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BAUDRILLARD REDUX: ANTIDOTES TO INTEGRAL REALITY

**RICHARD G. SMITH, DAVID B. CLARKE, AND
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[T]here's something entertaining in the spectacle of the present world racing out of control and ultimately unhinging *itself*, incapable as it is of escaping its own logic, as though it were caught in its own trap. (Jean Baudrillard)



Jean Baudrillard was one of the world's most influential and controversial intellectual figures. He died in Paris in 2007, aged seventy-seven, leaving a legacy that includes some of the most prescient, penetrating, and provocative commentary on the cultures and politics of our age. His *oeuvre* spans more than fifty books and hundreds of articles. Almost no aspect of Western culture, particularly those aspects contemporaneous with his own life, escaped Baudrillard's attention: the paradoxes of a consumer society geared to satisfaction yet more than capable of generating its own discontents; the implosion of the real in the wake of a media-induced excess of reality; the collapse of universalism and the rise of globalization and global terrorism; the fate of art in a transaesthetic era; and of politics in a transpolitical era; and so on. Baudrillard's ability to overturn accepted wisdom

and to scandalize the establishment afforded him an iconic status as a public intellectual – not just in France, where he made regular contributions to the national left-wing daily newspaper, *Libération*, but across much of the globe, where his texts and lecture tours led to his ideas being widely discussed and debated within academia and beyond; by artists, architects, photographers, writers, journalists, musicians, and filmmakers, among others.

Yet despite Baudrillard's renown, and in spite of the conceptual audacity and theoretical inventiveness of his writings, his influence on cultural politics, at least within the English-speaking world, has been largely confined to a particular reading – or, often, misreading – of his work. This reading has tended to become fixated on a handful of concepts – most notably “postmodernism,” “simulation,” and “hyperreality” – which are more often than not deployed in a somewhat gestural manner that is both allusive and elusive; and it is invariably presented as a “closed” reading, attributed to a cadre of devotees who are, for the most part, regarded as dogmatic disciples who do little more than recycle Baudrillard's ideas among a circle of fellow adepts with increasingly diminishing returns. While it is perhaps understandable that this situation should have arisen, particularly given Baudrillard's initial reception within the English-speaking world as the “high priest” of postmodernism (Kellner 1989), it is far from an accurate portrayal of the potential Baudrillard's work offers or, indeed, of Baudrillard himself. It is telling that the waning of interest in the postmodern since the 1990s has not, in fact, led to a corresponding decline of interest in Baudrillard. On the contrary, now that his work is no longer interpreted in the one-dimensional terms dictated by the modern/postmodern debate, a far fuller, richer, and more diverse understanding and appreciation of Baudrillard's import is beginning to emerge.

Since the topology of Baudrillard's work is that of a “double spiral,” wherein condition and critique twist and coil around one another inexorably (Rajan 2002; Smith with Doel 2001; Smith 2010a), recent scholarship has moved away from a one-sided emphasis on notions such as simulation and hyperrealism – even as these have been recast in terms of the virtual and integral reality – towards a double strategy that simultaneously brings into focus and into play precisely what it is that such notions disavow or displace (Doel 2010). Baudrillard has left us with a remarkable series of concepts suited to thinking about – or, better, thinking through and alongside – such displaced or disavowed elements: symbolic exchange, seduction, reversibility, catastrophe, fatality, absolute evil, impossible exchange, the irreducible, and the singular to mention just a few (see Bishop 2009; Butler 1999; Clarke et al. 2009; Gane 2000; Hegarty 2004; Merrin 2005; Pawlett 2007; Smith 2010b; Toffoletti 2011; Turner 2005). To this extent, Baudrillard's thought is transpolitical rather than political, transaesthetic rather than aesthetic, and thus concerned not with power and value, but with the ways in which power and value turn against themselves, hollowing out the spheres of the political and the cultural from within.

Given the somewhat belated general appreciation of the subtlety of Baudrillard's thought, this theme issue of *Cultural Politics* is devoted to demonstrating both the insights that Baudrillard himself achieved, and the potency of the concepts he bequeathed to us. The issue begins with Baudrillard in his own words, in the shape of an interview, published here for the first time in English translation. Mapping out the broad trajectory of his work, the ideas that he retraces in this interview set the scene for the remainder of the issue, which presents eight essays that explore the force of Baudrillard's thinking in a variety of contexts, the last of which rounds off the issue by reviewing Baudrillard's final three books: *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?*, *Carnival and Cannibal*, and *The Agony of Power* (Baudrillard, 2009 [2007], 2010a [2008], 2010b, respectively), suggesting the as yet untapped potential of Baudrillardian analysis.

From the opening interview to the closing review essay, the guiding rationale and distinguishing feature of this issue of the journal is its appreciation of and commitment to the dual game in which Baudrillard was himself engaged. Even so-called "integral reality" – which was Baudrillard's final conceptualization of the consequence of modernity's long-standing attempt to impose a final solution to the enigma of the world – cannot escape the paradoxes and reversals that its own logic of ex-position, ex-stasis, and ex-termination provokes (cf. Doel 2008). Recognition of these antidotes to integral reality is arguably the most significant legacy of Baudrillard's thought, as the work comprising this issue serves to highlight. When all is said and done, everything remains in play. To the bitter end – and beyond – Baudrillard remained an optimistic extremist or, if you prefer, an extreme optimist.

Before offering a fuller précis of each contribution to this issue of the journal, it is worth tracing the tenor and direction of the collection as a whole. While Baudrillard's thought developed considerably over time, demonstrating an astonishing capacity for conceptual innovation and experimentation, it is important to appreciate that the essential lineaments of Baudrillard's thinking remained remarkably consistent over the course of his career. With this in mind, the opening article, by Mario Perniola, relates to a work originally published in 1976: Baudrillard's (1993a) *Symbolic Exchange and Death* – the first of Baudrillard's texts to explicate the notion of "reversibility." Perniola's essay beautifully sets the scene for much of what is to follow, offering a rare and sophisticated cultural and historical contextualization of Baudrillard's thought. Having provided us with an insight into Baudrillard's untimely "death drive," so to speak, Perniola's essay paves the way for Jacques Donzelot's rumination on the specificity of Baudrillard's method, by way of a consideration of Baudrillard's "patasociology," which also serves to situate Baudrillard in his own historical context. The third essay, by Mike Gane, reads Baudrillard's long-standing engagement with the notion of fetishism right up to the "radical fetishism" of integral reality, thus bringing us from some of Baudrillard's very earliest writings to some of his very latest, retrospectively revealing the sequence of essays by

Perniola, Donzelot, and Gane to be a kind of triptych, portraying the consistency of Baudrillard's work from three different angles, and in so doing laying the foundations for the rest of the articles making up this issue.

The first essay in the second sequence of articles, by Lee Barron, focuses on how fully immersive, online computer-gaming worlds are much more than mere simulations or pale imitations. "More" because they are dual [*sic.*], both a paragon of integral reality – an absolute fetish, a totally virtualized and mediated world from which the human has truly disappeared – and, as with all games, a form of ambivalence, seduction, undecidability, and reversibility, always already undoing integral reality's reliance on equivalence, production, computerization, and models. This is followed by a contribution by Gary Genosko who, through a discussion of Baudrillard's critique of models as forms of self-referential simulation, is attentive to the way in which, for Baudrillard, models of communication foreclose on symbolic exchange by, on the one hand, simulating the genuine contact found in social relations, and, on the other hand, dissimulating their inherent separation of senders and receivers – for no model can reach beyond itself – so as actually to ensure non-communication and ex-communication. The remaining two articles focus attention on the antidotes to integral reality, and particularly how integral reality is itself prone to undoing itself from within. The article by Douglas Morrey, which offers an examination of Baudrillard alongside Dantec, explores how Dantec's fiction, like Baudrillard's theory, is not only attentive to, but partakes of, the extreme logic it favors, thus effectively adopting the Nietzschean trait of pushing that which wants to fall. Then, in a related exploration, Bran Nicol retraces the similar potency offered by the strategy of seduction in an article which turns detective fiction into a wonderfully apposite metaphor for conveying the antidote to integral reality. Finally, Mark Featherstone rounds off this issue of the journal with a review essay devoted to Baudrillard's final three books.

We turn now to offering a succinct overview of each contribution to the issue in the order in which they appear. First, paying oblique tribute to the profundity of Baudrillard's writing on death in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a [1976]), Mario Perniola's "Being-towards-Death and the Simulacrum of Death" compares and contrasts Heidegger and Baudrillard, offering an impressive philosophical and historical contextualization of the thought of each author. Perniola notes that Heidegger and Baudrillard share in their rejection of the theological conception of death (itself based on a metaphysical theory of man conceived in the image of God) and a normally counterposed humanist conception (equally based on a metaphysical theory of man as full presence). Beyond this, however, Heidegger and Baudrillard are fundamentally opposed, in terms of both their philosophical orientation (towards phenomenology and ontology in Heidegger's case; towards psychoanalysis and history in the case of Baudrillard), and in terms of their respective cultural alignment (towards Luther, Jansenism, and

their common Augustinian origin for Heidegger; towards the Jesuit tradition and, especially, the baroque in Baudrillard). This basic contrast – Heidegger referring back to a tradition that has consistently viewed life as a meditation on death; Baudrillard relating to a tradition, as much “primitive” as “Jesuitico-Baroque,” which “saw the vision of death as the entry condition for the great theatre of life” – is compellingly elaborated with reference to a dazzling array of historical sources. Indeed, while displaying an impressive capacity to distill and summarize the orientations of both Heidegger and Baudrillard, Perniola’s approach is fundamentally historical – aiming to locate the different tendencies of thought on death in their broader historical-cultural context and, accordingly, to reveal their political implications. Consequently, the essentially Lutheran being-towards-death elaborated into a philosophical system by Heidegger is traced back to the *Artes moriendi* of the late Middle Ages, where a good life – living well – was predicated on a lifetime’s meditation on how to die well. In contrast, the genealogy of Baudrillard’s approach relates back to the *Artes moriendi* of the first half of the sixteenth century, when a humanist reversal – “whoever wishes to die well must learn to live well” – of the medieval position influenced Jesuit theology (specifically via the cultivation of an Ignatian sensibility of *indifference*, which underpinned a conception of life as a simulation of death: living as if one were dead, taking no interest in life), only to culminate in the baroque, where death and worldliness were no longer seen as being fundamentally opposed. The accomplishment of the baroque was effectively to regard death as lying at the origin of history, specifically via the cultivation of a sensibility whereby one might accept being *in* the world but not *of* the world – which has, as its corollary, the recognition that any search for authenticity is itself always already inauthentic. For in accepting the world as a vast artifice, as a construction made up of appearances, it can only be in abandoning these appearances that a sense of desolation lies. This, Perniola convincingly demonstrates, is entirely of a piece with Baudrillard’s ruminations on the repression of death and the abandonment of symbolic relations with the dead that characterizes Western culture – which subsequently underpin Baudrillard’s abandonment of critique as a mode of theorizing in favor of the fatal strategy of reversibility.

Jacques Donzelot was a colleague of Baudrillard in the Sociology Department at the University of Nanterre in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. In his essay entitled “Patasociology at the University of Nanterre,” Donzelot recollects a class on patasociology that he taught jointly with Baudrillard, highlighting their exchange of ideas, their fundamental disagreements over, and their radical divergence with respect to three issues: the family and sexual liberation; the social; and politics. Donzelot notes that, whereas he concerned himself with the *birth* of phenomena, Baudrillard concerned himself with their *death*. While Donzelot investigated the “birth of the modern family,” the “invention of the social,” and the formation of “a new public spirit,” Baudrillard sought to conceptualize the “dissolution of seduction,” the

“death of the social,” and the “end of politics” (Baudrillard 1985, 1990 [1979], 2007). Donzelot recalls that Baudrillard’s method rested on the principle of reversibility, never restricting thought merely to explaining what was new and emerging at a particular time or place but, rather, condemning the current order of things through a focus on reversion – with what is withdrawing, becoming lost, and disappearing. Donzelot notes the influence of Nietzsche on Baudrillard’s philosophy inasmuch as Baudrillard’s writing and theoretical practice is anti-systematic, seeking the absolute other of any given system, from which it can be sent to its doom and annihilated *in toto*. Baudrillard’s radical antagonism seeks to dispel all illusions and hypocrisy, to destroy obvious, positive, and progressive representations of the world; not to seek an alternative reconciliation, synthesis, or unity, but rather to negate truth and put an end to the world as we know it, to leave room only for a radicalism whose mode of thinking is a profoundly liberating irony. Something of this sense is conveyed by our next contribution.

Given Baudrillard’s consistent interest in, and theorization of, the object – it was the topic of his very first book, *The System of Objects* (1996a [1968]) – it is surprising that the notion and status of the fetish and fetishism in Baudrillard’s work has received relatively little attention (although see Clarke 2010a). To begin to address this oversight, Mike Gane, in an essay entitled “Baudrillard’s Radicalization of Fetishism,” discusses Baudrillard’s distinctive framing of that concept – one that stands apart from theology (the Christian critique of primitive religions, where the fetish was associated with artifice, illusion, and superstition) as well as from the social theories of both the French positivists (for whom the fetish was conceptualized as a positive elementary religious form for social classification and representations of the world) and the humanist neo-Marxists (who saw the fetish as illusory and mystifying in their theorization of exploitation, alienation, commodification, and financialization). Gane proceeds to consider how Baudrillard’s understanding of fetishism developed from an early theorization demonstrating the confinement of the fetish to the political economy of the sign, rather than its acceptance as an element within the symbolic exchange of “primitive societies,” to a later theorization of the absolute fetish in integral reality, whereby the sign has become disembodied and consequently beyond the horizon of the subject and psychoanalysis.

Gane argues that from Baudrillard’s (1981 [1972]) distinctive early theorization of the fetishism attaching to the commodity–sign, through to the analyses of fetishism that he offered in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993a [1976]) and *Seduction* (1990 [1979]), Baudrillard progressively extended his analysis of neo-fetishism within Western culture. In so arguing, Gane delivers two vital insights. First, Gane shows how the concept of the fetish becomes much broader in its scope in Baudrillard’s later writings – as Baudrillard increasingly makes recourse to it in discussions of all manner of topics, from childhood, gender, and the body to capitalism, art, architecture, and money. Second, Gane reveals how Baudrillard extends Baudelaire’s notion of

the absolute commodity to reject fetishism's negative and alienated connotations in favor of a conception of the triumph of a higher form of "radical fetishism" allied to the fourth order of integral reality, wherein the object has moved beyond representation to become a total, banal, "nondescript," and "unexchangeable" reality (Pawlett 2010): an absolute fetish detached from the subject with "no reference, no meaning, no cultural value properly so-called" (Baudrillard 1998: 107).

In "Living with the Virtual: Baudrillard, Integral Reality and *Second Life*," Lee Barron discusses the virtual worlds of immersive electronic games as illustrative of "integral reality." Barron adopts this concept in preference to the earlier Baudrillardian notions of simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality as a means of engaging with the all-encompassing virtual reality gaming environments offered by fully interactive, online game-play spaces such as Linden Lab's *Second Life*. In *The Perfect Crime* (1996b [1995]), Baudrillard discussed the murder of the reality principle to suggest that the real itself retrospectively becomes nothing more than a particular case of simulation. In coining the term "integral reality," Baudrillard (2005a [2004]) is concerned to emphasize the indistinction of the real and the virtual: it is not that reality has disappeared, to be replaced by simulacra, but rather that reality itself is an invention of simulation models, the inevitable consequence of the absence of symbolic exchange. Reading Tim Guest's (2008) *Second Lives* – an account of his journey through *Second Life* – in the light of this conception of integral reality, Barron concludes that players of digital online games "go beyond a simulatory experience" in ways that "suggest the validity of Baudrillard's idea of an integral 'ultra-reality'." In contrast to a materialist critique of immersive electronic games as merely second-order simulacra, Barron observes a process of osmosis between *Second Life* and the world, such that the game is both captured by the world and captures the world. As with cloning and simulation, this "becoming-world" of the game and the "becoming-game" of the world are vital facets of the contemporary moment. "The world is a game" (Baudrillard 1993b: 46). Indeed, game-play amounts to a form of reversibility against the political-economic principle of production: whether in games of chance at a casino or the electronic gamer's cool passion for the intensity of video games, they are played because the players want to be seduced, to be charmed by the game, and to effect a disappearance through their immersion in the immanence and immediacy of the virtual: "the fundamental passion ... is that of the game" (Baudrillard 2005b: 149).

In "No More Models," Gary Genosko considers Baudrillard's critique of models in general, and communication modeling in particular, with reference to Roman Jakobson's model of poetic communication and the mediating-models approach associated with Mary Morgan and Margaret Morrison. He begins by rehearsing Baudrillard's powerful critique of the transmission model of communication, and particularly the phatic (contact) function in Jakobson's model. On Genosko's reading, Baudrillard compresses Jakobson's model into the "fatal

formula” of sender–message–receiver. Once separated, the two poles of sender and receiver are no longer in contact with one another, and so the possibility of genuine contact – exemplified by all forms of symbolic exchange – is foreclosed. The transmission of messages between senders and receivers would seem to put the two poles back into contact with one another, but this reconnection can only ever be feigned. By simulating contact, communication dissimulates the inevitability of non-communication and ex-communication. Genosko offers a beautiful quotation from Baudrillard’s *Seduction*: “Language has no need of ‘contact’: it is we who need communication to have a specific ‘contact’ function, precisely because it is eluding us” (1990 [1979]: 164). It is a moot point, however, whether Baudrillard’s fatal formula does justice to the complexity of Jakobson’s model of communication, and Genosko gives careful consideration to this matter.

Genosko argues that, for Baudrillard, the modeling of communication not only inaugurates non-communication and ex-communication, it also shifts them from the sphere of representation into the sphere of simulation. Since meaning, reference, and value are modulated effects that are always already accounted for within the combinatorial matrix and modulation of codes, every model is necessarily self-referential. No model can reach beyond the jurisdiction of its own code. “[T]he real is not only that which can be reproduced, *but that which is always already reproduced*” (Baudrillard 1993a [1976]: 73). Hereinafter, hyperreality reigns, and all forms of symbolic ambivalence are ex-terminated by semiotic equivalence. At this point, Genosko alights upon one of Baudrillard’s most infamous metaphors: the floating free of models, codes, sign systems, etc. He does so, however, with a twist, since for Genosko there are two kinds of flotation. The first arises from the drift of communication and modeling into simulation and hyperreality. This is the path that Baudrillard pursued, and which Genosko calls sinister, extreme, and fatal. The “real” and its “representation” are not so much abolished as returned to the simulacrum whence they came – to the good fortune of symbolic exchange. In such a situation there can be no more models. The other kind of flotation arises from a transversal movement that carries models away from the path laid out between the “real” (which is destined to be eclipsed) and the “code” (which is destined to be cancelled). This is the path that Genosko pursues via the mediating-models approach, an approach that situates models in a relationship of partial independence from both data and theory. While the first path leads to ex-termination (the vanishing of every term into ambivalence, undecidability, and indifference), the second path leads to deterritorialization and reterritorialization (every model opens itself to creative encounters and new potentialities). For Genosko, then, Baudrillard conflated models and simulation by way of his fatal formula extracted from Jakobson, and collapsed the real and its representation into the hyperreal. But since there are two kinds of flotation, there is another destiny for modeling: quasi-independent mediating models. Genosko concludes by suggesting that, since vestiges of the “real”

and “representation” remain within Baudrillard’s work, it may once again become possible to reorientate the trajectory of Baudrillard’s thought onto the other path of mediated models. In the final pages of his article, Genosko hazards a guess at what this path may open up for media and communication theory: a transduction of force and a transmission of violence.

Douglas Morrey’s contribution, “Perfect Crime, Absolute Evil,” focuses on the relations between Baudrillard’s theoretical writings and the fictional writings of Maurice Dantec (*Villa Vortex*, in particular), teasing out a range of shared themes and common influences – notably Nietzsche and Gnosticism – that allow the works of the two writers to inform one another. For Morrey, this throws into relief their essentially similar political (or, better, transpolitical) leanings, ultimately permitting their positioning in relation to a number of other, potentially more radical alternatives. Dantec’s fiction and the quasi-theological thought processes underpinning it have earned Dantec something of a reputation as an extremist, echoing Baudrillard’s reputation as a theoretical extremist. What is particularly interesting about Dantec, read in the light of Baudrillard’s reflections on “integral reality,” is the fictional inflection that Dantec gives to the world.

In an essay “On truth, fiction and uncertainty,” Bauman (1997) describes two possible models for the role of fiction in a world of uncertainty, derived from the opposing reflections offered on the theme by Milan Kundera and Umberto Eco. For Kundera, artistic fiction alone found itself in a position to keep the flame of truth alive in a world in which Nietzsche’s “ascetic priests” obsessively trimmed the truth to fit the template of reason. Paradoxically, for Kundera, fiction amounts to the only truth in a world where the (itself fictive) notion of “truth” assumes a sinister, despotic, totalitarian character. For Kundera, on Bauman’s rendering, artistic fiction is thus “a continuous training session for living with the ambivalent and the mysterious; it rehearses tolerance and equanimity towards the wayward, the contingent, the not-wholly-determined, the not-wholly-understood, and the not-wholly-predictable” (1997: 119) – and as such serves as the “irreverent counter-culture” to “the technological-scientific culture of modernity.” For Eco, in direct contrast, fiction offers us “the pleasant impression of inhabiting worlds in which the notion of truth is unshakable; by comparison, the real world appears to be an awfully uncertain and treacherous land...” (Bauman 1997: 119). In characteristic fashion, Bauman (1997: 120) squares the circle by positing that “the scores of the real and the fictional worlds in the game of certainty are inversely related,” such that “the deeper the uncertainty that rankles the real world, the higher the certainty value of fiction” – as in Eco’s formulation – while “the more the real world sways under the indomitable pressure of genuine or putative certainties, the more poignant and attractive becomes that other aspect of the contrived, fictional reality of the novel” – as Kundera maintains. In the world theorized by Baudrillard, truth and fiction dissolve into simulacra. “It is reality itself which now

needs the ‘suspension of disbelief’, once the preserve of art, in order to be grasped and treated and lived as reality” (Bauman 1997: 125). Perhaps the extremity of Dantec’s disposition does, as Morrey suggests, fall foul of the tendency towards paranoia that the kind of Matrix-like system it seeks to attack would itself promote. But Dantec’s strategy reveals that, in the grip of integral reality, “It is left now to the work of fiction to unconceal the particularly postmodern variety of concealment; to put on display what socially produced reality tries hard to hide – those mechanisms which take the separation of truth and falsity off the agenda” (Bauman 1997: 126).

In a similar vein to Morrey, and taking his lead from the way in which Baudrillard became “obsessed by the mode of disappearance, and no longer by the mode of production” (Baudrillard 1994: 162) – a term which, Baudrillard reminds us, originally carried the meaning of “making visible” or “forcing to appear” (*pro-ducere*) – Bran Nicol, in “Detective fiction and ‘The Original Crime’,” pitches the logic of seduction against the productive logic that has dominated both detective fiction and its study; its writing and its (critical) reading. Working from the elective affinity between Baudrillard’s theoretical practice and Sophie Calle’s artistic practice, Nicol proceeds to highlight the double game of appearance and disappearance, their reciprocal ex-position and ex-termination, which constitutes the conceptual universe of their respective work. In so doing, Nicol opens up a perspective from which the inseparability or Möbius spiraling of perception and deception that animates Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” can be discerned. This is a perspective that leads detective fiction itself astray: Nicol detects a secret complicity in the shared topology of Calle’s and Poe’s work, which is ultimately more profound than the apparent patterns of similarity that are rendered as self-evident in received typologies of detective fiction. Once the clandestine, double agency of seduction is permitted to circulate, the carefully forged links between, for example, Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle are loosened, and Calle’s *Suite vénitienne* is permitted to emerge as itself a quintessential work of detective fiction. The vitality of these insights carries import not only for thinking about a particular genre, such as detective fiction: they plot out the limits of thinking in terms of production – most significantly in terms of panopticism, that archetypal mode of rendering visible and aligning visibility with control – that all too often constrain thinking itself to a productive rather than a seductive form. Seduction is, one might say, in the spirit of Nicol’s adopted theme, the purloined dimension. Nicol’s virtuosic application of Baudrillard’s emphasis on seduction, disappearance, and deception, which is set against production, appearance, and perception, thus possesses far-reaching implications that might be pursued across all areas of cultural activity (see Clarke 2010b; Toffoletti 2011).

The issue closes with Mark Featherstone’s “Against the Fake Empire: Utopia, Dystopia, Apocalypticism in Baudrillard’s Late Works,” an essay devoted to Baudrillard’s last three books: *Why Hasn’t Everything Already Disappeared?* (2009 [2007]), *Carnival and Cannibal* (2010a

[2008]), and *The Agony of Power* (2010b). Featherstone makes the argument that these three final works effectively elaborate the condition and critique of integral reality, which forms the main thesis of *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact* (2005a [2004]). While *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* (2009 [2007]) accounts for the rise to worldwide dominance of the fake empire of integral reality, *The Agony of Power* (2010b) demonstrates the impossibility of its interminable project of disappearance. Given this paradox, the thesis of *Carnival and Cannibal* (2010a [2008]) is that it is the very drive to realize integral reality that ensures its incompleteness. In other words, according to Featherstone, for Baudrillard, reality prohibits its own realization. Consequently, Featherstone concludes that, at the very end of his intellectual career, Baudrillard's thought remained radically open and doggedly optimistic. Such is the actual utopianism of the alleged apologist for all manner of postmodern misery (cf. Clarke 2011).

Taken together, then, this special issue offers an exemplary series of analyses that demonstrate the way in which Baudrillard's works both describe the total simulacrum of integral reality and point to its inexorable tendency to generate a series of reversions that inevitably undermine its hegemony. As the issue's contributors make clear, Baudrillard's conceptual universe sets an agenda that should receive increasing attention precisely because, among other things, it provides a way of becoming sensitized to those elements of the world that are overlooked because they escape accepted cultural categories. Baudrillard's worldview ultimately attunes us to the way in which such elements remain seductive, capable of diverting events and inducing catastrophe; to the ways in which symbolic exchange and reversibility still hold sway in a world where the status of the real, caught in its own trap, is constantly unhooking itself (cf. Clarke 2008; Doel 2009).

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