Symbolic exchange is no longer the organising principle of modern society. Of course, the symbolic haunts modern social institutions in the form of their own death. Indeed, since the symbolic no longer rules these social forms, they experience it only as this haunting, and as a demand forever blocked by the law of value. Even though a certain idea of revolution has, since Marx, attempted to find a way past the law of value, it long since became a revolution in accordance with the Law. Even psychoanalysis gravitates around this haunting, which it fends off while at the same time circumscribing it within an individualised unconscious, thus reducing it, under the Law of the Father, to the obsessional fear of castration and the Signifier. Always the Law. However, beyond the topologies and economies, both libidinal and political, gravitating around a materialist or desiring-production on the stage of value, an outline of social relations emerges, based on the extermination of value. For us, the model of this relation harks back to primitive formations, but this radical utopia is slowly beginning to intrude at every level of contemporary society; this intoxicating revolt no longer has anything to do with the laws of history, nor even – but we will have to wait for a later stage for this to appear, since it is a recent phantasy – with the ‘liberation’ of a ‘desire’.

In this light, other theoretical events, such as Saussure’s anagrams and Mauss’s gift-exchange, assume cardinal importance. In the long run, these hypotheses are more radical than Marx’s or Freud’s, whose interpretations are censored by precisely their imperialism. The anagrams or gift-exchanges are not merely transitory phases within the disciplines of linguistics and anthropology, nor are they inferior forms compared to the vast machinations of the unconscious and the revolution. Here one predominant form emerges, from which Marxism and psychoanalysis, though they may not be aware of it, derive. This form is equally dismissive of political and libidinal economy, outlining instead a beyond of value, a beyond of the law, a beyond of repression and a beyond of the unconscious. This is taking place here and now.

When Freud proposes the theory of the death drive, this is the one theoretical event of the same order as the anagram and the gift, provided we radicalise it against Freud himself. Indeed we must switch the targets of each of these three theories, and turn Mauss against Mauss, Saussure against Saussure and Freud against Freud. The principle of reversibility (the counter-gift) must be imposed against all the economistic, psycholo-
gistic and structuralist interpretations for which Mauss paved the way. The Saussure of the Anagrams must be set against Saussurian linguistics, against even his own restricted hypotheses concerning the anagram. The Freud of the death drive must be pitched against every previous psychoanalytic edifice, and even against Freud's version of the death drive.

At the price of paradox and theoretical violence, we witness that the three hypotheses describe, in their own respective fields (but this propriety is precisely what the general form of the symbolic annihilates), a functional principle sovereignly outside and antagonistic to our economic 'reality principle'.

Everywhere, in every domain, a single form predominates: reversibility, cyclical reversal and annulment put an end to the linearity of time, language, economic exchange, accumulation and power. Hence the reversibility of the gift in the counter-gift, the reversibility of exchange in the sacrifice, the reversibility of time in the cycle, the reversibility of production in destruction, the reversibility of life in death, and the reversibility of every term and value of the langue in the anagram. In every domain it assumes the form of extermination and death, for it is the form of the symbolic itself. Neither mystical nor structural, the symbolic is inevitable.

The reality principle corresponded to a certain stage of the law of value. Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacrums. We must therefore reconstruct the entire genealogy of the law of value and its simulacrums in order to grasp the hegemony and the enchantment of the current system. A structural revolution of value. This genealogy must cover political economy, where it will appear as a second-order simulacrum, just like all those that take place on the real: the real of production, the real of signification, whether conscious or unconscious.

Capital no longer belongs to the order of political economy: it operates with political economy as its simulated model. The entire apparatus of the commodity law of value is absorbed and recycled in the larger apparatus of the structural law of value, thus becoming part of the third order of simulacrums (see below). Political economy is thus assured a second life, an eternity, within the confines of an apparatus in which it has lost all its strict determinacy, but maintains an effective presence as a system of reference for simulation. It was exactly the same for the previous apparatus -- the natural law of value -- which the system of political economy and the market law of value also appropriated as their imaginary system of reference ('Nature'): 'nature' leads a ghostly existence as use-value at the core of exchange-value. But on the next twist of the spiral, use-value is seized as an alibi within the dominant order of the code. Each configuration of value is seized by the next in a higher order of simulacrums. And each phase of value integrates the prior apparatus into its own as a phantom reference, a puppet reference, a simulated reference.

A revolution separates each order from its successor: these are the only genuine revolutions. We are in the third order, which is the order no longer of the real, but of the hyperreal. It is only here that theories and practices, themselves floating and indeterminate, can reach the real and beat it to death.

Contemporary revolutions are indexed on the immediately prior state of the system. They are all buttressed by a nostalgia for the resurrection of the real in all its forms, that is, as second-order simulacra: dialectics, use-value, the transparency and finality of production, the 'liberation' of the unconscious, of repressed meaning (the signifier, or the signified named 'desire'), and so on. All these liberations provide the ideal content for the system to devour in its successive revolutions, and which it brings subtly back to life as mere phantasms of revolution. These revolutions are only transitions towards generalised manipulation. At the stage of the aleatory processes of control, even revolution becomes meaningless.

The rational, referential, historical and functional machines of consciousness correspond to industrial machines. The aleatory, non-referential, transferential, indeterminate and floating machines of the unconscious respond to the aleatory machines of the code. But even the unconscious is reabsorbed by this operation, and it has long since lost its own reality principle to become an operational simulacrum. At the precise point that its psychical reality principle merges into its psychoanalytic reality principle, the unconscious, like political economy, also becomes a model of simulation.

The systemic strategy is merely to invoke a number of floating values in this hyperreality. This is as true of the unconscious as it is of money and theories. Value rules according to the indiscernible order of generation by means of models, according to the infinite chains of simulation.

Cybernetic operativity, the genetic code, the aleatory order of mutation, the uncertainty principle, etc., succeed determinate, objectivist science, and the dialectical view of history and consciousness. Even critical theory, along with the revolution, turns into a second-order simulacrum, as do all determinate processes. The deployment of third-order simulacra sweeps all this away, and to attempt to reinstate dialectics, 'objective' contradictions, and so on, against them would be a futile political regression. You can't fight the aleatory by imposing finalities, you can't fight against programmed and molecular dispersion with prises de conscience and dialectical sublation, you can't fight the code with political economy, nor with 'revolution'. All these outdated weapons (including those we find in first-order simulacrum, in the ethics and metaphysics of man and nature, use-value, and other liberatory systems of reference) are gradually neutralised by a higher-order general system. Everything that filters into the non-finality of the space-time of the code, or that attempts to intervene in it, is
disconnected from its own ends, disintegrated and absorbed. This is the well-known effect of recuperation, manipulation, of circulating and recycling at every level. ‘All dissent must be of a higher logical type than that to which it is opposed’ (Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure* [London: Tavistock, 1977], p. xxvii). Is it at least possible to find an even match to oppose third-order simulacra? Is there a theory or a practice which is subversive because it is more aleatory than the system itself, an indeterminate subversion which would be to the order of the code what the revolution was to the order of political economy? Can we fight DNA? Certainly not by means of the class struggle. Perhaps simulacra of a higher logical (or illogical) order could be invented: beyond the current third order, beyond determinacy and indeterminacy. But would they still be simulacra? Perhaps death and death alone, the reversibility of death, belongs to a higher order than the code. Only symbolic disorder can bring about an interruption in the code.

Every system that approaches perfect operativity simultaneously approaches its downfall. When the system says ‘A is A’, or ‘two times two equals four’, it approaches absolute power and total absurdity; that is, immediate and probable subversion. A gentle push in the right place is enough to bring it crashing down. We know the potential of tautology when it reinforces the system’s claim to perfect sphericity (Ubu Roi’s belly).

Identity is untenable: it is death, since it fails to inscribe its own death. Every closed or metastable, functional or cybernetic system is shadowed by mockery and instantaneous subversion (which no longer takes the detour through long dialectical labour), because all the system’s inertia acts against it. Ambivalence awaits the most advanced systems, that, like Leibniz’s binary God, have deified their functional principle. The fascination they exert, because it derives from a profound denial such as we find in fetishism, can be instantaneously reversed. Hence their fragility increases in proportion to their ideal coherence. These systems, even when they are based on radical indeterminacy (the loss of meaning), fall prey, once more, to meaning. They collapse under the weight of their own monstrosity, like fossilised dinosaurs, and immediately decompose. This is the fatality of every system committed by its own logic to total perfection and therefore to a total defeciveness, to absolute infallibility and therefore irrevocable breakdown: the aim of all bound energies is their own death. This is why the only strategy is catastrophic, and not dialectical at all. Things must be pushed to the limit, where quite naturally they collapse and are inverted. At the peak of value we are closest to ambivalence, at the pinnacle of coherence we are closest to the abyss of corruption which haunts the reduplicated signs of the code. Simulation must go further than the system. Death must be played against death: a radical tautology that makes the system’s own logic the ultimate weapon. The only strategy against the hyperrealist system is some form of pataphysics, ‘a science of imaginary solutions’; that is, a science-fiction of the system’s reversal against itself at the extreme limit of simulation, a reversible simulation in a hyperlogic of death and destruction.¹

The symbolic demands meticulous reversibility. *Ex-terminate* every term, abolish value in the term’s revolution against itself: that is the only symbolic violence equivalent to and triumphant over the structural violence of the code.

A revolutionary dialectic corresponded to the commodity law of value and its equivalents; only the scrupulous reversion of death corresponds to the code’s indeterminacy and the structural law of value.²

Strictly speaking, nothing remains for us to base anything on. All that remains for us is theoretical violence – speculation to the death, whose only method is the radicalisation of hypotheses. Even the code and the symbolic remain terms of simulation: it must be possible to extract them, one by one, from discourse.

Notes

1. Death is always equally what waits at the term of the system, and the symbolic *extermination* that stalks the system itself. It is not that there are two words to designate the finality of death internal to the system, the one in-scribed everywhere in its operational logic, and the other a radical counter-finality ex-scribed on the system as such, but which haunts it everywhere: only the term of death, and it alone, figures on both sides. This ambiguity can already be discerned in the Freudian death-drive. Rather than an ambiguity, however, it simply translates the proximity of complete perfection and immediate defeciveness.

2. Death ought never to be understood as the real event that affects a subject or a body, but as a form in which the determinacy of the subject and of value is lost. The demand of reversibility puts an end to determinacy and indeterminacy at the same time. It puts an end to bound energies in stable oppositions, and is therefore in substantial agreement with theories of flows and intensities, whether libidinal or schizo. The unbinding of energies is, however, the very form of the current system, which consists in a strategic drift of value. The system can be connected and disconnected, but all the freed energies will one day return to it: this is how the concepts of entropy and intensity come about. Capital is an energetic and intense system. Hence the impossibility of distinguishing the libidinal economy from the political economy (see Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* [tr. I.H. Grant, London: Athlone, 1992]) of the system of value; and the impossibility of distinguishing capitalist schiz offrom revolutionary schiz (see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* I [tr. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H.R. Lane, London: Athlone, 1984]). For the system is master: like God it can bind or unbind energies; what it is incapable of (and what it can no longer avoid) is reversibility. Reversibility alone therefore, rather than unbinding or drifting, is fatal to it. This is exactly what the term symbolic ‘exchange’ means.
1

THE END OF PRODUCTION

The Structural Revolution of Value

Saussure located two dimensions to the exchange of terms of the langue, which he assimilated to money. A given coin must be exchangeable against a real good of some value, while on the other hand it must be possible to relate it to all the other terms in the monetary system. More and more, Saussure reserves the term value for this second aspect of the system: every term can be related to every other, their relativity, internal to the system and constituted by binary oppositions. This definition is opposed to the other possible definition of value: the relation of every term to what it designates, of each signifier to its signified, like the relation of every coin with what it can be exchanged against. The first aspect corresponds to the structural dimension of language, the second to its functional dimension. Each dimension is separate but linked, which is to say that they mesh and cohere. This coherence is characteristic of the 'classical' configuration of the linguistic sign, under the rule of the commodity law of value, where designation always appears as the finality of the structural operation of the langue. The parallel between this 'classical' stage of signification and the mechanics of value in material production is absolute, as in Marx's analysis: use-value plays the role of the horizon and finality of the system of exchange-values. The first qualifies the concrete operation of the commodity in consumption (a moment parallel to designation in the sign), the second relates to the exchangeability of any commodity for any other under the law of equivalence (a moment parallel to the structural organisation of the sign). Both are dialectically linked throughout Marx's analyses and define a rational configuration of production, governed by political economy.

A revolution has put an end to this 'classical' economics of value, a revolution of value itself, which carries value beyond its commodity form into its radical form.

This revolution consists in the dislocation of the two aspects of the law of value, which were thought to be coherent and eternally bound as if by a natural law. Referential value is annihilated, giving the structural play of value the upper hand. The structural dimension becomes autonomous by excluding the referential dimension, and is instituted upon the death of reference. The systems of reference for production, signification, the affect, substance and history, all this equivalence to a 'real' content,

loading the sign with the burden of 'utility', with gravity – its form of representative equivalence – all this is over with. Now the other stage of value has the upper hand, a total relativity, general commutation, combination and simulation – simulation, in the sense that, from now on, signs are exchanged against each other rather than against the real (it is not that they just happen to be exchanged against each other, they do so on condition that they are no longer exchanged against the real). The emancipation of the sign: remove this 'archaic' obligation to designate something and it finally becomes free, indifferent and totally indeterminate, in the structural or combinatory play which succeeds the previous rule of determinate equivalence. The same operation takes place at the level of labour power and the production process: the annihilation of any goal as regards the contents of production allows the latter to function as a code, and the monetary sign, for example, to escape into infinite speculation, beyond all reference to a real of production, or even to a gold-standard. The flotation of money and signs, the flotation of 'needs' and ends of production, the flotation of labour itself – the commutability of every term is accompanied by speculation and a limitless inflation (and we really have total liberty – no duties, disaffection and general disenchantment; but this remains a magic, a sort of magical obligation which keeps the sign chained up to the real, capital has freed signs from this 'naïveté' in order to deliver them into pure circulation). Neither Saussure nor Marx had any presentiment of all this: they were still in the golden age of the dialectic of the sign and the real, which is at the same time the 'classical' period of capital and value. Their dialectic is in shreds, and the real has died of the shock of value acquiring this fantastic autonomy. Determinacy is dead, indeterminacy holds sway. There has been an extermination (in the literal sense of the word) of the real of production and the real of signification.¹

I indicated this structural revolution of the law of value in the term 'political economy of the sign'.² This term, however, can only be regarded as makeshift, for the following reasons:

1. Does this remain a political-economic question? Yes, in that it is always a question of value and the law of value. However, the mutation that affects it is so profound and so decisive, the content of political economy so thoroughly changed, indeed annihilated, that the term is nothing more than an allusion. Moreover, it is precisely political to the extent that it is always the destruction of social relations governed by the relevant value. For a long time, however, it has been a matter of something entirely different from economics.

2. The term 'sign' has itself only an allusive value. Since the structural law of value affects signification as much as it does everything else, its form is not that of the sign in general, but that of a certain organisation which is that of the code. The code only governs certain signs however. Just as the commodity law of value does not, at a given moment, signify just any determinant instance of material production, neither, conversely, does the
structural law of value signify any pre-eminence of the sign whatever. This illusion derives from the fact that Marx developed the one in the shadow of the commodity, while Saussure developed the other in the shadow of the linguistic sign. But this illusion must be shattered. The commodity law of value is a law of equivalences, and this law operates throughout every sphere: it equally designates the equivalence in the configuration of the sign, where one signifier and one signified facilitate the regulated exchange of a referential content (the other parallel modality being the linearity of the signifier, contemporaneous with the linear and cumulative time of production).

The classical law of value then operates simultaneously in every instance (language, production, etc.), despite these latter remaining distinct according to their sphere of reference.

Conversely, the structural law of value signifies the indeterminacy of every sphere in relation to every other, and to their proper content (also therefore the passage from the determinant sphere of signs to the indeterminacy of the code). To say that the sphere of material production and that of signs exchange their respective contents is still too wide of the mark: they literally disappear as such and lose their specificity along with their determinacy, to the benefit of a form of value, of a much more general assemblage, where designation and production are annihilated.

The 'political economy of the sign' was also consequent upon an extension of the commodity law of value and its confirmation at the level of signs, whereas the structural configuration of value simply and simultaneously puts an end to the regimes of production, political economy, representation and signs. With the code, all this collapses into simulation. Strictly speaking, neither the classical economy nor the political economy of the sign ceases to exist: they lead a secondary existence, becoming a sort of phantom principle of dissuasion.

The end of labour. The end of production. The end of political economy. The end of the signifier/signified dialectic which facilitates the accumulation of knowledge and meaning, the linear syntagma of cumulative discourse. And at the same time, the end of the exchange-value/use-value dialectic which is the only thing that makes accumulation and social production possible. The end of the linear dimension of discourse. The end of the linear dimension of the commodity. The end of the classical era of the sign. The end of the era of production.

It is not the revolution which puts an end to all this, it is capital itself which abolishes the determination of the social according to the means of production, substitutes the structural form for the commodity form of value, and currently controls every aspect of the system's strategy.

This historical and social mutation is legible at every level. In this way the era of simulation is announced everywhere by the commutability of formerly contradictory or dialectically opposed terms. Everywhere we see the same 'genesis of simulacra': the commutability of the beautiful and the ugly in fashion, of the left and the right in politics, of the true and the false in every media message, the useful and the useless at the level of objects, nature and culture at every level of signification. All the great humanist criteria of value, the whole civilisation of moral, aesthetic and practical judgement are effaced in our system of images and signs. Everything becomes undecidable, the characteristic effect of the domination of the code, which everywhere rests on the principle of neutralisation, of indifference. This is the generalised brothel of capital, a brothel not for prostitution, but for substitution and commutation.

This process, which has for a long time been at work in culture, art, politics, and even in sexuality (in the so-called 'superstructural' domains), today affects the economy itself, the whole so-called 'infrastructural' field. Here the same indeterminacy holds sway. And, of course, with the loss of determination of the economic, we also lose any possibility of conceiving it as the determinant agency.

Since for two centuries historical determination has been built up around the economic (since Marx in any case), it is there that it is important to grasp the interruption of the code.

The End of Production

We are at the end of production. In the West, this form coincides with the proclamation of the commodity law of value, that is to say, with the reign of political economy. First, nothing is produced, strictly speaking: everything is deduced, from the grace (God) or beneficence (nature) of an agency which releases or withholds its riches. Value emanates from the reign of divine or natural qualities (which for us have become retrospectively confused). The Physiocrats still saw the cycles of land and labour in this way, as having no value of their own. We may wonder, then, whether there is a genuine law of value, since this law is dispatch without attaining rational expression. Its form cannot be separated from the inexhaustible referential substance to which it is bound. If there is a law here, it is, in contrast to the commodity law, a natural law of value.

A mutation shakes this edifice of a natural distribution or dispensing of wealth as soon as value is produced, as its reference becomes labour, and its law of equivalence is generalised to every type of labour. Value is now assigned to the distinct and rational operation of human (social) labour. It is measurable, and, in consequence, so is surplus-value.

The critique of political economy begins with social production or the mode of production as its reference. The concept of production alone allows us, by means of an analysis of that unique commodity called labour power, to extract a surplus (a surplus-value) which controls the rational dynamics of capital as well as its beyond, the revolution.

Today everything has changed again. Production, the commodity form, labour power, equivalence and surplus-value, which together formed the outline of a quantitative, material and measurable configuration, are now things of the past. Productive forces outlined another reference which,
although in contradiction with the relations of production, remained a reference, that of social wealth. An aspect of production still supports both a social form called capital and its internal critique called Marxism. Now, revolutionary demands are based on the abolition of the commodity law of value.

Now we have passed from the commodity law of value to the structural law of value, and this coincides with the obliteration of the social form known as production. Given this, are we still within a capitalist mode? It may be that we are in a hyper-capitalist mode, or in a very different order. Is the form of capital bound to the law of value in general, or to some specific form of the law of value (perhaps we are really already within a socialist mode? Perhaps this metamorphosis of capital under the sign of the structural law of value is merely its socialist outcome? Oh dear . . .)? If the life and death of capital are staked on the commodity law of value, if the revolution is staked on the mode of production, then we are within neither capital nor revolution. If this latter consists in a liberation of the social and generic production of man, then there is no longer any prospect of a revolution since there is no more production. If, on the other hand, capital is a mode of domination, then we are always in its midst. This is because the structural law of value is the purest, most illegible form of social domination, like surplus-value. It no longer has any references within a dominant class or a relation of forces, it works without violence, entirely reabsorbed without any trace of bloodshed into the signs which surround us, operative everywhere in the code in which capital finally holds its purest discourses, beyond the dialectics of industry, trade and finance, beyond the dialectics of class which it held in its ‘productive’ phase – a symbolic violence inscribed everywhere in signs, even in the signs of the revolution.

The structural revolution of value eliminated the basis of the ‘Revolution’. The loss of reference fatally affected first the revolutionary systems of reference, which can no longer be found in any social substance of production, nor in the certainty of a reversal in any truth of labour power. This is because labour is not a power, it has become one sign amongst many. Like every other sign, it produces and consumes itself. It is exchanged against non-labour, leisure, in accordance with a total equivalence, it is commutable with every other sector of everyday life. No more or less ‘alienated’, it is no longer a unique, historical ‘praxis’ giving rise to unique social relations. Like most practices, it is now only a set of signing operations. It becomes part of contemporary life in general, that is, it is framed by signs. It is no longer even the suffering of historical prostitution which used to play the role of the contrary promise of final emancipation (or, as in Lyotard, as the space of the workers’ enjoyment [souffrance] which fulfils an unremitting desire in the abjection of value and the rule of capital). None of this remains true. Sign-form seizes labour and rids it of every historical or libidinal significance, and absorbs it in the process of its own reproduction: the operation of the sign, behind the empty allusion to what it designates, is to replicate itself. In the past, labour was used to designate the reality of a social production and a social objective of accumulating wealth. Even capital and surplus-value exploited it – precisely where it retained a use-value for the expanded reproduction of capital and its final destruction. It was shot through with finality anyway – if the worker is absorbed in the pure and simple reproduction of his labour power, it is not true that the process of production is experienced as senseless repetition. Labour revolutionises society through its very abjection, as a commodity whose potential always exceeds pure and simple reproduction of value.

Today this is no longer the case since labour is no longer productive but has become reproductive of the assignation to labour which is the general habit of a society which no longer knows whether or not it wishes to produce. No more myths of production and no more contents of production: national balance sheets now merely retrace a numerical and statistical growth devoid of meaning, an inflation of the signs of accountancy over which we can no longer even project the phantasy of the collective will. The paths of growth itself is dead, since no-one believes any longer in the paths of production, whose final, paranoid and panic-stricken tunescence it was. Today these signs are detumescent. It remains, however, more necessary than ever to reproduce labour as a social ritual [affectation], as a reflex, as morality, as consensus, as regulation, as the reality principle. The reality principle of the code, that is: an immense ritual of the signs of labour extends over society in general – since it reproduces itself, it matters little whether or not it produces. It is much more effective to socialize by means of rituals and signs than by the bound energies of production. You are asked only to become socialized, not to produce or to excel yourself (this classical ethic now arouses suspicion instead). You are asked only to consider value, according to the structural definition which here takes on its full social significance, as one term in relation to others, to function as a sign in the general scenario of production, just as labour and production now function only as signs, as terms commutable with non-labour, consumption, communication, etc. – a multiple, incessant, twisting relation across the entire network of other signs. Labour, once voided of its energy and substance (and generally disinvested), is given a new role as the model of social simulation, bringing all the other categories along with it into the aleatory sphere of the code.

An unnervingly strange state of affairs: this sudden plunge into a sort of secondary existence, separated from you by all the opacity of a previous life, where there was a familiarity and an intimacy in the traditional process of labour. Even the concrete reality of exploitation, the violent sociality of labour, is familiar. This has all gone now, and is due not so much to the operative abstraction of the process of labour, so often described, as to the passage of every signification of labour into an operational field where it becomes a floating variable, dragging the whole imaginary of a previous life along with it.
beneath commodities from the outset: to remove indeterminacy from nature (and man) in order to submit it to the determinacy of value. This is confirmed in the constructionist mania for bulldozers, motorways, 'infrastructures', and in the civilising mania of the era of production, a mania for leaving no fragment unproduced, for countersigning everything with production, without even the hope of an excess of wealth. Producing in order to mark, producing in order to reproduce the marked man. What is production today apart from this terrorism of the code? This is as clear for us as it was for the first industrial generations, who dealt with machines as with an absolute enemy, harbingers of total destructuration, before the comforting dream of a historical dialectic of production developed. The Luddite practices which arose everywhere to some extent, the savagery of attacking the instrument of production (primarily attacking itself as the productive force), endemic sabotage and defection bear lengthy testimony to the fragility of the productive order. Smashing machines is an aberrant act if they are the means of production, if any ambiguity remains over their future use-value. If, however, the ends of this production collapse, then the respect due to the means of production also collapses, and the machines appear as their true end, as direct and immediate operational signs of the social relation to death on which capital is nourished. Nothing then stands in the way of their destruction. In this sense, the Luddites were much clearer than Marx on the impact of the irruption of the industrial order, and today, at the catastrophic end of this process, to which Marx himself has misled us in the dialectical euphoria of productive forces, they have in some sense exacted their revenge.

We do not mean to invoke the prestige that may attach to a particular type of labour when we say that labour is a sign, nor even the sense of improvement signified by wage labour for the Algerian immigrant in relation to his tribal community, or for the Moroccan kid from the High Atlas Mountains whose only dream is to work for Simca, or for women in our own society. In this case, labour refers to a strict value: betterment or a different status. On the contemporary stage, labour no longer emerges from this referential definition of the sign. There is no longer any proper signification of a particular type of labour or of labour in general, but a system of labour where jobs are exchanged. No more 'right man in the right place', an old adage of the scientific idealism of production. There are no more interchangeable but indispensable individuals in a determinate labour process, since the labour process itself has become interchangeable: mobile, polyvalent and intermittent structures of absorption, indifferent to every object and even to labour itself, when understood according to its classical operation and applied solely to localise each individual within a social nexus where nothing converges except perhaps within the immensity of this operational matrix, an indifferent paradigm which identifies every individual according to a shared radical, or a syntagma which links them into an indefinite combinatorial mode.

Labour (even in the guise of leisure), like a primary repression, pervades
every aspect of life in the form of a control, a permanent occupation of spaces and times regulated according to an omnipresent code. Wherever there are people, they must be fixed, whether in schools, factories, on the beach, in front of the TV, or being retrained. Generalised and permanent mobilisation. Such labour is not, however, productive in the sense of ‘original’: it is nothing more than the mirror of society, its imaginary, its fantastic reality principle. Perhaps its death drive.

This is the tendency of every current strategy that turns around labour: ‘job enrichment’, flexitime, mobility, retraining, continuing education, autonomy, worker-management, decentralisation of the labour process, even the Californian utopia of domestic cybernetics. Your quotidian roots are no longer savagely ripped up in order to hand you over to the machine – you, your childhood, your habits, your relationships, your unconscious drives, and even your refusal to work are integrated into it. You will easily find a place for yourself amongst all of this, a personalised job, or, failing that, there is a welfare provision calculated according to your personal needs. In any case, you will no longer be abandoned, since it is essential that everyone be a terminal for the entire system, an insignificant terminal, but a term none the less – not an inarticulate cry, but a term of the langue and at the terminus of the entire structural network of the language. The very choice of work, the utopia of a tailor-made job, signifies that the die is cast, that the structure of absorption is total. Labour power is no longer brutally bought and sold, it is designed, marketed and turned into a commodity – production re-enters the sign system of consumption.

An initial step of this analysis was to conceive the sphere of consumption as an extension of the sphere of the forces of production. We must now do the reverse. The entire sphere of production, labour and the forces of production must be conceived as collapsing into the sphere of ‘consumption’, understood as the sphere of a generalised axiomatic, a coded exchange of signs, a general lifestyle. In this way knowledge, the sciences, attitudes (D. Verres, *Le discours du capitalisme* [Paris: L’herne, 1971], p. 36: ‘Why not consider the attitudes of the workforce as one of the resources to be managed by the boss?’), but also sexuality and the body, the imagination (ibid., p. 74: ‘The imagination is all that remains bound to the pleasure principle, whereas the psychical apparatus is subordinated to the reality principle’ (Freud). We must put a stop to this waste. The imagination should be realised as a force of production, it should be invested. The slogan of technocracy is: ‘Power to the Imagination!’). The same goes for the unconscious, the revolution, and so on. True, all this is in the process of being ‘invested’ and absorbed into the sphere of value, but not so much market value as accountable value; that is, it is not mobilised for the sake of production, but indexed, allocated, summoned to play the part of a functional variable. It has become not so much a force of production as several pieces on the chessboard of the code, caught in the same game-rules. The axiom of production now tends to be reduced to factors, the axiom of the code reduces everything to a variable. One leads to equations and balance sheets of forces, and the other tends towards mobile and aleatory sets, which neutralise whatever escapes or resists them by connection and not by annexation.

This goes much further than Taylorism, or the Scientific Organisation of Labour (SOL), but its spectre marks an essential milestone of investment by the code. Two phases can be distinguished.

The ‘pre-scientific’ phase of the industrial system, characterised by maximum exploitation of labour power, is succeeded by the phase of machinery and the preponderance of fixed capital, where ‘objectified labour appears not only in the form of product, or of the product employed as the means of labour, but in the form of the force of production itself’ (Marx, *Grundrisse* [tr. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973], p. 694). This accumulation of objectified labour which supplants living labour as a force of production is subsequently multiplied to infinity by the accumulation of knowledge: ‘The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital’ (ibid., p. 694).

In the phase of machinery, the scientific apparatus, the collective labourer and the SOL, the ‘production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity’. (ibid., p. 693). There is no longer any ‘original’ force of production, only a general machinery transforming the forces of production into capital; or, rather, a machinery which manufactures both the force of production and labour power. The whole social apparatus of labour is forestalled by this operation. The collective machinery has begun to produce social goals directly, and this is what produces production.

The hegemony of dead labour over living labour. Primitive accumulation merely accumulates dead labour to the point that it can reabsorb living labour. Or, in other words, it becomes capable of controlling the production of living labour for its own ends. This is why the end of primitive accumulation marks the decisive turning point of political economy: the transition to the preponderance of dead labour, to crystallised social relations incarnated in dead labour, weighing down on society in its entirety as the code of domination itself. Marx’s greatest error was to have retained a belief in the innocence of machines, the technical process and science – all of which were supposedly capable of becoming living social labour once the system of capital was liquidated, despite the fact that this is precisely what the system is based on. This pious hope springs from having underestimated death in dead labour, and from thinking that death is overcome in the living, beyond a certain crucial point, by a sort of historical somersault of production.

Marx had, however, sensed this while noting that ‘objectified labour confronts living labour within the process itself as the power which rules it; a power which, as the appropriation of living labour, is the form of capital’ (*Grundrisse*, p. 693 [J.B.’s emphasis]). This also becomes apparent in the
formula according to which, at a certain stage of capital, man ‘steps to the side of the production process, instead of being its chief actor’ (ibid., p. 705). This formula goes well beyond political economy and its critique, since it literally signifies that it is a matter no longer of a production process, but of a process of exclusion and relegation.

We must again draw out all the consequences of this. When production attains this circularity and turns in on itself, it loses every objective determination. It incants itself as myth while its own terms have become signs. Simultaneously, when this sphere of signs (including the media, information, etc.) ceases to be a specific sphere for representing the unity of the global process of capital, then we must not only say with Marx that ‘the production process has ceased to be a labour process’ (ibid., p. 693), but that ‘the process of capital itself has ceased to be a production process’. With the hegemony of dead labour over living labour, the whole dialectic of production collapses. Following the same basic schema as the central oppositions of rationalist thought (truth and falsity, appearance and reality, nature and culture), all the oppositions according to which Marxism operates (use-value/exchange-value, forces of production/relations of production) are also neutralised, and in the same way. Everything within production and the economy becomes commutable, reversible and exchangeable according to the same indeterminate peculiarity as we find in politics, fashion or the media. The indeterminate peculiarity of the forces and relations of production, of capital and labour, use-value and exchange-value, constitutes the dissolution of production into the code. Today the law of value no longer lies so much in the exchangeability of every commodity under the sign of a general equivalent, as it does in a much more radical exchangeability of all the categories of political economy (and its critique) in accordance with the code. All the determinations of ‘bourgeois’ thought were neutralised and abolished by the materialist thought of production, which has brought everything down to a single great historical determination. In its turn, however, this too is neutralised and absorbed by a revolution of the terms of the system. Just as other generations were able to dream of pre-capitalist society, we have begun to dream of political economy as a lost object. Now, even its discourse carries some referential force only because it is a lost object.

Marx:

On the whole, types of work that are consumed as services and not as products separable from the worker hence not capable of existing as commodities independently of him ... are of microscopic significance when compared with the mass of capitalist production. They may be entirely neglected, therefore, and can be dealt with under the category of wage-labour. (Capital [tr. Ben Fowkes, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976], Vol. 1, pp. 1044–5)

This chapter of Capital was never written: the problem posed by this disjunction, which confirms that between productive and unproductive labour, is utterly insoluble. Every Marxist definition of labour is split, but this was happening from the outset. In the Grundrisse, Marx says: ‘Labour becomes productive only by producing its own opposite [that is, capital]’ (p. 305n), from which we may logically conclude that if labour comes to reproduce itself, as is the case today within the compass of the ‘collective labourer’, it ceases to be productive. This is the unforeseen consequence of a definition which did not even consider that capital might take root in something other than the ‘productive’, precisely, perhaps, in labour voided of its productivity, in ‘unproductive’ labour, somehow neutralised, where capital simply eludes the dangerous determinacy of ‘productive’ labour and can begin to establish its total domination. By misunderstanding ‘unproductive labour’, Marx conceives the real undefined character of labour on which the strategy of capital is based.

‘Production for unproductive consumption is quite as productive as that for productive consumption, always assuming that it produces or reproduces capital’ (Grundrisse, p. 306n). According to Marx’s own definition, there is a paradox here which results from an increasing sector of human labour becoming unproductive without apparently preventing capital from consolidating its dominance. In fact, however, this is all rigged in advance—there are not two or three types of labour,7 capital itself whispered these pedantic distinctions to Marx, while never being stupid enough to believe in them itself, always merely ‘naively’ overlooking them. There is only one sort of labour (a fundamental definition in fact), and as luck would have it this is the one that Marx let slip through his fingers. Today all labour falls under a single definition, that bastard, archaic and unanalysed category of service-labour, and not the supposedly universal classical definition of ‘proletarian’ wage-labour.

This is not service-labour in the feudal sense, since labour has lost the sense of obligation and reciprocity that it had in the feudal context, but in the sense that Marx indicates: in service, pretension is inseparable from the pretaker—an archaic aspect in the productivist vision of capital, but one that’s fundamental if capital is grasped as a system of domination, as a system of ‘infeudation’ to a labouring society, that is, to a certain type of political society for which labour is the rule of the game. This is where we are (if we weren’t already there in Marx’s time): the reduction of every labour to a service, labour as pure and simple presence/occupation, consumption of time, pretension of time. We make an ‘act’ of labour as we make an act of presence or an act of allegiance. In this sense, pretension is in fact inseparable from the pretaker. The service rendered conjoints the body, time, space and grey matter. Whether this produces or not is a matter of indifference as regards this personal indexation. Surplus-value disappears, of course, and the meaning of wages changes (we will come back to this later). It is not, however, a ‘regression’ of capital towards feudalism, but rather the dawn of its real domination, solicitation and total conscription of the ‘person’. This is the tendency of every effort to ‘re-valorise’ labour, making it into a total service where the pretaker may be more or less absent, but increasingly personally involved.
In this sense labour can no longer be distinguished from other activities, particularly from its opposing term of free time, which, because it implies the same mobilisation and the same investment (or the same productive disinvestment), is today just as much a service rendered,\(^8\) which, in accordance with any standard of justice, should merit a wage (this is not absolutely impossible).\(^9\) In short, it is not only the imaginary distinction between productive and unproductive labour which is shaken up, but also the distinction between work and rest itself. There is quite simply no more labour in the specific sense of the term, so Marx ultimately did well not to write his chapter of Capital: it was condemned from the outset.

It is at precisely this moment that workers become 'agents of production'. This slippage of terminology — such things have their own importance — ironically signifies the status of one who produces nothing. The semi-skilled worker was no longer a labourer, but merely a worker facing the total indifferentiation of labour, no longer struggling over the content of labour nor over specific wages, but struggling over the generalised form of labour and the political wage. The formation of the 'agent of production' is accompanied by his liberation from the most abstract form — much more abstract than the old semi-skilled worker, exploited to death: the mannequin of labour appeared, the lowest common denominator, the dumb waiter of labour's unreality principle. A pleasant euphemism: we no longer work... but merely perform 'acts of production'. This is the end of production-culture, hence the *a contrario* appearance of the term 'productive'. This 'productive agent' is no longer characterised by its exploitation, nor by its being raw material in a labour process; it is characterised by its mobility and interchangeability, by being an insignificant inflection of fixed capital. The 'agent of production' designates the ultimate status of Marx's worker who, as he said, 'steps to the side of the production process'.

The current phase, where the 'process of capital itself ceases to be a process of production', is simultaneously the phase of the disappearance of the factory: society as a whole takes on the appearance of a factory. The factory must disappear as such, and labour must lose its specificity in order that capital can ensure the extensive metamorphosis of its form throughout society as a whole. We must therefore formally recognise the disappearance of the determinate sites of labour, a determinate subject of labour, a determinate time of social labour, we must formally recognise the disappearance of the factory, labour and the proletariat if we want to analyse capital's current and real dominance.\(^10\) The chain-store stage of society or the factory superstructure, the virtual reserve army of capital, is at an end. The principle of the factory and labour explodes and scatters over every aspect of society in such a way that the distinction between the two becomes 'ideological'. It becomes one of capital's traps for maintaining the factory's specific and privileged presence in the revolutionary imaginary. Labour is everywhere, because there is no more labour. Labour now reaches its definitive, completed form, its *principle*, which supports and confirms the principles elaborated in the course of history in those other social spaces that preceded manufacturing industry and served as a model for it: the asylum, the ghetto, the general hospital, the prison — all the sites of enclosure and concentration that our culture has hidden in its march to civilisation. Today, all these determinate sites are themselves losing even their own limits, they are spread throughout global society since the asylum form, carceral form and discrimination have begun to invest the whole social space, every moment of real life.\(^11\) All these things — factories, asylums, prisons, schools — still exist, and will no doubt continue to exist for an indefinite period, as warning signs, to divert the reality of the domination of capital into an imaginary materiality. There have always been churches to hide the death of God, or to hide the fact that God was everywhere, which amounts to the same thing.

There will always be animal reserves and Indian reservations to hide the fact that they are dead, and that we are all Indians. There will always be factories to hide the death of labour, the death of production, or the fact that they are everywhere and nowhere at once. For there is nothing with which to fight capital today in determinate forms. On the contrary, should it become clear that capital is no longer determined by something or other, and that its secret weapon is the reproduction of labour as imaginary, then capital itself would be close to exhaustion.

**Wages**

Labour, which in its completed form has no relation to any determinate production, is also without any equivalent in wages. Wages are equivalent to labour power only from the perspective of the quantitative reproduction of labour power. When they become the sanction of the status of labour power, the sign of obedience to the rule of the game of capital, wages no longer possess any such meaning. They are no longer in any proportional or equivalence relation at all.\(^12\) They are a sacrament, like a baptism (or the Extreme Unction), which turns you into a genuine citizen of the political society of capital. Beyond the economic investment which constitutes the worker's wage-revenue for capital (end of the salariat as exploitation, beginning of the salariat as the 'actionariat' of capitalist society — the worker's strategic function slides towards consumption as obligatory social service), it is the other sense of the term 'investment' which brings it into the current phase of wage-status: capital invested the worker with a wage just as one used to be invested with a charge or a responsibility. But capital also invested the worker as one might 'invest' a town, totally occupying it and controlling all access.\(^13\)

It is not solely by means of wage-revenue that capital charges producers to keep money in circulation and thus to become real reproducers of capital, but more fundamentally by means of the wage-status by which they are turned into purchasers of goods in the same way that capital itself is the purchaser of labour. Every user uses consumer objects reduced to the
The functional status of the production of services, just as capital uses labour power. Everyone is thus invested with the fundamental mentality of capital.

On the other hand, as soon as wages are detached from labour power, nothing (not even the unions) stands in the way of an unlimited and maximal wage demand. If there is a 'right price' for a certain quantity of labour force, a price can no longer be fixed on consensus and global participation. The traditional wage demand is only a negotiation over the producer's conditions. The maximalist demand is an offensive form of the wage-earner's reversal of his status as a reproducer, a status to which he is condemned by means of the wage. It is a challenge. The wage-earner wants everything. His method is not only to aggravate the economic crisis of the system but to turn every political constraint that the system imposes against it.

The maximalist slogan runs: 'maximum wage for minimum labour'. The political result of this escalating reversal might indeed be to send the system into orbit, in accordance with its own logic of labour as enforced presence. For wage-earners operate no longer as producers, but rather in terms of non-production, a role assigned them by capital. Neither do they operate dialectically, their interventions are catastrophic.

The less there is to do, the more wage increases must be demanded, since the minimal job is a more obvious sign of an absurdity than that of enforced presence. This is the 'class' that capital transforms in its own image: even robbed of its exploitation, the use of its labour power, it couldn't pay capital too much for this denial of production, this loss of identity, this debauchery. The exploited can demand only the minimum, but lower their status and they are free to demand everything. The striking thing about this is that capital can follow into these fields with relative ease. It is not too much for the unions to make those wage-earners without consciousness aware of the wage–labour equivalence which capital itself has abolished. It is not too much for the unions to channel this unlimited wage-blackmail into the wholesome straits of negotiation. Without the unions, the workers would immediately demand 50 per cent, 100 per cent or 200 per cent increases—and perhaps get them! There are examples of this in the United States and Japan.

**Money**

The homology Saussure established between labour and the signified on the one hand, and wages and the signifier on the other, is a kind of matrix which can be used as a base from which to survey political economy in its entirety. Today, however, the contrary proves to be the case: signifiers are severed from signifieds and wages are severed from labour. The escalating play of the signifier parallels the escalation of wages. Saussure was right: political economy is a language [langue], and the same mutation that affects linguistic signs when they lose their referential status also affects the categories of political economy. The same process ramifies in two other directions.

1. Production is severed from every reference or social finality. It then enters a growth phase. We must not interpret this growth as an acceleration, but in another sense, as something which marks and brings about the end of production. This is characterised by a significant divergence between production, on the one hand, and a relatively contingent and autonomous consumption, on the other. When, after the crisis of 1929, and especially after the Second World War, consumption began to be literally 'planned', that is, took on the force at once of a myth and of a controlled variable, we enter a phase where neither production nor consumption retains any proper determinations or respective ends. Both become caught in a cycle or spiral, they are overcome by a confusion propagated by growth which leaves the traditional social objectives of production and consumption well behind. This process has only itself as an end. It no longer targets needs or profits. It is not an acceleration of productivity, but a structural inflation of the signs of production, an oscillation and proliferation of every sign, including monetary signs. It is the era of rocket launching programmes, Concorde, and total war strategies, of the proliferation of industrial estates, social or individual infrastructural facilities, training programmes and recycling, etc. – production for production's sake in accordance with a constraint of reinvestment at any cost (reinvestment no longer operating as the rate of surplus-value). The dominating achievement of this repurposing planning promises to be anti-pollution measures, where the entire 'productive' system will recycle and therefore eliminate its own waste products. This huge equation adds up to zero; not nothing, however, because the dialectic of pollution and anti-pollution 'produces' inchoate aspirations to growth without end.

2. The monetary sign is severed from every social production and then enters a phase of speculation and limitless inflation. Inflation is to money what the escalation of wages is to the sale of labour power, and what growth is to production. In each case, the same split releases the same burst of frantic activity and the same virtual crisis: the splitting of wages and the 'right price' of labour power, and the splitting of money and real production, both result in the loss of a system of reference. Abstract social labour time on the one hand and the gold-standard on the other lose their function as indices and criteria of equivalence. Wage inflation and monetary inflation (as well as growth) are therefore of the same type and are inseparable.

Purged of finalities and the affects of production, money becomes speculative. From the gold-standard, which had already ceased to be the representative equivalent of a real production but still retains traces of this in a certain equilibrium (little inflation, the convertibility of money into gold, etc.), to hot money and generalised flotation, money is transformed from a referential sign into its structural form – the 'floating' signifier's own logic, not in Lévi-Strauss's sense, where it has not yet discovered its
signified, but in the sense that it is well rid of every signified (every ‘real’ equivalent) as a brake to its proliferation and its unlimited play. Money can thus be reproduced according to a simple play of transfers and writings, according to an incessant splitting and increase of its own abstract substance.

Hot money: a name given to Euro-dollars, doubtless in order to characterise the senseless circulations of the monetary sign. Now, however, we should more accurately say that money has become ‘cool’, this term designating, following McLuhan and Riesman, an intense but non-affective relativity of terms, a play sustained purely by the rules of the game, the commutation of terms and the exhaustion of these commutations. By contrast, ‘hot’ characterises the referential phase of the sign, with its singularity and the opacity of its signified in the real, its very powerful affect and its minimal commutability. We are right in the middle of the sign’s cool phase. The current system of labour is cool, every structural assemblage is, generally speaking, cool, while both ‘classical’ production and labour, hot processes par excellence, have been replaced by unlimited growth bound to a disinvestment of the contents and process of labour, which are cool processes.

Coolness is the pure play of the values of discourse and the commutations of writing. It is the ease and aloofness of what now only really plays with codes, signs and words, the omnipotence of operational simulation. To whatever extent affects or systems of reference remain, they remain hot. Any ‘message’ keeps us in the hot. We enter the cool era when the medium becomes the message. And this is precisely what has taken place with money. Once a certain phase of disconnection has been reached, money is no longer a medium or a means to circulate commodities, it is circulation itself, that is to say, it is the realised form of the system in its twisting abstraction.

Money is the first ‘commodity’ to assume the status of a sign and to escape use-value. Henceforth, it intensifies the system of exchange-value, turning it into a visible sign, and in this way makes the transparency of the market (and therefore of rarity too) visible. Today, however, money sanctions a further step: it also escapes exchange-value. Freed from the market itself, it becomes an autonomous simulacrum, relieved of every message and every signification of exchange, becoming a message itself and exchanging amongst itself. Money is then no longer a commodity since it no longer contains any use-value or exchange-value, nor is it any longer a general equivalent, that is, it is no longer a mediating abstraction of the market. Money circulates at a greater rate than everything else, and has no common measure with anything else.

We could of course say that this has always been the case that since the first light shone on the market economy, money circulated at the highest rate and drew every other sector into this acceleration. And throughout the history of capital there is a distortion of all the different levels (financial, industrial, agricultural, but also consumer goods, etc.) according to the speed at which it circulates. These distortions still persist today, as the resistance of national currencies (bound up with a market, a production and a local equilibrium) to international speculative currencies testifies. It is, however, the latter that is leading the offensive, because it is what circulates at the highest rate, it is what drifts and floats: a simple play of flotation can ruin any national economy. In accordance with a differential rate of rotation, every sector is thus directed by this high intensity flotation which, far from being a baroque, epiphenomenal process (‘What is the Stock Market for?’), is the purest expression of the system. We discover this scenario everywhere: in the inconvertibility of currencies into gold, or in the inconvertibility of signs into their systems of reference; in the floating and generalised convertibility of currencies amongst themselves, or in the mobility and the endless structural play of signs. But we also discover this in the flotation of all the categories of political economy once they lose their gold-reference, labour power and social production: labour and non-labour, labour and capital, become commutable, all logic has dissolved; and we discover this in the flotation of all the categories of consciousness where the mental equivalent of the gold-standard, the subject, has been lost. There are no more authorities to which to refer, under whose jurisdiction producers could exchange their values in accordance with controlled equivalents: the end of the gold-standard. There are no more authorities to which to refer, under whose aegis a subject could exchange objects dialectically, or exchange their determinations around a stable identity in accordance with definite rules: the end of the conscious subject. (We are tempted to say that this is the reign of the unconscious.)

The logical consequence of this is, if the conscious subject is the mental equivalent of the gold-standard, then the unconscious is the mental equivalent of speculative currency and hot money. Today, individuals, disinvested as subjects and robbed of their fixed relations, are drifting, in relation to one another, into an incessant mode of transferential fluctuations: flows, connections, disconnections, transference/counter-transference. Society as a whole could easily be described in terms of the Deleuzian unconscious, or of monetary mechanics (indeed in the Riesmanian terms of ‘other-directedness’, which is already, unfortunately in Anglo-Saxon and therefore barely schizophrenic terms, the flotation of identities). Why privilege the unconscious here (even if it is orphan and schizophrenic)? The unconscious is that mental structure contemporaneous with the most radical, current phase of dominant exchange; it is contemporaneous with the structural revolution of value.

Strikes

Within a system of production, strikes were historically justified as organised violence for purposes of snatching a fraction of surplus-value, or else power, from the opposing violence of capital. Today this form of the strike is dead:
1. It is dead because capital is in a position to leave every strike to continue until it rots, precisely because we are no longer in a system of production (maximisation of surplus-value). Profits be damned so long as the reproduction of the form of social relations is saved!

2. It is dead because such strikes change nothing fundamental: contemporary capital merely redistributes itself, a matter of life or death for it. At best, strikes merely snatch only what, in the end, capital would have conceded anyway.

So if relations of production, and with them the class struggle, fall into orchestrated social and political relations, then clearly all that can intervene in this cycle is what escapes the organisation and definition of class as:

- a representative historical agency;
- a productive historical agency.

Only those who escape the swings and roundabouts of production and representation can disrupt these mechanisms and provoke, from the depths of their blinded state, a return to the 'class struggle', which might indeed mark the end of this struggle as a locus within the 'political'. It is here that the intervention of immigrants in recent strikes\textsuperscript{18} takes on meaning.

Because millions of workers find themselves, by means of the mechanics of discrimination, deprived of all representative authority, their appearance on the Western stage of the class struggle carries the crisis of representation to a crucial level. Kept classless by society as a whole, including the unions (and, on this point, with the economic-racial complicity of their 'rank and file': for the organised proletarian 'class', centred on its relations with political-economic forces with the bourgeois capitalist class, the immigrant is 'objectively' an enemy of the class), the immigrants play, through the action of this social exclusion, the role of analysts of the relation between workers and the unions, and, more generally, of the relation between the 'class' and every representative authority of the 'class'. They are deviant as regards the system of political representation and of every authority who claims to speak in their name.

This situation will not last: unions and bosses have sensed the danger and have begun to reintegrate the immigrants as 'temporary full citizens', full-time extras on the stage of the 'class struggle'.

The Autopsy of the Unions The Renault strike of March–April 1973 constituted a general repetition of this crisis. Apparently confused, uncoordinated, manipulated and, in the final analysis, a failure (except for the extraordinary terminological victory that consisted in the replacement of the once taboo term 'semi-skilled worker' with the term 'agent of production')! this strike was in reality the beautiful swan song of the unions, caught between their rank and file and the bosses. From the outset it was a 'savage' strike, unleashed by semi-skilled immigrant workers. The CGT,\textsuperscript{19} however, had a weapon ready to counter this accidental war: namely spreading the strike to other factories or to other sectors of the workforce, thus taking advantage of the now ritual spring mass demonstrations. Yet even this mechanism of control, which had been repeatedly tested ever since 1968, which the unions counted they could rely on for generations to come, let them down this time. Even the non-savage rank and file (at Seguin, Flins and Sandouville) were sometimes on strike and sometimes back at work (which is also important), without paying heed to the 'advice' from their unions. The unions were constantly being caught off-guard. The workers wanted nothing to do with whatever the unions won from management and put before them. Those concessions they drew from the workers in order to relaunch negotiations with management were rejected by the management, who then closed down the factories. Management appealed to the workers while ignoring the unions, and in fact deliberately forced the crisis in order to force the unions to retreat: couldn't they control all the workers? The unions' social legitimacy, and even their existence, was at issue. Hence the bosses' (and all levels of government) adoption of a 'hard line'. It was no longer a question of a test of strength between the organised (unionised) proletariat and the bosses, but of a test of representativity for the unions, under pressure from both the rank and file and management. Such tests result from every savage strike over the last few years sparked off by non-union personnel, rebellious youth, immigrants: the classless.

The stakes at this level are extraordinary. The entire edifice of society threatens to collapse with the unions' legitimacy and representativity. Adjudicators and other mediating bodies no longer count for much. Even the police are useless without the unions if the latter cannot police the factories and elsewhere. In May '68, it was the unions who saved the regime, but now their knell is being sounded. The import of the stakes is profoundly expressed in the utter confusion of events such as the Renault strike and May '68 (and this holds good for student demonstrations just as it does for the Renault strikes). To strike or not to strike. Where do we stand on this? No-one can decide any more. What are the objectives? Where are the enemy? What are we talking about? The Geiger counters that the unions, parties and micro-groups used to measure the masses' readiness for combat are thrown into turmoil. The student movement is too fluid for the hands of those who would like to structure it according to their own objectives: don't they have any objectives? In any case, it did not want to become objectified behind its back. The workers went back to work without gaining a thing, while eight days beforehand they had refused when they were offered palpable benefits. In fact, this confusion is similar to what happens in dreams: it betrays a resistance or a censorship acting on the dream-content itself. Here it betrays something of vital importance, something difficult, however, for the proletarians themselves to accept: the social struggle has been displaced from the traditional, external enemy of the class, management and capital, onto the internal class enemy, the proper representative authority for the class, the party or the union. These
are the authorities to which the workers delegate their power, which is turned against them under the form of management or government delegations of power. Capital itself only alienates labour power and its product, its only monopoly is production. Parties and unions alienate social power from the exploited and have a monopoly on representation. Calling them into question is a revolutionary historical development. But this development is paid for by a loss of clarity, a loss of resolution, an apparent regression, the absence of continuity, logic and objectives, etc. This is because everything becomes uncertain when it is a matter of confronting one’s own repressive agency, of driving the unionist, shop steward, official or spokesperson from one’s own head. But the confusing character of spring ‘73 indicates precisely that we have fundamentally located the problem: the unions and parties are dead, all that remains for them to do is die.

The Corrupted Proletariat The crisis of representation is the crucial political aspect of the latest social movements. In itself, this crisis may prove fatal to the system, and already we can see the emerging outline (in the unions themselves) of its formal overcoming (its recuperation) in a generalised schema of self-management. No more delegation of power – everyone will be fully responsible for production! The new ideological generation is coming! But it will have a great deal to do, because this crisis is intricately bound up with another crisis, deeper still, which touches production itself, the very system of productivity. And there again, indirectly of course, the immigrants are in the position of analysts. Just as they analyse the ‘proletariat’s’ relation to its representative agencies, they analyse the workers’ relation to their own labour power, their relation to themselves as a productive force (and not only to a few of them, selected as representative authorities). This is because they have recently been extracted from a non-productivist tradition; because they had to be socially destructured in order to be thrown into the process of Western labour, and because, in return, it is they who thoroughly destructure the general process and morality of production which dominates Western societies.

It is just as if their forced recruitment into the European market provoked an increasing corruption of the European proletariat as regards labour and production. It is no longer simply a matter of ‘clandestine’ practices of resistance to labour (go-slow, wastage, absenteeism, etc.), which have never stopped. This time the workers downed tools openly, collectively and spontaneously, just like that, suddenly, asking for nothing, negotiating nothing, to the great despair of both unions and management, and started work again just as spontaneously, as a group, the following Monday. Neither failure nor victory, it was not a strike, it was just a ‘stoppage’, a euphemism which says far more than the term ‘strike’. The whole discipline of labour collapses, all the moral norms and practices that industrial colonisation has imposed on Europe for two centuries disintegrate and are forgotten with apparent ease, without the ‘class struggle’

strictly speaking. Discontinuity, latitudinarianism, indiscipline as regards working hours, indifference with regard to wage pressure, to surplus, promotion, accumulation, forecasting. You do only what you have to, then stop and go back to it later. This is exactly the behaviour that inhabitants of ‘developing countries’ were reproached for by the colonists, who found it impossible to train the inhabitants to obey value and labour, rational and continuous time, the concept of saving wages, and so on. It is only by sending them abroad that the inhabitants were finally integrated into the labour process. And it is at precisely this point that Western workers start to ‘regress’ more and more into the behaviour of ‘underdeveloped’ inhabitants. It is not that seeing the Western proletariat in the grip of corruption constitutes a revenge for colonisation in its most advanced form (importing manual labour), although one day it might have to be the turn of the proletariat to be exported to the developing countries in order to relearn the historical and revolutionary values of labour.

There is a direct relation between the ultra-colonisation of immigrant workers (since the colonies were not profitable where they were, they had to be imported) and the industrial de-colonisation which affects every sector of society (everywhere, in schools and in factories, we move from the hot phase of the investment of labour to the cynical and cool execution of tasks). Because they have most recently left their ‘savage’ indifference for ‘rational’ labour, these immigrants (and the young or rural semi-skilled workers) are in a position to analyse Western society with the recent, fragile, superficial and arbitrary collectivisation enforced by labour, this collective paranoia, which has spawned a morality, a culture and a myth. We have forgotten that it was only two centuries ago that this industrial discipline was imposed, at unprecedented cost, on the West itself, that it has never quite succeeded and is beginning to crack dangerously (it will barely have lasted as long, indeed, as overseas colonisation).

Strike for Strike’s Sake Strike for strike’s sake is the true condition of the contemporary struggle. Unmotivated, with neither objective nor political referent, it is the oppositional response adopted against a production which is also unmotivated, with neither a referent, nor a social use-value, nor any other finality than its own – production for production’s sake, in short, a system which has become only a system of reproduction, revolving around itself in a gigantic tautology of the labour process. Strike for strike’s sake is the complementary tautology, but, since it unveils a new form of capital corresponding to the final stage of the law of value, it is also subservive.

Strikes have at last ceased to be a means, and only a means, of putting pressure on the relation of political forces and the power game. It becomes an end. Even on their own ground they negate, by means of a radical parody, the sort of finality without end that production has become. In production for production’s sake, there is no more waste. We have no use for this term, which means something only in a restricted utilitarian
economy. It relies on a pious critique of the system. Concorde, the space programme, etc., are not a waste of resources; on the contrary, since the system, having reached this high point of 'objective' futility, produces and reproduces labour itself. Besides, this is precisely what everyone (including the workers and the unions) demands of it. Everything revolves around jobs (the social is just a matter of job creation), and in order to keep their jobs, the British unions are prepared to transform Concorde into a supersonic bomber. Inflation or unemployment? Long live inflation! Labour-like social security, has come to be just another consumer good to be distributed throughout society. The enormous paradox is that the less labour becomes a productive force, the more it becomes a product. This is not the least important characteristic of the current mutations of the capitalist system, the revolution from the specific stage of production to the stage of reproduction. It has less and less need of labour power in order to function and grow, while there are increasing demands on it to produce more and more labour. Corresponding to the absurd circularity of a system where one labours only to produce more labour is the demand for strikes for strikes' sake (at any rate, this is the point at which the majority of 'protest' strikes have today come to an end). 'Pay us for the days we are on strike' basically means 'pay us in order that we may reproduce strikes for strikes' sake'. This is the reversal of the absurdity of the system in general.

Today, all products, labour included, are beyond both use and futility. There is no more productive labour, only reproductive labour. In the same way there is no more 'productive' or 'unproductive' consumption, only a reproductive consumption. Leisure is as productive as labour, factory labour as 'unproductive' as leisure or the service industries, it is irrelevant what formula we use. This indifference precisely marks the phase of the completion of political economy. Everyone is reproductive; that is, everyone has lost the concrete finality which once marked them out from one another. Nobody produces any more. Production is dead, long live reproduction!

The Genealogy of Production The system currently reproduces capital according to its most rigorous definition, as the form of social relations, rather than in its vulgar sense as money, profits and the economic system. Reproduction has always been understood as, and determined by, an 'increasing' reproduction of the mode of production, even though it became necessary to conceive of the mode of production as a modality (and not the only one) of the mode of reproduction. Productive forces and the relations of production, the sphere of material productivity in other words, are perhaps only one of many possible, and therefore historically relative, conjunctions of the process of reproduction. Reproduction is a form which far outstrips economic exploitation, and so the play of productive forces is not its necessary condition.

The historical status of the 'proletariat' (the industrial wage-earners) is primarily one of incarceration, concentration and exclusion. The seventeenth-century incarceration described by Foucault expands grotesquely in the age of industrial manufacture. Didn't 'industrial' labour (which, unlike cottage industries, is collective, controlled, and stripped of the means of production) evolve within the first great hôpitaux généraux? In the beginning, society, in the process of rationalisation, incarcerated its idle, its wanderers, its deviants, gave them an 'occupation' and fixed them, imposed its rational principle of labour on them. But these outcasts contaminated the process of rationalisation in turn, and the rupture produced when society instituted its principle of rationality spilled over the whole of the society of labour: the Great Confinement is a model in miniature, later generalised in the industrial system of every society that, under the sign of labour and productivist finality, became a concentration camp, a detention centre or a prison.

Instead of extending the concepts of the proletariat and exploitation to racial or sexual oppression and such like, we should ask ourselves if it is not the other way round. What if the fundamental status of the worker, like the mad, the dead, nature, beasts, children, Blacks and women, was initially to be not exploited but excommunicated? What if he was initially not deprived and exploited but discriminated against and branded?

My hypothesis is that there has never been a genuine class struggle except on the grounds of this discrimination: sub-humans struggle against their status as beasts, against the abjection of the caste division that condemns them to the sub-humannity of labour. This lies behind every strike and every revolt, and today it is still behind the most 'wage-related' demonstrations. Hence their virulence. Having said that, today the proletarian is a 'normal' being, the worker has been promised the dignity of a full 'human being', and, moreover, in accordance with this category, he seizes onto every dominant discrimination: he is racist, sexist and repressive. As regards today's deviants and whoever is discriminated against, no matter what their social standing, he has sided with the bourgeoisie and the normal human being. How true: the fundamental law of this society is not the law of exploitation, but the code of normality.

May '68: The Illusion of Production The first shockwaves of this transition from production to pure and simple reproduction took place in May '68. They struck the universities first, and the faculty of human sciences first of all, because that was where it became most evident (even without a clear 'political' consciousness) that we were no longer productive, only reproductive (and that lecturers, science and culture were themselves only relays in the general reproduction of the system). All this was experienced as total futility, irresponsibility ('What are sociologists for?'), as a relegation, and provoked the student movement of '68 (rather than the absence of prospects, since there are always plenty of prospects in reproduction - it was rather the places, the spaces where something actually happens that had ceased to exist).
These shockwaves are still being felt. They cannot but reach the very limits of the system, as soon as entire sectors of society topple from the rank of productive forces to the pure and simple status of reproductive forces. Although this process was first felt in the cultural sectors of science, justice and the family—the so-called 'superstructural' sectors—it is clear today that it is progressively affecting the entire so-called 'infrastructural' sector: a new generation of partial, savage and occasional strikes since '68 testify no longer to the 'class struggle' of a proletariat attached to production, but to the revolt of those who, even in the factories, are attached to reproduction.

Nevertheless, in this same sector there are marginal, anomie groups who are the first to register these effects: young semi-skilled workers brought directly from rural areas into the factories, immigrants, non-union members; and so on. For all the above mentioned reasons, the 'traditional', organised and unionised proletariat have looked likely to be the last to react, since it is they who can entertain the illusion of 'productive' labour for longest. The consciousness of being, in relation to everyone else, the true 'producers' and, albeit at the cost of the exploitation, nevertheless being at the very source of social wealth is a 'proletarian' consciousness which is reinforced and sanctioned by the organisation, constituting what is certainly the most solid ideological defence against the deconstruction of the current system which, far from turning whole strata of the population into proletarians or, as Marxian theory proper has it, expanding the exploitation of 'productive' labour, aligns everybody under the same reproductive worker status.

'Productive' manual workers, more than anybody else, thrive on the illusion of production just as they experience their leisure under the illusion of freedom.

As long as these things are experienced as sources of wealth or satisfaction, as use-value, then the worst, most alienated and exploited labour is bearable. As long as we can still discover a 'production' corresponding (even if this is only in the imagination) to individual or social needs (this is why the concept of need is so fundamental and so mystifying), the worst individual or historical situations are bearable because the illusion of production is always the illusion coincident of production and use-value. Those who today believe in the use-value of their labour power—the proletariat—are virtually the most mystified and the least susceptible to this revolt which grabs people from the depths of their total futility and the circular manipulation which turns them into pure markers of senseless reproduction.

The day that this process spreads to all of society, May '68 will assume the form of a general explosion, and the problem of the link between the students and the workers will no longer be posed: it merely betrays the gulf that separates those in the current system who still believe in their own labour force and those who no longer believe in it.

**Political Economy as a Model of Simulation**

From now on political economy is the real for us, which is to say precisely that it is the sign's referential, the horizon of a defunct order whose simulation preserves it in a 'dialectical' equilibrium. It is the real, and therefore the imaginary, since here again the two formerly distinct categories have fused and drifted together. The code (the structural law of value) uses the systematic reactivation of political economy (the restricted market law of value) as our society's imaginary-real. Furthermore, the appearance of the restricted form of value is an attempt to obscure its radical form.

Profit, surplus-value, the mechanics of capital and the class struggle: the entire critical discourse on political economy is staged as a referential discourse. The mystery of value is enacted on stage (of course, the mystery has simply acquired a new value: the structural law of value has become mysterious); everyone agrees as to the 'determining instance' of economics, and this has become 'obscene'. This is a provocation. Capital no longer looks to nature, God or morality, but strictly to political economy and its critique for its alibis, and lives through its own denunciation from within itself—feedback or a dialectical stimulus. Hence the essential role played by Marxist analysis in designer capital.

The same scenario is played out in economics as Bourdieu and Passeron describe it, taking place in the academic system whose alleged autonomy enables it to reproduce the class structure of society very efficiently. Similarly, the alleged autonomy of political economy (or rather its value as a determining agency) enables it to reproduce, just as efficiently, capital's symbolic function, its real domination over life and death established by the code, and which is continually stirring up political economy as a medium, an alibi and a fig-leaf.

A machine has to function if it is to reproduce relations of production. A commodity must have a use-value in order to sustain the system of exchange-value. This was the first-level scenario. Simulation is today at the second level: a commodity must function as an exchange-value in order better to hide the fact that it circulates like a sign and reproduces the code.

Society has to reproduce itself as class society, as class struggle, it must 'function' at the Marxian-critical level in order the better to mask the system's real law and the possibility of its symbolic destruction. Marcuse pointed out a long time ago that dialectical materialism was getting out of hand: far from being deconstructed by the forces of production, the relations of production from now on submit to the forces of production (science, technology, etc.) and find a new legitimacy in them. There again, we must pass on to the second level: the social relations of symbolic domination utterly submit to the mode of production (both the forces of production and the relations of production), where we find, in the apparent
movement of political economy and the revolution, a new legitimacy and the most perfect alibi.

Hence the necessity of resurrecting and dramatising political economy in the form of a movie script, to screen out the threat of symbolic destruction. Hence the kind of crisis, the perpetual simulacrum of a crisis, we are dealing with today.

In the aesthetic stage of political economy, the finality—without—end of production, the ethical, ascetic myth of accumulation and labour collapses. Capital, to avoid the risk of bursting from these liquefied values, thus becomes nostalgic once more for its great ethical epoch when production had a meaning, the golden age of shortages and the development of the forces of production. In order to re-establish finalities and to reactivate the principle of economics, we must generate shortages once again. Hence ecology, where the danger of absolute scarcity reinstates an ethic of energy conservation.

Hence the crisis of energy and raw materials, a real blessing for a system which, in the mirror of production, only reflects a fluctuating, empty form. The crisis will enable the return of a lost referentiality to the economic code, and will give the principle of production a gravity that evaded it. We will rediscover a taste for ascesis, that pathetic investment born of lack and deprivation.

The whole recent ecological turn had already taken up this process of regeneration during the crisis—no longer a crisis of overproduction as in 1929—the involution of the system, recycling its lost identity. A crisis no longer of production, but of reproduction (hence the impossibility of grasping how much truth and how much simulacrum there may be in this crisis). Ecology is production haunted by shortages and using itself as a resource, once more discovering a natural necessity where the law of value is tried out again. But ecology is too slow. A sudden crisis, as happened with oil, constitutes a more energetic therapy. The less oil there is, the more we will become aware of how much production there is: From the moment that the place of raw materials is noted again, labour power will also resume its rightful place, and the entire mechanism of production will become intelligible once more. Production has been given another chance.

So don't panic. On the eve of the intensive mobilisation of labour power, when the ethics of labour power threatened to collapse, the crisis of material energy came at the right time to mask the truly catastrophic destruction of the finality of production, and displaced it onto a simple internal contradiction (but we know that the system thrives on its contradictions).

There is still an illusion in thinking that the capitalist system, at a certain threshold of increased reproduction, passes irrevocably from a strategy of shortage to a strategy of abundance. The current crisis proves that this strategy is reversible. The illusion still comes from a naive faith in a reality of shortage or a reality of abundance, and therefore from the illusion of a real opposition between these two terms. When these two terms are quite simply alternatives, the strategic definition of neo-capitalism is to pass into not a phase of abundance (consumption, repressive desublimation, sexual liberation; etc.) but a phase of systematic alternation between the two terms—shortage and abundance—because neither retains a reference, nor therefore an antagonistic reality, and therefore because the system is indifferent to which one it employs.

The indeterminacy affecting terms, the neutralisation of a dialectical opposition into a pure and simple structural alternation, produces the characteristic effect of an uncertainty surrounding the reality of the crisis. Everyone tries to stave off the unbearable simulacrum-effect—characteristic of everything that issues from the systematic operation of the code—as a conspiracy. It is comforting to think that it was 'great capital' that provoked the crisis, because it restores a real political-economic agency and the presence of a (hidden) subject of the crisis, and therefore an historical truth. The terror of the simulacrum is over. So much the better: it is better to have the omnipresent political-economic fatality of capital than not, so long as it is clearly true. Better the economic atrocities of capital—profit, exploitation—than to face up to the situation we are in, where everything operates or breaks down through effects of the code. Misconstrual [méconnaissance] of the 'truth' of this global domination (if there is a global domination) is proportional to the crisis itself, where it is revealed for the first time on a massive scale.

The 1929 crisis was still a crisis of capital, measured by its rates of reinvestment, surplus-value and profit, a crisis of (over)production measured by the social finalities of consumption. The crisis is resolved by regulating demand in an endless exchange of finalities between production and consumption. From now on (and conclusively after the Second World War), production and consumption cease to be opposed and possibly contradictory poles. At a stroke, the entire economic field loses all internal determinacy along with the very possibility of a crisis. It no longer survives except as a process of economic simulation at the fringes of a process of reproduction, into which it is entirely absorbed.

Have we ever been real shortages to grant the economic principle a reality, so that today we could say that it is disappearing and no longer functions save as a myth, an alternative myth, moreover, to that of abundance? In the course of history, have shortages ever had a use-value, an irreducible economic finality, so that today we could say that it has disappeared in the cycle of reproduction, merely consolidating the code's hegemonic control over genuine matters of life and death? We are saying that in order for the economy to produce itself (and this is all it ever produces), it needs this dialectical tension between scarcity and abundance. For the system to reproduce itself, however, it now requires only the mythical operation of the economy.

It is because the entire economic sphere has been defused that everything can be expressed in terms of political economy and production. Economics, preferably in its Marxian variety, becomes the explicit dis-
course of a whole society, the vulgate of every analysis. Sociologists, human scientists, etc. (even Christians, especially Christians of course), turn to Marxism as the discourse to which they refer. A whole new Divine Left is rising. Everything has become ‘political’ and ‘ideological’ by the same endless drift of the operation of integration. The newsflash is political, sport is political, not to mention art: reason is everywhere on the side of the class struggle. The entire latent discourse of capital has become manifest, we notice a widespread jubilation secure in the assumption of this ‘truth’.

May ’68 marked the decisive step in the naturalisation of political economy. Because the shock of May ’68 shook the system down to the depths of its symbolic organisation, it has given urgency to a vital transition from ‘superstructural’ (moral, cultural, etc.) ideologies to an ideologisation of the infrastructure itself. By giving official status to oppositional discourse, capital will consolidate its power under cover of economic and political legislation. Political economy, Marxian political economy, has sealed the rift of May ’68, just as the unions and the left-wing parties ‘negotiated’ the crisis on the ground. The hidden referent of economics and politics has therefore been dug up only in order to retrieve a catastrophic situation, and today it continues to be circulated, generalised and desparately reproduced, since the catastrophic situation opened up by May ’68 is not over.

If we dared, we would say that economics and its critique are only superstructural; we will not dare, however, since to do so would only be to twist this old image around – where would the infrastructure be then? Etc. It would also provide economics with a chance to reappear one day in accordance with the see-saw effect which itself belongs to the code. We have been tricked too often with the infrastructure to start this mask-play up again. The system itself has put an end to infra- and superstructural determinations. Today it pretends to take political economy as the infrastructure because Marx kindly whispered this alternative strategy to it, but actually capital has never really functioned on this imaginary distinction, it is not that naive. Its potency comes directly from its simultaneous development at every level, and from never having fundamentally posed itself the question of determination, the cunning distinction of agencies, or ‘ideology’. It has never confused itself with production, as did Marx and every subsequent revolutionary who believed and still believes in production, confusing their phantasies with their lunatic hopes. For its part, capital is content to extend its laws in a single movement, inexorably occupying all the interstices of life without confusing its priorities. If it has set men to work, capital has also impelled them to culture, needs, languages and functional idioms, information and communication; it directs them to rights, to liberty and sexuality, it forces the instinct of preservation and the death instinct upon them; it has set them up everywhere in accordance with myths that are simultaneously opposed and indifferent. This is its only law: indifference. To set up a hierarchy of agencies would be far too dangerous a game, and would run the risk of backfiring. No, better to level out, neutralise, cover over and indifferentiate, which is what it knows how to do; that’s how it follows its law. But it also dissimulates this fundamental process under the ‘determinant’ mask of political economy.

In the immense polymorphous machine of contemporary capital, the symbolic (gift and counter-gift, reciprocity and reversal, expenditure and sacrifice) no longer counts for anything, nature (the great referential of the origin and substance, the subject/object dialectic, and so on) no longer counts, political economy itself only survives in a brain-dead state, but all these phantoms continue to plague the operational field of value. Perhaps here, on an immense scale, we can discern the echo of what Marx drew to our attention: every event first passes through an historical existence before being revived under a parodical form. In our day, however, these two phases telescope, since good old materialist history has itself become a process of simulation, no longer even offering the chance of a grotesque, theatrical parody: today the terror based on things voided of their substance exerts itself directly, and simulacra immediately anticipate every determination of our lives. Now, rather than theatre and the imaginary, there is a fierce strategy of neutralisation that no longer leaves any significant place for a Napoleon III-type slapstick, an historical farce which, to Marx’s mind, is effortlessly overcome by real history. It is a different matter as regards the simulacra which eliminate both ourselves and history simultaneously. But perhaps all this arises from a general illusion in Marx concerning the possibilities for a revolution of the system. He had clearly seen the extent to which there already lurked in capital in his own time a capacity for it to undermine its own bases and go ‘into overdrive’. He clearly saw that capital tended to reduce, if not totally eliminate, the labour power in its processes, and substitute a dead labour power for it. Since, however, he thought that living labour power was the objective, historical and necessary foundation of capital, he could only think that it was digging its own grave. The illusion is that capital buried labour power. More subtly, however, it turns labour power into the second term of a stable opposition with capital. It makes this rupturing energy which should shatter the relations of production into a term homogeneous with the relations of production, in a simulation of opposition under the sign of dead labour. From now on a single hegemonic agency (dead labour) divides into capital and living labour. The antagonism is resolved by a binary apparatus of coded operativity. But what, you might ask, of surplus-value and production? Alright, capital doesn’t give a damn. Without lending capital a Marxist’s intuition (even though Marx did everything he could to alert capital to what was waiting for it: if it persisted in playing on the terrain of production, it was heading for its death in the short term – the economy was a fatal-trap-for capital), everything happened as if it had clearly understood Marx on this point and had, in consequence, ‘chosen’ to liquidate production so as to go onto another kind of strategy. I am saying
that everything happens *as if*, because it is not completely certain that capital ever had this productivist view of itself (Marx was basically the only one who had, and he projected this fantasy onto it as an historical truth); it is more likely that it only ever *played* at production, even if this meant that production had to be abandoned at a later stage, were it to draw capital into fatal contradictions. Has capital ever taken production seriously? Don’t be so stupid: at the height of the seriousness of production, capital is doubtless only a simulation.

That is why the only acts that accompany capital’s real domination are situated in the field of this radical indeterminacy and break with this dissipative economic strategy.

We will not destroy the system by a direct, dialectical revolution of the economic or political infrastructure. Everything produced by contradiction, by the relation of forces, or by energy in general, will only feed back into the mechanism and give it impetus, following a circular distortion similar to a *Machina* strip. We will never defeat it by following its own logic of energy, calculation, reason and revolution, history and power, or some finality or counter-finality. The worst violence at this level has no purchase, and will only backfire against itself. We will never defeat the system on the plane of the *real*: the worst error of all our revolutionary strategies is to believe that we will put an end to the system on the plane of the *real*: this is their imaginary, imposed on them by the system itself, living or surviving only by always leading those who attack the system to fight amongst each other on the terrain of reality, which is *always the reality of the system*. This is where they throw all their energies, their imaginary violence, where an implausible logic constantly turns back into the system. We have only to do it violence or counter-violence since it thrives on symbolic violence — not in the degraded sense in which this formula has found fortune, as a violence of signs, from which the system draws strength, or with which it ‘masks’ its material violence: symbolic violence is deduced from a logic of the symbolic (which has nothing to do with the sign or with energy): reversal, the incessant reversibility of the counter-gift and, conversely, the seizing of power by the unilateral exercise of the gift.

We must therefore displace everything into the sphere of the symbolic, where challenge, reversal and overdetermining are the law, so that we can respond to death only by an equal or superior death. There is no question here of real violence or force, the only question concerns the challenge and the logic of the symbolic. If domination comes from the system’s retention of the exclusivity of the gift without counter-gift — the gift of work which can only be responded to by destruction or sacrifice, if not in consumption, which is only a spiral of the system of surplus-gratification without result, therefore a spiral of surplus-domination; a gift of media and messages to which, due to the monopoly of the code, nothing is allowed to retort; the gift, everywhere and at every instant, of the social, of the protection agency, security, gratification and the solicitation of the social from which nothing is any longer permitted to escape — then the only solution is to turn the principle of its power back against the system itself: the impossibility of responding or retorting. To defy the system with a gift to which it cannot respond save by its own collapse and death. Nothing, not even the system, can avoid the symbolic obligation, and it is in this trap that the only chance of a catastrophe for capital remains. The system turns on itself, as a scorpion does when encircled by the challenge of death. For it is summoned to answer, if it is not to lose face, to what can only be death. The system must itself commit suicide in response to the multiplied challenge of death and suicide.

So hostages are taken. On the symbolic or sacrificial plane, from which every moral consideration of the innocence of the victims is ruled out, the hostage is the substitute, the alter-ego of the ‘terrorist’ — the hostage’s death for the terrorist’s. Hostage and terrorist may thereafter become confused in the same sacrificial act. The stakes are death without any possibility of negotiation, and therefore return to an inevitable overdetermining. Of course, they attempt to deploy the whole system of negotiation, and the terrorists themselves often enter into this exchange scenario in terms of this calculated equivalence (the hostages’ lives against some ransom or liberation, or indeed for the prestige of the operation alone). From this perspective, taking hostages is not original at all, it simply creates an unforeseen and selective relation of forces which can be resolved either by traditional violence or by negotiation. It is a tactical action. There is something else at stake, however, as we clearly saw at The Hague over the course of ten days of incredible negotiations: no-one knew what could be negotiated, nor could they agree on terms, nor on the possible equivalences of the exchange. Or again, even if they were formulated, the ‘terrorists’ demands’ amounted to a radical denial of negotiation. It is precisely here that everything is played out, for with the impossibility of all negotiation we pass into the symbolic order, which is ignorant of this type of calculation and exchange (the system itself lives solely by negotiation, even if it takes place in the equilibrium of violence). The system can only respond to this irritation of the symbolic (the most serious thing to befal it, basically the only revolution) by the real, physical death of the terrorists. This, however, is its defeat, since their death was their stake, so that by bringing about their deaths the system has merely impaled itself on its own violence without really responding to the challenge that was thrown to it. Because the system can easily compute every death, even war atrocities, but cannot compute the death-challenge or symbolic death, since this death has no calculable equivalent, it opens up an inexplicable overdetermining by other means than a death in exchange. Nothing corresponds to death except death. Which is precisely what happens in this case: the system itself is driven to suicide in return, which suicide is manifest in its disarray and defeat. However infinitesimal in terms of relations of forces it might be, the colossal apparatus of power is eliminated in this situation where (the very excess of its) derision is turned back against itself. The police and the army, all the institutions and mobilized violence of power whether individually or...
massed together, can do nothing against this lowly but symbolic death. For this death draws it onto a plane where there is no longer any response possible for it (hence the sudden structural liquefaction of power in '68, not because it was less strong, but because of the simple symbolic displacement operated by the students' practices). The system can only die in exchange, defeat itself to lift the challenge. Its death at this instant is a symbolic response, but a death which wears it out.

The challenge has the efficiency of a murderer. Every society apart from ours knows that, or used to know it. Ours is in the process of rediscovering it. The routes of symbolic effectiveness are those of an alternative politics.

Thus the dying ascetic challenges God ever to give him the equivalent of this death. God does all he can to give him this equivalent 'a hundred times over', in the form of prestige, of spiritual power, indeed of global hegemony. But the ascetic's secret dream is to attain such an extent of mortification that even God would be unable either to take up the challenge, or to absorb the debt. He will then have triumphed over God, and become God himself. That is why the ascetic is always close to heresy and sacrilege, and as such condemned by the Church, whose function it is merely to preserve God from this symbolic face-to-face, to protect Him from this mortal challenge where He is summoned to die, to sacrifice Himself in order to take up the challenge of the mortified ascetic. The Church will have had this role for all time, avoiding this type of catastrophic confrontation (catastrophic primarily for the Church) and substituting a rule-bound exchange of penitences and gratifications, the impressario of a system of equivalences between God and men.

The same situation exists in our relation to the system of power. All these institutions, all these social, economic, political and psychological mediations, are there so that no-one ever has the opportunity to issue this symbolic challenge, this challenge to the death, the irreversible gift which, like the absolute mortification of the ascetic, brings about a victory over all power, however powerful its authority may be. It is no longer necessary that the possibility of this direct symbolic confrontation ever takes place. And this is the source of our profound boredom.

This is why taking hostages and other similar acts rekindle some fascination: they are at once an exorbitant mirror for the system of its own repressive violence, and the model of a symbolic violence which is always forbidden it, the only violence it cannot exert: its own death.

Labour and Death

Other societies have known multiple stakes: over birth and kinship, the soul and the body, the true and the false, reality and appearance. Political economy has reduced them to just one: production. But then the stakes were large, the violence extreme and hopes too high. Today this is over. The system has rid production of all real stakes. A more radical truth is dawning, however, and the system's victory allows us to glimpse this fundamental stake. It is even retrospectively becoming possible to analyse the whole of political economy as having nothing to do with production, as having stakes of life and death. A symbolic stake.

Every stake is symbolic. There have only ever been symbolic stakes. This dimension is etched everywhere into the structural law of value, nowhere immanent in the code.

Labour power is instituted on death. A man must die to become labour power. He converts this death into a wage. But the economic violence capital inflicted on him in the equivalence of the wage and labour power is nothing next to the symbolic violence inflicted on him by his definition as a productive force. Faking this equivalence is nothing next to the equivalence, qua signs, of wages and death.

The very possibility of quantitative equivalence presupposes death. The equivalence of wages and labour power presupposes the death of the worker, while that of any commodity and any other presupposes the symbolic extermination of objects. Death makes the calculation of equivalence, and regulation by indifference, possible in general. This death is not violent and physical, it is the indifferent consumption of life and death, the mutual neutralisation of life and death in sur-vival, or death deferred.

Labour is slow death. This is generally understood in the sense of physical exhaustion. But it must be understood in another sense. Labour is not opposed, like a sort of death, to the 'fulfilment of life', which is the idealist view; labour is opposed as a slow death to a violent death. That is the symbolic reality. Labour is opposed as deferred death to the immediate death of sacrifice. Against every pious and 'revolutionary' view of the 'labour (or culture) is the opposite of life' type, we must maintain that the only alternative to labour is not free time, or non-labour, it is sacrifice.

All this becomes clear in the genealogy of the slave. First, the prisoner of war is purely and simply put to death (one does him an honour in this way). Then he is 'spared' [épargné] and conserved [conservé] (=servus), under the category of spoils of war and a prestige good: he becomes a slave and passes into sumptuary domesticity. It is only later that he passes into servile labour. However, he is no longer a 'labourer', since labour only appears in the phase of the serf or the emancipated slave, finally relieved of the mortgage of being put to death. Why is he freed? Precisely in order to work.

Labour therefore everywhere draws its inspiration from deferred death. It comes from deferred death. Slow or violent, immediate or deferred, the scanion of death is decisive: it is what radically distinguishes two types of organisation, the economic and the sacrificial. We live irreversibly in the first of these, which has inexorably taken root in the différence of death.

The scenario has never changed. Whoever works has not been put to death, he is refused this honour. And labour is first of all the sign of being judged worthy only of life. Does capital exploit the workers to death? Paradoxically, the worst it inflicts on them is refusing them death. It is by
deferring their death that they are made into slaves and condemned to the indefinite abjection of a life of labour.

The substance of labour and exploitation is indifferent in this symbolic relation. The power of the master always primarily derives from this suspension of death. Power is therefore never, contrary to what we might imagine, the power of putting to death, but exactly the opposite, that of allowing to live – a life that the slave lacks the power to give. The master confiscates the death of the other while retaining the right to risk his own. The slave is refused this, and is condemned to a life without return, and therefore without possible expiation.

By removing death, the master removes the slave from the circulation of symbolic goods. This is the violence the master does to the slave, condemning him to labour power. There lies the secret of power (in the dialectic of the master and the slave, Hegel also derives the domination of the master from the deferred threat of death hanging over the slave). Labour, production and exploitation would only be one of the possible avatars of this power structure, which is a structure of death.

This changes every revolutionary perspective on the abolition of power. If power is death deferred, it will not be removed insofar as the suspension of this death will not be removed. And if power, of which this is always and everywhere the definition, resides in the act of giving without being given, it is clear that the power the master has to unilaterally grant life will only be abolished if this life can be given to him – in a non-deferred death. There is no other alternative; you will never abolish this power by staying alive, since there will have been no reversal of what has been given. Only the surrender of this life, retaliating against a deferred death with an immediate death, constitutes a radical response, and the only possibility of abolishing power. No revolutionary strategy can begin without the slave putting his own death back at stake, since this is what the master puts off in the différence from which he profits by securing his power. Refuse to be put to death, refuse to live in the mortal reprieve of power, refuse the duty of this life and never be quits with living, in effect be under obligation to settle this long-term credit through the slow death of labour, since this slow death does not alter the future of this abject dimension, in the fatality of power. Violent death changes everything, slow death changes nothing, for there is a rhythm, a scanion necessary to symbolic exchange: something has to be given in the same movement and following the same rhythm, otherwise there is no reciprocity and it is quite simply not given. The strategy of the system of power is to displace the time of the exchange, substituting continuity and mortal linearity for the immediate retaliation of death. It is thus futile for the slave (the worker) to give little by little, in infinitesimal doses, to the rope of labour on which he is hung to death, to give his life to the master or to capital, for this ‘sacrifice’ in small doses is no longer a sacrifice – it doesn’t touch the most important thing, the différence of death, and merely distils a process whose structure remains the same.

We could in fact advance the hypothesis that in labour the exploited renders his life to the exploiter and thereby regains, by means of this very exploitation, a power of symbolic response. There was counter-power in the labour process as the exploited put their own (slow) death at stake. Here we agree with Lyotard’s hypothesis on the level of libidinal economics: the intensity of the exploited’s enjoyment [jouissance] in their very abjection. And Lyotard is right. Libidinal intensity, the charge of desire and the surrendering of death are always there in the exploited, but no longer on the properly symbolic rhythm of the immediate retaliation, and therefore total resolution. The enjoyment of powerlessness (on sole condition that this is not a phantasy aimed at reinstating the triumph of desire at the level of the proletariat) will never abolish power.

The very modality of the response to the slow death of labour leaves the master the possibility of, once again, repeatedly, giving the slave life through labour. The accounts are never settled, it always profits power, the dialectic of power which plays on the splitting of the poles of death, the poles of exchange. The slave remains the prisoner of the master’s dialectic, while his death, or his distilled life, serves the indefinite repetition of domination.

This domination increases as the system is charged with neutralising the symbolic retaliation by buying it back through wages. If, through labour, the exploited attempts to give his life to the exploiter, the latter wards off this restitution by means of wages. Here again we must take a symbolic radiograph. Contrary to all appearances and experience (capital buys its labour power from the worker and extorts surplus labour), capital gives labour to the worker (and the worker himself gives capital to the capitalist). In German this is Arbeiter: the entrepreneur is a ‘provider of labour’; and Arbeiter: it is the capitalist who gives, who has the initiative of the gift, which secures him, as in every social order, a pre-eminence and a power far beyond the economic. The refusal of labour, in its radical form, is the refusal of this symbolic domination and the humiliation of being bestowed upon. The gift and the taking of labour function directly as the code of the dominant social relation, as the code of discrimination. Wages are the mark of this poisonous gift, the sign which epitomises the whole code. They sanction this unilateral gift of labour, or rather wages symbolically buy back the domination exercised by capital through the gift of labour. At the same time, they furnish capital with the possibility of confining the operation to a contractual dimension, thus stabilising confrontation on economic ground. Furthermore, wages turn the wage-earner into a ‘consumer of goods’, reiterating his status as a ‘consumer of labour’ and reinforcing his symbolic deficit. To refuse labour, to dispute wages is thus to put the process of the gift, expiation and economic compensation back into question, and therefore to expose the fundamental symbolic process.

Wages are no longer ‘grabbed’ today. You too are given a wage, not in exchange for labour, but so that you spend it, which is itself another kind of labour. In the consumption or use of objects, the wage-consumer finds
herself reproducing exactly the same symbolic relation of slow death as she undergoes in labour. The user experiences exactly the same deferred death in the object (she does not sacrifice it, she 'uses' it and 'uses' it functionally) as the worker does in capital. And just as wages pay back this unilateral gift of labour, the price paid for the object is only the user paying back the object's deferred death. The proof of this lies in the symbolic rule which states that what falls to you without charge (lotteries, presents, gambling wins) must not be devoted to use, but spent as pure loss.

Every domination must be bought back, redeemed. This was formerly done through sacrificial death (the ritual death of the king or the leader), or even by ritual inversion (feasts and other social rites: but these are still forms of sacrifice). This social game of reversal comes to an end with the dialectic of the master and the slave, where the reversibility of power cedes its place to a dialectic of the reproduction of power. The redemption of power must always, however, be simulated, and this is done by the apparatus of capital where formal redemption takes place throughout the immense machine of labour, wages and consumption. Economics is the sphere of redemption par excellence, where the domination of capital manages to redeem itself without ever really putting itself at stake. On the contrary, it diverts the process of redemption into its own infinite reproduction. This is perhaps where we find the necessity of economics and its historical appearance, at the level of societies so much more vast and mobile than primitive groups, where the urgency of a system of redemption which could be measured, controlled and infinitely extended (which rituals cannot be) all at the same time, and which above all would not put the exercise and heredity of power back into question. Production and consumption are an original and unprecedented solution to this problem. By simulating redemption in this new form, the slide from the symbolic into the economic allows the definitive hegemony of political force over society to be secured.

Economics miraculously succeeds in confining the real structure of power by reversing the terms of its definition. While power consists in unilateral giving (of life in particular, see above), a contrary interpretation has been successfully imposed: power would consist in a unilateral taking and appropriation. Under cover of this ingenious retraction, real symbolic domination can continue to do as it will, since all the efforts of those under this domination will rush into the trap of taking back from power what it has taken from them, even 'taking power' themselves, thus blindly pushing on along the lines of their domination.

In fact, labour, wages, power and revolution must all be read against the grain:

- the slow death of labour is not endured, it is a desperate attempt, a challenge to capital's unilateral gift of labour;
- the only effective reply to power is to give it back what it gives you, and this is only symbolically possible by means of death.

However, if, as we have seen, the system itself deploys economics, removes its substance and its credibility, then, in this perspective, doesn't it put its own symbolic domination back into question? No, since the system brings about the overall reign of its power strategy, the gift without counter-gift, which becomes fused with deferred death. The same social relations are set up in the media and in consumption, where we have seen ('Requiem pour les Media' [Utopie, 4, 1971]) that there is no possible response or counter-gift to the unilateral delivery of messages. We were able to interpret (CERFI's project concerning automobile accidents) auto-slaughter as

- the price that the collective pays to its institutions...: the State's gifts inscribe a 'debt' in the collective accounts book. Gratuitous death is then merely an attempt to absorb this deficit. The blood on the roads is a desperate form of compensation for the State's tarmac gifts. The accident thus takes its place in the space that instigates a symbolic debt towards the State. It is likely that the more this debt grows, the more marked will be the tendency towards the accident. Every 'rational' strategy for curbing this phenomenon (prevention, speed limits, rescue services, repression) is effectively negligible. They simulate the possibility of integrating the accident into a rational system, and are therefore incapable of grasping the root of the problem: balancing a symbolic debt which founds, legitimates and reinforces the collective dependency on the State. On the contrary, these 'rational' strategies accentuate the phenomenon. In order to avert the effects of accidents, they propose to institute more mechanisms, more state institutions, supplementary 'gifts', which are simply means of aggravating the symbolic debt.

In this way the struggle is everywhere opposed to a political authority (cf. Pierre Clastres, Society against the State [tr. R. Hurley and A. Stein, New York: Zone Books, 1990]), which sets all the power it can draw from its showers of gifts - the survival it maintains and the death it withdraws - above the struggle in order to stockpile and then distil it for its own ends. Nobody really accepts this bonus forever, you give what you can, but power always gives more so as to serve better, and an entire society or a few individuals can go to great lengths, even their own destruction, to put an end to it. This is the only absolute weapon, and the mere collective threat of it can make power collapse. Power, faced with this symbolic 'blackmail' (the barricades of '68, hostage-taking), loses its footing: since it thrives on my slow death, I will oppose it with my violent death. And it is because we are living with slow death that we dream of a violent death. Even this dream is unbearable to power.

Notes

1. If it were only a question of the ascendency of exchange-value over use-value (or the ascendency of the structural over the functional dimension of language), then Marx and
Saussure have already signalled it. Marx almost turns use-value into the medium or the alibi, pure and simple, of exchange-value. His entire analysis is based on the principle of equivalence at the core of the system of exchange-value. But if equivalence is at the core of the system, there is no indeterminacy in the global system (there is always a dialectical determinacy and finality of the mode of production). The current system, however, is itself based on indeterminacy, and draws impetus from it. Conversely, it is haunted by the death of all determinacy.

2. [See Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, tr. Charles Levin, St Louis, MO: Telos, 1972 - tr.]

3. Theoretical production, like material production, loses its determinacy and begins to turn itself into an abstractive tool, slipping abysmally [en abyme] towards a reality that cannot be found. This is where we are today: undecidability, the era of floating theories, as much as floating money. No matter what perspective they come from (the psychoanalytic included), no matter with what violence they claim to rediscover an immanence, or a movement without systems of reference (Deleuze, Lyotard, etc.), all contemporary theories are floating and have no meaning other than to serve as signs for one another. It is pointless to insist on their coherence with some 'reality', whatever that might be. The system has removed every secure reference from itself; nothing it has from any other labour power. Theory no longer has any use-value, the theoretical mirror of production has also cracked. So much the better. What I mean is that the very undecidability of theory is an effect of the code. Let there be no illusions: there is no schizophrenic 'drift' about this fluctuation of theories, where flows pass freely over the body without organs (of what, capital?). It merely signifies that any theory can from now on be exchanged against any other according to variable exchange rates, but without any longer being invested anywhere, unless it is the mirror of their writing.


5. [In English in the original - tr.]

6. [In English in the original - tr.]

7. Marx, that cunning Jesuit, was not far from recognising this with his concept of the collective labourer:

The product is transformed from the direct product of the individual producer into a social product, the joint product of a collective labourer, i.e., a combination of workers, each of whom stands at a different distance from the actual manipulation of the object of labour. With the progressive accretion of the co-operative character of the labour process, there necessarily occurs a progressive extension of the concept of productive labour, and of the concept of the bearer of that labour, the productive worker. In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any one of its subordinate functions. The definition of productive labour given above, the original definition, is derived from the nature of material production itself, and it remains correct for the collective labourer, considered as a whole. But it no longer holds good for each member taken individually. (*Capital*, pp. 643-4 [J.B.’s emphases])

8. Free time is, so to speak, a form of 'complex labour', in the sense that, as opposed to simple labour, it accords with the definition of service: solidarity of the pretation and the prestaton, non-equivalence to a time of abstract social labour, non-equivalence to a wage which reproduces labour power. Marx would have been able to see this were he not myopically concerned with productive labour and the multiple distinctions which together tend to salvage the subject of history: the productive worker. The realisation of labour power, driven to perfection, would shatter the reified form by cutting the chain that ties the individual to the machinery', writes Marcuse. 'Another way would open the dimension of free time as the one in which man's private and societal existence would constitute itself' (*Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964], p. 37). Instead of phantasmagoria over free time, Marcuse understood that the system, throughout the technical progress and automation, produces free time as the equivalent of the predetermined form of labour power: the equivalent of the form of abstract social labour time, simply by being the inverted simulation of non-labour.

Job training, qualification and education, etc., are other forms of complex labour. There is also a temptation to analyse them in terms of surplus-value, of the reinvestment by capital of science, training and research, of a constant capital superadded to the ordinary worker. Adam Smith writes: 'A man educated at the expense of much labour and time ... may be compared to one of those expensive machines' (*The Wealth of Nations* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976] Vol. 1, p. 118). This is an error. Instead, education and training are not long-term investments. They are rather the direct social relation of domination and control. Capital doesn't look for any complex labour in this, but indulges in absolute waste, sacrificing an enormous part of its 'surplus-value' in the reproduction of its hegemony.

9. Paid unemployment already provides an example of this (one year of servicer pay in France at the time of writing). In certain other countries, however, it has been replaced by a 'negative taxation' scheme, which provides for a basic minimum wage for all, housewives, the handicapped, the young unemployed, to be deducted from eventual paid labour. Unemployment is quite simply disappears here as a critical conjunction (with all the political implications it used to have). Labour becomes an option, while wages become a certificate of existence, an automatic inscription in the social apparatus. Capital still remains as wages, but this time in its pure form - freed from a labour (as the signifier, following Saussure's analogy, was freed from the signified) which was only an occasional content of capital.

10. Throughout the social evolution of housing, we can see how capital's strategy has displaced itself from an economic process to an extensive process.

In the beginning, workers' housing was simply a 'dorm', a branch of the factory, a functional site for the reproduction of labour power, a strategic site for both manufacture and business. Housing was not invested with the form of capital.

Gradually, housing is invested as a space-time marked by a direct and generalised process of the control of social space. It becomes a site of reproduction, not of labour, but of the habitat itself as a specific function, as a direct form of social relation; no longer the reproduction of the worker, but of the inhabitant herself, the user. After the proletariat, the 'user' becomes the ideal type of the industrial slave. The user of goods, of words, the user of sex, the user of labour itself (the worker, or the 'agent of production', becomes the user of the factory and of her labour as individual and collective equipment, as a social service), the user of transport, but also the user of her life and death.

This decentered, extensive strategy, this all-out attack, the use or appropriation of use-value is the ultimate form of the self-management of social control.

11. Thus the Californian utopia of the cybernetic disintegration of the 'tertiary metropolis': home-based computer labour. Labour is pulverised into every pore of society and everyday life. As well as labour power, the space-time of labour also ceases to exist: society constitutes nothing but a single continuum of the processes of value. Labour has become a way of life. Nothing can reinstate the factory walls, the golden age of the factory and class struggle against the ubiquity of capital, surplus-value and labour, against their inevitable disappearance as such. The worker merely nourishes the imaginary of the struggle, just as the cop nourishes the imaginary of repression.

12. The concept of surplus-value has simply lost any meaning as regards a system which, from reproducing labour power in order to generate profit and surplus-value, has now become reproductive of life in its entirety through advanced redistribution or reintegration of every equivalent of social surplus labour. From this point on, surplus-value is everywhere and nowhere. Capital no longer has any 'incidental expenses', nor on the other hand has it any 'profit' in the sense of a unilateral extortion. The law of the system requires that you give yourself up to its redistributions in order that it circulates and that
each and everyone, caught in the tightly woven net of this incessant redistribution, might become a manager, while the whole group becomes able to manage its own surplus-value, thus implicating oneself fundamentally within the everyday political order of capital. And just as, viewed from the point of view of capital, surplus-value has lost all meaning, it has also lost all meaning from the point of view of the exploited. The distinction between a fraction of labour returning as a wage and a remainder called surplus-value has lost all meaning from the point of view of the worker who used to reproduce her labour power as a wage, but now reproduces her entire life in a generalised process of labour.

13. [Baudrillard is playing on the French term investissement, used to translate Freud's Besetzung, rendered in English as 'cathexis'. The French term covers the political and libidinal economic sense of 'investment' as well as the military sense of the 'occupation' of hostile territory – tr.]

14. Other parallel forms of maximalist reversal: equal wages for all, the struggle against qualifications. All these forms seek the end of the division of labour (the end of labour as social relation) and the end of the law of equivalence in the field of wages and labour power, which is of fundamental importance for the system. Therefore they indirectly target the very form of political economy.

15. This same phenomenon arises in the 'developing' countries. There is no upper limit to the cost of raw materials once they, outside the grasp of economies, become the sign and the gauge of the acceptance of a global political order, a peaceful planetary co-existence where the developing countries are forcibly socialised under the great powers. The escalation of prices then becomes a challenge, not only to the wealth of the Western countries, but also to the political system of peaceful co-existence in the face of a single predominant global political class. Whether this class is capitalist or communist is of minor importance.

Before the oil crisis, the Arabs made traditional wage demands: petrol must be sold at the price. Now, however, these demands have turned around and become unlimited and maximal.

16. The energy crisis gave both 'types' of inflation an ab libitum and a perfect deterrent in one go. From this point on, inflation as a structural crisis internal to the system may be plausibly blamed on the 'overvaluation' of energy and raw materials by the countries that produce them. Disaffection with the productivist system, which, amongst other things, is expressed in the maximal wage challenge, may be counteracted by the threat of poverty, that is, by threatening the use-value of the economic system itself.


18. This intervention, however, is not exclusive of any other group deprived of social representation. When young women, high school students, homosexuals and even 'proles' become 'savages', or if we admit that basically the unions do not represent them at all, but only themselves, then we all in like manner become 'immigrants'. On the other hand, these groups might cease to be 'immigrants'. There are then no 'immigrants as such', and they do not constitute a new historical subject, a neo-proletariat who would take over as the other.

19. [Confédération générale du travail, the French Trades Union Congress – tr.]

20. [For an exposition of the Great Confinement, see Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilisation, tr. Richard Howard, London: Tavistock, 1967 – tr.]

21. As an illustration of this, we might analyse an advert for the Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP), which reads: 'I am interested in your money – fair's fair – lend me your money and you may profit from my bank.'

To begin with, this is the first time that capital (in its front line institution, namely international finance capital) has so clearly and openly stated the law of equivalence, and, surprisingly, in the form of an advertising slogan. These things are usually unstated; commercial exchange is seen as immoral, and all publicity tries to cover this up as a matter of urgency. We may therefore be sure that this candour is a second-degree mask.

Secondly, its apparent aim is to convince people on economic grounds to do themselves a good turn and take their money to the BNP. Its real strategy remains unofficial, however: to convince people by this 'man to man' capitalist openness, saying 'let's not be sentimental about this', 'no more of the ideology of dependence', 'cards on the table', etc., and so to seduce people by means of the obscenity of revealing the hidden, immoral law of equivalence. This is a 'macho' complicity where men share the obscene truth of capital. Hence the smell of lechery about his advert, the salaciousness and smuttness of the eyes glued to your money as if it were your genitals. The technique used by the advert is a perverse provocation which is much more subtle than the simplistic seduction of the smile (such as was the theme of the Société Générale's [a bank – tr.] counter-offensive: 'It is not the banker who should smile, but the client'). People are seduced by the obscenity of the economic, taken to the level of the perverse fascination that the very atrocity of capital exercises on them. From this perspective the slogan quite simply signifies: 'I am interested in your arse – fair's fair – lend me your buttocks and I'll bugger you', which is not to everyone's taste.

Behind the humanist morality of exchange there is a profound desire for capital, a vertiginous desire for the law of value; and this complicity, both economic and non-economic, is what the advert, perhaps without knowing it, seeks to recover, testifying to an innuendo for politics.

Thirdly, the advertising executives could not have been unaware that this advert, with its vampiric image, scared the middle classes, so that to emphasise their lecherous complicity with this direct attack would provoke negative reactions. Why did they take this risk? Here we have the strangest trap: the advert was made to consolidate the resistance to the law of profit and equivalence so as to be better able to oppose the equivalence of capital, profit, and the economic in general (the 'fair's fair') at a time when this is no longer true, when capital has displaced its strategy and so is able to state its 'law' since it no longer its truth. Announcing this law is nothing more than a supplementary mystification.

Capital no longer thrives on the rule of any economic law, which is why the law can be made into an advertising slogan, falling into the sphere of the sign and its manipulation. The economic is only the quantitative theatre of value. This, as well as the fact that the role of money in all this is only a pretext, is expressed by the advert in its own way. Hence the commutability of the advert itself, which can operate at every level, for example:

- I am interested in your unconscious – fair's fair – lend me your phantasies and you may profit from my analysis;
- I am interested in your death – fair's fair – take out a life insurance policy and I will make your death into a fortune;
- I am interested in your productivity – fair's fair – lend me your labour power and you may profit from my capital;

and so on. This advert could serve as a 'general equivalent' for all real social relations.

Finally, if the advert's basic message is not equivalence, a = a, a fair's fair (no-one is fooled, as the advertising executives well know), could it be surplus-value (the fact that the operation ends up, for the banker and for capital, showing the equation: a = a + a')? The advert can barely conceal this truth, and everyone can sense it. Capital slides in and out of the shadows here, almost unmasking itself, but it is not serious since what the advert really says comes neither from the order of quantitative equivalence, nor from surplus-value, but from the order of the tautology:

not: a = a
nor: a = a + a'
but: A = A
That is: a bank is a bank, a banker is a banker, money is money, and you can have none of it. While pretending to state the economic law of equivalence, the advert actually states the tautological imperative, the fundamental rule of domination. For whether a bank is a bank, or indeed whether a table is a table, or whether $2 + 2 = 4$ (and not $5$ as Dostoyevsky had it), is the real capitalist credence. When capital says 'I am interested in your money', it feigns profitability in order to secure credibility. This credibility comes from the economic order (credibility), while the credence attached to the tautology sums up in itself the identity of the capitalist order and comes from the symbolic order.

22. So just as there had been (for Marx as well) a naturalist phantasy of use-value, there is for us today an economistic phantasy of exchange-value. For us, in the structural play of the code, exchange-value plays the same role as use-value used to play in the market law of value, the role of the simulacrum of reference. The American Senate has gone to the extent of calculating what it would cost to bring water back to the purity it had before the European conquest of the Americas (the '1491 standard', Christopher Columbus having landed, as we know, in 1492): $350 million. These millions matter little, however, since what the Senators are in fact calculating is the cost of bringing the system itself back to the original purity of primitive accumulation, the golden age of labour power. The 1890, or indeed 1840, standard?

In like fashion, the current monetary system dreams of gold and a gold standard to stabilise and regenerate fiduciary values. The current state of affairs is that free and unlimited speculation on the grounds of the loss of the gold-referent edges closer every moment to catastrophe: an arbitrariness and an inflation of such proportions that the authority of money itself is toppled and loses all its credibility. Again we have a cyclical regeneration by means of reference; a 'critical' regeneration is necessary in order to prevent financial exchanges from reaching the limits of unreality, where they would be destroyed.

23. There are, of course, contradictions remaining between the structural and the market law of value, just as, in a previous phase, there were between the law of the market and resistant pre-capitalist values (which contradictions have not completely disappeared). In this way, the ultimate end of the system is the control of death: death is one of the structural markings of life, it also clashes with economic imperatives and a traditional logic of profit (the enormous cost of long-term care, hospitalisation, and so on). A compromise results from this, an absurd equilibrium (we can afford to keep 35 per cent of all leukaemia sufferers alive). Assessing the marginal costs of death. Anything above this level and we let them die. But this is not cynical economics, on the contrary, the economy prevents the system from following the conclusions of its own logic and barring people's access to death.

24. There is in fact a constant play between the two forms of value, controlled by a strategy aiming at intensifying the crisis. And although the crisis seems to require a solution, it is this solution already.

25. The gift, under the sign of gift-exchange, has been made into the distinguishing mark of primitive 'economies', and at the same time into the alternative principle to the law of value and political economy. There is no worse mystification. The gift is our myth, the idealist myth correliative to our materialist myth, and we bury the primitives under both myths at the same time. The primitive symbolic process knows nothing of the gratuitity of the gift, it knows only the challenge and the reversibility of exchanges. When this reversibility is broken, precisely by the unilateral possibility of giving (which presupposes the possibility of stockpiling value and transferring it in one direction only), then the properly symbolic relation is dead and power makes an appearance: it will merely be deployed thereafter throughout the economic apparatus of the contract. It is our (operational) fiction, our metaphysics, the idea that it is possible to accumulate stock-value in its head (capital), to make it increase and multiply: this is the trap of the accumulation and capital. It is equally our fiction, however, to think that we may relinquish it absolutely (with the gift). The primitives know that this possibility does not exist, that the arresting of value on one term, the very possibility of isolating a segment of exchange, one side of the exchange, is unthinkable, that everything has a compensation, not in the contractual sense, but in the sense that the process of exchange is unavoidably reversible. They base all their relations on this incessant backfire, ambivalence and death in exchange, whereas we base our order on the possibility of separating two distinct poles of exchange and making them autonomous. There follows either the equivalent exchange (the contract) or the inequivalent exchange which has no compensation (the gift). But both, as we shall see, obey the same dislocation of the process and the same autonomisation of value.

26. This is no doubt especially true in the phase of physical abjection and savage exploitation, in capitalist 'prostitution' under the market law of value. How much of this remains in our phase, the structural law of value?

27. This is particularly clear when wages are unilaterally bestowed, imposed in 'negative taxation' without any labour in return. The wage-earner without equivalence; in this trans-economic contract, we see a pure domination and pure subervience to the gift and the premium emerge.

28. That is symbolic exchange. We must emphasise that it stands opposed to the entire liberal or Christian humanist ideology of the gift. The gift is the source and even the essence of power. Only the counter-gift, the reversibility of symbolic exchange, abolishes power.
‘Design(ated)’ nudity implies that there is nothing behind the lattice of
signs that it weaves, especially not a body: neither a body of labour, nor a
body of pleasure; neither an erogenous body nor a broken body. It
formally exceeds all that in a simulacrum of the pacified body, just like
Brigitte Bardot, who is ‘beautiful because she fits her dress exactly’ – a
functional equation without any unknown factors. As opposed to the rent
skin and torn muscles of the anatomical body, the modern body comes
much more under the heading of the inflatable, a theme illustrated by a
cartoon strip in *Lui* where we see a stripper, her clothes scattered on the
floor around her, making one final gesture: she ‘uncorks’ her navel and
deflates immediately, leaving only a small heap of skin on the stage.

A utopia of nudity, of the body present in its truth: this is at most the
ideology of the body that can be represented. The Indian (I no longer know
which one) said: ‘The naked body is an expressionless mask hiding each of
our true natures.’ By this he meant that the body only has meaning when it
is marked, covered in inscriptions. Alphonse Allais’ Rajah, a fanatic for
denotation and truth, translated this contrariwise: not content to have
made the dancing girl undress, he flays her alive.

The body is not at all the surface of being, a virginal beach without
tracks, nature. It has only taken on this ‘original’ value through repression:
and so, to liberate the body as such in accordance with naturalist illusions is
to liberate it as repressed. Even in nudity, the body turns back on itself,
shrouding itself with an ethereal and ineluctable censorship: the second
skin. For the skin, like every sign that takes on the value of a sign, is
doubled through signification: it is always already the second skin, not the
final skin, but always the only one.

In the redundancy of the nudity-sign, which works towards a reconstruc-
tion of the body as a phantasm of totalisation, we again find the infinite
speculation of the conscious subject through its mirror-image, capturing
and bringing a formal resolution to the insurmountable division of the
subject in this reduplication. The signs inscribed on the body, where the
death drive is also tangentially inscribed, merely repeat the metaphysical
operations of the conscious subject on corporeal material. ‘By beating our
skins we beat metaphysics back into our brains’, as Artaud said.

Closure of the mirror, phallic reduplication of the mark: in both cases
the subject is seduced by itself. It seduces its own desire and conjures it up
in its own body, doubled in signs. Behind the exchange of signs, behind the
labour of the code which functions as a fortification of the phallic, the
subject can hide away and recover its strength: shying away from the desire
of the other (from its own lack), and, as it were, to see (to see oneself)
without being seen. The logic of the sign meets the logic of perversion.

It is important here to make a radical distinction between the labour of
inscription and the mark at the level of the body in ‘primitive’ societies and
that which takes place in our current system. They are too easily mixed up
in the category of the ‘symbolic expression’ of the body. As if the body had
always been what it is, as if archaic tattooing had the same meaning as
make-up, as if, beyond all the revolutions of the mode of production, there
existed an unexchanged mode of signification at the basis of every age
extending even into the sphere of political economy. In archaic society, as
opposed to our own, where signs are exchanged under the regime of the
general equivalent, where they have an exchange-value in a system of
phallic abstraction and of the imaginary saturation of the subject, marking
the body as a masking practice, all have the function of immediately
actualising symbolic exchange, gift-exchange with the gods or within the
group. Here, negotiation is not a negotiation of identity by the subject
behind the mask, nor the manipulation of the sign: on the contrary, it
consumes the subject’s identity and, like the subject, enters the game of
possession and dispossession, the entire body becoming, just like gods and
women, material for symbolic exchange. Finally, within this standard
schema of signification, our transcendent Signifier/Signified, our Phallus/
Subjectivity, which governs our entire political economy of the body, has
not yet emerged. When the Indian (perhaps the same one) says ‘everything
is a face to me’, in response to the white man’s questions as to why he is
naked, he is saying that his entire body (which, as we have seen is never
nude) is given over to symbolic exchange, while for us, nudity has a
tendency to be reduced to a single face and a single look. For the Indian,
people gaze at each other and exchange all their signs. These signs are
consumed in an incessant relaying and refer neither to a transcendental law
of value, nor to a private appropriation of the subject. For us, the body is
sealed in signs, increasing its value through a calculus of signs that it
exchanges under the law of equivalence and the reproduction of the
subject. The subject is no longer eliminated in the exchange, it speculates.
The subject, not the savage, is enmeshed in fetishism: through the
investment [faire-valoir] of its body, it is the subject that is fetishised by the
law of value.

Strip-tease

Bernardin (manager of the Crazy Horse Saloon):

You neither strip nor tease . . . you parody . . . I am a hoaxter: you give the
impression of giving the naked truth, there could not be a greater hoax.
This is the opposite of life, because when she is nude, she has many more
adornments than when she is dressed. Bodies are made up with extremely
beautiful special foundations, leaving the skin satin smooth . . . She has
gloves that cut off on her arms, which is always so beautiful, green, red or black
stockings on her legs, also cut off at the thigh . . .

Dream strip-tease: the space-woman. She was dancing in the void. Because
the more slowly a woman dies, the more erotic it is. So I believe that this would
reach its apex with a woman in a state of weightlessness.

Beach nudity has nothing to do with stage nudity. On stage the women
are goddesses, they are untouchable . . . The wave of nudity sweeping through the
closed sphere of a body which, by means of this aura of gestures, designates itself as a phallus and specifies itself as a sign of desire. To succeed is not at all to ‘make love with the audience’ as is generally thought, it is rather precisely the opposite. The stripper is a goddess according to Bernardin, and the prohibition cast over her, which she traces around herself, does not signify that you cannot take anything from her (cannot pass into sexual acting-out, this repressive situation belongs to the bad strip), but rather that you cannot give her anything, because she gives herself everything, hence the complete transcendence that makes her fascinating.

The slow pace of the gestures comes from the priesthood and from transubstantiation. Not bread and wine in this case, but the transubstantiation of the body into the phallus. Every piece of clothing that falls brings her no closer to nudity, to the naked ‘truth’ of sex (although the entire spectacle is also fuelled by the voyeuristic drive, haunted by a violent laying bare and the rape-drive, but these phantasms run counter to the spectacle). As her clothes fall, she designates what she strips down as a phallus — she unveils herself as other and the same game becomes profound, the body emerging more and more as a phallic effigy to the rhythm of the strip. This is not then a game of stripping signs away in order to reveal a sexual ‘depth’, but, on the contrary, an ascending play of the construction of signs — each mark deriving an erotic force by means of its labour as a sign, that is, by means of the reversal it effects of what has never been (loss and castration) into what it designates instead to take its place: the phallus.11 This is why the strip-tease is slow: it ought to go as fast as possible if it is simply a matter of preparing for sex. It is slow because it is discourse, the construction of signs, the meticulous elaboration of deferred meaning. The gaze too testifies to this phallic transfiguration. A fixed gaze is an essential asset of the good stripper. This is commonly interpreted as a distanciation technique, a coolness intended to mark the limits of this erotic situation. Yes and no: the fixed gaze that merely marks a prohibition would once more turn the strip into a kind of repressive pornodrama. That is not a good strip, the mastery of the gaze has nothing to do with a willed ‘cool’: if it is cool, as with mannequins, it is on condition that cool is redefined as a very specific quality of the whole contemporary media and body culture, and no longer belongs to the order of the hot and the cold. This gaze is the neutralised gaze of auto-erotic fascination, of the woman-object gazing at herself with her eyes wide open, then closing her eyes on herself. This is not the effect of desire undergoing censorship, it is the peak of perfection and perversion. It is the fulfillment of the entire sexual system that has it that a woman is never more completely herself, and therefore never so seductive, as when she accepts giving herself pleasure first of all, taking pleasure in herself, having no other desire or transcendence than that of her own image.

The ideal body, as outlined in this statute, is that of the mannequin. The mannequin offers the model of every phallic instrumentalisation of the
body. The word itself states this: manne-ken, ‘little man’, the child or the penis. The woman wraps her own body in a sophisticated manipulation, a flawless and intense narcissistic discipline, which effectively makes it the paradigm of seduction. And doubtless it is here, in this perverse process that turns her and her sacrificial body into a living phallus, that we find the real castration of woman (also of man, but according to a model which tends to crystallise around the woman). To be castrated is to be covered with phallic substitutes. The woman is covered in them, she is summoned to produce a phallus from her body, on pain of perhaps not being desirable. And if women are not fetishists it is because they perform this labour of continual fetishisation on themselves, they become dolls. We know that the doll is a fetish produced in order to be continually dressed and undressed, dressed up and dressed down. It is this play of covering and uncovering that gives the doll its childhood symbolic value, it is in this play, conversely, that every object- and symbolic relation regresses when the woman turns herself into a doll, becomes her own fetish and the fetish of the other.12 As Freud says: ‘pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallise the last moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic (Fetishism, in Standard Edition, Vol. 21, p. 155).

Thus the fascination of the strip-tease as a spectacle of castration derives from the immanence of discovering, or rather seeking and never managing to discover, or better still searching by all available means without ever discovering, that there is nothing there. ‘An aversion, which is never absent in any fetishist, to the real female genitals remains a stigma indelible of the repression that has taken place’ (ibid., p. 154). The experience of this unthinkable absence, which subsequently remains constitutive of every ‘revelation’, every ‘unveiling’ (and in particular the sexual status of ‘truth’), the obsession with the hole is changed into the converse fascination with the phallus. From this mystery of the denied, barred, gaping void, a whole population of fetishes surges forth (objects, phantasms, body-objects). The fetishised woman’s body itself comes to bar the point of absence from which it arose, it comes to bar this vertigo in all its erotic presence, a ‘token of a triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it’ (ibid., p. 154).

There is nothing behind this succession of veils, there never has been, and the impulse which is always pressing forward in order to discover this is strictly speaking the process of castration; not the recognition of lack, but the fascinating vertigo of this nihilating substance. The entire march of the West, ending in a vertiginous compulsion for realism, is affected by this myopia of castration. Pretending to restore the ‘ground of things’, we unconsciously ‘eye up’ the void. Instead of a recognition of castration, we establish all kinds of phallic alibis; then, following a fascinated compulsion, we seek to dismiss these alibis one by one in order to uncover the ‘truth’, which is always castration, but which is in the last instance always revealed to be castration denied.

Planned Narcissism

All this leads us to repeat the question of narcissism in terms of social control. There is a passage in Freud that brings out everything we have been discussing up to this point:

Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment which compensates them for the social restrictions that are imposed on them in their choice of object. Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man’s love for them. Nor does their need lie in the direction of loving, but of being loved; and the man who fulfils this condition is the one who finds favour with them. . . . Such women have the greatest fascination for men, not only for aesthetic reasons, since as a rule they are the most beautiful, but also because of a combination of interesting psychological factors. (‘On narcissism: An introduction’, in Standard Edition, Vol. 14, 1957, pp. 88–9)

There follows a question ‘of children, cats, and certain animals’ which ‘we envy[.] . . . for maintaining . . . an unassailable libidinal position’, and for the ‘narcissistic consistency . . . they manage’ (ibid., p. 89). In the current system of erotics, however, it is not a question of primary narcissism bound to a sort of ‘poly morphous perversity’. It is rather a matter of the displacement of ‘[the narcissism] enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego [onto] the ego-ideal’, or, more precisely, the projection of the ‘narcissistic perfection of . . . childhood’ (ibid., p. 94) as the ideal ego which, as we know, is bound up with repression and sublimation. The gratification the woman takes from her body and the rhetoric of beauty reflect, in fact, a fierce discipline, an ethics which parallels the one that governs the economic order. Neither can one distinguish, in the framework of this functional aesthetics of the body, the process by which the subject submits to its narcissistic ideal ego from that by which society enjoins the subject to conform to this ideal, leaving it no other alternative but to love itself, to invent itself and invest itself in accordance with socially imposed rules. This narcissism is therefore radically distinct from that of the cat or the child in that it is placed under the sign of value. This is a planned narcissism, a managed and functional exaltation of beauty as the exploitation and exchange of signs. Self-seduction is only apparently gratuitous; in fact its every detail is finalised by the norm of the optimal management of the body on the market of signs. Modern erotics, whatever phantasms are in play in it, is organised around a rational economy of value, differentiating it absolutely from primary or infantile narcissism.

Thus fashion and advertising sketch the auto-erotic Carte du Ten dre13 and plan its exploration: you are responsible for your body and must invest in it and make it yield benefits – not in accordance with the order of enjoyment – but with the signs reflected and mediated by mass models, and in accordance with an organisation chart of prestige, etc. A strange strategy is operative here; there is a diversion and transfer of investments from the body and the erogenous zones towards staging the body and erotogeneity. From now on, narcissistic seduction becomes associated with
regression within the law (towards incest), nor a pure and simple transgression (always dependent on the law), it is the revolution of this law.


20. After the history of the body's negativity comes the history of its positivity. The ambiguity of the current 'revolution' derives entirely from the fact that centuries of repression have based the body on value. Repressed, the body is charged with a transgressive virtuality of all values. Similarly, however, we must understand that a long lasting and inextricable confusion between the body and a series of 'materialist' values (health, well-being, sexuality, liberty) has been at work in the shadows of repression. The concept of the body has grown up in the shadow of a certain transcendental materialism which has slowly matured in the shadow of idealism as its revitalising solution, even bringing about its resurrection in accordance with determinate finalities, and operates as a dynamic element in the equilibrium of the new system of values. Nudity becomes the emblem of radical subjectivity. The body becomes the standard of the pulsions. But this liberation has something of the ambiguity of every liberation, in that it is here liberated as value. Just as labour is never 'liberated' as anything other than labour power in a system of forces of production and exchange-value, subjectivity is only ever liberated as a phantasm and sign-value in the framework of planned signification, a systematics of signification where coincidence with the systematics of production is clear enough. In the final analysis, subjectivity is only ever 'liberated' in the sense that it is once again seized by political economy.

21. And the opposite of Ockham's razor, which castrates and traces the taut thread of abstraction and reason.

5

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND DEATH

The Extradition of the Dead

As soon as savages began to call 'men' only those who were members of their tribe, the definition of the 'Human' was considerably enlarged: it became a universal concept. This is precisely what we call culture. Today all men are men. Universality is in fact based exclusively on tautology and doubling, and this is where the 'Human' takes on the force of a moral law and a principle of exclusion. This is because the 'Human' is from the outset the institution of its structural double, the 'Inhuman'. This is all it is: the progress of Humanity and Culture are simply the chain of discriminations with which to brand 'Others' with inhumanity, and therefore with nullity. For the savages who call themselves 'men', the others are something else. For us, by contrast, under the sign of the Human as a universal concept, others are nothing. In other cases, to be 'man' is, like being a gentleman, a challenge, a distinction experienced as a great struggle, not merely giving rise to an exchange of quality or status amongst different beings (gods, ancestors, foreigners, animals, nature...), but imposing its stakes universally, being praised and prohibited. We are happy to be promoted to the universal, to an abstract and generic value indexed on the equivalence of the species, to the exclusion of all the others. In some sense, therefore, the definition of the Human inexorably contracts in accordance with cultural developments: each 'objective' progressive step towards the universal corresponded to an ever stricter discrimination, until eventually we can glimpse the time of man's definitive universality that will coincide with the excommunication of all men – the purity of the concept alone radiant in the void.

Racism is modern. Previous races or cultures were ignored or eliminated, but never under the sign of a universal Reason. There is no criterion of man, no split from the Inhuman, there are only differences with which to oppose death. But it is our undifferentiated concept of man that gives rise to discrimination. We must read the following narrative by Jean de Léry, from the sixteenth century: *Histoire d’un voyage en la terre de Brésil* ('The History of a Journey to the Land of Brazil') to see that racism did not exist in this period when the Idea of Man does not yet cast its shadow over all the metaphysical purity of Western culture. This Reformation puritan from Geneva, landing amongst Brazilian cannibals, is not racist. It is due to the extent of our progress that we have since become racists, and not only
towards Indians and cannibals: the increasing hold of rationality on our culture has meant the successive extraditions of inanimate nature, animals and inferior races into the Inhuman, while the cancer of the Human has invested the very society it claimed to contain within its absolute superiority. Michel Foucault has analysed the extradition of madmen at the dawn of Western modernity, but we also know of the extradition and progressive confinement of children, following the course of Reason itself, into the idealised state of infancy, the ghetto of the infantile universe and the abjection of innocence. But the old have also become inhuman, pushed to the fringes of normality. Like so many others, the mad, children and the old have only become 'categories' under the sign of the successive segregations that have marked the development of culture. The poor, the under-developed, those with subnormal IQs, perverts, transsexuals, intellectuals and women form a folklore of terror, a folklore of excommunication on the basis of an increasingly racist definition of the 'normal human'.

Foucault's analysis, amongst the masterpieces of this genuine cultural history, takes the form of a genealogy of discrimination in which, at the start of the nineteenth century, labour and production occupy a decisive place. At the very core of the 'rationality' of our culture, however, is an exclusion that precedes every other, more radical than the exclusion of madmen, children or inferior races, an exclusion preceding all these and serving as their model: the exclusion of the dead and of death.

There is an irreversible evolution from savage societies to our own: little by little, the dead cease to exist. They are thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation. They are no longer beings with a full role to play, worthy partners in exchange, and we make this obvious by exiling them further and further away from the group of the living. In the domestic intimacy of the cemetery, the first grouping remains in the heart of the village or town, becoming the first ghetto, prefiguring every future ghetto, but are thrown further and further from the centre towards the periphery, finally having nowhere to go at all, as in the new town or the contemporary metropolis, where there are no longer any provisions for the dead, either in mental or in physical space. Even madmen, delinquents and misfits can find a welcome in the new towns, that is, in the rationality of a modern society. Only the death-function cannot be programmed and localised. Strictly speaking, we no longer know what to do with them, since, today, it is not normal to be dead, and this is new. To be dead is an unthinkable anomaly; nothing else is as offensive as this. Death is a delinquency, and an incurable deviance. The dead are no longer inflicted on any place or space-time, they can find no resting place; they are thrown into a radical utopia. They are no longer even packed in and shut up, but obliterated.

But we know what these hidden places signify: the factory no longer exists because labour is everywhere; the prison no longer exists because arrests and confinements pervade social space-time; the asylum no longer exists because psychological control and therapy have been generalised and become banal; the school no longer exists because every strand of social progress is shot through with discipline and pedagogical training; capital no longer exists (nor does its Marxist critique) because the law of value has collapsed into self-managed survival in all its forms, etc., etc. The cemetery no longer exists because modern cities have entirely taken over their function: they are ghost towns, cities of death. If the great operational metropolis is the final form of an entire culture, then, quite simply, ours is a culture of death.3

Survival, or the Equivalent to Death

It is correct to say that the dead, hounded and separated from the living, condemn us to an equivalent death: for the fundamental law of symbolic obligation is at play in any case, for better or worse. Madness, then, is only ever the dividing line between the mad and the normal, a line which normality shares with madness and which is even defined by it. Every society that internalises its mad is a society invested in its depths by madness, which alone and everywhere ends up being symbolically exchanged under the legal signs of normality. Madness has for several centuries worked hard on the society which confines it, and today the asylum walls have been removed, not because of some miraculous tolerance, but because madness has completed its normalising labour on society: madness has become pervasive, while at the same time it is forbidden a resting place. The asylum has been reabsorbed into the core of the social field, because normality has reached the point of perfection and assumed the characteristics of the asylum, because the virus of confinement has worked its way into every fibre of 'normal' existence.

So it is with death. Death is ultimately nothing more than the social line of demarcation separating the 'dead' from the 'living': therefore, it affects both equally. Against the senseless illusion of the living of willing the living to the exclusion of the dead, against the illusion that reduces life to an absolute surplus-value by subtracting death from it, the indestructible logic of symbolic exchange re-establishes the equivalence of life and death in the indifferent fatality of survival. In survival, death is repressed; life itself, in accordance with that well known ebbing away, would be nothing more than a survival determined by death.

The Ghetto Beyond the Grave

The concept of immortality grew alongside the segregation of the dead. For the flip-side of death, this eminent status which is the mark of the 'soul' and 'superior' spiritualities, is only a story that conceals the real extradition of the dead and the rupturing of a symbolic exchange with them. When the dead are there, lifelike [vivants] but different from the living [vivants]
whom they partner in multiple exchanges, they have no need to, and neither is it necessary that they should, be immortal, since this fantastic quality shatters all reciprocity. It is only to the extent that they are excluded by the living that they quietly become immortal, and this idealised survival is only the mark of their social exile.

We must get rid of the idea of progress in religions, leading from animism to polytheism and then to monotheism, in the course of which an immortal soul progressively emerges. It is to the precise extent that the dead are confined that they are conferred an immortality, just as, in a similar way, we see life expectancy grow simultaneously with the segregation of pensioners, deemed asocial, in our societies.

Immortality is progressive, and this is one of the strangest things. It progresses in time, passing from limited to eternal survival; in social space, immortality becomes democratic and passes from being the privilege of a few to being everyone’s virtual right. This is relatively recent, however. In Egypt, certain members of the group (Pharaohs, then priests, chiefs, the wealthy, the initiates of the dominant class), according to the degree of their power, slowly broke away as immortals, others having only the right to death and the double. Towards the year 2000 BC, everyone accedes to immortality in a sort of social conquest, perhaps the outcome of a great struggle. Without attempting a social history or constructing a fiction, we can well imagine, in Egypt and the Great Dynasties, revolts and social movements demanding the right to immortality for all.

In the beginning, then, immortality was a matter of an emblem of power and social transcendence. Where, in primitive groups, there were no structures of political power, there was no personal immortality either. Consequently, in the least segmented societies, a ‘relative’ soul and a ‘restricted’ immortality correspond to a similarly relative transcendence of power structures. Then, with the Grand Empires, despotic societies of total transcendence of power, immortality is generalised and becomes eternal. The King or the Pharaoh is the first to benefit from this advancement, but then, at a more advanced stage, issuing from God Himself who is immortality par excellence, immortality is democratically redistributed. But the phase of the immortal God, which coincides with the great universalist religions (and Christianity in particular), is already a phase of a huge abstraction of social power in the Roman Imperium. If the Greek gods were mortals, it is because they were bound to a specific culture and were not yet universal.

In its initial stages, Christianity was not in accord over immortality, which was a late acquisition. The Church Fathers still admitted the provisional elimination of the soul awaiting resurrection. Even when St Paul preached the idea of resurrection, the pagans mocked him for it and even the Church Fathers had a deep resistance to it. In the Old Testament (Daniel), resurrection is promised only to those who have not received retribution during their lifetime for good or evil. The beyond of life, survival, is only the settling of all accounts, existing only according to what remained unexchanged in life. Resurrection, or immortality, is a fine example of the last resort as regards the symbolic possibility of the archaic group’s immediate regulation of all its accounts, annulling all its symbolic debt without reference to an afterlife.

Originally the distinctive emblem of power, the immortality of the soul acts, throughout Christianity, as an egalitarian myth, as a democratic beyond as opposed to worldly inequality before death. It is only a myth. Even in its most universalist Christian version, immortality only belongs to every human being by right: in fact, it is sparingly granted, remaining the privilege of a culture, and within this culture, the privilege of a specific social and political caste. Have the missionaries ever believed in the immortal soul of the natives? Has woman ever really had a soul in ‘classical’ Christianity? What about madmen, children and criminals? In fact it always comes down to this: only the rich and powerful have a soul. Social, political and economic inequality (life expectancy, prestigious funerals, glory and living on in men’s memories) before death is only ever the effect of this fundamental discrimination: some, the only real ‘human beings’, have the right to immortality; others have only the right to death. Nothing has changed greatly since Egypt and the Great Dynasties.

‘What does immortality matter?’ the naive materialist will say, ‘It’s all imaginary.’ Yes, and it is exciting to see that this is where the basis of the real social discrimination lies, and that nowhere else are power and social transcendence so clearly marked than in the imaginary. The economic power of capital is based in the imaginary just as much as is the power of the Church: capital is only its fantastic secularisation.

We can also see that democracy changes nothing here. We used to be able to fight in order to gain immortality for the souls of all, just as generations of proletarians fought in order to gain equality in terms of goods and culture. It is the same fight, the former for survival in the beyond, and the latter for survival here. It is the same trap: the personal immortality of a few resulting, as we have seen, in the break-up of the group – so what’s the point of demanding immortality for all? It is simply to generalise the imaginary. The revolution can only consist in the abolition of the separation of death, and not in equality of survival.

Immortality is only a kind of general equivalent bound to the abstraction of linear time (taking form as soon as time becomes this abstract dimension bound to the process of political-economic accumulation and, in short, to the abstraction of life).

Death Power

The emergence of survival can therefore be analysed as the fundamental operation in the birth of power. Not only because this set-up will permit the necessity of the sacrifice of this life and the threat of recompense in the
next (this is exactly the priest-caste's strategy), but more profoundly by instituting the *prohibition of death* and, at the same time, the agency that oversees this prohibition of death: power. Shattering the union of the living and the dead, and slapping a prohibition on death and the dead: the primary source of social control. Power is possible only if death is no longer free, only if the dead are put under surveillance, in anticipation of the future confinement of life in its entirety. This is the fundamental Law, and power is the guardian at the gates of this Law. It is not the repression of unconscious pulsions, libido, or whatever other energy that is fundamental, and it is not anthropological; it is the repression of death, the *social* repression of death in the sense that this is what facilitates the shift towards the repressive socialisation of life.

Historically, we know that sacredotal power is based on a monopoly over death and exclusive control over relations with the dead. The dead are the first restricted area, the exchange of whom is restored by an obligatory mediation by the priests. Power is established on death's borders. It will subsequently be sustained by further separations (the soul and the body, the male and the female, good and evil, etc.) that have infinite ramifications, but the principal separation is between life and death. When the French say that power 'holds the bar', it is no metaphor: it is the bar between life and death, the decres that suspends exchange between life and death, the tollgate and border control between the two banks.

This is precisely the way in which power will later be instituted between the subject separated from its body, between the individual separated from its social body, between man separated from his labour: the agency of mediation and representation flourishes in this rupture. We must take note, however, that the archetype of this operation is the separation between a group and its dead, or between each of us today and our own deaths. Every form of power will have something of this smell about it, because it is on the manipulation and administration of death that power, in the final analysis, is based.

All the agencies of repression and control are installed in this divided space, in the suspense between a life and its proper end, that is, in the production of a literally fantastic and artificial temporality (since at every instant every life has its proper death there already, that is to say, in this same instant lies the finality it attains). The first abstract social time is installed in this rupture of the indivisible unity of life and death (well before abstract social labour time!). All the future forms of alienation that Marx denounces, the separations and abstractions of political economy, take root in this separation of death.

The economic operation consists in life taking death hostage. This is a *residual* life which can from now on be read in the operational terms of calculation and value. For example, in Chamisso's *The Man who Lost his Shadow*, Peter Schlemil becomes a rich and powerful capitalist once his shadow has been lost (once death is taken hostage: the pact with the Devil is only ever a political-economic pact).

Life given over to death: the very operation of the symbolic.

The Exchange of Death in the Primitive Order

Savages have no biological concept of death. Or rather, the biological fact, that is, death, birth or disease, everything that comes from nature and that we accord the privilege of necessity and objectivity, quite simply has no meaning for them. This is absolute disorder, since it cannot be symbolically exchanged, and what cannot be symbolically exchanged constitutes a mortal danger for the group. They are reconciled, unexpiated, sorcerous and hostile forces that prowl around the soul and the body, that stalk the living and the dead; defunct, cosmic energies that the group was unable to bring under control through exchange.

We have de-socialised death by overturning bio-anthropological laws, by according it the immunity of science and by making it autonomous, as individual fatality. But the physical materiality of death, which paralyses us through the 'objective' credence we give it, does not stop the primitives. They have never 'naturalised' death, they know that death (like the body, like the natural event) is a *social relation*, that its definition is social. In this they are much more 'materialist' than we are, since for them the real materiality of death, like that of the commodity for Marx, lies in its *form*, which is always the form of a social relation. Instead, all our idealism converges on the illusion of a biological materiality of death: our discourse of 'reality', which is in fact the discourse of the *imaginary*, surpasses the primitives in the intervention of the *symbolic*.

Initiation is the accent of the beat of the operation of the symbolic. It aims neither to conjure death away, nor to 'overcome' it, but to articulate it socially. As R. Jaulin describes in *La Mort Sara* [Paris: Plon, 1967], the ancestral group 'swallows the *koy*' (young initiation candidates), who die 'symbolically' in order to be reborn. Above all, we must avoid understanding this according to the degraded meaning we attach to it, but in the sense that their death becomes the stakes of a reciprocal-antagonistic exchange between the ancestors and the living. Further, instead of a break, a social relation between the partners is established, a circulation of gifts and counter-gifts as intense as the circulation of precious goods and women: an incessant play of responses where death can no longer establish itself as end or agency. By offering her a piece of flesh, the brother gives his wife to a dead member of the family, in order to bring him back to life. By nourishing her, this dead man is included in the life of the group. But the exchange is reciprocal. The dead man gives his wife, the clan's land, to a living member of the family in order to come back to life by assimilating himself to her and to bring her back to life by assimilating her to himself. The important moment is when the *moh* (the grand priests) put the *koy*
(the initiates) to death, so that the latter are then consumed by their ancestors, then the earth gives birth to them as their mother had given birth to them. After having been 'killed', the initiates are left in the hands of their initiatory, 'cultural' parents, who instruct them, care for them and train them (initiatory birth).

It is clear that the initiation consists in an exchange being est-blished where there had been only a brute fact: they pass from natural, aleatory and irreversible death to a death that is given and received, and that is therefore reversible in the social exchange, 'soluble' in exchange. At the same time the opposition between birth and death disappears: they can also be exchanged under the form of symbolic reversibility. Initiation is the crucial moment, the social nexus, the darkroom where birth and death stop being the terms of life and twist into one another again; not towards some mystical fusion, but in this instance to turn the-initiate into a real social being. The uninitiated child has only been born biologically, he has only one 'real' father and one 'real' mother; in order to become a social being he must pass through the symbolic event of the initiatory birth/death, he must have gone through the circuit of life and death in order to enter into the symbolic reality of exchange.

It is not, in this initiatory test, a matter of staging a second birth to eclipse death. Jauhn himself leans towards this interpretation: society 'conjured' death away, or even opposed it 'dialectically', in the initiation, to a term of his invention which it uses and 'overcomes': 'To the life and death they are given, men have added initiation, by means of which they transcend the disorder of death.' This formula is very beautiful and very ambiguous at the same time, since initiation is not 'added' to the other terms, and it doesn't play life off against death towards a rebirth (we are extremely suspicious of those who triumph over death!). It is the splitting of life and death that initiation conjures away, and with it the concomitant fatalitity which weighs down on life as soon as it is split in this way.

For life then becomes this biological irreversibility, this absurd physical destiny, life has then been lost in advance, since it is condemned to decline with the body. Hence the idealisation of one of these terms, birth (and its doubling in resurrection) at the expense of the other, death. This, however, is simply one of our ingrained prejudices concerning the 'sense' or 'meaning of life'. For birth, as an irreversible individual event, is as traumatising as death.

Psychoanalysis puts this differently: birth is a sort of death. And with baptism, Christianity has done nothing more than, through a collective ritual, to define the mortal event of birth. The advent of life is a crime of sorts, if it is not repeated and expiated by a collective simulacrum of death. Life is only a benefit in itself within the calculable order of value. In the symbolic order, life, like everything else, is a crime if it survives unilaterally, if it is not seized and destroyed, given and returned, 'returned' to death. Initiation effaces this crime by resolving the separate event of life and death in one and the same social act of exchange.

Symbolic/Real/Imaginary

The symbolic is neither a concept, an agency, a category, nor a 'structure', but an act of exchange and a social relation which puts an end to the real, which resolves the real, and, at the same time, puts an end to the opposition between the real and the imaginary.

The initiatory act is the reverse of our reality principle. It shows that the reality of birth derives solely from the separation of life and death. Even the reality of life itself derives solely from the disjunction of life and death. The effect of the real is only ever therefore the structural effect of the disjunction between two terms, and our famous reality principle, with its normative and repressive implications, is only a generalisation of this disjunctive code to all levels. The reality of nature, its 'objectivity' and its 'materiality', derives solely from the separation of man and nature, of a body and a non-body, as Octavio Paz put it. Even the reality of the body, its material status, derives from the disjunction of a spiritual principle, from discriminating a soul from a body.

The symbolic is what puts an end to this disjunctive code and to separated terms. It is the u-topia that puts an end to the topologies of the soul and the body, man and nature, the real and the non-real, birth and death. In the symbolic operation, the two terms lose their reality.8

The reality principle is never anything other than the imaginary of the other term. In the man/nature partition, nature (objective, material) is only the imaginary of man thus conceptualised. In the sexual bipartition masculine/feminine, an arbitrary and structural distinction on which the sexual reality (and repression) principle is based, 'woman' thus defined is only ever man's imaginary. Each term of the disjunction excludes the other, which eventually becomes its imaginary.

So it is with life and death in our current system: the price we pay for the 'reality' of this life, to live it as a positive value, is the ever-present phantasm of death. For us, defined as living beings, death is our imaginary.9 So, all the disjunctions on which the different structures of the real are based (this is not in the least abstract: it is also what separates the teacher from the taught, and on which the reality principle of their relation is based; the same goes for all the social relations we know) have their archetype in the fundamental disjunction of life and death. This is why, in whatever field of 'reality', every separate term for which the other is its imaginary is haunted by the latter as its own death.

Thus the symbolic everywhere puts an end to the fascination with the real and the imaginary, to the closure of the phantasm drawn up by psychoanalysis, but where, at the same time, psychoanalysis locks itself up by establishing, through a considerable quantity of disjunctions (primary and secondary processes, unconscious and conscious, etc.), a psychological reality principle of the unconscious inseparable from psychoanalysis's own reality principle (the unconscious as psychoanalysis's reality principle!) and thus in which the symbolic cannot but put an end to psychoanalysis too.
The Inevitable Exchange

The real event of death is imaginary. Where the imaginary creates a symbolic disorder, initiation restores symbolic order. Incest prohibition does the same thing in the domain of filiation: the group responds to the real, natural, "social" event of biological filiation by a system of alliance and the exchange of women. It is essential that everything (women in this case, but otherwise birth and death) becomes available for exchange, that is, comes under the jurisdiction of the group. Incest prohibition, in this sense, is interdependent with and complementary to initiation, in that in the one case young initiates circulate amongst the living adults and the dead ancestors: they are given and returned, whereby they accede to symbolic recognition. In the other case, it is women who circulate: they too only attain real social status once given and returned, instead of being retained by the father or brothers for their own use. 'Whosoever gives nothing, whether his daughter or his sister, is dead.'

Incest prohibition lies at the basis of alliances amongst the living. Initiation lies at the basis of alliances amongst the living and the dead. This is the fundamental fact that separates us from the primitives: exchange does not stop when life comes to an end. Symbolic exchange is halted neither by the living nor by the dead (nor by stones or beasts). This is an absolute law: obligation and reciprocity are insurmountable. None can withdraw from it, for whom-or whatever's sake, on pain of death. Death is nothing other than this: taken hostage by the cycle of symbolic exchanges (cf. Marcel Mauss, 'L'effet physique chez l'individu de l'idée de mort suggérée par la collectivité', in Sociologie et Anthropologie [4th edn, Paris: PUF, 1968]).

But we could also say that this does not separate us from the primitives, and that it is exactly the same for us. Throughout the entire system of political economy, the law of symbolic exchange has not changed one iota: we continue to exchange with the dead, even those denied rest, those for whom rest is prohibited. We simply pay with our own death and our anxiety about death for the rupture of symbolic exchanges with them. It is profoundly similar with inanimate nature and beasts. Only an absurd theory of liberty could claim that we are quits with the dead, since the debt is universal and unceasing: we never manage to 'return' what we have taken for all this 'liberty'. This huge litigation, involving all the obligations and reciprocities that we have denounced, is properly the unconscious. No need for a libido, for desire, for an energetics or for the pulsions and their destinations to give an account of this. The unconscious is social in the sense that it is made up of all that could not be exchanged socially or symbolically. And so it is with death: it is exchanged in any case, and, at best, it will be exchanged in accordance with a social ritual, as with the primitives; at worst, it will be 'redeemed by an individual labour of mourning'. The unconscious is subject in its entirety to the distortion of the death of a symbolic process (exchange, ritual) into an economic process (redemption, labour, debt, individual). This entails a considerable difference in enjoyment: we trade with our dead in a kind of melancholy, while the primitives live with their dead under the auspices of the ritual and the feast.

The Unconscious and the Primitive Order

The reciprocity of life and death, which entails their exchange in a social cycle instead of being cut up according to biological linearity or the repetition of the phantasm, the reabsorption of the prohibition separating the living from the dead that rebounds so violently on the living; all this puts the very hypothesis of the unconscious into question again.

In his *Oedipe africain* [Paris: Plon, 1969], Edmond Ortigues asks what it means 'to marry one's mother' and 'to kill one's father':

The verb 'to marry' has a different meaning in different contexts, it has not got the same social and psychological content. As for the verb 'to kill', apparently so clear-cut, are we quite certain that it holds no surprises? What then is a 'dead father' in a country where the ancestors are so close to the living? . . . Everything changes, requiring us to re-examine the meaning of each term.

In a society under the sway of ancestral law, it is impossible for the individual to kill the father, since, according to the customs of the Ancients, the father is always already dead and always still living. . . . To take the father's death upon oneself or to individualise the moral consciousness by reducing paternal authority to that of a mortal, a substitutable person separable from the ancestral altar and from 'custom', would be to leave the group, to remove oneself from the basis of tribal society.

When we talk of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, we think of an individually experienced drama. But what might this be in a tribal society where the religion of 'fertility' and the 'ancestors' proposes as the explicit basis of the collective tradition what, for us, the young Oedipus is condemned to live out in his personal phantasms?

Therefore, the 'symbolic function' in primitive societies is articulated not through the law of the Father and the individual psychical reality principle, but from the outset through a collective principle, through the collective movement of exchanges. In the initiation, we have seen how, by means of a social process, the biological figures of filiation break up in order to make way for the initiatory parents. These parents are symbolic figures who refer to the socious, that is, to all the fathers and mothers of the clan, and ultimately to the dead fathers, the ancestors, and to the clan's earth mother. The instance of the Father does not appear, it is broken down into the collectivity of rival brothers (initiates). 'Aggressivity will be displaced along a horizontal line, into fraternal rivalry, overcompensated by an extremely powerful solidarity' (Ortigues, ibid.). (Why 'will be displaced'? As if it were normally directed onto the Father?) Opposed to the Oedipus principle, which corresponds to the negative aspect of incest prohibition (prohibited with the mother and imposed by the father) is, in the positive sense, a principle of the exchange of sisters by brothers. It is the sister, and not the mother, who is at the centre of this apparatus, and it is at the level
of brothers that the whole social act of exchange is organised. Therefore, no desocialised Oedipal triangle, no closed familial structure sanctioned by prohibition and the dominant Word of the Father, but a principle of exchange between peers, on the basis of the challenge and reciprocity: an autonomous principle of social organisation.

The appearance of the concept of the gift was implemented at the core of one and the same age group in an atmosphere of equality. The sacrifice to which the child consents in the nursery to benefit another child is not of the same order as separation from the mother. (Ortigues, ibid.)

All this tells of a social principle of exchange opposed to a psychical principle of prohibition. All this tells of a symbolic process opposed to an unconscious process. Nowhere in the primitive order, since it is well ventilated and resolutely social, does there emerge the psychically over-determined biological triad of the family, with the psychical apparatus and the intertwined phantasms, as its double, the whole thing crowned by the fourth purely ‘symbolic’ term, the phallus. The phallus is ‘strictly necessary in order to introduce a relation to the level of speech, and to make it into a reciprocal law of recognition amongst subjects’. It is here, in fact (at least in psychoanalytic theory), that the Name of the Father, the signifier of the Law, is inscribed for us, and alone introduces us into exchange. The famous ploy of the Word of the Father protects us against mortal fusion with, and absorption by, the desire for the mother. Without the phallus, there is no salvation. The necessity of this Law and of a symbolic agency barring the subject, thanks to which the primary repression at the basis of the formation of the unconscious is implemented, by the same token gives the subject access to his own desire. Without this agency to arrange exchanges, without the mediation of the phallus, the subject, incapable of repression, no longer even gains access to the symbolic and sinks into psychosis.

Because they were effectively ignorant of this Law, and the structure of repression and the unconscious which it entails, we were able to say that primitive societies were ‘psychotic’ societies. Of course, this is simply our fierce way of abandoning them to their gentle madness (if not to see, as begins to happen in the psychoanalytic West itself, whether psychosis might not conceal a more radical meaning, a more radical symbolicity than we have ever glimpsed under the sign of psychoanalysis). Yes, these societies have access to the symbolic.\(^{13}\) No, they do not gain access to the symbolic by means of the intercession of an immutable Law, the image of which is sketched in the social order itself: the Father, the Chief, the Signifier and Power. The symbolic is not an agency here, so that access to it would be regulated by the mediation of a Phallus, an upper-case figure to embody all the metonymic figures of the Law. The symbolic is precisely this cycle of exchanges, the cycle of giving and returning, an order born of the very reversibility which escapes the double jurisdiction, the repressed psychical agency, and the transcendent social instance.\(^{14}\)

When fathers are exchanged, given, received and transmitted from one generation ofinitiates to the other in the form of already dead and always living ancestors (the biological father is himself inexchangeable, no-one can stand in for him, and his symbolic figure, his word, is immutable; it too remains unexchanged, a word with no response); when the mother (the ancestral grounds put at stake with each successive initiation), is given, received and transmitted (this is also the tribal language, the secret language to which the initiate gains access) by the fathers, then everything – the father, the mother and the word – loses its character as a fatal and indecipherable agency, even its position in a structure controlled by prohibition (just as birth and death lose their status as fatal events, as necessity and as law, in the symbolic hyperevent of initiation).

If we can speak of a society with neither repression nor unconscious, it is not in order to rediscover some miraculous innocence where the flows of ‘desire’ roam freely and the primary processes are realised without prohibition. This is an order of the dispossessed [désole], an idealism of desire and the libidus such as haunts Freudo-Reichian, Freudo-Marxist and even schizo-nomadic imaginations: the phantasm of a desire or a (machined) unconscious naturalised in order to be ‘liberated’. The phantasm of ‘liberty’ has today been transferred from the spheres of rational thought to those of the irrational, the brute, the ‘primary’ and the unconscious while, however, remaining a bourgeois problematic (namely the Cartesian and Kantian problematic of freedom and necessity).

To put the theory of the unconscious into question is also to put the theory of Desire into question, in that here, at the level of an entire civilisation, it is always simply a matter of a negative phantasm of the rational order. Hence Desire becomes an integral part of our reigning prohibition, its dreamt materiality becomes part of our imaginary. Whether it is dialectically related to the prohibition, as with Oedipus and psychoanalysis, or whether it is exalted in its brute productivity, as in Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus, it remains the promise of a savage naturality, the phantasm of an objective, liberatory pulsional energy to be liberated – a force of desire inherited from the mobile field of revolutions: good old labour force. As we know, the effect of force is always the effect of repression, as the effect of reality is always the effect of the imaginary. We must write the ‘Mirror of Desire’ as we have written The Mirror of Production.

An example: primitive cannibalism. Apart from the question of sustenance, this is a problem of the ‘oral drive’ of devouring, on which there weighs a fundamental (perhaps even the most fundamental) prohibition for us, whereas certain primitives would naively transgress and fulfill their ‘desire’ through this very process. A postulate: every man would like to devour his fellow man, and when, due to necessity, a Catholic rugby team did just this after their plane crashed in the Cordillères des Andes, the whole world was astonished at this divine resurgence of a nature they thought dead and buried. Even the Pope blessed and exculpated them, so as not to make them into an example; nevertheless, this is no longer
absolutely a crime. And why not, if only by reference to a nature whose consecration (unconscious and psychoanalytic), whose libidinal consecration is today in competition with the sanctity of the divine and the religious? Cannibals themselves do not claim to live in a state of nature, nor in accordance with their desire at all; they quite simply claim, through their cannibalism, to live in a society, the most interesting case being a society that eats its own dead. This is neither due to a vital necessity nor because the dead no longer count for anything, quite the contrary: it is in order to pay homage to them and thus to prevent those left to rot in accordance with the natural order, escaping from the social order, turning against the group and persecuting it. This devouring is a social act, a symbolic act, that aims to maintain a tissue of bonds with the dead man or the enemy they devour. In any case they don't just eat anybody, as we know; whoever is eaten is always somebody worthy, it is always a mark of respect to devour somebody since, through this, the devoured even becomes sacred. We scorn what we eat, we can only eat what we despise, that is, death, the inanimate, the animal or the vegetable condemned to biological assimilation. We think of anthropophagia as despicable in view of the fact that we despise what we eat, the act of eating and ultimately even our own bodies. Primitive devouring is ignorant of the abstract separation of the eater and the eaten into the active and the passive. Between the two there is a duel mode, combining honour and reciprocity, perhaps even a challenge and a duel tout court, which the eaten can eventually win (cf. the whole ritual of propitiation as regards nourishment). In any event, it is not a mechanical act of absorption. It is not even an absorption of the 'vital forces', as ethnologists, following the natives, communally claim, merely passing from an alimentary to a magical functionalism (the psychoanalysts adhere to a psychical functionalism of the pulsion). Devouring, no longer just an act of subsistence, nor a transubstantiation of manna benefiting the eater, is a social act, a sacrificial process where the metabolism of the whole group is at stake. Neither the fulfillment of desire nor the assimilation of something or other, it is on the contrary an act of expenditure, consumption or summation, and of the transmutation of the flesh into a symbolic relation, the transformation of the body in social exchange. We find the same thing in the Eucharist, but in the abstract form of the sacrament, using the general equivalence of bread and wine. The accursed share consumed here is already considerably sublimated and evangelised.

Killing no longer has the same meaning for us. The ritual murder of the king has nothing to do with the 'psychoanalytic' murder of the father. Behind the obligation to expiate the privilege the king retains through death, his murder aims to keep what threatened to accumulate and become fixed on the king's person (status, wealth, women and power) within the flow of exchanges, within the group's reciprocal movements. His death prevents this accident. This is the essence and function of sacrifice: to extinguish what threatens to fall out of the group's symbolic control and to bury it under all the weight of the dead. The king must be killed from time to time, along with the phallic which began to rule over social life. The king's murder does not therefore come from the depths of the unconscious or from the figure of the father, on the contrary, it is our unconscious and its peripeties that result in the loss of sacrificial mechanisms. We now only conceive of murder within a closed economy, as the phantasmatic murder of the father, that is, as the balance of repression and the law, as the fulfilment of desire and as the regulation of the accounts. The stake is phallic, and it is certain that it is on the basis of repression that, with the death of the father, the phallic peripeteia of the seizure of power enters the game. This is an extremely simplified rewriting of death and murder as repressed aggression, as a violence equivalent to the violence of repression. In the primitive order, murder is neither violence nor an acting-out of the unconscious. So for those who kill the king, there is no seizure of power nor any increase in guilt, as there is in the Freudian myth. Neither does the king simply endure this. Instead, he gives his death, returns it in exchange, and marks it with the feast, whereas the phantasmatic murder of the father is lived as the experience of guilt and anxiety.

Thus, neither killing nor eating have the same meaning for us: they do not result in a 'murder-pulsion', in an oral sadism, nor in a structure of repression, which alone gives them the meaning they have for us today. They are social acts that rigorously follow the apparatus of symbolic obligation. Amongst other things, they never have the unilateral meaning in which all the aggression at the basis of our culture is expressed: killing-eating - I kill I eat - you are killed, you are eaten. The unconscious and all its phantasms (and their psychoanalytic theory) presuppose the acknowledgement of this disjunction, the repression of ambivalence, the restitution of which, under whatever form it may be, in the symbolic process, puts an end to the jurisdiction of the unconscious.

KILLING POSSESSING DEVOURING - the entirety of our individual unconscious is organised around these terms and the phantasms that surround them, under the sign of repression.

GIVING RETURNING EXCHANGING - with the primitives, everything operates in the manifest collective exchange around these three terms, in the myths that underlie them.

Each of these 'verbs' of the unconscious presupposes a break, a rupture, the bar we find everywhere in psychoanalysis, along with the guilt it gives rise to, the play and the repetition of the prohibition. The 'verbs' of the symbolic assume on the contrary a reversibility, an indefinite cyclical transition.

Above all, however, the radical difference lies in the autonomisation of a psychical sphere: something operates collectively in primitive societies, the repression of which works for us solely on the agency of the psychical apparatus and the unconscious. The ritual is utterly different to the phantasm, as is the myth from the unconscious. All the analogies on which anthropology and psychoanalysis play are profound mystifications.
The distortion that psychoanalysis submits primitive societies to is of the same order, but in the opposite sense than what they have to endure under Marxist analysis.

1. For the anthropo-Marxists, the economic instance is also present and determinant in the type of society, it is merely hidden, latent, whereas for us it is manifest. This difference is judged to be secondary, however; the analysis does not stop and passes without meeting any opposition onto its materialist discourse.

2. For the anthropo-psychoanalysts, the agency of the unconscious is also present and determinant in this type of society; it is simply manifested, externalised, whereas for us it is latent, repressed. This difference remains inessential, however, and the analysis continues without disguising its discourse in terms of the unconscious.

On both sides there is the same misrecognition [méconnaissance] of this apparently miniscule difference: for one and the same structure, the economy or the unconscious, we pass from primitive formations to our own, now from the manifest to the hidden, now the reverse. Only our own metaphysics could neglect this detail, in the illusion that the content remains the same. But this is radically false: when the economic is hidden behind other structures, it quite simply ceases to exist; it provides no account of anything, it is nothing. On the other hand, when the unconscious is manifest, when it becomes a manifest and articulated structure, it is no longer unconscious at all. A psychical structure and a process based on repression have no meaning in the other, ritual and non-psychical configuration of an overt resolution of signs. Everything changes when we pass from the latent to the manifest, and from the manifest to the latent.16

This is why, against Marxist and psychoanalytic misrecognition, we must start over again beginning from this displacement.

We will come to see that the impossibility of locating and specifying the economic is due precisely to the symbolic. And that the possibility of overtly manifesting something unconscious, but which by this very fact ceases to be so, is also due to the symbolic.

The Double and the Split

The figure of the double, intimately bound up with figures of death and magic, poses in itself all the problems of psychological and psychoanalytic interpretation.

Shadow, spectre, reflection, image; a material spirit almost remains visible, the primitive double generally passes for the crude prefiguration of the soul and consciousness in accordance with an increasing sublimation and a spiritual 'hominisation', as in Teilhard de Chardin: towards the apogee of a single God and a universal morality. But this single God has everything to do with the form of a unified political power, and nothing to do with the primitive gods. In the same way, soul and consciousness have everything to do with a principle of the subject's unification, and nothing to do with the primitive double. On the contrary, the historical advent of the 'soul' puts an end to a proliferating exchange with spirits and doubles which, as an indirect consequence, gives rise to another figure of the double, wending its diabolical way just beneath the surface of Western reason. Once again, this figure has everything to do with the Western figure of alienation, and nothing to do with the primitive double. The telescoping of the two under the sign of psychology (conscious or unconscious) is only a misleading rewriting.

Between the primitive and its double, there is neither a mirror relation nor one of abstraction, as there is between the subject and its spiritual principle, the soul, or between the subject and its moral and psychological principle, consciousness. There is no sign of such a reason common to both the primitive and its double, no relation of ideal equivalence that structures the subject for us to the point of splitting it. The double is no longer a fantastic ectoplasm, an archaic resurgence issuing from guilt and the depths of the unconscious (we will come back to this). The double, like the dead man (the dead man is the double of the living, the double is the familiar living figure of the dead), is a partner with whom the primitive has a personal and concrete relationship, sometimes happy, sometimes not, a certain type of visible exchange (word, gesture and ritual) with an invisible part of himself. We cannot speak of alienation here, for the subject is only alienated (like we are) when he internalises an abstract agency, issuing from the 'other world', as Nietzsche said – whether psychological (the ego and the ego-ideal), religious (God and the soul) or moral (conscience and the law) – an irreconcilable agency to which everything else is subordinated. Historically then, alienation begins with the internalisation of the Master by the emancipated slave: there is no alienation as long as the duel-relations to the master and the slave lasts.

The primitive has a non-alienated duel-relation with his double. He really can trade, as we are forever forbidden to do, with his shadow (the real shadow, not a metaphor), as with some original, living thing, in order to converse, protect and conciliate this tutelary or hostile shadow. The shadow is precisely not the reflection of an 'original' body, it has a full part to play, and is consequently not an 'alienated' part of the subject, but one of the figures of exchange. In another context, this is precisely what poets find when they question their own body, or interpellate words in language. To speak to one's body and to speak to language in a duel mode beyond the active and the passive (my body speaks (to) me, language speaks (to) me) – to make each fragment of the body and each fragment of language autonomous, like a living being, capable of responding and exchanging – is to bring about the end of separation and the split, which is only the submissive equivalence of each part of the body to the principle of the subject, and the submissive equivalence of each fragment of language to the code of language.
The status of the double (as well as that of spirits and gods, which are also real, living and different beings, not idealised essences) in primitive society is therefore the inverse of our alienation: one being multiplies into innumerable others just as alive as the first, whereas the unified, individual subject can only confront itself in alienation and death.

With the internalisation of the soul and consciousness (the principle of identity and equivalence), the subject undergoes a real confinement, similar to the confinement of the mad in the seventeenth century as described by Foucault. It is at this point that the primitive thought of the double as continuity and exchange is lost, and the haunting double comes to the fore as the subject’s discontinuity in death and madness. ‘Whoever sees his double, sees his death.’ A vengeful and vampiric double, an unquiet soul, the double begins to prefigure the subject’s death, haunting him in the very midst of his life. This is Dostoevsky’s double, or Peter Schlemihl’s, the man who lost his shadow. We have always interpreted this double as a metaphor of the soul, consciousness, native soil, and so on. Without this incurable idealism and without being taken as a metaphor, the narrative is so much more extraordinary. We have all lost our real shadows, we no longer speak to them, and our bodies have left with them. To lose one’s shadow is already to forget one’s body. Conversely, when the shadow grows and becomes an autonomous power (as with the mirror-image in The Student of Prague, which has the effect of the Devil and dementia), it is so as to devour the subject who has lost it, it is a murderous shadow, the image of all the rejected and forgotten dead who, as is quite normal, never accept being nothing in the eyes of the living.

Our entire culture is full of this haunting of the separated double, even in its most sublime form, as Freud gave it in ‘Das Unheimliche’ (‘The Uncanny’: ‘Disturbing Strangeness’ or ‘Disturbing Familiarity’): the anxiety that wells up around the most familiar things. Here the vertigo of separation builds up to its greatest intensity, since this is its simplest form. There comes a moment, in fact, when the things closest to us, such as our own bodies, the body itself, our voice and our appearance, are separated from us to the precise extent that we internalise the soul (or any other equivalent agency or abstraction) as the ideal principle of subjectivity. This is what kills off the proliferation of doubles and spirits, consigning them once again to the spectral, embryonic corridors of unconscious folklore, like the ancient gods that Christianity verteufelt, that is, transformed into demons.

By a final ruse of spirituality, this internalisation also psychologises doubles. In fact it is interpretation in terms of an archaic psychical apparatus that is the very last form of the Verstümmelung, the demonic corruption and elimination of the primitive double: projection of the guilt attached to the phantasmatic murder of the other (the close relative) in accordance with the magic of the omnipotence of ideas (Allmacht der Gedanken), the return of the repressed, etc. In ‘The Uncanny’, Freud writes:

Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe. This was characterised by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings; by the subject’s narcissistic overvaluation of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic based on that belief; by the attribution to various outside persons and things of carefully graded magical powers, or ‘mana’; as well as by all the other creations with the help of which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality. It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to the animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as ‘uncanny’ fulfills the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them back to expression.


This is how psychology, our authority in the depths, our own ‘next world’, this omnipotence, magical narcissism, fear of the dead,15 this animism or primitive psychical apparatus, is quietly palmed off on the savages in order then to recuperate them for ourselves as ‘archaic traces’. Freud does not think this is what he said in speaking of ‘narcissistic overvaluation of . . . mental processes’. If there is such an overvaluation of one’s own mental processes (to the point of exporting this theory, as we have done with our morality and techniques, to the core of every culture), then it is Freud’s overvaluation, along with our whole psychologicist culture. The jurisdiction of the psychological discourse over all symbolic practices (such as the dazzling practices of the savages, death, the double and magic; but also over our current symbolic practices) is even more dangerous than that of the economistic discourse: it is of the same order as the repressive jurisdiction of the soul and consciousness over the body’s entire symbolic potential. Psychoanalysis’s reinterpretation of the symbolic is a reductive operation. Since we live under the unconscious (but is this the case? Isn’t it our own myth, marking out and even participating in repression: a repressed thought of repression?), we believe that we are justified in extending the jurisdiction of psychical history as we used to do with history itself, to every possible configuration. The unconscious, and the psychical order in general, becomes the insurmountable agency, giving the feudal right of trespass over every previous individual and social formation. This imaginary also spreads into the future, however: if the unconscious is our modern myth, and psychoanalysis its prophet, the liberation of the unconscious (Desiring-Revolution) is its millenial heresy.

The idea of the unconscious, like the idea of consciousness, remains an idea of discontinuity and rupture. Put simply, it substitutes the irreversibility of a lost object and a subject forever ‘missing’ itself, for the positivity of the object and the conscious subject. However decentralised, the subject remains within the orbit of Western thought, with its successive ‘topologies’ (hell/heaven – subject/nature – conscious/unconscious), where the fragmented subject can only dream of a lost continuity.16 It will never get back to, or catch up with [rejoindre] utopia, which is not at all the phantasm
of a lost order but, contrary to all the topologies of discontinuity and repression, the idea of a duelling order, of reversibility, of a symbolic order (in the strong etymological sense of the term) where, for example, death is not a separate space; where neither the subject’s own body nor its own shadow are separate spaces; where there is no death putting an end to the history of the body; where there is no bar putting an end to the ambivalence of the subject and the object; where there is neither a beyond (survival and death) nor an ‘on this side’ (the unconscious and the lost object); only an immediate, non-phantasmatic actualisation of symbolic reciprocity. This utopian idea is not fusional: only nostalgia engenders fusional utopias. There is no nostalgia here, nor is anything lost, separated or unconscious. Everything is already there, reversible and sacrificed.

**Political Economy and Death**

We do not die because we must, we die because it is a habit, to which one day, not so long ago, our thoughts became bound.

Raoul Vaneigem

Den Göttern ist der Tod immer nur ein Vorurteil
[To the Gods, death is only ever a prejudice.]

F.W. Nietzsche

As a universal of the human condition, death exists only when society discriminates against the dead. The institution of death, like that of the afterlife and immortality, is a recent victory for the political rationalism of castes, priests and the Church: their power is based on the management of the imaginary sphere of death. As regards the disappearance of the religious afterlife, it is the even more recent victory for the State’s political rationality. When the afterlife fades in the face of the advances made by ‘materialist’ reason, it is quite simply because it has crossed over into life itself. The power of the State is based on the management of life as the objective afterlife. In this, it is more powerful than the Church, since the abstract power of the State is increased not by an imaginary beyond, but by the imaginary of life itself. It relies on secularised death, the transcendence of the social, and its force derives from the mortal abstraction it embodies. Just as medicine is the management of the corpse, so the State is the management of the dead body of the socius.

From the start, the Church was established on the bipartition of survival, or the afterlife, from life, the earthly world and the Kingdom of Heaven. It kept a jealous watch over this partition, for if the distance disappeared, its power would be at an end. The Church lives in the deferred eternity (as the State lives in deferred society, as revolutionaries live in the deferred revolution: all are living in death) that it had so much trouble imposing. All primitive Christianity, and later popular, messianic and heretical Christianity, lived in the hope of parousia, in the necessity of the immediate realisation of the Kingdom of God (cf. W.E. Mühllmann, *Les Messianismes révolutionnaires* [tr. J.B., 1968]). The mad Christians did not at first believe in a heaven and hell in the beyond: their vision implied the pure and simple resolution of death in the collective will for immediate eternity. The great Manichean heresies that threatened the foundations of the Church hold the same principle since they interpret this world as an antagonistic duality, a here and a there, of the principles of good and evil; impiously, they bring heaven and hell down to earth. For having effaced the glaze of the beyond they were ferociously suppressed, as were the spiritualist heretics of the St Francis of Assisi or the Joachim of Fiore type, whose radical charity amounted to establishing a total community on this earth and thus sparing the Last Judgement. The Cathars also set their sights a little too much on achieved perfection in the inseparability of body and soul, the immanence of salvation in collective faith, which made a joke of the Church’s power of death. Throughout its history, the Church has had to dismantle the primitive community which had a tendency to seek salvation in the intense reciprocity with which it was shot through and on which it drew for its own energy. Against the abstract universality of God and the Church, sects and communities practised the ‘self-management’ of salvation, which then consisted in the group’s symbolic exaltation, finally turning into a deadly vertigo. The Church’s sole condition of possibility is the incessant elimination of this symbolic demand. This is also the State’s sole condition of possibility. At this point political economy enters the arena.

To counter the dazzling sight of earthly communities, the Church imposes a political economy of individual salvation. First through faith (which became the soul’s personal relation to God instead of the effervescent community), then through the accumulation of works and merits, that is, an economy in the strict sense of the term, with its final account and its equivalences. It is then, as always since the appearance of processes of accumulation, that death really arose at the horizon of life. It is then that the Kingdom really passes to the other side of death, before which everyone finds themselves alone once again. Wherever it goes, Christianity trails with it the fascination with suffering, solitude and death involved in the destruction of archaic communities. In the completed form of the religious universal, as in the economic (capital), everyone finds themselves alone again.

With the sixteenth century, the modern figure of death was generalised. The Counter-Reformation, the funereal and obsessional games of the Baroque, and especially Protestantism, by individualising conscience before God and disinvesting collective ceremonial, brought about the progress of the individual’s anguish of death. It also gave rise to the immense modern enterprise of staving off death: the ethics of accumulation and material production, sacralisation through investment, the labour and profit collectively called the ‘spirit of capitalism’ (Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic* [tr. T. Parsons, London: Routledge, 1992] ) constructed a salvation-machine from which intra-worldly ascetic is little by
little withdrawn in the interests of worldly and productive accumulation, without changing the aim of protecting itself against death.

With the turn of the sixteenth century, the vision and iconography of death in the Middle Ages was still folkloric and joyous. There is a collective theatre of death, which was not yet buried in individual consciousness (nor, as later, in the unconscious). In the fifteenth century, death also inspired the great messianic and egalitarian festival of the Dance of Death: kings, bishops, princes, townsfolk and villagers are all equal in the face of death, by way of a challenge to the unequal order of birth, wealth and power. This was the last great movement that Death was able to appear as an offensive myth, and as collective speech, since, as we know, death has become an individual, tragic
thought 'of the law [de droite]', a 'reactionary' thought as regards revolt and social revolutionary movements.

Our death was really born in the sixteenth century. It has lost its scythe and its clock, it has lost the Apocalyptic Horsemen and the grotesque and macabre plays of the Middle Ages. Again, all this came from folklore and festival, in which death was still exchanged, not of course with the primitives' 'symbolic efficacy', but at least as the collective phantasm on cathedral pediments and in the divided operations of hell. We could even say that pleasure is possible insofar as there is a hell. Its disappearance from the imaginary is only the sign of its psychological interiorisation; death ceases to be the Grim Reaper, and becomes an anguish concerning death. More subtle and more scientific generations of priests and sorcerers will flourish on this psychological hell.

With the disintegration of traditional Christian and feudal communities through bourgeois Reason and the nascent system of political economy, death is no longer divided. It is cast in the image of the material goods which, as in previous exchanges, begin to circulate less between inseparable partners (it is always more or less a community or a clan who exchange), and increasingly under the sign of a general equivalent. In the capitalist mode, everyone is alone before the general equivalent. It is no coincidence that, in the same way, everyone finds themselves alone before death, since death is general equivalence.

From this point on the obsession with death and the will to abolish death through accumulation become the fundamental motor of the rationality of political economy. Value, in particular time as value, is accumulated in the phantasm of death deferred, pending the term of a linear infinity of value. Even those who no longer believe in a personal eternity believe in the infinity of time as they do in a species-capital of double-compound interests. The infinity of capital passes into the infinity of time, the eternity of a productive system no longer familiar with the reversibility of gift-exchange, but instead with the irreversibility of quantitative growth. The accumulation of time imposes the idea of progress, as the accumulation of science imposes the idea of truth: in each case, what is accumulated is no longer symbolically exchanged, but becomes an objective dimension. Ultimately, the total objectivity of time, like total accumulation, is the total impossibility of symbolic exchange, that is, death. Hence the absolute impasse of political economy, which intends to eliminate death through accumulation: the time of accumulation is the time of death itself. We cannot hope for a dialectical revolution at the end of this process of spiralling hoarding.

We already know that the economic rationalisation of exchange (the market) is the social form which produces scarcity [Marshall Sahlins, 'The original affluent society', in Stone Age Economics [Chicago: Aldine and Atherton, 1972]). Similarly, the infinite accumulation of time as value under the sign of general equivalence entails the absolute scarcity of time that is death.

A contradiction in capitalism? No, communism in this instance is in solidarity with political economy, since, in accordance with the same fantastic schema of an eternal accumulation of productive forces, communism too aims for the abolition of death. Only its total ignorance of death (save perhaps as a hostile horizon to be conquered by science and technics) has protected it up to now from the worst contradictions. For nothing can will the abolition of the law of value if you want to abolish death, that is, to preserve life as absolute value, at the same time. Life itself must leave the law of value and achieve a successful exchange against death. The materialists, with their idealistic life expurgated of death, a life 'free' at last of all ambivalence, hardly trouble themselves with this.

Our whole culture is just one huge effort to dissociate life and death, to ward off the ambivalence of death in the interests of life as value, and time as the general equivalent. The elimination of death is our phantasm, and ramifies in every direction: for religion, the afterlife and immortality; for science, truth; and for economics, productivity and accumulation.

No other culture had this distinctive opposition of life and death in the interests of life as positivity: life as accumulation, death as due payment.

No other culture had this impasse: as soon as the ambivalence of life and death and the symbolic reversibility of death comes to an end, we enter into a process of accumulation of life as value; but by the same token, we also enter the field of the equivalent production of death. So life-become-value is constantly perverted by the equivalent death. Death, at the same instant, becomes the object of a perverse desire. Desire invests the very separation of life and death.

This is the only way that we can speak of a death-drive. This is the only way we can speak of the unconscious, for the unconscious is only the accumulation of equivalent death, the death that is no longer exchanged and can only be cashed out in the phantasm. The symbolic is the inverse dream of an end of accumulation and a possible reversibility of death in exchange. Symbolic death, which has not undergone the imaginary disjunction of life and death which is at the origin of the reality of death, is exchanged in a social ritual of feasting. Imaginary-real death (our own) can only be redeemed through the individual work of mourning, which the subject carries out over the death of others and over himself from the start.
of his own life. This work of mourning has fuelled Western metaphysics of death since Christianity, even in the metaphysical concept of the death drive.

The Death Drive

With Freud we pass from philosophical death and the drama of consciousness to death as a pulsional process inscribed in the unconscious order; from a metaphysics of anguish to a metaphysics of the pulsion. It's just as if death, liberated from the subject, at last gained its status as an objective finality: the pulsional energy of death or the principle of psychical functioning.

Death, by becoming a pulsion, does not cease to be a finality (it is even the only end from this standpoint: the proposition of the death drive signifies an extraordinary simplification of finalities, since even Eros is subordinate to it), but this finality sinks, and is inscribed in the unconscious. Now this sinking of death into the unconscious coincides with the sinking of the dominant system: death becomes simultaneously a 'principle of psychical functioning' and the 'reality principle' of our social formations, through the immense repressive mobilisation of labour and production. In other words, with the death drive, Freud installs the process of repetition at the core of objective determinations, at the very moment when the general system of production passes into pure and simple reproduction. This coincidence is extraordinary, since we are much more interested in a genealogy of the concept of the death drive than in its metaphysical status. Is the death drive an anthropological 'discovery' which supplants all the others (and which can from now on provide a universal explanatory principle: we can imagine political economy entirely governed and engendered by the death drive), or is it produced at a given moment in relation to a particular configuration of the system? In this case, its radical nature is simply the radical nature of the system itself, and the concept merely sanctions a culture of death by giving it the label of a trans-historical pulsion. This operation is characteristic of all idealist thought, but we refuse to admit this with Freud. With Freud (as with Marx), Western reason will stop rationalising and idealising its own principles, it will even stop idealising reality through its critical effect of 'objectivity'. Ultimately, reality will designate unsurpassable pulsional or economic structures: thus the death drive as the eternal process of desire. But how is it that this proposition is itself not a matter of a secondary elaboration?

It is true that, at first, the death drive breaks with Western thought. From Christianity to Marxism and existentialism: either death is openly denied and sublimated, or it is dialecticised. In Marxist theory and practice, death is already conquered in the being of the class, or it is integrated as historical negativity. In more general terms, the whole Western practice of the domination of nature and the sublimation of aggression in production and accumulation is characterised as constructive Eros: Eros makes use of sublimated aggression for its own ends and, in the movement of becoming (this applies just as much to political economy), death is distilled as negativity into homeopathic doses. Not even the modern philosophies of 'being-towards-death' reverse this tendency: here death serves as a tragic haunting of the subject, sealing its absurd liberty.22

In Freud it is quite another matter. A dialectic with the death drive is no longer possible; there is no longer any sublimation, even if it is tragic. For the first time, death appeared as an indestructible principle, in opposition to Eros. The subject, class and history are irrelevant in this regard: the irreducible duality of the two pulsions, Eros and Thanatos, reawakens the ancient Manichean version of the world, the endless antagonism of the twin principles of good and evil. This very powerful vision comes from the ancient cults where the basic intuition of a specificity of evil and death was still strong. This was unbearable to the Church, who will take centuries to exterminate it and impose the pre-eminent principle of the Good (God), reducing evil and death to a negative principle, dialectically subordinate to the other (the Devil). But there is always the nightmare of Lucifer's autonomy, the Archangel of Evil (in all their forms, as popular heresies and superstitions that always have a tendency to take the existence of a principle of evil literally and hence to form cults around it, even including black magic and Jansenist theory, not to mention the Cathars), which will haunt the Church day and night. It opposes the dialectic as an institutional theory and as a deterrent to a radical, dualistic and Manichean concept of death. History will bring victory to the Church and the dialectic (including the 'materialist' dialectic). In this sense, Freud breaks quite profoundly with Christian and Western metaphysics.

The duality of the life and death instincts corresponds more precisely to Freud's position in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In Civilisation and its Discontents, the duality completes itself in a cycle dominated solely by the death drive. Eros is nothing but an immense detour taken by culture towards death, which subordinates everything to its own ends. But this last version does not, however, revert to an inverted dialectic between the two terms of the duality, since dialectics can only be the constructive becoming of Eros, whose goal is 'to establish ever larger unities and to bind and regulate energies'. Two principal characteristics oppose the death drive to this:

1. It dissolves assemblages, unbinds energy and undoes Eros's organic discourse by returning things to an inorganic, ungebunden, state, in a certain sense, to utopia as opposed to the articulate and constructive topics of Eros. Entropy of death, negentropy of Eros.

2. This power of disintegration, disarticulation and defection implies a radical counter-finality in the form of an involution towards the prior, inorganic state. The compulsion to repeat (Wiederholungszwang), or the 'tendency to reproduce and revive even those past events that involve no satisfaction whatsoever', is primarily, for every living being, the tendency
to reproduce the non-event of a prior inorganic state of things, that is to say, death. It is thus always as a repetitive cycle that death comes to dismantle the constructive, linear or dialectical finalities of Eros. The viscosity of the death drive and the elasticity of the inorganic is everywhere victorious in its resistance to the structuration of life.

In the proposed death drive therefore, whether in its duel form or in the incessant and destructive counter-finality of repetition, there is something irreducible to all the intellectual apparatuses of Western thought. Freud’s thought acts fundamentally as the death drive in the Western theoretical universe. But then, of course, it is absurd to give it the constructive status of ‘truth’: the ‘reality’ of the death instinct is indefensible; to remain faithful to the intuition of the death drive, it must remain a deconstructive hypothesis, that is, it must be adopted solely within the limits of the deconstruction that it carries out on all prior thought. As a concept, however, it too must be immediately deconstructed. We cannot think (other than as the ultimate subterfuge of reason) that the principle of deconstruction is all that escapes it.

The death drive must be defended against every attempt to re dialectise it into a new constructive edifice. Marcuse is a good example of this. Concerning repression through death, he writes: ‘Theology and philosophy today compete with each other in celebrating death as an existential category. Perverting[] a biological fact into an ontological essence, they bestow transcendental blessing on the guilt of mankind which they help to perpetuate’ (Eros and Civilisation [London: Sphere, 1970], p. 188). Thus it is for ‘surplus-repression’. As for fundamental repression:

The brute fact of death denies once and for all the reality of a non-repressive existence. For death is the final negativity of time, but ‘joy wants eternity’... . Time has no power over the Id, the original domain of the pleasure principle. But the Ego, through which alone pleasure becomes real, is in its entirety subject to time. The mere anticipation of the inevitable end, present in every instant, introduces a repressive element into all libidinal relations. (ibid., p. 185)

We will overlook the ‘brute fact of death’: it is never a brute fact, only a social relation is repressive. What is most curious is the way in which death’s primal repression exchanges signs with the ‘liberation’ of Eros:

The death instinct operates under the Nirvana principle: it tends towards... a state without want. This trend of this instinct implies that its destructive manifestations would be minimised as it approached such a state. If the instinct’s basic objective is not the termination of life but of pain — the absence of tension — then paradoxically, in terms of the instinct, the conflict between life and death is the more reduced, the closer life approximates the state of gratification. ... Eros, freed from surplus-repression, would be strengthened, and the strengthened Eros would, as it were, absorb the objective of the death instinct. The instinctual value of death would have changed. (ibid., p. 187, J.B.’s emphasis)

Thus we will be able to change the instinct and triumph over the brute fact, in accordance with good old idealist philosophy of freedom and necessity:

Death can become a token of freedom. The necessity of death does not refute the possibility of final liberation. Like the other necessities, it can be made rational – painless. (ibid., p. 188)

The Marcusean dialectic therefore implies the total restoration of the death drive (in Eros and Civilisation, however, this passage is immediately followed by the ‘Critique of Neo-Freudian Revisionism’!), thus limiting the resistances this concept provokes in pious souls. Here again, it is not too much for dialectics – the ‘liberation’ of Eros in this instance; in others the ‘liberation’ of the forces of production – to bring about the end of death. The death drive is irritating, because it does not allow of any dialectical recovery. This is where its radicalism lies. But the panic it provokes does not confer the status of truth on it: we must wonder if, in the final instance, it is not itself a rationalisation of death.

This is first of all the conviction that we hear in Freud (elsewhere he will talk of a speculative hypothesis):

The dominating tendency of mental life... is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the ‘Nirvana principle’, to borrow a term from Barbara Low)... [which] is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of death instincts. (‘Beyond the pleasure principle’, in Standard Edition, Vol. 18, 1955, pp. 55-6)

Why, then, all Freud’s efforts to ground the death instinct in biological rationality (Weissmann’s analysis, etc.)? This positivist effort is generally deplored, a little like Engels’ attempt to dialecticise Nature that we agree to ignore out of affection for him. However:

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons — becomes inorganic once again — then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the aim of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘inanimate things existed before living ones’... Thus these guardians of life [instincts], too, were originally the myrmidons of death. (ibid., p. 38)

It is difficult to rid the death drive of positivism here in order to turn it into a ‘speculative hypothesis’ or ‘purely and simply a principle of psychical functioning’ (J.B. Pontalis, L’Arc, 34, 1968). Moreover, at this level there is no longer any real pulsional duality: death alone is finality. But it is this finality that in turn poses a crucial problem, since it inscribes death as anterior, as psychical and organic destiny, almost like programming or genetic code, in short, as a positivity that, unless we believe in the scientific reality of this pulsion, we can only take it as a myth. We can only set Freud against what he himself says:

The theory of the drives is so to say our mythology. Drives are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness. (‘New introductory lectures’, in Standard Edition, Vol. 22, 1964, p. 95)

If the death drive is a myth, then this is how we will interpret it. We will interpret the death drive, and the concept of the unconscious itself, as myths, and no longer take account of their effects or their efforts at ‘truth’. A myth recounts something: not so much in the content as in the form of its discourse. Let’s make a bet that, under the metaphorical species of sexuality
and death, psychoanalysis tells us something concerning the fundamental organisation of our culture, that when the myth is no longer told, when it establishes its fables as axioms, it loses the 'magnificent indefiniteness' that Freud spoke of. 'The concept is only the residue of a metaphor', as Nietzsche said. Let's bet then on the metaphor of the unconscious, on the metaphor of the death drive.

Eros in the service of death, all cultural sublimation as a long detour to death, the death drive nourishing repressive violence and presiding over culture like a ferocious super-ego, the forces of life inscribed in the compulsion to repeat; all this is true, but true of our culture. Death undertakes to abolish death and, for this very purpose, erects death above death and is haunted by it as its own end. The term 'pulsion' or 'drive' is stated metaphorically, designating the contemporary phase of the political-economic system (does it then remain political economy?) where the law of value, in its most terrorist structural form, reaches completion in the pure and simple compulsive reproduction of the code, where the law of value appears to be a finality as irreversible as a pulsion, so that it takes on the figure of a destiny for our culture. Stage of the immanent repetition of one and the same law, insisting on its own end, caught, totally invested by death as objective finality, and total subversion by the death drive as a deconstructive process – the metaphor of the death drive says all of this simultaneously, for the death drive is at the same time the system and the system's double, its doubling into a radical counter-finality (see the Double, and its 'worrying strangeness', das Unheimliche).

This is what the myth recounts. But let's see what happens when it sets itself up as the objective discourse of the 'pulsion'. With the term 'pulsion', which has both a biological and a psychical definition, psychoanalysis settles down into categories that come straight from the imaginary of a certain Western reason: far from radically contradicting this latter, it must then interpret itself as a moment of Western thought. As for the biological, it is clear that scientific rationality produces the distinction of the living and the non-living on which biology is based. Science, producing itself as a code, on the one hand literally produces the dead, the non-living, as a conceptual object, and, on the other, produces the separation of the dead as an axiom from which science can be legitimated. The only good (scientific) object, just like the only good Indian, is a dead one. Now it is this inorganic state to which the death drive is oriented, to the non-living status that only comes about through the arbitrary decrees of science and, when all's said and done, through its own phantasm of repression and death. Ultimately, being nothing but the cyclical repetition of the non-living, the death drive contributes to biology's arbitrariness, doubling it through a psychoanalytic route. But not every culture produces a separate concept of the non-living; only our culture produces it, under the sign of biology. Thus, suspending the discrimination would be enough to invalidate the concept of the death drive, which is ultimately only a theoretical agreement between the living and the dead, with the sole result that science loses its footing amongst all the attempts at articulation. The non-living is always permanently sweeping science along into the axiomatics of a system of death (see J. Monod, Chance and Necessity [tr. Austin Wainhouse, London: Collins, 1970]).

The problem is the same as regards the psychical, putting the whole of psychoanalysis into question. We must ask ourselves when and why our system began to produce the 'psychical'. The psychical has only recently become autonomous, doubling biology's autonomy at a higher level. This time the line passes between the organic, the somatic and 'something else'. There is nothing psychical save on the basis of this distinction. Hence the ensuing insoluble difficulty of linking the two parts together again; the precise result of this is the concept of the pulsion, which is intended to form a bridge between the two, but which merely contributes to the arbitrariness of each. Here the metapsychology of the pulsion reverts to mind-body metaphysics, rewriting it at a more advanced stage.

The separated order of the psychical results from our precipitate desire, in our (conscious or unconscious) 'heart of hearts', for everything that the system prohibits from collective and symbolic exchange: it is an order of the repressed. It is hardly astonishing that this order is governed by the death drive, since it is nothing but the precipitate individual of an order of death. Psychoanalysis, like every other discipline, theorises the death drive as such within its own order, and so merely sanctions this mortal discrimination.

Conscious, unconscious, super-ego, guilt, repression, primary and secondary processes, phantasm, neurosis and psychosis: yes, all this works very well if we consent to the circumscription of the psychical as such, which circumscription produces our system (not just any system) as the immediate and fundamental form of intelligibility, that is to say, as code. The omnipotence of the code is precisely the inscription of separate spheres, which then justifies a specialised investigation and a sovereign science; but it is undoubtedly the psychical that has the best future. All the savage, errant, transversal and symbolic processes will be inscribed and domesticated within it, in the name of the unconscious itself, which, like an unexpected joke, is generally considered today as the leitmotiv of radical 'liberation'! Death itself will be domesticated under the sign of the death drive!

In fact the death drive must be interpreted against Freud and psychoanalysis if we wish to retain its radicality. The death drive must be understood as acting against the scientific positivity of the psychoanalytic apparatus as developed by Freud. The death drive is not just the limit of psychoanalysis's formulations nor its most radical conclusion, it is its reversal, and those who have rejected the concept of the death drive have, in a certain sense, a more accurate view than those who take it, as even Freud himself did, in their psychoanalytic stride without, perhaps, understanding what he had said. The death drive effectively goes far beyond all previous points of view and renders all previous apparatuses, whether
economic, energetic, topological or even the psychical apparatus itself, useless. All the more reason, of course, for the pulsional logic it draws on, inherited from the scientific mythology of the nineteenth century. Perhaps Lacan guessed this when he spoke of the 'irony' of the concept of the death drive, of the unheard of and insoluble paradox that it poses. Historically, psychoanalysis has taken the view that this is its strangest offspring, but death does not allow itself to be caught in the mirror of psychoanalysis. It acts as a total, radical, functional principle, and has no need of the mirror, repression, nor even a libidinal economy. It merely meanders through successive topologies and energetic calculi, ultimately forming the economics of the unconscious itself, denouncing all that as well as Eros's positive machinery, as the positive interpreting machine that it disrupts and dismantles like any other. A principle of counter-finality, a radical speculative hypothesis, meta-economic, metapsychical, meta-energetic, metapsychoanalytic, the death (drive) is beyond the unconscious: it must be wrested from psychoanalysis and turned against it.

Death in Bataille

Despite its radicality, the psychoanalytic vision of death remains an insufficient vision: the pulsions are constrained by repetition, its perspective bears on a final equilibrium within the inorganic continuum, eliminating differences and intensities following an involution towards the lowest point; an entropy of death, pulsional conservatism, equilibrium in the absence of Nirvana. This theory manifests certain affinities with Malthusian political economy, the objective of which is to protect oneself against death. For political economy only exists by default: death is its blind spot, the absence haunting all its calculations. And the absence of death alone permits the exchange of values and the play of equivalences. An infinitesimal injection of death would immediately create such excess and ambivalence that the play of value would completely collapse. Political economy is an economy of death, because it economises on death and buries it under its discourse. The death drive falls into the opposite category: it is the discourse of death as the insurmountable finality. This discourse is oppositional but complementary, for if political economy is indeed Nirvana (the infinite accumulation and reproduction of dead value), then the death drive denounces its truth, at the same time as subjecting it to absolute derision. It does this, however, in the terms of the system itself, by idealising death as a drive (as an objective finality). As such, the death drive is the current system's most radical negative, but even it simply holds up a mirror to the funereal imaginary of political economy.

Instead of establishing death as the regulator of tensions and an equilibrium function, as the economy of the pulsion, Bataille introduces it in the opposite sense, as the paroxysm of exchanges, superabundance and excess. Death as excess, always already there, proves that life is only defective when death has taken it hostage, that life only exists in bursts and in exchanges with death, if it is not condemned to the discontinuity of value and therefore to absolute deficit. 'To will that there be life only is to make sure that there is only death.' The idea that death is not at all a breakdown of life, that it is willed by life itself, and that the delirial (economic) phantasm of eliminating it is equivalent to implanting it in the heart of life itself – this time as an endless mournful nothingness. Biologically, '[t]he idea of a world where human life might be artificially prolonged has a nightmare quality about it' (G. Bataille, Eroticism [2nd edn, tr. M. Dalwai, London: Marion Boyars, 1987], p. 101), but symbolically above all; and here the nightmare is no longer a simple possibility, but the reality we live at every instant: death (excess, ambivalence, gift, sacrifice, expenditure and the paroxysm), and so real life is absent from it. We renounce dying and accumulate instead of losing ourselves:

Not only do we renounce death, but also we let our desire, which is really the desire to die, lay hold of its object and we keep it while we live on. We enrich our life instead of losing it. (Eroticism, p. 142)

Here, luxury and prodigality predominate over functional calculation, just as death predominates over life as the unilateral finality of production and accumulation:

On a comprehensive view, human life strives towards prodigality to the point of anguish, to the point where the anguish becomes unbearable. The rest is mere moralising chatter. . . . A febrile unrest within us asks death to wreak its havoc at our expense. (ibid., p. 60)

Death and sexuality, instead of confronting each other as antagonistic principles (Freud), are exchanged in the same cycle, in the same cyclical revolution of continuity. Death is not the 'price' of sexuality – the sort of equivalence one finds in every theory of complex living beings (the infusorium is itself immortal and asexual) – nor is sexuality a simple detour on the way to death, as in Civilisation and its Discontents: they exchange their energies and excite each other. Neither has its own specific economy: life and death only fall under the sway of a single economy if they are separated; once they are mixed, they pass beyond economics altogether, into festivity and loss (eroticism according to Bataille):

[We can no longer differentiate between sexuality and death, which are simply the culminating points of the festival nature celebrates, with the inexhaustible multitude of living beings, both of them signifying the boundless wastage of nature's resources as opposed to the urge to live on characteristic of every living creature. (Eroticism, p. 61)]

This festivity takes place because it reinstates the cycle where penury imposes the linear economy of duration, because it reinstates a cyclical revolution of life and death where Freud augurs no other issue than the repetitive involution of death.

In Bataille, then, there is a vision of death as a principle of excess and an anti-economy. Hence the metaphor of luxury and the luxurious character of death. Only sumptuous and useless expenditure has meaning; the
economy has no meaning, it is only a residue that has been made into the law of life, whereas wealth lies in the luxurious exchange of death: sacrifice, the ‘accursed share’, escaping investment and equivalence, can only be annihilated. If life is only a need to survive at any cost, then annihilation is a priceless luxury. In a system where life is ruled by value and utility, death becomes a useless luxury, and the only alternative.

In Bataille, this luxurious conjunction of sex and death figures under the sign of continuity, in opposition to the discontinuous economy of individual existences. Finitude belongs in the discontinuous order, where discontinuous beings secrete finality, all sorts of finalities, which amount to only one: their own death.

We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. (Eroticism, p. 15)

Death itself is without finalities; in eroticism, the finality of the individual being is put back into question:

What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners . . . ? The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives. (Ibid., p. 17)

Erotic nakedness is equal to death insofar as it inaugurates a state of communication, loss of identity and fusion. The fascination of the dissolution of constituted forms: such is Eros (pace Freud, for whom Eros binds energies, federates them into ever larger unities). In death, as in Eros, it is a matter of introducing all possible continuity into discontinuity, a game of complete continuity. It is in this sense that ‘death, the rupture of the discontinuous individualities to which we cleave in terror, stands there before us more real than life itself’ (Ibid., p. 19). Freud says exactly the same thing, but by default. It is no longer a question of the same death.

What Freud missed was not seeing the curvature of life in death, he missed its vertigo and its excess, its reversal of the entire economy of life, making it, in the form of a final pulsion, into a belated equation of life. Freud stated life’s final economy under the sign of repetition and missed its paroxysm. Death is neither resolution nor involvement, but a reversal and a symbolic challenge.

For once they travel down their allotted paths
With open eyes, self-oblivious, too ready to
Comply with what the gods have wished them,
Only too gladly will mortal beings
Speed back into the All by the shortest way;
So rivers plunge—not movement, but rest they seek,
Drawn on, pulled down against their will from
Boulder to boulder—abandoned, helmsless—
By that mysterious yearning toward the chasm;
Chaotic deeps attract, and whole peoples too
May come to long for death
[By Xanthos once, in Grecian times, there stood
The town]
productive and anti-reproductive. It is true that it aims at continuity, as Bataille says, but not that of the species, which is only the continuity of an order of life, whereas the radical continuity in which the subject is ruined by sex and death always signifies the fabulous loss of an order. It is no more supported by the reproductive act than desire is supported by need, no more than sumptuary expenditure prolongs the satisfaction of needs: this biological functionalism is annihilated in eroticism. To look for the secret of sacrifice, sacrificial destruction, play and expenditure in the law of the species, is to reduce it all to a functionalism. There is not even a contiguity between sacrifice and the law of the species. Erotic excess and the reproductive sexual function have nothing in common. The symbolic excess of death has nothing in common with the body’s biological losses.

Bataille, here, labours the influence of the temptation of naturalism, if not biologist, leading him, conversely, to naturalise a tendency to discontinuity: ‘The urge to live on characteristic of every living creature’ (ibid., p. 61). The ‘living creature’ protects itself against the living energies of a debauched nature, an orgy of annihilation by means of prohibitions, resisting the excess of the death drive that comes from nature by every available means (its resistance, however, is only ever provisional: ‘Men have never definitively said no to violence and death’ — ibid., p. 62).

Thus, on the basis of a natural definition of expenditure (nature as the model of prodigality) and a substantial and ontological definition of economics (the subject wishes to live on in his being — but where does this basic desire come from?), Bataille sets up a kind of subjective dialectic of prohibition and transgression, where the initially high-spirited character of sacrifice and death is lost in the delights of Christianity and perversion, a kind of objective dialectic between continuity and discontinuity where the challenge posed by death to economic organisation is effaced in the face of a great metaphysical alternation.

Nevertheless, something remains in Bataille’s excessive and luxuriant vision of death that removes it from psychoanalysis and its individual and psychical domain. This something provides the opportunity to disturb every economy, shattering not only the objective mirror of political economy, but also the inverse psychical mirror of repression, the unconscious and libidinal economy. Beyond all mirrors, or in their fragments, shattered like those of the mirror where The Student of Prague rediscovered its real image at the moment of death, something appears for us today: a fantastic dispersal of the body, of being and wealth. Bataille’s figure of death is the closest premonition of this.

My Death is Everywhere, my Death Dreams

Punctual Death, Biological Death

The irreversibility of biological death, its objective and punctual character, is a modern fact of science. It is specific to our culture. Every other culture says that death begins before death, that life goes on after life, and that it is impossible to distinguish life from death. Against the representation which sees in one the term of the other, we must try to see the radical indeterminacy of life and death, and the impossibility of their autonomy in the symbolic order. Death is not a due payment [échelance], it is a nuance of life; or, life is a nuance of death. But our modern idea of death is controlled by a very different system of representations: that of the machine and the function. A machine either works or it does not. Thus the biological machine is either dead or alive. The symbolic order is ignorant of this digital abstraction. And even biology acknowledges that we start dying at birth, but this remains with the category of a functional definition. It is quite another thing to say that death articulates life, is exchanged with life and is the apogee of life: for then it becomes absurd to make life a process which expires with death, and more absurd still to make death equivalent to a deficit and an accelerated repayment. Neither life nor death can any longer be assigned a given end: there is therefore no punctuality nor any possible definition of death.

We are living entirely within evolutionist thought, which states that we go from life to death: this is the illusion of the subject that sustains both biology and metaphysics (biology wishes to reverse metaphysics, but merely prolongs it). But there is no longer even a subject who dies at a given moment. It is more real to say that whole parts of ‘ourselves’ (of our bodies, our language) fall from life to death, while the living are subjected to the work of mourning. In this way, a few of the living manage to forget them gradually, as God managed to forget the drowned girl who was carried away by the stream of water in Brecht’s song:

Und es geschah, dass Gott sie allmählich vergess,
zerst das Gesicht, dann die Hände, und zuletzt das Haar ...

[It happened (very slowly) that it gently slid from God’s thoughts:
First her face, then her hands, and right at the end her hair.]


The subject’s identity is continually falling apart, falling into God’s forgetting. But this death is not at all biological. At one pole, biochemistry, asexual protozoa are not affected by death, they divide and branch out (nor is the genetic code, for its part, ever affected by death: it is transmitted unchanged beyond individual fates). At the other, symbolic, pole, death and nothingness no longer exist, since in the symbolic, life and death are reversible.

Only in the infinitesimal space of the individual conscious subject does death take on an irreversible meaning. Even here, death is not an event, but a myth experienced as anticipation. The subject needs a myth of its end, as of its origin, to form its identity. In reality, the subject is never there: like the face, the hands and the hair, and even before no doubt, it is always already somewhere else, trapped in a senseless distribution, an endless cycle impelled by death. This death, everywhere in life, must be conjured up and localised in a precise point of time and a precise place: the body.
enanced immediately, in total blindness and total ambivalence. But is it revolutionary? If political economy is the most rigorous attempt to put an end to death, it is clear that only death can put an end to political economy.

Notes

1. Racism was founded, and from the universal point of view we claim to have overcome it in accordance with the egalitarian morality of humanism. Neither the soul, in times past, nor today the biological characteristics of the species, on which this egalitarian morality is based, offer a more objective or less arbitrary argument than, for example, the colour of one's skin, since they too are distinctive criteria. On the basis of such criteria (soul or sex), we effectively obtain a Black = White equivalence. This equivalence, however, excludes everything that has not a 'human' soul or sex even more radically. Even the savages, who hypostatise neither the soul nor the species, recognise the earth, the animal and the dead as the socius. On the basis of our universal principles, we have rejected them from our egalitarian metahumanism. By integrating Blacks on the basis of white criteria, this metahumanism merely extends the boundaries of abstract sociability, de jure sociability. The same white magic of racism continues to function, merely whitening the Black under the sign of the universal.

2. The more we stress the human character of the divine essence, and the more we see the distance that separates God from man increase, the more we see reflection on religion or theology nullify the identity and unity of the divine essence and the human essence, the more we see the deasebasing of all that is human, in the sense that human consciousness becomes its object. The reason for this is that if everything positive in the conception we have of the divine being is reduced to the human, then man, the object of consciousness, could only become a negative and inhuman conception. To enrich God, man must become poor (Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* [I.H.G. translation; available tr. George Elliot, New York: Harper and Row, 1957]). This text clearly describes an 'abduction' into the universal. The universalisation of God is always bound up with an exclusion and reduction of the human in its originality. When God starts to resemble man, man no longer resembles anything. What Feuerbach does not say, because he is still too wrapped up in religion, is that the universalisation of man also takes place at the cost of the exclusion of all others (madmen, children, etc.) in their difference. When Man starts to resemble Man, others no longer resemble anything. Defined as universality and as an ideal reference, the Human, jut like God, is properly inhuman. Feuerbach has equally nothing to say concerning the act of abduction, by which God captures the human for his own use, in such a way that man is nothing more than the anaemic negative of God, which, backfiring, killed God himself. Even Man is dying from the various 'inhumanities' (madness, infancy, savagery) he has instituted.

3. At a time when public sector housing is taking on the appearance of a cemetery, cemeteries normally adopt the form of real estate (as in Nice, etc.). On the other hand, it is remarkable that in the American metropolis, and often in the French, traditional cemeteries constitute the only green, or empty, spaces in the urban ghetto. That the space of the dead became the only district in the city where living is tolerable says a great deal about the inversion of values in the modern necropolis. In Chicago children play in cemeteries, cyclists ride there and lovers kiss. What architect would dare to draw inspiration from the truth of the contemporary urban set-up and form a conception of a city on the basis of cemeteries, waste ground and 'accursed' spaces? This would truly be the death of architecture.

4. Heresies always put this 'Kingdom of the Beyond' in question to establish the Kingdom of God hic et nunc. To deny the doubling of life and sur-vival, to deny the next world, is also to deny the rupture with the dead and therefore the necessity of crossing over via an
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intermediary agency to establish trade with them. This is the end of the Church and its power.

5. God keeps the signer and the signified, good and evil, apart. He also separates man and woman, the living and the dead, the body and the mind, the Other and the Same, etc. More generally, it is He who maintains the split between the poles of every distinct opposition, and therefore between the inferior and the superior, Black and White. As soon as reason becomes political, that is to say, as soon as the distinct opposition is resolved as power and leans in the interests of one of these terms, God is already on this side.

6. [tient la barre: ‘at the helm’ – tr.]

7. For us, by contrast, everything which is symbolically exchanged constitutes a mortal danger for the dominant order.

8. There is therefore no distinction on the symbolic plane between the living and the dead. The dead have a different status, that is all, which requires certain ritual precautions. But visible and invisible do not exclude each other since they are two possible states of a person. Death is an aspect of life. The Canaques arriving in Sydney for the first time, stupefied by the crowds, soon explains the thing by the fact that in this country the dead walk amongst the living, which is nothing strange. ‘Do Kamo’, for the Canaques (Maurice Leenhardt, *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World* [tr. Basia Miller Gulati, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979]), is that ‘which lives’, and everyone may belong to this category. There again the living/non-living is a distinctive opposition that we alone make, and we base all our ‘science’ and our operational violence on it. Science, techniques and production assume this rupture of the living and the non-living, privileging the living on which alone science in all its rigour is based (cf. J. Monod, *Chance and Necessity*). Even the ‘reality’ of science and techniques is also the separation of the living and the dead. The very finality of science as a pulsion, as the death drive (the desire to know), is inscribed in this disjunction, so that an object is only real insofar as it is dead, that is, relegated to inert and indifferent objectivity, as were initially, above everything else, the dead and the living.

By contrast, the primitives were not plunged, as we like to say so much, into ‘animism’, that is, into the idealism of the living, into the irrational magic of forces: they privilege *neither one term nor the other*, for the simple reason that they do not make this distinction.

9. This rule also applies in the political sphere. Thus the peoples of the Third World (Arabs, Blacks and Indians) act as Western culture’s imaginary (as much an object or support of racism as the support of revolutionary aspirations). On the other hand, we, the technological and industrial West, are their imaginary, what they dream of in their separation. This is the basis of the reality of global domination.

10. Of course, the psychoanalytic (Lacanian) real is no longer given as substance, nor as a positive reference: it is the always lost object that cannot be located, and of which there is nothing ultimately to say. A delimited absence in the network of the ‘symbolic order’, this real retains however the charm of a game of hide-and-seek with the signer which traces after it. From the representation to the trace, the real effaced – not entirely, however. There is all the difference between an unconscious topology and utopia. Utopia puts an end to the real, even as absence or lack.

At least in Lacan there is something other than the idealist misinterpretation of Lévi-Strauss, for whom, in his *Structural Anthropology* [2 vols, tr. M. Layton, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977–9]), ‘the function of the symbolic universe is to resolve on the ideal plane what is experienced as contradictory on the real plane’. Here (not too far from its most degraded sense), the symbolic appears as a sort of ideal compensation function, mediating between the separation of the real and ideal. In fact, the symbolic is quite simply reducible to the imaginary.

11. On the other hand, whoever cannot be given also dies, or falls to the necessity of selling themselves. This is where prostitution takes hold, as the residue of gift-exchange and the first form of economic exchange. Even though the prostitute’s wages were initially, in

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the ancient context, a ‘sacrificial wage’, it inaugurates the possibility of another type of exchange.

12. Cf. also M. Leenhardt: There is no idea of nothingness in death. The Canaques does not mistake the idea of death for that of nothingness. Perhaps we may find in their term *siri* an idea similar to our ‘nothingness’. *Siri* indicates the situation of the bewitched or cursed man who has been abandoned by his ancestors, the bana, a man in perdurance, out of society. He feels himself non-existent and suffers a veritable ruin. For him ‘nothingness’ is, at most, a social negation and is not a part of the idea he has of death. (Do Kamo, p. 35)

13. Such societies are consequently less psychotic than our modern societies (for which we polity reserve the qualification ‘neurotic’, but which are in fact in the process of becoming ‘psychotic’ according to our own definition, that is, they are in the process of a total loss of access to the symbolic).

14. Because the ‘social’ itself does not exist in ‘primitive societies’. The term ‘primitive’ has been eliminated today, but we must also eliminate the equally ethnocentric term ‘society’.

15. Cf. the cannibalistic scene in Jean de Lhéry’s *Les Indiens de la Renaissance*.


17. Just like Jaulin (La Mort Sara) on the primitive fear of the dead: ‘By lending anti-social intentions to the forces of death, the Sara have merely logically extended some very broad observations and, at the same time, several unconscious givens.’ It is not at all certain that these unconscious ‘givens’ have much to do with this. The haunting and the negativity of the forces of death might well be explained as the menacing agency and the immanence of these wandering forces as soon as their escape from the group, where they can no longer be exchanged. ‘The dead man’, in fact, ‘avenges himself.’ But the hostile double, the hostile dead man, is repeatedly incarnated in the group’s failure to preserve his material in symbolic exchange, to repatriate, through an appropriate ritual, this ‘nature’ that escapes with the dead man and which then crystallises into a malefic instance. This nevertheless leaves his relation with the group intact: he exercises it in the form of persecution (the dead labour frozen within capital plays the same role for us). This has nothing to do with a superegoic projection or an unconscious apparatus issuing from the depths of the species...

18. The neo-millennialism of the liberation of the unconscious should not be analysed as a distortion of psychoanalysis: it follows logically from the imaginary resurrection of the lost object (*objet petit a*) that psychoanalysis buried at the core of its theory: the always unreachable real which allows it to guard the gates to the symbolic. The *objet petit a* is in fact the true mirror of Desire, and, at the same time, the mirror of psychoanalysis.

19. Science itself is cumulative only because it is half bound up with death, because it heaps death upon death.

20. In times past, however, there had already existed another individual and pessimistic thought of death: the Stoics’ aristocratic, pre-Christian thought was also bound up with the conception of a personal solitude in death in a culture where collective myths were collapsing. The same emphases are also found in Montaigne and Pascal, in the feudal lord or the Jansenist of noblese de robe (the ennobled bourgeoisie), in humanist resignation or desperate Christianity. This, however, marks the beginning of the modern anguish of death.

21. In this respect, there is no difference between atheist materialism and Christian idealism, for they part company only on the question of the afterlife (but whether or not there is anything after death has no importance: ‘that is not the question’ [in English in the original – tr.]), they agree on the basic principle: life is life, and death is always death; that is, they share the will to keep them scrupulously at a distance from each other.

22. The Christian dialectic of death epitomises and puts an end to Pascal’s formula: ‘It is important for all life to know whether the soul is mortal or immortal’, is succeeded by
humanist thinking, a rationalist mastery over death. In the West, this has been drawn on from the Stoics and the Epicureans (Montaigne – the denigration of death – benign or cold serenity), up to the eighteenth century and Feuerbach: ‘Death is a phantom, a chimera, since it exists only when it does not exist.’ The staging of reason never results in an excess of life, nor in an enthusiastic sense of death: humanism seeks a natural reason for death, a wisdom backed up by science and the Enlightenment thinkers.

The denial of death as an agent and the movement of the becoming – succeeds this formal and rationalist overcoming of death. The beautiful dialectic follows the upward mobility of political economy.

The dialectic then breaks down to make room for the irreducibility of death and its insurmountable immanence (Kierkegaard). With Heidegger, dialectical reason falls into ruin, taking a subjective and irrational turn towards a metaphysics of despair and the absurd which, however, does not prevent it from being the dialectic of a conscious subject finding a paradoxical freedom in it: ‘Everything is permitted, since death is insurmountable’ (quia absurdum: Pascal was not so far from the modern pathos of death). Camus: ‘The absurd man fixes death with an impassioned stare; this fascination liberates him.’

The anguish of death as a test of truth. Human life as being-towards-death. Heidegger: ‘Authentic being-towards-death – that is to say, the finitude of temporality – is the hidden basis of Dasein’s historicality’ (Being and Time [tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978], §74, p. 438). Death as ‘authenticity’: there is in this, in relation to a system that is itself morifying, a vertiginous escalation, a challenge which is in fact a profound obedience.

The terror of authenticity through death remains a secondary process in that, by means of dialectical acrobatics, consciousness recuperates its ‘finitude’ as destiny. Anxiety as the reality principle and as ‘freedom’ remains the imaginary which, in its contemporary phase, has substituted the mirror of death for that of immortality. But all this remains extremely Christian and is moreover constantly mixed up with ‘existential’ Christianity.

Revolutionary thought, for its part, oscillates between the dialecticisation of death as negativity, and the rationalist objective of the abolition of death: to put an end to it as a ‘reckless’ obstacle in solidarity with capital, with the help of science and technics, en route to the immortality of generic man, beyond history, in communism. Death, like so many other things, is only a superstructure, whose exit will be governed by the revolution of the infrastructure.

23. There is a great risk of confusion here, for if we acknowledge that death and sexuality are biologically intertwined in the organic destiny of complex beings, this has nothing to do with the symbolic relation of death and sex. The first is inscribed in the positivity of the genetic code, the second in the destruction of social codes. Or rather, the second has no biological equivalent inscribed anywhere, whether in a code or in language. It is play, challenge and intense pleasure [jouissance] as it mockingly thwarts the former. Between the two, between the real relation of death and sexuality and their symbolic relation, there passes the caesura of exchange, a social destiny where everything plays.

Weissman: some is immortal, plasma germinative and immortal. Protozoa are virtually immortal, death arising only with differentiated metazoans for whom death becomes possible and even rational (the unlimited duration of an individual life becomes a useless luxury. For Bataille, death on the contrary becomes an ‘irrational’ luxury). Death is only a late acquisition of living beings. In the history of the species of living creatures, it appears along with sexuality.

So also Tourrier in Friday or the Other Island (tr. Norman Denny, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 106–7:

Sex and death. Their close association … he insisted that this was a sacrifice of the individual to the species, since in the act of procreation the individual loses something of his substance. Thus sexuality is the living presence, ominous and mortal, of the species in the essence of the individual. To procreate is to bring forth a new generation which innocently and inexorably will thrust its predecessor towards extinction … The instinct which brings the sexes together is then an instinct of death. But Nature has thought it prudent to disguise her stratagem, transparent though it is, and what appears to be the self-indulgence of lovers is in reality a course of mad self-abnegation.

This fable is accurate, but demonstrates only the correlation between biological sex and death: in fact, death’s decree appears along with sexuality, since the latter is already the inscription of a functional distribution, and therefore is immediately of a repressive order. But this functional distribution is not of the order of the pulsion; it is social. It appeared in a certain type of social relation. Savages do not make sexuality autonomous like we do; they are closer to what Bataille describes: ‘Through the activity of organs in a flow of coalescence and renewal, like the ebb and flow of waves … the self is dispossessed’ (Eroticism [2nd edn, tr. M. Dalwood, London: Marion Boyars, 1987], p. 18).

24. In fact, Bataille’s vision of ‘excess’ often falls into the trap of transgression, a fundamentally Christian dialectics or mysticism (but shared by contemporary psychoanalysis and by every ‘libertarian’ ideology of the festival and release [défoulement] of the prohibition and transgression. We have made the festival into an aesthetics of transgression, because our entire culture is one of prohibition. Repression still marks the idea of the festival, which by the same token may be accused of reactivating the prohibition and reinforcing the social order. We treat the primitive feast to the same analysis since we are basically incapable of imagining anything other than the bar, its onthiside and its beyond, which again issues from our fundamental schema of an uninterrupted linear order (the ‘good form’ which culture excludes is always that of the end, of a final fulfilment). Like the sacrifice, the primitive feast is not a transgression but a reversal, a cyclical revolution. This is the only form that puts an end to the bar and its prohibitions. The inverse order of the transgression or ‘liberation’ of repressed energies simply ends up in a compulsion to repeat the prohibition. Thus only reversibility and the cycle are in excess; transgression remains by default. ‘In the economic order, all production is reproduction; in the symbolic order, all reproduction is production.’

25. It is, moreover, curious to see how, technically, death becomes increasingly undecidable for science itself: heart failure, then a levelencephalogram; but then what? There is no longer any objective progress here: something of the indeterminacy and undecidability of death in the heart of science itself is reflected on the symbolic plane.

26. To the point that it is sufficient that certain political groups demand some accident or assassination attempt of unknown origin: this is their only ‘practice’, transforming chance into subversion.

27. Since today this contractual demand is addressed to social authorities, whereas before one signed pacts with the Devil to prolong, enrich and enjoy one’s life. The same contract, and the same trap: the Devil always wins.

28. This is more important than the maximal exploitation of the labour force. This can clearly be seen in the case of the elderly: they are no longer exploited (if they are allowed to live on the fruits of society) if they are forced to live, since they are the living example of the accumulation of life (as opposed to its consumption). Society supports them as models of the use-value of life, accumulation and saving. This is precisely why they no longer have any symbolic presence in our society.

29. It only becomes the object of a passion against if it can be imputed to a person (a particular capitalist or a particular business personified), and is therefore experienced once again as crime and sacrifice.

30. Contrary to what is generally thought, human sacrifices succeeded animal sacrifice to the extent that the animal lost its magical pre-eminence, and the man-king succeeded the animal-totem as worthy of the sacrificial function. The more recent substitutive sacrifice of the animal has a very different meaning.