to adopt this approach: “the only strategy possible is that of the object” (*Fatal Strategies*

143). In contrast to the Heideggerian approach that posits the existence of real things in the world that make up the ontic conditions of existence, these objects do not attain their status arbitrarily, as though it were an implicit condition of their existence but may only attain a specific status if that status is ascribed to them. Otherwise, Baudrillard's appreciation of the object over the subject would merely re-inscribe the universalizing assumptions held of subjectivity in the form of the object. The radicality of Baudrillard's challenge lies in its de-structuration of this principle by privileging that which the object represents as opposed to what may be assumed as its ontological condition.

Seduction is "something that seizes hold of all pleasures, affects and representations, and gets ahold of dreams themselves in order to reroute them from their primary course, turning them into a sharper, more subtle game" (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 124). In the example of sex, Baudrillard suggests that if it "has a natural law, a pleasure principle, then seduction consists in denying that principle and replacing it with a rule, the arbitrary rule of a game" (125). However, "seduction cannot possibly be represented, because in seduction the distance between the real and its double, and the distortion between the Same and the Other, is abolished" (67). The absolute distance between the sexes is an example of a "natural law" that imposes a set of regulations and guidelines for the realization of a certain set of principles in the case of men and women. The rule of seduction operates as an antidote to the absurd finality of the sexes, potentializing the sexes to fold into one another, to seduce one another, and to ultimately be diverted from their respective paths.

Seduction is a challenge to the law of scientific reasoning because it interprets the world in "the terms of play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances" (7), as opposed to a definitive, calculable, static entity. In this code governed system, where appearances and the play of

signifiers command societal formations, “absence seduces presence, cold seduces hot, the subject seduces the object, and to be sure, the reverse” (104). In effect, this “universe that can no longer be interpreted in terms of psychic or psychological relations, nor those of repression and the unconscious” (7) but may be interpreted in terms of floating signification and simulated bodily essences.

Simulation, or hyperreality, is the phase of signification that has been the most successful at inoculating itself from the play of seduction, which is ironic given its commitment to signification. However, simulation is also committed to the realization of all potential in its hyperreal form. This is not only indicated by the advent of the mass media but is a condition of our cultural logic of scientific domination that purports to move closer and closer to the domain of truth. It is in this capacity that Baudrillard, in his late work, turns surprisingly optimistic about the possibility of seduction to wrest the finality of science, and concomitantly simulation, from their having moved astray from “illusion” to the domain of hyperreality.

Seduction is a strategy, or more specifically, a “fatal strategy”—a strategy employed to drive an idea to its logical conclusion: its death. Seduction disrupts and destroys Eurocentric modes of observation and deduction in favor of the free play of those objects of study. In *Fatal Strategies*, he writes “Against the true of the true, against the truer than true (which immediately becomes pornographic), against the obscenity of obviousness, against this unclean promiscuity with itself that we call resemblance, we must remake illusion, rediscover illusion, this power, at once immoral and maleficent, to tear the same away from the same, called seduction. Seduction against terror: these are the stakes” (75). Fatal strategies move to dissuade thought from replicating the conditions of the “real.” They do this by denying finality, the “rational,” the “logical,” in favor of the unknown. If fatal strategies are not employed, “the world will end—



literally—when all seductive rapports yield to rational ones” (186). Biological certainty, economic certainty, political certainty, societal certainty, all contribute to the steady decline of seduction, where the game of the world is administered by the law, over the rule. The cybernetician as a post-human embodied subject is a logical sequential consequence of this systematic erasure of the unknown. The cybernetician, and the masses more generally, call on the world to reveal itself, to make itself an object that can be fully grasped and totally understood in the form of a cyberworld. I return to the question of post-human subjectivity and resistance in the third chapter but, for now, we may observe a phenomenological relationship between the world and the cybernetician, where the two cooperate in the systematic hyperreal(ization) of the other. The cyberworld and cybernetician develop together, establishing parameters and conditions for the other that compartmentalize and subsume the possibility for resistance.

Baudrillard’s distinction between rule and law beautifully illuminates his own theoretical approach where the “Rule plays on an immanent sequence of arbitrary signs, while the Law is based on a transcendent sequence of necessary signs” (*Seduction* 131). The rule of the game makes a mockery of the finality of the law. For Baudrillard, the “rule functions as the parodic simulacrum of the law. Neither an inversion nor subversion of the law, but its reversion in simulation” (149). Under the rule, which is best suited to describe the pre-industrial logic of symbolic exchange, there is seduction, a simulacral “reversion” rather than a simulated hyperreality. The rule, and therefore seduction, understands simulation as a continuation of the law of symbolic exchange on a technical plain. Simulation and developments in virtual technologies are not what concern Baudrillard because he locates in these systems an extension of the rule of symbolic exchange where there are new rules and a new game:

Heidegger: ‘When we look into the ambiguous essence of technology, we behold the constellation, the stellar course of the mystery.’ This sentence is quite enigmatic, since it seems to contradict Heidegger’s [sic] interpretation of technology as ‘negative ontology,’ as a loss of being, as a definitive unveiling of the secret of the universe, as a disenchanted inspection, an ‘*arraisonnement*’ (*Gestell*) of the world, in short, as the Perfect Crime itself. The alternative would be that, at the extreme horizon of technology, something else happens, another game, with other rules. The point is that the constellation of the secret still resists, remains alive. (Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion* 82)

If simulation is denied the space of radical ambiguity in favour of a space of teleological certainty of the triumph of Western technological developments, then we run the risk of destroying the world through its complete realization. Seduction responds to simulation by operating within its boundaries, mocking its demonstration of reality and its conceptual relationship to Truth and instilling a degree of uncertainty into its formula. This theoretical challenge moves beyond the classic critical operation of the dialectic because the world is now “sworn to extremes, not to equilibrium, sworn to radical antagonism, not to reconciliation or synthesis” (Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* 25).

In a world that has moved beyond dialectics, into the hyperreal, Baudrillard suggests that radical theory must be “violent” to “prevent things and concepts from touching indiscriminately, to create discrimination, and remake emptiness” (217). The human is no exception to this challenge. Only once the advent of biological certainty has been interrogated, and the operations of simulation have been revealed, can a radical theory be realized. Otherwise, we run the risk of

perpetuating the same Eurocentric and scientific certitude that Baudrillard identified in Foucault, Marx, and Freud.

The body is an integral focus of Baudrillard's move toward a radical theoretical approach. In the age of simulation, where "both the Father and Mother have disappeared [...] in favour of a matrix/code [the word "matrice" means both 'matrix' and 'womb']" (*Seduction* 169), the "masses themselves form a clone-like apparatus that functions without the mediation of the other" (173). Bodies are indistinguishable here as the scientific and technical structures surrounding the body have mapped the body in a move to dispel any and all mysteries of the body under the blinding light of scientific inquiry. Seduction as a fatal strategy that obfuscates and destabilizes hyperreality reinvigorates the unknown as it destabilizes the distinction between subject and object, where objects are no longer simply subject to the gaze of the observer but return that gaze in a playful reversal.

## 1.5 Baudrillard's Fears for the Future and Today

In Baudrillard's later work he allocates a great deal of time to disease and the implications of cancer and AIDS today. Baudrillard wonders to what extent our heavy reliance on health technologies and disease prevention represents a potentially greater risk for humanity than disease itself. He writes that "the growing cerebrality of machines must logically be expected to occasion a technological purification of bodies" (*Prophylaxis and Virulence* 24). The "purification of bodies" occurs once they have been "dispossessed of their defenses" and are then "vulnerable to science and technology" (34). Reflexively, bodies lose their connection to

what might be considered their natural immunological systems because the “extermination of man begins with the extermination of man’s germs” (34).

Foucault outlines a potentially tangible genesis of the purification of bodies in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Despite this thesis’ elucidation of Baudrillard’s reservations about Foucault’s genealogical method, there is a brilliant moment when Foucault observes that “the day it was admitted that lesions explained symptoms, and that the clinic was founded on pathological anatomy, it became necessary to invoke a transfigured history, in which the opening up of corpses, at least in the name of scientific requirements, preceded a finally positive observation of patients” (154) so as to “map the disease in the secret depths of the body” (167).

The act of an autopsy on the deceased conjures away the mystery of death under the gaze that holds the scalpel. The ideological move to make the unknown known displaces death from the dead to the cadaver: an endless supply of potential knowledge for the purpose of delaying death for living. The scientific, or clinical, gaze acts as a cathartic release for the fear of death experienced by people in its theoretical radius. No more superstition, no more uncertainty, just pure analytical inquiry. At this point, it is no longer death that has been exorcised from the dead, but life from the living. Baudrillard suggests this in his early work, but the situation he observes in *The Transparency of Evil* takes this hypothesis further, theorizing the implications and future threats to this hyperdefensive epoch.

In this hyperdefensive epoch, he argues, seduction begins to fade as a potentially radical option because the historical categorizations of humanity have succumbed to the weight of the sterilized protection of the human body. Germs, death, disease, and other constitutive emblems of the human genome are eradicated now toward the move to completely sterilize all negations. Without negation, there can be no seduction. Seduction may only exist where there are

possibilities for alternatives, or to put it broadly, for antitheses that serve as radical forays to displace the positionality of any given theses. If, in the case of the human body, total immunity was to occur, Baudrillard argues that we would enter a phase of social control more malevolent than any disease.

However, all negations cannot be totally removed. In Roberto Esposito's *Immunitas*, he argues that autoimmunity serves as something of an antidote to this phenomenon. He states that if autoimmunity is negatively affected, there will be a "dissolution of the negative from any positive role" (165). The function of the negative in the dialectical configuration of contagion against the body is a necessary one. The presence of bacteria, germs, and viruses is integral to the maintenance of a healthy bodily immune system. If the body is denied these ills, the body will not realize its utopian potential, but will fall prey to even the slightest risks posed to it. Without its antithesis—in the form of viruses—the body deteriorates:

Just as we are up against a new violence in our societies — a violence born of the paradox of a permissive and pacified society, so we are up against new diseases, the diseases of bodies over-protected by their artificial shields - both medical and computer shields.

Bodies which are, as a result, susceptible to every virus, to the most 'perverse', unexpected chain reactions. A pathology no longer based in accidents or anomie, but in 'anomalies.'

*(Screened Out 35)*

For Baudrillard, these anomalies correspond to a new phase of disease that are indicative of the terrible effects of AIDS and cancer to which "there is no effective prevention or therapy" (11).

Baudrillard suggests that each of these extreme antagonisms to the body are not simply coincidental. Rather, they are the "prototypes of our modern pathology" ("Prophylaxis and Virulence 36). Furthermore, their presence today is logical given the fact that the "body itself has

become a non-body, a virtual machine, that viruses are taking over” (34). These are diseases, then, that are responding to the “very success of prophylaxis and medicine, illnesses bred of the disappearance of illness” (34). Cancer and AIDS, having “no biological solution” (34), represent an antagonism, the extreme form of attack that employ two strategies respectively: proliferate the body’s cells to their end point, and turn the body’s defense system back on itself. However, if we surmise that the classic dialectical configuration has not changed, then cancer and AIDS function as a sort of defensive strategy against a potentially more devastating antithesis. Baudrillard entertains the possibility that cancer’s demonstration of the negative effects of unending proliferation in our “flows, circuits, and networks” (38), and AIDS’s demonstration of the total “promiscuity” of the subject as a mode of self-destruction, are defenses against a potentially more dangerous enemy: the complete liberation of every desire. This is because desire is not simply a radical form of desublimation, but as Baudrillard makes clear in *Symbolic Exchange & Death*, serves as the mirror of political economy’s move towards total realization and the exorcism of the unknown. If desires are made completely manifest, where they are conducted under the auspices of a panoptic system of surveillance, Baudrillard believes that we would enter a phase of total control and oppression like that suffered by the Alphas in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*.<sup>12</sup>

In opposition to Baudrillard’s theorization of disease, Foucault’s project still operates under the assumption that the dialectical movement between body and contagion has remained unchanged. For instance, Foucault writes that “only individual illnesses exist: [...] because the

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<sup>12</sup> There is no doubt that to hierarchize modes of oppression like that of the oppression of AIDS and cancer, and the oppression of the emancipation of desire is an incredibly problematic one and should be challenged rigorously.

action of the illness rightly unfolds in the form of an individuality” (*Birth of the Clinic* 207). In contrast, Baudrillard’s theory considers the possibility that the “individual” has disappeared: “The genetic revolution that is taking place at the moment raises the question ‘Am I a man or just a potential clone?’” (*The Transparency of Evil* 24). If the clone serves as an adequate designation of the human, we may theorize disease anew, outside of the Hegelian constraints imposed on it as a conflict between bodies and contagions.

In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard’s deconstruction of the subject/object dichotomy challenges privileging of the subject, or individuated self, over the object. In many ways, his thought through *The Transparency of Evil* remains consistent when he writes that the “new technologies, with their new machines, new images and interactive screens, do not alienate me. Rather, they form an integrated circuit with me” (58). These new technologies represent the most exaggerated form of simulation, where every potential human “reality” or Truth has been realized in the world’s double: the virtual. These viruses point to a limitation of our endless proliferation in the realm of the virtual. Of course, these viruses disproportionately affect certain marginalized groups, especially so in the case of AIDS.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> We would do well to point to the limitations of Baudrillard’s project here however. Whereas in his discussion about war, Baudrillard acknowledges the loss of life, in his theorization about disease, he is less interested in acknowledging the suffering that these diseases impose. Rather, Baudrillard searches--with good intentions--to locate the possible productive side of these diseases. This is ironic given his condemnation of rendering productive other biological zones hitherto. In this way, I suggest that Baudrillard is not nearly as effective about breaking out of the parameters of political economy, or the logic of the code, nearly as effectively as he, or his followers believe. The most effective solution to this problem, and conveniently the easiest to conduct, would be for Baudrillard to listen to those people who suffer from said ills rather than dictate their living conditions. This does not mean that Baudrillard is completely fallacious in his theorization, but that his theoretical discourse is heavily lacking in testimony from those immediately affected by these phenomena.

The prevalence of AIDS in impoverished communities cannot be ignored. Baudrillard's theory of AIDS may be easily disregarded as a generally conservative account of post-quiet revolution sexual practices, but I am hesitant to argue that his theory is anything of the sort. Rather Baudrillard contends that AIDS performs a dual function: It responds to the virtuality of the system by eliciting a discourse of deceleration while simultaneously eradicating groups outside of the purview of white Eurocentric power structures of scientific inquiry. AIDS mirrors the system of the hegemonic West by placing boundaries around the speed of systemic exploitation while eradicating a "diabolical otherness boding the breakdown of all this humming machinery" ("Prophylaxis and Virulence 37). In relation to Baudrillard's thought, AIDS may be considered a post-human phenomenon. It is a strategy mobilized by a consolidated human *ethos* in the form of the post-human to perpetually affirm the hetero-normative condition of the human—one rooted in biological certainty under the *aegis* of male/female reproductive rights over those that do not subscribe to this dominant ideological schematic.

AIDS extends much further than the consolidation of a heteronormative world space however. People of color and the poor, who are disproportionately affected, attest to the degree to which the subtle logic of the system—if we may accept that AIDS is in fact an extension of the system—privileges a specific race and class over others. What is striking is the intensity of the animosity held by those not affected by AIDS against those have been diagnosed by it. Fears regarding the transmission of AIDS from mere touching, to the exchange of bodily fluid, only served to stigmatize and further isolate those diagnosed. It is apparent that Baudrillard too fell prey to such anxieties, but the reality of such prejudice speaks to his thesis that AIDS is a disease that not only targets those that fall outside of the purview of the system, but actually maintains such a dislocation.



In this stage of simulation, where there is an explosion of meaning in the hyperreal dissemination of information and images, everything comes to correspond to that very logic. In this capacity, Baudrillard argues that AIDS disproportionately affects marginalized groups because they exist on the margins and therefore risk disturbing the finality associated with the prevailing cultural logic of de-regulation. They resemble “closed circuits” that form their own communities and ways of being that do not subscribe to the dominant code. They represent deterritorialization through their being territorialized outside of the hegemonic logic of openness; and openness that is a *trompe l’oeil*, but that is nevertheless alluring in its spectacular infinite proliferation of highly codified regulations for being. These post-humans do not resemble “docile bodies” as Foucault proclaimed, but are more appropriately titled dromological bodies in the spirit of Paul Virilio’s theorization of speed and movement. Dromological bodies may extend laterally, as far as they may in the simulacral sphere of hegemonic power relations, as long as they do not stray from the linear path. Sara Ahmed illustrates this particularly well when she writes that “heterosexual bodies ‘extend’ into spaces, as those spaces *have taken form by taking on their form*” (*Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* 92). The limitlessness of heterosexuality leads Baudrillard to question its place in the matrix of oppression indicative of these diseases, and the way in which proliferation is an overwhelmingly heterosexual phenomenon that not only disavows certain people, but actually operates to erase them.

This virtual stage corresponds to a fourth stage of simulation, the fractal stage. “At the fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value, there is no point of reference at all, and value radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices, without reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of pure contiguity” (Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil* 5). This stage corresponds with a pass from the posthuman phenomenological spirit of simulation toward the

absolute finality of the human. As demonstrated with the example of AIDS, this system has expelled, or is in the process of expelling, the remnants of any opposition to the law of equivalence, to the law of total transparency. When everything has been revealed, and the zones of otherness have been eradicated through disease, war and scientific persuasion, the human will emerge as a trans-historical certainty.

The fractal stage, or the obscene abundance of reality, makes a fatal mistake, however. Because “there is not enough room both for the world and for its double” (Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange* 3), there is no way that the world can be verified. “This is indeed, why ‘reality’ is an imposture” (3). The world of the virtual does not serve as an adequate double for the “real” world because the virtual, in its formation, destroys the real world. The virtual world destroys the real world by “substituting an artificial one” (14), at which point the artificial world becomes the original referent.

The artificial world does not only control its own constitutive structures, but violently responds in a sort of abreaction to any instance of its otherness, or the unknown. The humans that occupy this world, exhibiting the world’s microcosm, are “‘Human Xerox’” machines through “school systems, the media system, [and] mass culture and information systems” (37). This designation of the human as such marks a considerable turn from the classification of human as cybernetic being, precisely because the Xeroxed human is not capable of exerting even the slightest “mastery” over the objects that surround them. In this virtual world, “the mass and the individual are merely electronic extensions of each other” (48), to the point that the “master has disappeared” (55).

Baudrillard’s seemingly cynical theoretical approach to the loss of the human attempts to move beyond the classic formulations of critical theory in order to match the velocity of the

human's disappearance. Baudrillard is always trying to move to the moment that he may locate his object of study, rather than employing outdated approaches to social theory. For this reason, what may be understood as posthuman scholarship continually risks presupposing teleological characteristics of humanity and the human that make for a convenient analysis but are ultimately doomed to mirror the same discursive strategies that theories of the posthuman supposedly move beyond. Baudrillard's brand of posthumanism locates the "loss" of the human in its total realization, in its hyperreal representation. In the following chapter, I present theories of the posthuman that are both in opposition to and affirmative of Baudrillard's testimony of the loss of the human in order to address potentially radical forays for the evaluation of that always already slippery concept: the human.

## 2 Posthumanism or, *The Mirror of Humanism*.

Jean Baudrillard's theorization of the present status of humanity aligns his philosophy with posthumanist thought. However, individual posthuman theorists often pursue very different projects, which makes a single or stable definition of posthumanism elusive. Nevertheless, what remains consistent across these diverse projects is a commitment to questioning the notion of the human, whether or not we conceive of the human as a static or a fluid entity. This chapter explores this questioning of the human through the work of Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, and Rosi Braidotti in order to present three divergent approaches to posthumanism. After setting out the specifics of each of their respective projects, I perform a Baudrillardian critique of their thought to suggest that, despite their proclamation of the end of the 'human,' they actually (re)construct the human.

These thinkers pose many significant problems for a Baudrillardian understanding of posthumanism. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Baudrillard's theories expound and criticize the state of humanity after modernity. However, Baudrillard remains on the side of critique, avoiding a celebration of the posthuman condition that too frequently preserves the very humanist assumptions it claims to dispel. To put it as broadly as I believe I can, Baudrillard would be greatly skeptical of posthumanism's reliance on scientific and technological innovation

to disrupt conventionally held beliefs pertaining to oppression, the human/animal divide, and difference more broadly. This is a concern shared, perhaps surprisingly, by Hannah Arendt when she luminously writes that “it seems astronomers needed no telescope to assert that, contrary to all sense experience, it is not the sun that moves around the earth but the earth that circles the sun. If the historian looks back upon these beginnings with all the wisdom and prejudices of hindsight, he is tempted to conclude that no empirical confirmation was needed to abolish the Ptolemaic system” (*The Human Condition* 258). Like Arendt, Baudrillard’s work resists any attachment to a scientific system that lays claim to objectively theorize the world and the people that inhabit it. Rather, Baudrillard adopts a “pataphysical” approach, “a science of imaginary solutions” (*Fragments: Conversations with Francois L’Yvonnet* 5), to challenge the tenets of enlightenment rationality that swallow and subsume illusion through globalized scientific reason. For Baudrillard, to take pataphysics seriously is to risk not being taken seriously at all. This is a situation recounted by Sylvère Lotringer when he writes that “Deleuze let it be known around town that he considered Baudrillard the shame of the profession. Felix condemned his fatalism and irresponsible politics, not realizing that Jean was political, if in very different ways: He was a historian of the future, looking back from the end of the world at contemporary society” (“On Jean Baudrillard”). Lotringer then remarks on the irony of this condemnation by questioning, “wasn't [Baudrillard] exactly the kind of hero they had praised in *Anti-Oedipus*, a deterritorialized thinker surfing the flows of capital?” (“On Jean Baudrillard”). The consequences of Baudrillard’s approach to theory and philosophy attest to a detachment from the confinements of situational, or regional, rules, codes and laws that govern the production and dissemination of ideas. In this sense, Baudrillard embodies the challenge he undertook against

the hyper-rationalistic tents of advanced industrial capital, and universalizing assumptions of scientific inquiry.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, there have been only a few efforts to challenge posthumanism through Baudrillard's work, and even fewer have applied his thought specifically in relation to theories of the posthuman. The only project that has taken a theoretical approach similar to the one employed in this thesis is one by Jon Baldwin. In his short piece, "Self-Immolation by Technology': Jean Baudrillard and the Posthuman in Film and Television," Baldwin employs Baudrillard's theories of "cloning, artificial intelligence (AI), transsexuality, mediated reality, virtuality and increased networks" to "consider the alterity that is being lost in the posthuman process" (20). Baldwin argues that those elements which are lost in the posthuman turn are characteristically human attributes that belong to the realm of reality. Baldwin concludes his piece by stating that "without the symbolic, alterity and singularity we might be said to have lost the human" (26).

I have chosen to briefly present Baldwin's text because, despite its relevance and the many affinities that it shares with my project, it also diverges from my reading, particularly as it conflates many of Baudrillard's key terms and ideas. For instance, Baldwin insists that by "immersing ourselves in the virtual and the digital, by becoming posthuman and inhuman, we may not finally find our way back to the real and back to the human" (25). However, this statement assumes that there is, in Baudrillard's work, a commitment to the renewal of a pre-simulated era. In contrast to Baldwin's argument, Baudrillard writes that illusion is "something which drives a break into a world that is too known, [...], too conventional, too real" (*Paroxysm: Interview with Philippe Petit* 71). To suggest that there was an epoch in which the "real" or the "human" actually existed is to position Baudrillard as a thinker of teleological processes, which

completely undermines his (un)systematic destabilization of the tenets of enlightenment rationality that are intertwined with the concept of a stable notion of the “human.” In addition, Baudrillard’s critical approach is not an effort to instill a universal set of principles, like the human or reality, that can be unearthed through a careful analysis of the simulation technological of today. It is precisely these attempts to universalize and romanticize sets of people that Baudrillard challenges. And lastly, if we were to remain true to Baudrillard’s theoretical terminology when we refer to a time that precedes our hyperreal one, the proper term would be “illusion,” not the “real.”<sup>14</sup>

Over the course of this chapter, I return to Baldwin’s piece to elaborate on some key affinities between his work and my own. However, this chapter attempts to remain truthful to Baudrillard’s philosophy by refraining from attaching significance to, or romanticizing, specific Baudrillardian terms that can easily be misread as evidence of a pre-simulated epoch. There is a seductive allure in Baudrillard’s work that appears to present search for origins, but I will resist any such move here to be faithful to the enigmatic essence of Baudrillard’s methodology that, like the theories he postulates, resist classification. Before I proceed, one element that is important to note is that Baudrillard makes a fundamental distinction between two forms of reality: a “conflictual reality,” and a “non-contradictory reality” (*The Perfect Crime* 38). Conflictual reality corresponds to a possible time that precedes hyperreality, where peoples and ideas are free from the solidifying mechanisms indicative of the mass media. In opposition, non-

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<sup>14</sup> This distinction is tantamount to understanding Baudrillard’s work. Gerry Coulter addresses this problem in “Simulation is not the Opposite of the Real – Jean Baudrillard on Simulation and Illusion,” (2011) where he writes that “the opposite of simulation is illusion. The ‘real’ which is the outcome of discourse and language simulations is merely a ‘particular case of simulation’” (3).

contradictory reality is the phase of reality that has eradicated all negativity in favor of total operativity. The transition from conflictual reality to non-contradictory reality is set in motion by a “gigantic enterprise of disillusionment” (17), that is driven to put the “illusion of the world to death”(17).<sup>15</sup> The gigantic enterprise of disillusionment corresponds to that phase of simulation that strives to bring everything to light, and to purge the world of illusion and mystery. This enterprise is in the service of the oppressive manifestation of the “code” that, as I demonstrated in the first chapter, is the fundamental structure on which simulation resides.

Illusion is a totalizing structure that is without an identity and is therefore not something that can be attached a romanticized significance in the form of an “origin.” In fact, it would be erroneous to propose a linear teleological progression across time and space that has culminated in this present phenomenon. This is because, for Baudrillard, history itself “has always, deep down, been an immense simulation model” (*Illusion of the End* 7), “the last great myth” (*Simulacra & Simulation* 47). While Baudrillard appears to be fascinated by a “pre-simulated” epoch, or a “conflictual reality,” he is fundamentally pessimistic of any possibility to return to said age. I propose, then, that we read Baudrillard as a thinker against the “gigantic enterprise of disillusionment,” in the form of a radical challenge, or fatal theory, that wrests the world from its current determinacy toward the possibility of an indeterminate, conflictual reality.

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<sup>15</sup> Baudrillard uses the term illusion vaguely even though it performs an integral role in his work. Illusion is that which opposes the de-mystifying operations of modernity, while always already providing the conditions for modernity’s possibility. This Derridean reasoning is never fully expounded upon by Baudrillard, and the reader is left to assume a great deal about the resistive capacity of illusion, and the form(s) it may take.



In this chapter, I mobilize Baudrillard's performative polemical style he employs against Marx and Foucault to illustrate the points of contact between humanism and posthumanism in the metaphorical image of the 'mirror.' As I have shown in the previous chapter, Marx and Foucault, for Baudrillard, mirror the same modes of oppression that they purport to challenge or move away from. I will apply this approach to posthumanism as it is taken up by Wolfe, Hayles, and Braidotti, to illuminate the *liaison* between posthumanism and enlightenment rationality, between the posthuman and advanced industrial capitalism, and between the posthuman and anthropocentrism. This endeavor will demonstrate the ways in which the tenets of posthumanism often mirror the same systemic structures of oppression that they claim to resist.

## 2.1 Hayles and the History of the Posthuman

Katherine Hayles's seminal text, *How we Became Posthuman*, is a brilliant historical account of the interplay between cybernetics, literature, and theory in the construction of the posthuman. From the Macy Conferences on cybernetics, to the theoretical implications of the work of Michel Foucault and the literary work of Philip K. Dick, Hayles explores how the posthuman condition has been mapped and negotiated through a wide array of media. Hayles also establishes an eloquent definition of the posthuman:

What is the posthuman? [...] First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a

minor slideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the post human, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism, and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (2-3)

In this passage, Hayles outlines four characteristics that shape a distinct notion of the posthuman. What each of these four factors have in common, however, is a commitment to the contestation of the human as the highest order of being. Hayles's thesis is a radical one given the implicit anthropocentric assumptions that have haunted philosophy, and nearly every other domain of human reflection, for at least three millennia. This section will explore the radical challenge to humanism that Hayles puts forth and it will ask: how can we justify the claim that there exists a posthuman moment at all? But in considering this question, I present the ways in which Hayles's text, although prodigious in magnitude and scope, fundamentally relies on the same philosophical premises and methods that Hayles suggests we, as a species, have moved beyond.

In her book, Hayles outlines the three waves of cybernetics that have been tantamount in the construction of the posthuman. They are as follows:

[The] first-wave [of] cybernetics followed traditional scientific protocols in considering observers to be outside the system they observe. Yet cybernetics also had implications

that subverted this premise. The objectivist view sees information flowing from the system to the observers, but feedback can also loop through the observers, drawing them in to become part of the system being observed; (9)

The second wave of cybernetics grew out of attempts to incorporate reflexivity into the cybernetic paradigm at a fundamental level. The key issue was how systems are constituted as such, and the key problem was how to redefine homeostatic systems so that the observer can be taken into account. [...] cybernetics by 1980 has spun off from the idea of reflexive feedback loops a theory of autopoiesis with sweeping epistemological implications; (10)

The third wave swelled into existence when self-organization began to be understood not merely as the (re)production of internal organization but as the springboard to emergence. [...] The intent is to evolve the capacity to evolve. Some researchers have argued that such self-evolving programs are not merely models of life but are themselves alive. (11)

As Hayles illuminates in this passage, the teleological progression of cybernetics has evolved to the point where “self-evolving programs” are “alive.” This proposition challenges the often-held assumptions regarding the subject/object split, in which the subject, being “alive,” is privileged over the inanimate object. No longer is autonomy solely assigned to the subject; it is also characteristic of the object. If we accept this postulate, I would like to expand on it by considering a researcher and an object of study. In the interaction between an observer that holds the gaze, and an object that receives the gaze, we might note, in relation to Hayles’s proposal, that the observer and the object inform each other, shaping each other in a quasi-

phenomenological moment. In each individual instance however, either in the case of the object or the subject, Hayles characterizes their processes as being “autopoietic.”<sup>16</sup> Cary Wolfe eloquently illustrates this phenomenon as an “openness from closure,” where systems evolve of their own accord without outside intervention or interference. Hayles is cautious with this theory however as she writes that “[e]mphasizing that autonomy always takes place in the context of structural coupling, autopoiesis rejects the objectivism that drives a wedge between the scientist-observer and the world being observed” (142).

Hayles’s concern is that autopoietic theory may fail to recognize the historical, cultural, and social instances that frame and shape these “closed” systems. With these theories however, she cautions that we must be careful not to carelessly accept the egalitarian implications that can be deduced from them because they can often erase embodied experiences. Hayles does not totally disavow the theory of autopoiesis however, but extends it to include the outside systems and forces that operate on other systems: “whereas autopoietic theory emphasizes the closure of circular processes, [...] enaction sees the organism’s active engagement with its surroundings as more open-ended and transformative” (156). This introduction of “enaction” may be likened the theory to embodiment that considers ontological pluralism when it comes to autopoiesis and systems theory.

Hayles employs this theory of enaction to challenge Michel Foucault. Foucault’s theory of panopticism poses the same broad problems as autopoietic theory because it “diverts attention away from how actual bodies, in their cultural and physical specificities, impose, incorporate,

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<sup>16</sup> Autopoiesis is the term used to designate a system that is able to sustain and reproduce itself without outside interference or aid.

and resist incorporation of the material practices he describes” (194). When Foucault writes that the “Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power” (*Discipline & Punish* 202), he fails to consider how embodiment informs and alters the panoptic gaze in the same capacity that the object informs the subject in the subject/object relation. In effect, “Foucault thus participates in, as well as deconstructs, the panoptic move of disembodiment” (Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman* 194). Hayles’s challenge to Foucault and the theory of autopoiesis serves as a microcosm for her conception of posthuman theory: “Although in many ways the posthuman deconstructs the liberal humanist subject, it thus shares with its predecessor an emphasis on cognition rather than embodiment. [...] To the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it” (5). With this passage it is apparent that Hayles is cautious not to mirror the same systems of power that she postulates that posthumanism challenges. For this reason, she repeatedly steers the posthuman away from systems and theoretical approaches that are emblematic of humanism. However, we must consider whether Hayles is entirely successful in this endeavor. We may first consider the possibility that Hayles fails to break away from the constraints of humanism by considering her semiotic analysis.

Hayles’s challenge to the tents of humanism shares some affinities with Baudrillard’s semiotic approach in his early work. For instance, she argues that in “informatics, the signifier can no longer be understood as a single marker, for example an ink mark on a page;” instead, it “exists as a flexible chain of markers bound together by the arbitrary relations specified by the relevant codes. [...] A signifier on one level becomes a signified on the next-higher level” (31). Her point is striking as it posits that the disturbance of the signifier is bound up with the

development and play of informatics. In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Baudrillard addresses this phenomenon, but he associates it not with a specific epoch, but with the ontological condition of language itself. He states that the “scission (*coupure*) does not occur between a sign and a ‘real’ referent. It occurs between the Sr [signifier] as form and, on the other side, the Sd [signified] and the Rft [referent], which are registered together as content [...] under the aegis of the Sr” (151) to which the “crucial thing is to see that the separation of the sign and the world is a fiction” (152). First and foremost, Baudrillard regards the world as an amalgamation of signifiers that collide and interact with one another. The signifier precedes the profound reality that constitutes the referent, or the objective object. This reversal of the Sr/Sd split undermines the great scientific endeavors of enlightenment thought that, in a move away from the ‘uncritical’ superstition of religion, spirituality, or mysticism, reveal the objective, unchanging, *a priori* conditions of the world and of being. Baudrillard directly addresses this radical re-evaluation when he writes that “[d]enotation maintains itself entirely on the basis of the myth of ‘objectivity’ where objectivity is “the direct adequation of a Sr to a precise reality” (157). This challenge maintains itself well when applied against the backdrop of those strains of Marxist thought that attempt to locate, beneath the veneer of floating signifiers—which manifest themselves in the form of exchange values (EV)—a concrete, utilitarian form of use value (UV). In contrast, Baudrillard argues that the “salvation of UV from the system of EV, without realizing that UV is a satellite system in solidarity with that of EV [...] this is precisely the idealism and transcendental humanism of contents which we discover again in the attempt to rescue the Sd from the terrorism of the Sr” (160). Baudrillard’s point against “transcendental humanism” is not inconsequential in his critique. Rather, I believe his critique to be an intriguing anti-humanist re-evaluation of the human by condemning the human to the same status of the

signifier: as a floating entity that may only achieve meaning by being placed in contact with other floating entities. Humanism as a philosophical doctrine purges the human of its status as a fluid and dynamic entity in favor of a biologically and historically determined being. In effect, the efforts of scientific rationality and experimentation to make apparent the dark recesses of the human body and mind are not neutral acts of “objective” exploration but are complicit with this “transcendental humanism.” Baudrillard, for his part, concludes this argument by suggesting that “the process of signification is, at bottom, nothing but a gigantic *simulation model of meaning*” (160) which, if we accept Baudrillard’s general thesis, precedes objectivity.

Hayles’s attention to the linguistic side of human interaction and being in the contemporary episteme reveals that her theory subtly echoes the systems of humanist thought. This dilemma reveals itself even more problematically when Hayles presents the more ‘concrete’ examples of artificial life (AL) and artificial intelligence (AI) to demonstrate the supposed challenges these AIs pose to the human and humanism. For Hayles, “[a]s long as AL [Artificial Life] programs are considered to be simulations, any results produced from them may be artifacts of the simulation rather than properties of natural systems” (*How we Became Posthuman* 234). Here, Hayles generates a very clear divide between the ‘real’ human and the ‘simulated’ AL. This divide inadvertently casts the human as the initial condition for existence and any creation that follows as something of a prosthesis that is condemned to the status of simulation. So while Hayles is committed to destabilizing the privileging of the corporeal body over external prostheses, her project is haunted by a commitment to a historical and scientifically charged human: the “body is the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history, and it is naïve to think that this history does not affect human behaviors at every level of thought and actions” (284). Simulation, in Hayles’s work, evokes a pejorative connotation,

where the body, reality, and objectivity are privileged: “Just because information has lost its body does not mean that humans and the world have lost theirs” (244).

Hayles regards simulation as constitutive of non-human beings that are outside the realm of “natural systems,” whereas, for Baudrillard, simulation is a permanent state of the human condition. This does not mean that Baudrillard is not a critic of simulation but there is a distinction to be made here, and it may be observed in his outlining of the orders of simulacra. The three orders of simulacra operate alongside the “mutations of the law of value” and have culminated into the “current code-governed phase” (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* 50). This reading echoes Foucault’s description of the carceral state, in which there is a will toward control and classification that codifies the human experience under the aegis of an oppressive surveillance mechanism, one that does not derive from any given point, but that is embedded in our social relations and hierarchal systems.

In a sense then, Baudrillard could be said to commit the same disavowal of embodiment that Hayles accuses Foucault of committing. However, Baudrillard does not see the present epoch as neatly limiting or homogenizing people under a single locus of power. Baudrillard’s concern with simulation is to be found in the potentialities that it projects onto the human subject through virtual technologies of communication and bodily interaction. The problem with simulation in the present epoch, for Baudrillard, is that it has consolidated the development of the ‘hyper-real’ or the more real than real through the realization of all desires through virtual technologies (*The Transparency of Evil*) In this view, computers, artificial intelligence, gadgets are treated as scapegoats for the loss of reality and as a focal point of simulation. Just as Disneyland functions to convince those people outside of it that they are not in a theme park, the diametrical opposition between simulation and reality convinces us of there being a “real” world



outside of the realm of the virtual. This bifurcation between reality and simulation is a problem for Baudrillard because it evokes the sense that there is a real human essence that can be re-attained and cultivated outside of simulation. By being relegated to specific zones that are inextricably linked to technology, simulation is made to serve this function as a space for unreality. Baudrillard addresses this point specifically when asked about his thoughts on the Wachowski's 1999 film, *The Matrix* —a film that establishes a clear divide between reality and simulation—:

*The Matrix's* chief value is that it pushes all these elements to a paroxysm. Yet it does it more crudely and in a far less complex way. Either the characters are in the Matrix, and belong to the digitized universe, or they are radically outside it—in Zion, the resistors' city. It would be interesting to show what happens at the point where these two worlds meet. The most embarrassing part of the film is that it confuses the new problem raised by simulation with its arch-classical, Platonic treatment. This is a serious flaw. ("*The Matrix Revisited*" 202)

Baudrillard's challenge to *The Matrix* reveals the extent to which he does not identify a clear bifurcation between reality and simulation, a point that many miss.<sup>17</sup>

A radical evaluation of humanity, by contrast, in the form of the posthuman, would not mirror and replicate the same conditions emblematic of a supposedly natural condition. Hayles's

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<sup>17</sup> Slavoj Žižek, a prominent voice in the field of posthuman studies, makes the same critical error when he states that "if this will become reality, this direct link between our brains and digital space, [...] then, in a way, we will no longer be humans." This temporal and cultural distinction between a time and space when and where humans may be said to have been truly human retroactively constructs the human as a static entity of the past.

strong emphasis on technological innovation and historicism does not destabilize the human, but retroactively confirms its presence in a *telos* of the human condition where science, the triumph of humanism *par excellence*, is employed to point to the end of humanism. Hayles's theory of autopoiesis approaches a radical alternative to humanist thought by epistemologically re-evaluating the Western liberal-humanist subject in favor of a multitude of divergent social, cultural, and philosophical knowledges that do not subscribe to the Western conception of humanism. However, Hayles's location of this potentiality through the cultural imperative of scientifically 'rationalistic' processes and histories undermines these possibilities in the overwhelming homogenization of critical thought under the umbrella of Western culture and discourse. In other words, the blatant association of anti-humanism with the progression of scientific discourse and development promotes, rather than destabilizes, the hegemonic global reach of Western discourses of rationality in the form of a humanist anti-humanism that is all too emblematic of dominant Western ideological rhetoric. It seems as though, in the case of Hayles, the master's tools are not only ineffective at dismantling the master's house, but actually serve to repair and update the master's house (Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House")

We may observe Baudrillard's most strident challenge to this reliance on historicism and a scientific *telos* in *Impossible Exchange* when he writes that "our sciences and technologies have accustomed us to see everything in terms of a continuous evolution, which is never anything other than our own—the theological form of our superiority" (9). This point is only enforced when we consider posthumanism's theorization of the animal in relation to the human, a point that is central to the work of Cary Wolfe.

## 2.2 Wolfe and the Question of the Animal

The question of the animal serves a key role in the posthuman turn. In Cary Wolfe's, *What is Posthumanism?*, he deconstructs the historical split between humans and animals. Wolfe does this by drawing upon Jacques Derrida's, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, to illustrate the fragility of the binary distinction between the human and the animal, or as he puts it, "my concern here will be to show the limits of philosophical humanism for thinking about the status of nonhuman beings and our relations and duties to them, which stems in part from its inability to locate the question properly" (62).

Beyond this question of the animal, Wolfe theorizes the implications of autopoiesis to locate the presence of virtuality in these systems: "Crucially, then, 'virtual' does not mean 'not-real'; on the contrary, given the 'openness from closure' principle, the more virtual the world is, the more real it is, because the buildup of internal complexity made possible by autopoietic closure actually increases the complexity of the environment that is possible for any system" (XXIV). Wolfe suggests that the fundamental attribute of any sentient system is an autopoietic one, which is not withheld from virtual systems. With this point we may observe a fundamental and crucial difference between Wolfe and Hayles. In contrast to Hayles, Wolfe does not quarantine the virtual, but accepts its inherent connection to the basic condition of living organisms: autopoiesis. This radical proposition disturbs the immediate association that may be made between Wolfe's posthumanism and humanism more broadly because it undermines the monopoly held by human beings on these organizational and autopoietic processes. Wolfe articulately applies this theory to non-human animals to proclaim that anthropocentrism plagues nearly all theoretical and philosophical endeavors. What is extremely striking about Wolfe's

book, and his theory more generally, is that it is incredibly careful not to mirror the oppressive structures emblematic of humanism. For instance, he writes that “just because we direct our attention to the study of nonhuman animals, and even if we do so with the aim of exposing how they have been misunderstood and exploited, that does not mean that we are not continuing to be humanist—and therefore, by definition, anthropocentric” (99). In this section, I will question whether Wolfe is successful at generating a counter-mirror to the humanist project or if he ultimately gravitates to the same oppressive framework.

Following the Heideggerian usage of the “as such,” Derrida states in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* that “the strategy in question would consist in pluralizing and varying the ‘as such,’ and, instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of, as it were, in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly ‘deprived,’ by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple ‘as such’” (160). Derrida’s assertion of a deprivation that haunts humanity, which deconstructs the traditionally held belief that it is the animal which is ‘deprived,’ may be likened to his early discussion of the ‘prohibition of incest’ that cuts across epistemological and linguistic boundaries, and which also reveals a fundamental connection that disturbs clearly established lines of demarcation. In other words, “incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural” (*Writing and Difference* 283). By disturbing the dichotomous split between “nature/culture,” Derrida opens up the possibility for the theoretical—and even pragmatic—(re)evaluation of the respective linguistic structures that comprise this binary. In this deconstructive moment, nature and culture are called upon to demonstrate their respective ontological capacities without making reference to the other, and they are quick to find that this is an impossible task. The possibility of their realization derives from the common thread—incest prohibition—between the two because the

“incest-prohibition is no longer scandal one meets with or comes up against in the domain of traditional concepts; it is something which escapes these concepts and certainly precedes them—probably as the condition of their possibility” (5). The prohibition of incest attests to the fragility of the traditional split between culture and nature, pointing to the common thread that traverses each, plotting the foundation for each’s possibility for realization.

Let us now return to Derrida’s location of deprivation in the human/animal split. He argues that “logocentrism is first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of the *logos*, deprived of the *can-have-the-logos*” (*The Animal* 27). The animal has been denied this position throughout the history of ideas from “Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Levinas [...], all of them say the same thing: the animal is deprived of language” (32). Derrida’s response to this problem however is not to extend the liberal humanist project by gifting the animal what it has been denied, but to defy the monopoly held by humans, and the anthropocentric condition more generally: “according to what constitutes the logical matrix of my argument, it is not just a matter of giving back to the animal whatever it has been refused, in this case the I of automonstration. It is also a matter of questioning oneself concerning the axiom that permits one to accord purely and simply to the human or to the rational animal that which one holds the just plain animal to be deprived of” (95). In effect, Derrida performs a dual critique. First, he challenges the liberal humanist extension of all things “human,” to non-human others, and, second, he turns anthropocentrism on its head by concluding that the human has always already been similarly “deprived” of any such privileged position.

Cary Wolfe’s utilization of Derrida is characteristically faithful, as he even makes clear when he questions Derrida’s project: “‘Is Derrida (merely) an animal welfarist?’ In the end, do we find in Derrida’s work on ethics and the animal a reproduction [...] of ‘a kind of pitilessness

at the heart of welfarism, a willingness to go ahead with what we do to the vulnerable, a willingness to go on subjecting them to our power because we can, because it suits us to do so” (96). As mentioned earlier, Wolfe is careful not to reproduce the same oppressive conditions of liberal humanism that initially privileged the human in the human/animal divide. However, I wish to question whether or not Wolfe’s demonstration of his own (and Derrida’s) potential hypocrisy is enough to illustrate a radical re-evaluation of humanism, or is his reliance on Derridean deconstruction always already caught in the trap of liberal humanism? For Baudrillard, “The idea of the human can come only from elsewhere, not from itself. The inhuman alone can bear witness to it. When the human attempts to define itself by excluding the inhuman, it becomes a mockery” (*Paroxysm* 27). At the heart of this assertion is the notion that there must be an essence to the other, or the inhuman. The essence of any given being may only be realized through its wielding of ‘singularity’ which is an “absolute difference, a radical difference, something more different than difference” (Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil; or, The Lucidity Pact* 37). This difference is a point by which to confirm one’s own singularity, but that is ultimately to remain esoteric so as to abide by the rule that “every detail of the world is perfect if it is not referred to some larger set” (140).

To return to Jon Baldwin’s piece, he argues that singularity is a key concept in Baudrillardian posthuman thought. Baldwin writes:

One antidote to this would be the notion of the singularity and singularities. In a posthuman world that wants to be universal, digital, productive and cleansed of all ambiguity, a ‘culture of equivalence and calculation’ (Baudrillard 1997, 128), the singularity stands as, and valorizes, the unique, uncertain, unpredictable, incalculable, unrepresentable, untranslatable and unproductive. It threatens the drive towards a

posthuman globalized, secure, neutralized sameness with a radical otherness. In this sense, a singularity is analogous to the concepts offered by Baudrillard as antidotes to simulation, globalization, monoculture and the principle of equivalence, namely symbolic exchange, seduction, radical alterity, negativity and death – ‘the most singular of singularities.’ (“Self-Immolation” 22)

For Baudrillard, a posthuman turn does not derive from improvements in cognitive or linguistic science that point to the intrinsic similarities between humans and animals, blurring the lines between the two, but derives from the exorcism of singularity under the aegis of advanced universalizing structures of scientific rationality, observation, and surveillance, where animals and humans are denied the possibility of “radical alterity.” The deconstructive elements of posthumanism characteristic of Wolfe’s approach participate in this homogenization. We would do well to ask of Wolfe, what will result from a deconstruction of the human/animal divide? In the worst-case scenario, and the one that this thesis resists, is the consumption of the animal by the human, where the animal is exorcised of its singularity.

In *Impossible Exchange* Baudrillard writes that we “are moving everywhere towards an elimination of the Inhuman, towards an anthropological integrism which aims to submit everything to the jurisdiction of the Human” (16). He then continues by stating that “we have to look further than this critical thinking, a derivative of Western humanism, to far stranger objects which are bearers of a radical uncertainty,” essentially to “escape truth,” which is possible by leaving “matters to the object and its strange attraction, the world and its definitive uncertainty” (16). In the case of the animal specifically, Baudrillard states that “[e]very stage of evolution, every age of life, every moment of life, every animal or plant species, is perfect in itself. Every character, in its singular imperfection, in its matchless finitude, is incomparable” (*Intelligence of*

*Evil* 140). If the blurring of the line between animals and humans is ever complete, we must ask what will be left standing, a humanoid animal, or an animaloid human? If it is the former, which it would surely be given the human's history in this role, animals "will soon have no other purpose than to be preserved and kept in museums as traces of the genesis of man (man himself being destined for the status of future remnant in a world of clones)" (*Screened Out* 105). If this were to be the outcome, Baudrillard makes clear that the only justice would be for humanity (or posthumanity at that point) should "meet the same fate as animals" (198).

### 2.3 The Violence of "Becoming."

Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* is a seminal posthuman text that employs the Deleuze/Guattari notion of "becoming" as an avenue for creativity and resistance. In this section I expand upon many key terms employed by Braidotti, such as "becoming," "deterritorialization," and "flow," each of which is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work. While these thinkers are very important for Braidotti, I will not consider them directly here. The critique that I perform of Braidotti's work then, should not be construed as a challenge to Deleuze and Guattari *per se* (even though Baudrillard's critique of Deleuze and Guattari does anticipate my criticisms of Braidotti). My critique operates under the assumption that Braidotti is not simply re-stating the work of Deleuze and Guattari, but rather that Braidotti is expanding upon and creatively altering their work to fit within the posthuman canon.

For Braidotti, "[p]osthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives" (*The Posthuman* 37). Braidotti's brand of



posthumanism identifies and rebrands the cultural logic of globalization to radically potentiate the oppressive neo-colonial forces at work today. For Braidotti, to challenge is to commit oneself to the possibility of becoming, to mobilize the fluidity of living organisms in a counter-oppressive performance. In her words, “[w]hat we humans truly yearn for is to disappear by merging into this generative flow of becoming, the precondition for which is the loss, disappearance and disruption of the atomized, individual self” (136). The “flow of becoming,” in her view, stands in opposition to the reductive and oppressive mechanisms of advanced industrial capital that construct people as subjects with natural and universal needs and desires. “Becoming” opposes this system because it disturbs the transformation of people into commodities in advanced industrial capitalism, a process that subsumes assemblages under the aegis of production and capital, and then away from any creative human potential.

In this identification of the creative capacity of “becoming,” Braidotti considers the animal and natural life more generally, as localized points of “deterritorialization” to “emphasize the non-human, vital force of life,” the “*zoe*” (60). “*Zoe*,” or “life” from the original Greek, is a rather broad term, but one that does effectively communicate the intention of Braidotti’s project, which is to emphasize the resistive potential of non-human life as an avenue for the human’s “becoming” through the construction of a “system of representation that matches the complexity of contemporary non-human animals and their proximity to humans” (70).

Animals, however, are just one figure that Braidotti regards as a deterritorialized, “complex” system. The “minority” figure among humans, a figure often classified in racist terms as “sub-human,” represents much of the same resistive potential that she attributes to the animal. The minority figure, like the animal, is not inherently or naturally subordinate to a dominant group or class; rather the “reduction to sub-human status of non-Western others is a constitutive source of

ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization” (28). However, this assertion does present a certain ambiguity in Braidotti’s project. We might ask, for example, how can we identify and discern deterritorialized from ‘territorialized’ figures? In the last passage, only those groups that have been marginalized, or “de-humanized,” by a “dominant subject” present the possibility for “becoming.” Are there any spaces that do not fit this criterion? Or does Braidotti assume that the project of globalization has been completed, leaving no rock unturned, and no beings, human or non-human, undiscovered? I believe, for the sake of Braidotti’s argument, that the latter is the case. Otherwise, those undiscovered, or just recently discovered, peoples, organisms, or animals would not be deterritorialized figures because they have not been made subordinate, and therefore do not meet her criterion. In either instance however, the “process of becoming-minoritarian [Deleuze] or becoming-nomad of Europe involves the rejection of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world” (53). This “missionary role” may be likened to the gazing European figure that strives to uncover and demystify the mysteries and illusions of the globe, hierarchizing and classifying peoples, things, and animals so that they fit within a European structural framework. However, how can we be sure that these discursive strategies employed for the sake of “becoming” do not mirror the same “missionary” persona that Braidotti is critical of? At its core, Braidotti’s project challenges many of the same historical tenets of modernity that Baudrillard vehemently criticizes across his theoretical *oeuvre*. But, of all the posthuman thinkers presented here, I cannot think of one that presents as many problems for Baudrillardian thought as Braidotti does. We will return to this at the end of this section. For now, let us interrogate Braidotti’s project to see if she is effective at “avoiding the twin pitfalls of conservative nostalgia and neo-liberal euphoria” (11).

In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti address the fact that her project may be misconstrued as a neo-liberal affirmation of individualism: “The focus is shifted accordingly from unitary to nomadic subjectivity, thus running against the grain of high humanism and its contemporary variations. This view rejects individualism, but also exerts an equally strong difference from relativism or nihilistic defeatism. It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject” (49). In Braidotti’s account, the posthuman condition is one that recognizes a plethora of cultural, ethnic, and social expressions. She effectively recognizes essential singularities and differences that exists across cultural and temporal boundaries, but it is those very boundaries that most concern Braidotti: “The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences” (189). Beyond these boundaries, I believe it is safe to assume that there exist cultural differences. The project of Braidotti’s posthumanism, then, is to open up the potential for the realization of any given cultural belief system or practice in any other space. This is in opposition to the privileging of the Eurocentric institutional formations of health, education, and religion or, what broadly falls under the umbrella of liberal humanism.

The epistemological implications of Braidotti’s text are significant, as she demonstrates that critical theory must not (re)produce a hegemonic, and homogenous, discourse that simply reaffirms the old oppressive framework. For instance, she states that even “Marxism, under the cover of a master theory of historical materialism, continued to define the subject of European thought as unitary and hegemonic and to assign him (the gender is no coincidence) a royal place as the motor of human history” (23). This example resonates well with Baudrillard’s criticism of Marx, especially in his reduction and infantilization of ‘pre-industrial’ people. The title of Baudrillard’s book, *The Mirror of Production*, however, makes apparent that the replication of

oppression is often inadvertent and unintentional. Braidotti's example of Marxism is a calculated one, intended to present the argument that Braidotti herself is cognizant of the possibility of reproducing the classical oppressive structures of humanism. In much the same vein, there is a moment, at the beginning of her book where she meditates on a passage by Neil Badmington—another posthuman thinker—who states that “[a]pocalyptic accounts of the end of “man” [...] ignore Humanism's capacity for regeneration and, quite literally, recapitulation” (“Theorizing Posthumanism” 29). I want to expand on Badmington's testimony that humanism is not simply the drive to locate a fundamental *a priori* human essence, but that humanism may be characterized as ‘regenerative,’ and by extension, an adaptive phenomenon.

Paul Virilio, a prominent thinker on the topics of speed, war, communication, and urban geography, has theorized the implications of advanced global capitalism on the human's ability to perceive and understand the world: “critical space, and critical expanse, are now everywhere, due to the acceleration of communications [...], the various advertising slogans signalling perfectly the shrinking of geophysical space of which we are the beneficiaries but also, sometimes, the unwitting victims” (*Open Sky* 9). Globalization has made all corners of the globe, once distant objects of fantasy, overabundantly apparent. The boundaries that once separated people, whether they be state appointed or symbolically established, dissipate under this totalizing system. If we consider Badmington's statement above, humanism, unlike “space” in globalization, does not disappear but adapts.

The colonial expeditions of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries may provide an illustrative starting point to the type of humanism that flourishes today. Braidotti suggests that the process of “de-colonization created nation-states whose people, once enslaved, are now free to circulate globally. These people constitute the bulk of the unwanted immigrants, refugees, and asylum

seekers who are contained and locked up across the developed world” (*The Posthuman* 128).<sup>18</sup>

Despite Braidotti’s exaggeration of the proportion of incarcerated immigrants to incarcerated citizens, she does raise an interesting point regarding the effects of colonization and how colonization makes apparent the limitations of transcendental European reason by having present divergent beliefs and social systems. Braidotti’s recognition of these mechanisms of neo-colonization illuminate the cultural privileging of the “developed” world, and the perpetual exploitation of other peoples. Does this form of neo-colonialism only manifest in the overt demonstration of incarceration however? Or can we observe the tenets of humanism manifest themselves in other forms today?

In “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” bell hooks states that “[w]hen race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other” (23). It is my contention that Braidotti’s theory of “becoming” renders the other a commodity, an object to be devoured and consumed for the sake of the oppressors “alternative playground.” I believe Braidotti’s theory, then, to mirror the same structures of global capitalism incumbent upon present institutional formations of neo-colonial power. The risk to this form of neo-colonial humanism is, in Baudrillard’s words, to not be “dispossessed by the other” but to be “dispossessed *of* the other” (*Screened Out* 55). This consequence comes about when the other is denied their singularity and denied a position of “radical alterity.”

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<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that immigrants make up a significant portion of incarcerated people. For more on this see Butcher, K, & Piehl, M (2007); Rumbaut, R, Gonzales, R, Komaie, G, & Morgan, C (2006).

For hooks, as for Baudrillard, seduction is not something that may be mobilized or committed to.<sup>19</sup> Seduction marks a crucial distance between one group and another, where “all we can do is remind ourselves that seduction lies in non-reconciliation with the other, in preserving the alien status of the Other” (Baudrillard, *Screened Out* 56). The opposite of seduction, “which allows things to come into play and appear in secret, dual and ambiguous”, is identified by Baudrillard as ‘provocation’ which “does not leave you free to be; it calls on you to reveal yourself as you are. It is always blackmail by identity (and thus a symbolic murder, since you are never that, except precisely by being condemned to it)” (*Fatal Strategies* 61-2). Provocation, unlike seduction, can be mobilized, but it will ultimately result in a “blackmail by identity.” Through provocation, the Other is condemned to an identity. This is where the risk manifests itself. By forcing the other to adopt an identity, which allows for the facilitated consumption of that identity, the other is denied their radical ambiguity—that characteristic of their being that resists classification.

Nonetheless, Braidotti’s mobilization of “becoming” as a potentiation of affirmative possibilities that “encourages an affective opening-out towards the geo-physical” (*The Posthuman* 166) renders the other a productive force that can be mobilized for the betterment and “opening-out” of the transparent and adaptive neo-colonial figure. Braidotti’s theory does not exist in a vacuum however. With the current torrent of tourist activities in supposedly

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<sup>19</sup> In the same piece mentioned above, bell hooks makes an interesting point regarding the status of the “other,” and the respective position of the “other” in relation to the dominant group. Hooks states, drawing on Baudrillard’s theory of seduction, that “[d]ifference can seduce precisely because the mainstream imposition of sameness is a provocation that terrorizes” and that to “make one’s self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish forever one’s mainstream positionality.”

“exotic” areas of the globe, and the symbolic capital attached to cultural, and epistemological literacy—most often in the form of appropriation--Braidotti’s theory merely matches the cultural logic that pervades today.

In a similar capacity, Dolleen Manning, an Anishinaabe scholar, calls attention to the extent to which the problematic shortcomings of Braidotti’s may be observed in Deleuze and Guattari. Manning writes that “Deleuze and Guattari’s complex analysis of becoming appears, on the surface, to break with traditional Western epistemological models. However, not only do they begin with a humanist approach, but the sweeping intensities, stirred in these blocks of becoming, also arise in conjunction with the embodied cognitive subject intersecting with his or her surroundings” (“The Becoming-Human of Buffalo Bill” 199-200).

Specifically, Manning is interested in the way that Deleuze/Guattari potentiate Indigenous knowledges in this matrix of becoming. For Manning, “Aboriginal peoples continue to be feared, pitied or romanticized, for the unknown Otherness of the constructed Indian retains the façade of a self-generating beastliness” (198). This “construction” of the Indian does not reflect the reality of these people, but is the romanticized image of these people, projected back onto them. The Indigenous person is then forced into a precarious position where they are unable to break away from the image painted of themselves. Consequently, “Indigenous peoples cannot afford to *uncritically* allow ideas [...] to float freely across their borders. Indeed, such ideas threaten to (de)territorialize them once again” (204). We must then interrogate the project of becoming as an exclusive phenomenon, reserved for a specific group of people, which are surely not people who have been subject to colonization.

“Becoming,” is a cultural strategy to convince the neo-colonial dominator that the globe has not already been conquered, and that there exist spaces that are not affected by the high-humanist logic of Eurocentric reasoning and social practice. “Becoming” erases the historical implications of any given social, cultural, or ethnic community, by implying that they may be copied.<sup>20</sup> As Baudrillard writes: “we are iconoclasts—not in the sense that we destroy images, but in the sense that we manufacture a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see” (*Transparency of Evil* 17). The strategy of “becoming” is a tactic to “produce the other in the absence of the other, and so continually to be thrown back on oneself and one's own image” (*Screened Out* 55).

As I have demonstrated in the first chapter, this homogenization of the other is linked, in Baudrillard’s work, to the developments in virtual technologies. Take, for instance, representation in the media sphere. Of this, Baudrillard writes that the media have “pushed back the limits of will and representation, shuffled the cards and taken from each subject the disposition of his own body” (*Fatal Strategies* 125). Seduction maintains the “hypothesis of an enigmatic duel, of a violent solicitation or attraction, which is [...] of challenge, of a secret distance and perpetual antagonism” (129). Seduction opposes the homogenizing tendency of

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<sup>20</sup> Helen Hoy, a Canadian artist and scholar, speaks to this when she writes that “[m]ethodological--or epistemological—humility and caution recognize presumed limitations to the outsider’s understanding and the importance of not undermining the insider’s perspective.” Epistemic humility suggests that there will always be a barrier, of sorts, between cultural boundaries. The epistemological implications of Hoy’s theory here are exceptionally important given the advent of globalization. Braidotti’s project is diametrically opposed to Hoy’s because she suggests that the “other”—which are Indigenous people in Hoy’s account—should not be treated as an object for the dominant group’s leisurely consumption under the pretense of “becoming.”



these media technologies. Of course, there exist creative and affirmative potentials of these technologies. However, we must be careful not to tread on the side of a total dismissal, or a total acceptance of these technologies as Braidotti does: “I will always side firmly with the liberatory and even transgressive potential of these technologies, against those who attempt to index them to either a predictable conservative profile, or to a profit-oriented system that fosters and inflates individualism” (*The Posthuman* 58). Braidotti’s optimism toward these media technologies as potential loci for the demonstration of liberatory discourse too quickly dismisses the historically homogenous and violent roles these media have been complicit in. In a sense, the media are doomed to fail, as they rely on representation that imply peoples, cultures, and identities can be located and illustrated in such a way that they may be rendered consumable under the pretense of becoming.

Braidotti’s optimism does not participate in the “secret distance” emblematic of seduction, but operates at the level of provocation, where the “other” is forced to reveal themselves for the sake of the dominant group’s “becoming.” Braidotti’s project, inadvertently then, rather than challenging the historical fabrication of the figure of the human, imposes laws and regulations on those that have historically never been considered human. Instead of the other being a victim of colonial expeditions and the violent seizure of land and identity, Braidotti imposes a new form of colonial dominance under the precedent of epistemological awareness or appreciation. Of course, if this were all Braidotti’s text did, it would not commit the same violence as her discourse around “becoming” commits. “Becoming” erases the other, turning them into a commodity in the same capacity that advanced global capital does. Moreover, Braidotti’s optimism mirrors the unwavering optimism of basic liberal economic doctrine that proposes capitalism is bringing to the world riches the likes of which we have never seen.

At the end of *The Posthuman*, Braidotti leaves her reader with an optimistic take on the state of the world today: “It is one of the possible worlds we have made for ourselves, and in so far as it is the result of our joint efforts and collective imaginings, it is quite simply the best of all possible posthuman worlds” (197). In a world that has been in perpetual turmoil for the last century with the growing exploitation of the “third world,” and the perpetual reduction of marginalized people as commodities, we must ask, is this truly “the best of all possible posthuman worlds?”

### 3 Seducing the Cyborg

In the preceding chapter, I showed how posthumanists present a theoretical rupture with the continuity of the human. This rupture may be most easily characterized as the *genesis of the posthuman* even if there is a great deal of dispute regarding the moment of its emergence. However, what is consistent among posthuman scholarship is the commitment to developments in technological innovation, advances in linguistics, and epistemological cognizance as key elements to the construction of the posthuman. These phenomena disturb what it means to be human by presenting discursive, and even tangible, alternatives to the human psyche and body as theorized by enlightenment modernity. The ultimate figure for this shift in the logic of the human, and humanism more broadly, is the cyborg. For Donna Haraway, theoretician of the cyborg *par excellence*, the cyborg is “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (“A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” 150). The cyborg is not human, yet it “is our ontology; it gives us our politics” (150). Haraway’s illustration of the cyborg presents, for posthumanism, a radical challenge to the tenets of humanism that have guided and constructed the human. The figure of the cyborg allows us to elucidate and explore the ontology of the human, but the cyborg is also something of an optimistic figure that allows for the possibility to challenge the oppressive tenets of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, and white privilege.

This chapter explores Haraway's conception of the cyborg as a resistive figure to humanism. I begin by presenting the cyborg in Haraway's terms as both a direct consequence of systems of oppression, and as a challenge to those systems of oppression. I then proceed through the theoretical challenges that Haraway's cyborg has faced in the domains of disability and queer studies. In broad terms, this critique arises from a recognition of the way in which the cyborg represents certain complacency toward, comfort with, and even acquiescence to the forces that be. In my consideration of these critiques, I turn back to Baudrillard. Specifically, I address his theory of seduction as a strategy to wrest the cyborg from its localization within an ontologically grounded theoretical stratum. I conclude by arguing that Baudrillard's theory of seduction may serve as a means to maintain the cyborg's resistive potential in the form of a radical ambiguity that does not assume any given subject position, but that disturbs normative institutional formations precisely by its refusal to be structured.

### 3.1 The Cyborg

Haraway's thesis of the cyborg and cybernetics suggests that the posthuman turn is one that is governed by indeterminacy through the play of possibility as a "condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (150). This historical transformation cuts across the implicit finality associated with the sciences that inscribe on the human a biological certainty. Foucault elucidates this scientific construction of the human poignantly when he writes that the "epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance: no philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination, or the passions, had ever encountered, in the seventeenth or eighteenth

century, anything like man; for man did not exist” (*The Order of Things* 375-6). Thus, the determining moment of the posthuman’s genesis is when the human ceases to contain an ontological certainty as it has been inscribed through scientific observation and biological “validity.” Haraway’s famous concluding remark, that she would rather “be a cyborg than a goddess” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 181). is ironic then, given the fundamental connection between cybernetics and scientific positivism. But Haraway’s proposition is ultimately subversive given its employment of an ontologically uncertain figure—the cyborg—to undermine the authority maintained by the science machine in a playful appropriation of one of science’s prosthetic figures. Moreover, this reversal of the traditional honor associated with royalty does not only present a radical subversion of scientific rationality, but of the high humanistic status attached to being a goddess. The cyborg opposes this aristocratic humanism by having “no origin story in the Western sense - a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self-untied at last from all dependency, a man in space” (151). Haraway’s acknowledgement of the teleological condition of the cyborg does present a problem for us because it assumes a linear historical narrative attached to the cyborg that places it alongside the linearity of Western positivist accounts of history. Haraway is careful with this characterization of the cyborg however, as she posits that the cyborg is “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism” (151). Haraway’s gloomy tone indicates her concern for how the cyborg may have some affinity with these structural loci of oppression. However, she goes on to write that “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins” (151). Despite the perhaps innate union between the cyborg and these institutions (a familial one nonetheless), the cyborg houses the radical potential to challenge and overthrow those structures.

There is little mystery as to why the cyborg has been taken up by feminist and gender studies scholarship since its theorization by Haraway. Haraway's brilliant concluding remark, that she would rather be a "cyborg than a goddess," speaks volumes to those women and gender minorities denied agency in the patriarchal cisgender spaces constructed for a specific class, sex and race. Haraway is effective at doing this because her conception of the cyborg undermines the privileging of conventional notions of 'royalty,' while simultaneously invigorating a degree of autonomy and agency denied to those same people. I wish now to explore Haraway's theory of the cyborg in relation to Alison Kafer's *Feminist Queer Crip*, a book belonging to the domain of feminist disability studies that points to the limitations of Haraway's notion of the cyborg and that presents a possible reformation of that notion.

### 3.2 The Ontologically Determined Cyborg and Disability Studies

In, *Feminist Queer Crip*, Alison Kafer makes an intriguing argument for an inclusionary discourse surrounding the cyborg in disability studies. Kafer argues that the cyborg opens up possibilities for feminist, queer, and disability studies, but that it must be held in check lest it "perpetuate distinctions between 'normal' and 'abnormal' bodies, distinctions that have material consequences involving discrimination, economic inequalities, and restricted access" (110). Kafer goes on to suggest that disabled people are often associated with the cyborg given their bodies deviation from the norm, which establishes "markers of difference, suggesting an essential difference between disabled people and nondisabled people" (110). Kafer takes Donna Haraway to task on this point, charging that "looking carefully at which kinds of bodies, or which identities, get positioned as cyborg make clear the universalizing assumptions that operate within [Haraway's] text" (113). Kafer's desire to wrest the cyborg from the clutches of an

oppressive ontological certainty, or essentialism, marks a crucial incongruency between her theory and those of people that observe a fundamental essentialism in the figure of the cyborg. Kafer's criticism then presents a foray into a radical theory that resists the possibility of 'mirroring' the dominant modes of oppression that her work challenges.

The distinctive element of Kafer's piece is that it focuses primarily on the source material of cyborg epistemology—"A Cyborg Manifesto"—as opposed to other texts that have explored the cyborg. The tone and analytical rigor of Kafer's critique reveals that the cyborg is not innately opposed to structural manifestations of hegemony, but that it may even be a structural consequence of these oppressive mechanisms. Kafer does not completely reject the cyborg, however. Rather, she performs a 'crippling' of the cyborg to develop a "non-ableist cyborg politics" that views "disabled people as cyborgs not because of [their] bodies [...] but because of their political practices" (120). Kafer's move away from the body in relation to disability studies as a discipline, and the cyborg as a figure often (mis)associated with that discipline, makes clear that the cyborg retains its radicality outside of the body. To perform the reverse, and to inscribe on the body, or the cyborg, an unchanging totalizing essence only participates in the exclusion of those people that do not fit the mold of that archetype. The cyborg must lend itself to the play of signification that does not have an implicit attachment to any given cultural institution. This is a concern echoed in some strands of queer studies when Dennis Carlson argues that the "cyborg subject is not accustomed to thinking about 'race' or 'gender' or 'class' or 'sexual orientation' as if these were naturally given and meaningful categories" ("Gay, Queer, and Cyborg: The performance of identity in a transglobal age" 306). This is not to say that the process by which we may "cripple" the cyborg, or "queer" the cyborg is in any capacity the same operation but they do each point, however, to a contemporaneous theme of resistance that detects in the cyborg

a nothingness that is without history lest it be co-opted by any given dominant institutional structures.

In *Seduction*, Baudrillard performs a similar critique to the one employed by Kafer, albeit not one that considers disability explicitly, against Luce Irigaray. He writes of Irigaray that it “is always a question of the body, if not the anatomical, then the organic, erogenous body, the functional body that, even in fragmented and metaphorical form, would have pleasure as its object and desire as its natural manifestation. But then either the body is here only a metaphor [...], or else, with this body speech, this woman speech, we have, very definitely, entered into an anatomical destiny, into anatomy as destiny” (Baudrillard 9). Baudrillard demands that if we are to conduct a critique of any sort, it must not be one that relies on a transcendental signified from which to propel that critique. Or, as Kafer suggests in relation to the cyborg, any “potential transgressive tendencies in the term are lost when these labels become locked to certain bodies. ‘Cyborg’ itself becomes reified, reduced to a particular kind of body” (*Feminist Queer Crip*, 110). As Baudrillard illustrates, the radicality of the cyborg is housed in its indeterminacy, or in its challenge to the “masculine” which “possess unfailing powers of discrimination and absolute criteria for pronouncing the truth” (*Seduction* 10-11).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This “truth,” for Baudrillard, has no relation to Truth. In Baudrillard’s work, where there is a startling absence of a definition of his notion of truth, we may surmise that truth is neither universal, nor is it necessarily an idea held by the majority. I believe that Baudrillard’s conception of truth is of a pernicious nature, where truth arrives on the scene surreptitiously, in the laboratory, in the courthouse, in the factory, in the hospital, in each instance that people are called to act upon themselves as “selves,” and are then gifted the conceptual assemblages of sight that allow them to engage with the world as active agents. This is an idea more effectively articulated in Foucault’s second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, where he traces this development of the “self” back to the Greeks. The ambiguity of the cyborg extends to the domain of the self, destabilizing the comfortable localization of a self-actualized machinic propulsion into the realm of subjectivity, or in the consolidation of a “face” in the language of



### 3.3 Sara Ahmed's Critique of Baudrillard's Implicit Determinism

Baudrillard's alignment of a theoretical strategy alongside the subversion of the referential location of signification has not been without criticism. I will turn now to a short piece by Sara Ahmed entitled, "Beyond humanism and postmodernism: Theorizing a feminist practice" in which she argues that Baudrillard's move to dissuade and obfuscate the attachment of signs to a transcendent referent is ultimately a move to consolidate a humanist subject that is not formed under the aegis of determinacy, but is one that is "determined by indeterminacy" ("Beyond Humanism"). Ahmed argues that this is brought about by Baudrillard's disavowal of "anatomy, class, or gender," a disavowal that suggests an indifference to the effects of "discourse and power" ("Beyond Humanism"). Ahmed's criticism is a forceful one because, I believe, it challenges Baudrillard in his own terms. Ahmed is deft in pointing to the limits of Baudrillard's work because she challenges his claim to occupy a space of radical theory by pointing to the way that his work itself mirrors the world of the signified, of reality, and of the "liberal humanist" subject. The significance of Ahmed's criticism will reveal itself *a posteriori* as I trace her theorization of Baudrillardian critique and then supplant it with Baudrillard's own conception of power and resistance in his later work.

In Ahmed's critique of Baudrillard's *Seduction*, she states that if "the feminine as artifice and women as 'artificial' connect, then what Baudrillard is celebrating (in his idealization of the transvestite subject) is precisely women's status as signs and commodities circulated by and for

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Deleuze and Guattari, to destabilize the authority afforded to patriarchal institutional formations of observation and consumption.

male spectators and consumers” (“Beyond Humanism”). Contrary to Ahmed’s criticism, Baudrillard recognizes the oppression of particular groups over others over the course of history, and his use of the term “feminine” does not refer to women: “The relation of the Masculine and the Feminine to real men and women is relatively arbitrary” (*The Consumer Society* 97), but merely serves as a metaphorical display of that which is “not found in the history of suffering and oppression imputed to it - women's historical tribulations” (*Seduction* 6-7). This distinction is integral because it makes apparent two themes running through Baudrillard’s theoretical *oeuvre*: notably the very ‘real’ suffering of people across history, and the construction of a symbolic challenge to said violence.<sup>22</sup> In relation to the previous quote then, Baudrillard acknowledges the oppression of women throughout history but turns his focus to that of the feminine, not as what stands in for women (or that which has any real affinity with women), but as that which challenges the patriarchal construction of difference, hierarchization, and oppression. For Baudrillard, these institutional structures of oppression begin at the privileging of ‘real’ points of ontological certainty over the representation of those transcendent referents because “for if God is masculine, idols are always feminine” (*Seduction* 95). In this sense, Baudrillard’s challenge does not deny the space of ‘reality,’ but seeks to overcome the privileging of reality over the indeterminate. Baudrillard’s focus on the space of signs then simultaneously undermines the oppressive hierarchization of ‘reality’ over ‘unreality’ and opens

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<sup>22</sup> We may be reminded here of Baudrillard’s theorization of graffiti as “a savage offensive” [...] a new type of intervention in the city, no longer as a site of economic and political power, but as a space-time of the terrorist power of the media, signs and the dominant culture.” Graffiti is effective at countering state violence because it returns the voice that has been silenced in the “repression of the urban riots in the ghettos.” This play of signification illuminates the bridge that connects the real and the signifier, where both are capable of informing and challenging one another, and where neither hold a superior position over the other.

the possibility for the critical evaluation of those spaces condemned to the symbolic such as gender.

Baudrillard's theorization of gender, and the reduction of gender into either male or female, proceeds from his fascination with "transvestism." He argues that the transvestite plays with the "indistinctness of the sexes" in which he locates a highly subversive performance because in "order for sex to exist, signs must reduplicate biological being. Here the signs are separated from biology, and consequently the sexes no longer exist properly speaking" (12). There is an integral disturbance of the liberal humanist subject in the performative disturbance of gender identity in drag. This is because Baudrillard does not devalue the very real implications of representation on the creation of meaning, and also of its potential to disturb the localization of meaning or truth in a single point. When Ahmed suggests that Baudrillard does not understand that the "signs intrinsic to the production of the transvestite subject are material and determined" ("Beyond Humanism"), she invigorates and promotes the favoring of the material conditions of being as they manifest themselves corporeally. This is not to diminish the importance of the material conditions of existence; it is simply to affirm the role of representation on the formulation of identity. This is a point aptly illustrated by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* when she writes that "repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures both gay and straight may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories. The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy" (41). In fact, it is precisely by focusing on the play of signification, or the conceptual matrices formulated and negotiated by "copies," that we open the domain for a form of radical criticism that is able to adapt to the conditions set forth by the

simulacral apparatus that dominates today. On this particular point however, Ahmed is in agreement with Baudrillard as she writes that “I will not disagree with the analysis of transvestism (or sexuality more broadly) as a signifying system rather than as referential. I am quite in agreement with this textualization of the sexual subject” (“Beyond Humanism”). The point of departure for Ahmed is at the intersection of race, gender, and class and the simulacrum—where she believes Baudrillard to be solely interested. Baudrillard’s analysis, as argued by Ahmed, allows for the possibility of a challenge to subjectivity as it is traditionally understood as being a mastery of the material conditions of existence, and the corporeality of the body as assumed in the form of phenomenological subjectivity.<sup>23</sup> From here, I will proceed to craft out a Baudrillardian conception of posthuman subjectivity that maintains there not to be any certain attachment between signification as meaning, and the biological body.

### 3.4 Posthuman Subjectivity

Baudrillardian posthuman subjectivity may only adopt a resistive position if it remains on the periphery of subjectivity without fully embracing the potential of that subjectivity. This is beautifully elucidated in *A Thousand Plateaus*, when Deleuze and Guattari write that

Subjectification carries desire to such a point of excess and unloosening that it must either annihilate itself in a black hole or change planes. Destratify, open up to a new function, a *diagrammatic* function. Let consciousness cease to be its own double, and

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<sup>23</sup> Sara Ahmed’s book, *Queer Phenomenology*, takes up this problem extensively. However, she is not so much interested in disturbing the idea of a liberal humanist subject as she is in extending the privileges associated with that subject to those on the margins of society.

passion the double of one person for another. Make consciousness an experimentation in life, and passion a field of continuous intensities, an emission of particles-signs. Make the body without organs of consciousness and love. Use love and consciousness to abolish subjectification. [...] Desubjectify consciousness and passion. Are there not diagrammatic redundancies distinct from both signifying redundancies and subjective redundancies? Redundancies that would no longer be knots of arborescence but resumptions and upsurges in a rhizome? Stammer language, be a foreigner in one's own tongue (134).

Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of subjectivity presents a simultaneous imperative tone and a condemnation of the subjectivity that stands idle and just accepts the orders assigned onto them. For this reason, I do not subscribe to their approach to subjectivity, but see it as a brilliant point of departure for the "becoming" of a posthuman subjectivity that may be contradictory and is therefore elusive in its classification and designation.

The problem of subjectivity in the context of this thesis is addressed more directly in a short piece titled, "Introduction: Posthumanist subjectivities, or, coming after the subject..." by Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter. Callus and Herbrechter address subjectivity in the posthuman episteme by exploring the situatedness of that subjectivity. They write that "subjectivity is not a 'pick'n mix' tool-box, but an intellectual 'arsenal' that has many weapons" (247). This distinction is interesting in the context of my argument because of its immediate disdain for the appropriative practices mobilized in the name of posthumanism. Callus and Herbrechter's structuration of a posthuman subjectivity does not mobilize this "'pick'n mix' tool-box," which would be indicative of a posthuman discourse of becoming, but rather points to

a residue of a humanist subjectivity in the form of a mechanized “intellect.” This alternative is surely as problematic as the former, but it opens up a theoretical domain that Callus and Herbrechter expand on eloquently when they write that

while it is vital, of course to explore these new forms of subjectivity and question whether they are, in fact, still subjectivities, or to ask to what extent at least they change the notion of subjectivity, there is also a need to investigate what these developments and changes mean for the human subject, and whether the human subject turns, is about to turn or has turned into something else: something as yet relatively indistinct, amorphous even and – for want of a better term – ‘posthuman.’ (248)

Without wanting to do away with subjectivity completely, Callus and Herbrechter conceptualize the possibility of a radical re-evaluation. They are careful, however, to address the shortcomings of their brand of posthuman subjectivity when they ask if “posthumanism [is] sufficiently radical in its rethinking of subjectivity,” or if it “fall[s] back too readily on established repertoires?” (249). While they do not effectively resolve this dilemma in their short piece, they do present an interesting theory of subjectivity that aligns itself well with a Baudrillardian theory of subjectivity because, as they argue, “the singularity of the posthuman lies in its openness to whatever might happen to humanity, to ‘the genuine alternatives’ for the human and for subjectivity itself” (260). The human in this framework does not experience a total dissipation of subjectivity but is rather made subject to perpetual re-evaluations, in the endless flow of “whatever might happen,” of that subjectivity.

Callus and Herbrechter’s thesis opposes the humanist move to reduce subjectivity to a universal set of human characteristics. At this point, subjectivity ceases to resemble something

that can be contained under the aegis of a ‘human condition,’ but becomes an object--something outside of the self that comes then to spawn that very self in accordance with a broader socio-political apparatus. The relationship between the self and object is a mutually constitutive one for Callus and Herbrechter, and to take their theory seriously is to take the object seriously as a component in the formation of subjectivity. They posit that posthuman subjectivity, “in all the inscrutability of its hauntology, appears to announce, promise, conceal an other subjectivity: posthuman subjectivities, in their othering to the human, in which the human might yet, very paradoxically, be self-transgressingly itself – and in a willed way” (253). I believe that this rather enigmatic passage communicates the fallibility of subjectivity as a universal or transcendental human characteristic. Moreover, this passage demonstrates the cannibalistic tendency of any institutional structure that propels beyond its own means to control its power. Subjectivity, as a historically contingent facet of human interaction and cognition, experiences its own undoing precisely by its hyper-realization. The democratization of subjectivity in the realm of hyper-reality, or the conceptual world of the posthuman, destabilizes the privilege subjectivity wields.

The dissemination of subjectivity spreads it thin, to the point of vanishing in favour of posthuman subjectivities that mark both a shift in how we understand the human and subjectivity. Take, for instance, the plethora of opinions, perspectives, and ideas that permeate on the internet. This medium does not necessarily allow for the realization of one’s subjectivity—or individuality—but dilutes it across time and space in the instantaneous transmission of said subjectivity. The institutional logic of the internet, or our dromological *zeitgeist*, is to produce ideas and information as fast as possible, to the point that they reach, in Baudrillardian terms, “escape velocity” and are propelled beyond the purview of other subjects or individuals that are

necessary for the acknowledgement of there having been any idea, or speaking subject from which such idea emanates, at all. It is on this point that I turn back to Baudrillard to posit the role of resistance in relation to cannibalistic forms of absolute power that inevitably consume themselves as they manifest themselves through Eurocentric epistemologies of subjectivity and authority.

### 3.5 Resistance and Hybridity; or, a Postcolonial Posthumanism: From Baudrillard to Bhabha

In *Carnival and Cannibal*, Baudrillard argues that “hegemony [...] is accompanied by an extraordinary process of reversion, in which power is slowly undermined, devoured or ‘cannibalized’” (4). This subversion of institutional power does not necessarily derive from a willing and overt challenge to it. Rather, Baudrillard suggests that if

we consider what is really happening in this planetary confrontation, we see that the subjugated peoples, from the depths of their slavery, far from resembling their masters less and less and taking their liberatory revenge, have begun to resemble them more and more, have begun to mimic their model grotesquely, piling on thick the marks of their servitude –which is the other way of taking one’s revenge –a fatal strategy which we cannot term ‘victorious’ since it is lethal for both. (10-11)

Baudrillard states that we should resist adopting a challenge to power in the form of a radical subjectivity by which to challenge power, lest we risk being absorbed back into power’s ethos. A similar proposition is advanced by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, when he suggests that “[r]esistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention” (157), but that it can



manifest itself in the form of “hybridity” which is the “reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” (159). It does this by turning the “gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (160) that “terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition” (165). The subaltern persona in Bhabha’s discourse occupies then a “liminal moment of identification” that “produces a subversive strategy” through “movement and manoeuvre” without “teleology and holism” (265). Postcolonial subjectivities and posthuman subjectivities share a subversive resistance to the cultural domination of the code that Baudrillard conceptualizes as a broad cultural logic of oppression. It may even be said that Bhabha’s conception of hybridity proposes and informs a posthuman postcolonial subjectivity that neither holds a singular cultural identity, nor a clearly defined physical territory.

The points of contact between Jean Baudrillard and Homi Bhabha are sparse. However, both point to an interesting conceptualization of resistance that refuses to adopt a steady subject position from which to construct a counter-discourse. Counter-intuitively they propose that resistance may actually be effective when it assumes the literal form of the ‘eye of power.’ Effectively, the hegemonic locus of power is overturned by having its characteristics (re)presented and (re)displayed by those who have been denied agency in the eye of that very power. We are confronted here, however, with a problem: how can we reconcile a posthuman strategy of resistance that does not simply deploy the same discourse of becoming that Braidotti cherishes? To this question, I believe that the response lies in the concluding remarks in Callus and Herbechter’s article when they suggest that subjectivity can not necessarily be grasped and deployed at will, but that it is continually in flux, and is ultimately historically contingent. If we keep this proposition in mind, we may observe in Baudrillard a radical subversion to the privileging of the subject position. In other words, Baudrillard presents a theory in “which the

object is always presumed more cunning than the subject, and in which the object always ironically takes the detour of the subject. Faced with this potentialisation and redoubling of things, the subject must learn how to disappear in order to reappear as object” (*Revenge of the Crystal* 17).

### 3.6 Seducing the Cyborg

A critical Baudrillardian theory of the posthuman turn observes not the de-structuration of the human in relation to virtual technologies, advancements in linguistic science, or epistemological literacy, but the construction of an unchanging, universal human person in its hyperreal form. The form of a challenge, then, must operate to undermine this totalizing schema. I will call this challenge a *strategy of seduction*, and now propose a theory for its realization in the form of the cyborg.

A strategy is a pre-meditated organization of resources in the service of completing a future goal. In this sense, I am using the term ironically because I do not believe that seduction is a force that can be mobilized. Seduction floats and, as I have argued, its capabilities become manifest in its ability not to force change, but to court change. Seduction is then apolitical as it represents the antithesis to the fundamental doctrines of political discourse and authority, notably to the exertion of force to exert power over others. Seduction belongs to the realm of the symbolic and “we need a symbolic violence more powerful than any political violence.” (Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* 58). Moreover, seduction “represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe. The sovereignty of seduction is incommensurable with the possession of political [...] power” (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 8).

What is consistent between seduction and politics though, is a commitment to a basic synchrony at the level of their appearance. They change over time and adapt to match the cultural logic that pervades at that given moment. This formula is correct as long as we consider people in the form of broad groupings that are relatively homogenous and susceptible to a single form of force, and this is precisely where politics is the most comfortable. Seduction is not satisfied with this approach, and it acknowledges the plethora of cultural beliefs, attitudes, and doctrines that make up a homogenized people by piercing through their relational networks while never clearly becoming manifest. Seduction is to people what the luminiferous aether is to light—the condition for light’s possibility in movement but one that always remains undetected. It is this depth to seduction that is not accessible to the cyborg because, as Haraway notes, the cyborg has a “natural feel for united front politics” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 152).

In and of itself, this is nothing to elicit derision. Haraway is correct when she argues that the cyborg, as a political figure, challenges the institutional structures of capitalism and the patriarchy. Where the cyborg must be careful however, is in its acquiescence with a principle of unity, even though Haraway states her goal is to cultivate a “unity of people trying to resist world-wide intensification of domination” (155). In Haraway’s view, the cyborg’s ambiguity resists its facile deployment in the service of any particular unity. As in Baudrillard’s work where seduction diverts one from their identity, the cyborg resists identity, and this is where its potential lies. Once more, this is because the cyborg, like seduction, “is a challenge, a form which tends to unsettle someone in their identity” (Baudrillard, *Passwords* 22), and to wrest them from the clutches of dominant modes of identity creation that foreclose the possibility of change. This is where seduction and desire differ. The former corresponds to a totalizing logic of resistance, whereas the latter places the burden on the individual. The status of cyborg cannot

simply be wielded and discarded at will however, because if this were the case the cyborg would lose its radicality as indeterminacy and would enter the ranks among the other commodities that simulate, rather than satisfy, the possibility of change.

Seduction is always already between people, as a condition for their possibility as people with others. Seduction wrests people from the oppression of their own desires, rendering them closer to the image of objects than to subjects. Politics is opposed to seduction for this very reason as it is not interested in that which is hidden from people, but that which can be extracted from people. Seduction does not reduce, nor does it privilege appearance over disappearance. Seduction is in opposition to politics that calls on people to make themselves known, to make themselves seen. Seduction may also be characterized as, to borrow from Paul Virilio, an “aesthetic of disappearance.” On this point, however, Baudrillard makes a crucial distinction: “It’s not the same as disappearing within a network, where everyone becomes the clone or metastasis of something else; it’s a chain of interlinked forms, into which we disappear, where everything implies its own disappearance, it’s all about the art of disappearance” (*The Singular Objects of Architecture* 29). This disappearance corresponds rather poignantly to the Deleuzian/Guattarian rhizomatic flows of becoming that may ensue when the “faciality traits disappear” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 115). Baudrillard is hesitant to mobilize such a notion, but the sentiment is similar. Baudrillard’s approach to this possibility of disappearance is not in the service of constructing distinctions between points of territorialization and deterritorialization (which is not to say that Deleuze and Guattari neatly bifurcate these two plains either) but through the illustration of the suppression of this disappearance in the networked episteme.

Disappearance has, for a very long time, been something only a certain few could achieve. “Even in our own day, nine-tenths of humanity is outside history, outside a system of

interpretation and recording which was born with modern times and will disappear. History is a kind of luxury Western societies have afforded themselves. Its ‘their’ history” (Baudrillard, *Paroxysm* 21). For those marginalized by the systemic exploitation of their land, resources, and labour power, a call to disappearance is an impossible task; disappearance is a privilege. These modes of oppression attest to a disappearance of seduction, where certain sects of the world are prescribed a destiny by those wielders of authority. We may think of this in terms of the simulated representation of certain people, where their being rendered a caricature forces them to appear in one form or another—a form cemented in time. Seduction responds to this solidification of people by disturbing the crystallization of their identity and propelling them into the world of the unknown, outside of the pornographic reduction of people by the West. This is, to re-iterate, the same strategy elucidated by bell hooks because it does not pit power against power, but seduction against power; seduction against desire; seduction against provocation. In *Forget Foucault*, Baudrillard states that “we continually play on the process of disappearance in our relations to other,” and that this is “what seduction is, in the good sense” (119). With disappearance comes the dissipation of a selfhood—or a subjectivity—on which power, desire, and provocation reside; a deconstruction of the basic tenets of humanism.

In Baudrillard’s later work we can find constellations of a resistive theoretical framework that may not lend itself smoothly to a pragmatics of resistance, but that may certainly serve as a guiding strategy by which to conduct resistance: “To find the only adversary who will face this all-powerful hegemony, we must look for those beings that are strangers to will, exiled from dialogue and representation, exiled from knowledge and history” (*Agony* 104). A specific criterion that these exiles must satisfy though “may assume violent, anomalous, irrational aspects from the viewpoint of ‘enlightened’ thought -it may take ethnic, religious or linguistic forms, but

also, at the individual level, may find expression in character disorders or neuroses” (*Screened Out*, 156-7). This form of resistance has to be “seen as harbouring an original defiant reaction to the sway of the universal. Something which goes beyond the economic and the political. A kind of painful revisionism in respect of the established positions of modernity, in respect of the idea of progress and history - a kind of rejection not only of the famous global technostucture, but of the mental structure of the identification of all cultures and all continents in the concept of the universal” (157). Through a Baudrillardian lens of resistance, we must maintain that the cyborg emulates this form of ambiguity that does not lend itself to resistive schema by its being malleable, and therefore can be made productive, but that poses resistance to the totalizing framework of universal globalization by its being “anomalous.” The cyborg must lend itself to the play of signification that does not have an implicit attachment to any given cultural institution.

The cyborg must oppose unity if it is to respond to this hegemony in the form of a Baudrillardian “fatal strategy.” The cyborg must represent the in-betweenness of seduction, not by signifying seduction, as that would demand it assume a form, but by emulating the ambiguity of identity in the play of signification. The cyborg must then be opposed to “integral reality,” the “irreversible movement towards the totalization of the world” and instead adopt the “Dual Form: the reversibility internal to the irreversible movement of the real” (*The Intelligence of Evil* 21). The cyborg must emulate contradiction in opposition to the total operativity of integral reality. These criteria for its resistive potential make it difficult to ground because it does not smoothly lend itself to any given political pragmatism. In fact, it would be absurd to attach to the cyborg a political end point, as that would disturb the cyborg as cyborg, and it would become a human, bound up in the tyranny of solidification, an incarceration through presentation.

### 3.7 The Cyborg and the return of Illusion

A Baudrillardian cyborg would not be attuned to the present moment in the way that Haraway associated it with technological development. The cyborg is that which is indicative of, what I will hesitantly call, a pre-human human condition as much as a post-human human condition. When Haraway states that the cyborg is our “ontology,” I do not believe her to be incorrect, but I would suggest that the cyborg-as-human does not solely arise from the paradigmatic shift from the human to the posthuman, or from the factory to the computer lab. In fact, the figure of the cyborg as indeterminate, contradictory, and in-between shares a greater affinity with the times of old that Baudrillard suggests were governed by “illusion.” A Baudrillardian reading of the cyborg places it at the outset of humanity, not at its end. It is for this reason that the cyborg may resist the “the genetic reparation of all the deficits of the human species” (*The Intelligence of Evil*, 152). The contemporary phenomenon of hyperreality, or “integral reality,” is a systemic strategy to convince us that we have not lost the illusion of seduction and signification. Just as Baudrillard proclaimed that Disneyland is a strategy to hide the fact that all of America is Disneyland, we bombard ourselves with media images to convince ourselves of our maintained relationship with signification—something that is in constant flux. The cyborg, if maintained in its ambiguity, injects a degree of the unknow into the sphere of hyperreality, making apparent the distinction between hyperreality and illusion.

The cyborg is a trace of the illusion that conducted the world prior to the onset of “integral reality.” However, Baudrillard makes a rather intriguing claim regarding this integral reality when he states that it “brings the spectre of radical illusion into view, or back into view”

(186). Given that the cyborg is a trace of a time long past, this statement demands the dialectical re-evaluation of the relationship between the cyborg and integral reality. With this passage, Baudrillard makes clear that there is a Hegelian connection between what I have illustrated as a Baudrillardian cyborg and “integral reality.” This exposes a commitment to a dialectical configuration that Baudrillard, as early as 1983 with *Fatal Strategies*, claims to have done away with. In this way, we must push Baudrillard’s thought beyond his own (secret) commitment to dialectics. Or, perhaps Baudrillard took seriously Foucault’s plea that “We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 235). Either way, a challenge to the advent of integral reality in the form of the cyborg would not be satisfied with their dialectical progression. Provided that we take seriously Baudrillard’s suggestion that we are no longer guided by a dialectical configuration, we must be prepared to drive the cyborg to be more ambiguous, more antagonistic, more contradictory in response to a system that is growing “an unlimited operational project whereby everything becomes real, everything becomes visible and transparent, everything is 'liberated'” (*The Intelligence of Evil*, 17). Alternatively, in Baudrillard’s words, “we must fight for the criminal imperfection of the world. Against this artificial paradise of technicity and virtuality, against the attempt to build a world completely positive, rational, and true we must save the traces of the illusory world’s definitive opacity and mystery” (*The Vital Illusion* 74). The cyborg is a powerful ally in the drive toward illusion because it exists between worlds, between the hyper-rational world of scientific achievement, and the world of humanity in all its enigmatic glory.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, ambiguity is a privilege. Many people rely on their identity as a survival tactic. To this point, I would like to extend my theory of the cyborg onto



those who force the solidification of otherness in the form of an oppressive identity. This strategy is difficult however, because it demands a willingness on the part of the oppressor to adopt and take seriously the doctrine of ambiguity indicative of the cyborg. The cyborg must then be in the service of seducing those that hold power, not merely in the service of those who have been victim to it. This reversal turns the tables of responsibility from the oppressed to that of the oppressor. The cyborg may be able to accomplish this task if it, in accordance with Mauss' theory of the gift, presents a challenge to disappear on the part of the oppressors to which they must respond with an equal or greater counter-gift: another call to disappear. However, this strategy is only possible if the cyborg is committed to seduction, or the principle of disappearance that "draws the other into one's area of weakness, which is also his or her area of weakness" (*Seduction*, 83). The contradictory ontology of the cyborg reveals that it has no identity to lose. This is how it will oppose the violent determinacy of power and integral reality as it manifests itself today. This is why we must resist the classification of the cyborg. Let us hope, then, that the cyborg is not immune to seduction.

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