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For Symbolic Exchange and Birth

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis
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This thesis includes two chapters that will form a larger work, entitled “Symbolic Exchange and Birth.” The first chapter entitled “Bloodlines,” deals with issues of family, pedagogy, and co-sanguinity. By tracing the Confucian *Analects*, and Merleau-Ponty’s “The Philosopher and His Shadow” we come to the preliminary definition of the author’s own category: non-arbitrary or embodied simulacra. The second chapter, “The ‘Classical’ Age of Sign Relations,” details Baudrillard’s schema for ‘classical’ sign formation, which paves the way for the Baudrillard’s Orders of Simulacra.

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Bloodlines

I

Yan Hui passed away. The Master lamented, "Oh! Heaven has abandoned me. Heaven has abandoned me."

- Kongzi (Confucius), *The Analects* (Book 11, Verse 9)¹

Confucius (551-479 BCE) did not cry when his parents passed away; yet, when his favorite student died, he wailed and wailed, overcome with grief.

How are we to interpret this? Is it simply enough to say that the loss of a student equals the loss a child? Is such an equivocation appropriate in this case? Are there *blood relations* at play in questions of pedagogy?

How are we to interpret this in terms of the history of philosophy?

Confucius' tears are unique, to say the least. One might say that though all men weep, they do not typically do so as philosophers. *Socrates never cried. Aristotle never cried. Nietzsche wept, but in someone else's book.*

If there is a humor in these statements it is that, in philosophical discourse, the philosopher most often comports him or herself with the stoicism of

¹ Kongzi (Confucius). *The Analects*. Edward Gilman Slingerland. Anthologized in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan Van Norden, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2001), 29.

John Wayne, with a resolute *dryness* and a hermetic *sealedness*. *The philosopher does not leak*; he or she cognizes without the least effusion, like the hero of a Western who chops wood without breaking a sweat. Tears, liquids, fluids, and membranes - bodily things which exude, which are moist - until perhaps very recently (Cixous, Irigaray, Bataille) have simply not been part of the philosophical holographic at large.

Another unique aspect to the event of Yan Hui's death and Confucius' lament, albeit an obvious one, is the very fact of the nature of the relationship between Confucius and Yan Hui: Yan Hui was Kongzi's student - it cannot be emphasized enough. In light of this elementary fact, Confucius' tears honor Yan Hui beyond all other students in the history of philosophy. Where else can we locate the tears of the master shed on behalf the disciple?

Certainly, there is a history of eulogies in philosophy, and, of course, some are relatively more dry or wet than others. Jean-Paul Sartre's eulogy for Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida's *Adieu* to Emmanuel Levinas stand out as recent and exemplary examples of this most heartfelt genre of philosophical discourse; but, what is given between philosophers when philosophers die must be recognized as somewhat different from that which is given in the case of Yan Hui. When philosophers eulogize philosophers, what comes to the fore is not the love between fathers and sons, but love among equals, more akin to the love of friendship than to the love of family. There is a necessary settling of accounts as it relates to the bottomless question of influence; yet, influence here is not co-sanguine. Influence in this regard must be filtered into order by the

philosopher, who, as if panning for gold, sifts the particular grains of a writer's work that are the most brilliant and indispensable out from the general mixture of the writer's life, which now, extinguished, must merge with the infinitude of absence that only the dead possess.

And between philosophers, *who are teachers*, even in the case of Merleau-Ponty, who died suddenly and young, his work incomplete, there is not the sense that the philosopher died too soon.

Only the student can die too soon.

II

A philosopher's work is left open after his death. We see, most often, that persistent parts, indispensable jewels of insight remain in the form of questions yet to be answered. Formulated as particular questions in a series, the philosophical remainder of a writer's life need not be left to atmospheric ethereality, where the destabilizing question of whose question is this question might be raised.

The question of *this* philosopher has become *my* question. I take it up as a tool for continuous production, and provide the means to answer it more completely. My way of answering it is manifestly different than *his* way, which was necessarily incomplete. In this way, what was his was his, and what is mine is mine.

If there is a liquidity to all this, a sharing or a mutuality, it is dried out by the conventions of the discourse, by the stoic standard which does not shed a tear, but only produces an equivocal openness. There is exchange, but not a transubstantiation of blood.

Most importantly, we are equals in philosophy, and as such we each lay claim to a question with an equivocal independence.

III

Merleau-Ponty, of his teacher, Husserl: "To think is not to possess the objects of thought; it is to use them to mark out a realm to think about which we therefore are not yet thinking about."²

Confucius: "*Tian* has abandoned me. *Tian* has abandoned me."³

IV

Two perfectly reasonable interpretations regarding what is the shadow of "The Philosopher and His Shadow" (1960) are:

- (1) The shadow of the philosopher is the un-thought-of element of his philosophy, an absence, or...

² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. Richard C McCleary, trans. "The Philosopher and His Shadow." (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 160.

³ Kongzi (Confucius). *The Analects*. Edward Gilman Slingerland, trans. Anthologized in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan Van Norden, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2001), 29. The inclusion of the original Chinese is my addition.

(2) The shadow of the philosopher is the object of thought in question, the question itself: a finite presence.

Merleau-Ponty indicates that both of these interpretations must be superimposed upon each other if we are to confront the problem of how it is that a philosopher, within a tradition of philosophy, must comport him or herself with respect to philosophers of great influence. We see in Merleau-Ponty's essay that what then becomes critically important is the question of appropriateness. The problem posed by the question of appropriateness is equally complicated when the prior philosopher is known personally by the latter as it is when the prior philosopher is not known personally; yet further, this question is not limited to the relation between two independent "egos" who happen to philosophize, but also encompasses the question of how it is that any philosopher is to appropriately address his or her own work, particularly when the philosopher has grown up, or grown old: how does a philosopher, as an old man or woman, address the philosophical work of his or her youth with appropriateness?

V

Another interpretation would be to claim that the shadow of the philosopher is the student, who follows the philosopher *like a shadow*, who is a symbolic and therefore an *infinite* presence.

VI

Emmanuel Levinas speaks of just such a difficulty in his introduction to *Time and the Other* (1979), which he was made to write for the text's reprinting, three decades after its first publication. Levinas claims:

[T]o write a preface on the occasion of the republication of something one published thirty years ago is almost to write the preface to someone else's book. Except that one sees its shortcomings more quickly and feels them more painfully.⁴

Levinas does not concretely specify what it is that he sees and feels are "shortcomings" in his, now properly uncanny, work. Instead, Levinas only indicates his decision to forgo "rejuvenating [the text]"⁵ and offers his introduction as something of a contractual statement that confesses that, simply and in truth, problems exist within his manuscript: "Take these remarks as a preliminary note signaling all the flaws that since 1948 the aging of the text has probably accentuated."⁶

Though Levinas never points directly to the moments where *Time and the Other* breaks, it is perhaps more telling that neither does he reveal anything of who exactly this 'almost other person' is. There is no doubt, however, that Levinas must take this 'almost other' seriously - Levinas must relate to the 'almost other' *appropriately* - even if it is simply

⁴ Levinas, Emmanuel. *Time and the Other*. Richard A. Cohen, trans. (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

appropriate *enough* for the philosopher to indicate only that the ‘almost other’ is *there*, present by way of some ghost residue, clinging to the work, and that such a presence precipitates a radically private reverie.

By way of such an indication, we might take the liberty of assuming also that the manner of this something, or the character of this ‘almost other’, cannot be *directly confronted*. If such were so, then this “almost other” could be subsequently identified in the text itself (where it would appear in the form of an internal problem in the text’s theoretical operations, or worse, as a genetic confusion infecting then text in the manner of a virus), or in the text’s supplement (Levinas’ new introduction) as an effigy to be burnt. Levinas’ pronouncement - “Take these remarks as a preliminary note signaling all the flaws that since 1948 the aging of the text has probably accentuated.”⁷ - evidences a different strategy in that it identifies any flaws in the text in terms of a constitutive whole or a contextual ground. Levinas, by totalizing the flaws in his text in a single motion, signals that the flaws are not the flaws of Levinas the student, Levinas the prior, who *wrote*, but those of Levinas the teacher, Levinas the latter, who *reads*.

If we learn from Merleau-Ponty (and Levinas, but in a different way) that there is a difficulty in ‘looking back’ on the prior from the position of the latter, we learn from Levinas in the above passages that in ‘looking back’ we are met not with one who looks forward to us, who returns our gaze with an equivocal one, but that we are met by one whose total condition is

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

fundamented by his inability to look forward to us. In the position of the prior there is only innocence: that of the writer as he is fixed in his time, and as such is radically unable to predict the future, to derive in total the existence of the Atlantic from a tear, or to see, as a student, through the eyes of the teacher.

VII

Confucius did have sons. His bloodline continued.⁸ In fact, it was his grandson, Kong Ji (483-402 BCE), who composed the *Zhongyong*, which, on its own merit, was canonized into the *Sishu*, or the *Four Books* (of classical Confucianism),⁹ by Southern Song philosopher Zhi Xi (1130-1200). The significance of the *Sishu* cannot be underestimated. Where Confucius' singular contribution to Chinese intellectual development, of course, is the most far reaching - we could argue that more people have lived and died concordantly with Confucian principles than have lived and died following the teachings of *any* other philosopher in human history - what is represented in the *Sishu*, which served from Zhi Xi's lifetime until the early twentieth century as the standard pedagogical support for the Chinese intellectual class, is a decidedly familiar affair: every philosopher whose work is canonized there, either by line of blood or by line of pedagogy, is directly connected to the Kong family and to Confucius himself.

⁸ Kongzi's bloodline continues to this day. Some estimates indicate that there are roughly one and a half million people living today who can trace their genealogy back to Confucius. On October 20, 2005, I had the pleasure of a personal introduction to Kong Linghong, Professor of Philosophy at Zhejiang University and 76th generation of Confucius. Ironically, Dr. Kong is a Daoist.

⁹ The *Four Books*, chronologically, are the *Analects* (or *Lunyu*), *The Great Learning*, *Zhongyong*, and *Mencius*.

VIII

Merleau-Ponty indicates that his personal motivation for exploring the question of appropriateness in “The Philosopher and His Shadow” stems from the assimilation in his time of Husserl’s phenomenology into the larger narrative of the history of philosophy. Were it not for the deep, abiding value we find in the relationship between teachers and students, which Merleau-Ponty obviously holds in very high esteem, there would not be any need for him to ask whether or not the installment of Husserl into the philosophical *corpus* is taking the correct form, nor would there be any need to speculate as to what that correct form ought to be. But, there is the fact: Husserl was Merleau-Ponty’s teacher. He must respond to him in an appropriate way. Such is to address the one question whose answer cannot be given by the teacher: *what must I do with this relation that will survive both of us?*

The appropriate attitude in regard to influence, according to Merleau-Ponty, is to steer one’s Ship of Theseus between a Scylla and Charybdis of extreme operational compartments: on one hand, it is important not do the prior philosopher “superfluous homage” in an attempt to garner “unmerited warrant” for our own thinking, nor is it appropriate, on the other hand, to respect the philosopher’s integrity too wholly and restrict the prior philosopher’s thinking to his or her texts only.¹⁰ If we fail to navigate between such extremes, “any commemoration is also a betrayal.”¹¹

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. Richard C McCleary, trans. “The Philosopher and His Shadow.” (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Merleau-Ponty explains that...

Between an “objective” history of philosophy (which would rob the great philosophers of what they have given others to think about) and a mediation disguised as a dialogue (in which we would ask the questions and give the answers) there must be a middle-ground on which the philosopher we are speaking about and the philosopher who is speaking are present together, although it is not possible even in principle to decide at any given moment just what belongs to each.¹²

The appropriate position is one which carries with it a necessary indeterminacy. There is an fundamental ambiguousness that arises in regard to the ‘speaking who’ when teacher and student conjoin in the discourse that carries forward their tradition. To his credit, Merleau-Ponty advocates a certain comfort with this, and indicates that the instability of the “middle-ground” is in fact the condition in which philosophy is generated. Merleau-Ponty highlights the beginnings of phenomenology as his case in point, and emphasizes the constellation of discomfort that must have surrounded Husserl when Husserl himself was beginning his philosophical work:

Husserl present in person (and in addition with the genius’ power to fascinate and deceive) could not, I imagine, leave those surrounding him in peace. [Husserl’s philosophical community’s] whole philosophical life must have lain for a time in that extraordinary and inhuman occupation of being present at the continuing birth of a way of thinking, and of helping it become objective or even exist as communicable thought.¹³

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

We too, surely, can imagine a nervous, near-frantic excitement hovering around the lives of the great philosophers of history, a mythic and magical saturation pervading their life-worlds, hanging heavy like a thick, wet fog - always the question: is there something truly great, truly significant happening *now*? I wonder what it must have been to a student in Kongzi's house, to have been in Paris during the riots of 1968, to have been at Wagner's party, and to have seen Nietzsche shyly request to play the piano...

IX

In philosophy today, there are rumors and there is gossip: a whole *economy* of biographical anecdotes and apocryphal tales which seem to supplement the philosophical canon in a strange way; by way of their quasi-mythic orbit, rumors and gossip serve as replacement for the lost philosophical bloodline, much like the way in which Hollywood has come to serve as a replacement for History by way of its spectacular images. Properly *inappropriate* and *anti-philosophical*, these narratives serve to provide an extra-canonical proof for the integrity of philosophy in its proper, sanctioned register.

Did Jurgen Habermas take acid with Martin Heidegger? Did Ed Casey hang out with Marcel Duchamp? Were Dufrenne and Baudrillard mortal enemies? Did Schopenhauer leave the University of Berlin because of Hegel? What was the significance of Sartre's ugliness? Did Kant stop writing of religion when King Phillip II asked him? Was Irigaray kicked out

of Lacan's class? How many of Freud's daughters were lost to the Nazi incinerators? Four of them? Four. How many philosophers lost their fathers before the age of ten? How many before the age of five? Did Nietzsche collapse with his arms around the neck of a dying horse? Did he leave us when he collapsed?

Pythagorus recognized a friend in a puppy that was being beaten. Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault were lovers. Augustine was a womanizer. Sartre had his arrangement with Simone de Beauvoir. Heidegger was a Nazi. Descartes died in the snow. Pierce's earliest memory was hearing his father and Emerson speaking. James was bedridden for a year. Kant never left his home town. Wittgenstein built a house. Kierkegaard loved Regine Olsen. Althusser strangled his wife. Kristeva was beautiful. One day, when he was tired in meditation, Bodhidharma cut off his eyelids so that their sleepy drooping would no longer obstruct his enlightenment. He cast them to earth; they fell like pink blossoms, and where they fell there sprouted the first tea tree in China.

Are there not so many stories of Derrida? Each, like a magician's coin pulled from a pocket, twisted between fingers and made to disappear into a kiss of air: a story told for children?

In California, he wore suits sewn from moonbeams and peeked flirtatiously from behind mangrove trees. I sat at his table once. I left his lecture cursing. He told me in confidence that he didn't understand the work he did when he was a young man....

*...the night I met Avital Ronell, and shook her hand, as thin as the paper
you fold into cranes...*

Are there not so many stories of philosophers?

*...I flew to her in the night as a black swan, and between her legs: the
swishing of my feathers, the beating of my wings...*

X

A shadow is not but a sign of relations, but it is not an *arbitrary* sign.

XI

Tian, until recently, has been most often translated as 'heaven' because of the connotations of divinity that adhere to the term. Now many translators choose to leave the term un-translated so to avoid the assumption that the meaning of *tian* corresponds equivocally to the meaning of 'heaven' that derives from the Abrahamic traditions. The two terms are abundantly not the same, owing to the fact that between the East and the West there are radically different presuppositions at play in determining what it is that can be called divine. We will spend a brief moment discussing these differences so that we are sure we avoid this trap; we must show that Kongzi's lament does not equal *lema sabachtheni* if we are to draw out its significance.

The first major presupposition that is significant for our understanding of *tian* is that the world is not a world that is created by some external mover. The classical Chinese worldview is 'acosmotic', in that it does not presume there to be a "final whole we call the 'Cosmos' or 'World'," and 'anarchic', in that it does not presume an *arche*, a temporal-spatial generation point from which the world unfolds.¹⁴

Classical Chinese thinkers were not interested in the search for an ontological ground for phenomenon. Rather, they were preoccupied with the phenomenal world of processes and change construed simply as *wanwu* - "the ten thousand things." They were less inclined [than the Hellenics] to ask *what* makes something real or *why* things exist, and more interested in negotiating the complex relationships among the changing phenomenon themselves.¹⁵

An 'acosmotic' world is a world without finality. Likewise, things that constitute such a world are without finality. Since things do not have an end, or a final form, they are more aptly characterized as 'events' or 'processes'. The classical Chinese worldview cites continuous change as the phenomenal rule, rather than a complete, or static, unchanging essence.

The second major presupposition has to do with time, which is not in the classical Chinese tradition conceived separately from space. Time is rather a emergent quality of fundamentally interdependent and relational phenomena. While 'heaven' can be understood as an eternal fixture whose presence substantiates the law by which all things are ordered, the

¹⁴ Kong Ji (Zisizi). *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, trans. and commentary (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

classical Chinese worldview resists adamantly the possibility that there can be anything that can be called eternal. All things are defined by the context given to them by the field of their relations. Time, then, can only be understood as a particular quality of such manifest relations.

Radically different from an externalized divine agency, or 'heaven' being the house of such agency as it is generally understood in the Abrahamic traditions, *tian* is the immanent agency of *wanwu* - "the ten thousand things" or "all that happens" - itself, which arises intelligibly in terms of its virtue (*de*), its persistent particularities. Ames and Hall describe *tian* thus:

Tian is both *what* our world is and *how* it is. [...] *Tian* is both one and many. It is both the single source of from which the processes and events emerge, and the multivalent field constituted by them.

On this basis, *tian* can be described as the emergent orders negotiated out of the dispositions of the many particulars that are presently constitutive of it.¹⁶

Tian is not separate from the world; it is the virtue of the world. Nor is it static; it is fundamentally fluid. As such, the ordering power of *tian* cannot be conceived as an abstract principle, but that which in overflowing generosity provides people - who are not separate either from "the ten thousand things" - with as many concrete examples of its mandate (*tianming*) as there are spontaneous events. The pronounced emphasis on harmony (*he*) in classical Chinese thought, which is, interestingly, a term that carries a culinary etymology - "Harmony [(*he*)] is the art of combining and blending two or more foodstuffs so they mutually enhance

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

one another without losing their distinctive flavors.”¹⁷ - and which is often recognized as cultural achievement of the highest order, stems from the recognition that there are present and actual models for divine action abound in the world at all times that are both on display and available for absorption and simulation, and which are constituted by the priority of relations.

Harmonizing with the world is simulating its heavenly virtue. It is assuming responsibility for the character of one’s relational matrix, and acting in accord with it. The virtue of things, neither remote nor abstract - a knife blade’s sharpness, for example¹⁸ - provide profound models for

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁸ My reference to a knife-blade’s sharpness is a particular one; I refer to Cook Ding (Ting), one of the “ordinary people” I speak of above, who appears in the writings of the Daoist master, Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) and concretely demonstrates the virtue of harmonizing with *tian*. The account given by Zhuangzi of Cook Ding appears in “The Secret of Caring for Life” thus:

Cook Ting was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-hui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee - zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music.

“Ah this is marvelous!” said Lord Wen-hui. “Imagine skill reaching such heights!”

Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, “What I care about is the [*Dao*], which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years, I no longer saw the whole ox. And now - now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.

“A good cook changes his knife once a year - because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month - because he hacks. I’ve had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I’ve cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had just come from the grindstone. There are spaces in the joints, and the blade of the knife really has no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such

philosophy to follow. Concurrently, the virtue of people provide the models by which we understand how and what it is that we simulate when we comport ourselves with appropriateness within our life-world.

It is of no small significance that in the classical Chinese tradition ordinary people - in fact, *invisible people*: cooks, farmers, the elderly, and students - have the potential to become those who concretely demonstrate the highest and the most valued philosophical principles. We might note that, by contrast, in the Western philosophical cannon it is very difficult to find particular people who demonstrate such excellence.¹⁹ Embodying and

spaces, then there's plenty of room - more than enough for a blade to play about in. That's why after nineteen years the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone.

"However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I'm doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until - flop! the whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away."

"Excellent!" said Lord Wen-hui. "I have heard the words of Cook Ting and learned how to care for life!"

Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu). *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*. Burton Watson, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 46-47.

¹⁹ From *Apology*:

Finally I went to the craftsmen, for I was conscious of knowing practically nothing, and I knew that I would find that they had knowledge of many fine things. In this I was not mistaken; they knew things that I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I. But, [...] the good craftsmen seemed to me to have the same fault as the poets: each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had, so that I asked myself, on behalf of the oracle, whether or not I should prefer to be as I am, with neither their wisdom nor their ignorance, or to have both. The answer I gave myself and the oracle was that it was to my advantage to be as I am.

Plato. *Apology*. G.M.A. Grube, trans. Anthologized in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2000), 116.

demonstrating these highest principles is precisely how the person simulates *tian* in action: excellence that harmonizes with *tian* is not merely (and perhaps not at all) a representative act, but an act which allows for *tian* to be drawn out into intelligibility within the character of particular events. Ordinary events becomes rites (*li*) which saturate the world with the significance of the divine order present in the “natural tendencies” (*xing*) of “all that happens.”

XII

Where simulation leads, a logic of the real will not suffice

Where simulation leads, a logic of the ego will not suffice.

Where simulation leads, a logic of the contract will not suffice.

Where simulation leads, a logic of representation will not suffice.

Where simulation leads, a logic of production will not suffice.

Where simulation leads, a logic of being will not suffice.

XIII

Merleau-Ponty begins “The Philosopher and his Shadow” by quoting Husserl *personally*: “Establishing a tradition means forgetting its origins,

the aging Husserl used to say.”²⁰ Merleau-Ponty continues, *following his teacher*, by highlighting the indeterminacy that seems to be at the core of tradition itself: “Precisely because we owe so much to tradition, we are in no position to see just what belongs to it.”²¹

If there is, as Merleau-Ponty suggests there is in the “middle ground” of appropriate comportment toward prior philosophers generally, a fundamental indeterminacy at play in one’s residence within a tradition (which we might venture categorically includes all philosophers), then it is of the utmost importance that we as philosophers determine what is it that this indeterminacy means. What does the trembling here at the heart of tradition signify? And what is the nature of this signification?

Merleau-Ponty, to his credit, seems to advocate that we must be comfortable with this indeterminacy, and accept it; but, his acceptance of it as a simple fact of the problematics of “the perception of others,” coupled with his reliance on representation as being the prow of the ship of the world’s operational scenario limits him from adequately answering the question he sets out with: precisely *not* whether or not I can *represent* my teacher’s thought with precision and accuracy (which is ground upon which Merleau-Ponty is successful in “The Philosopher and His Shadow;” there is no *uncertainty* here), but how is that I can *become him*, not merely speak *for* him, but speak *as* him, as new being in a continuing bloodline. This is understandable, given that it is Merleau-Ponty’s relation to Husserl,

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. Richard C McCleary, trans. “The Philosopher and His Shadow.” (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159.

²¹ *Ibid.*

and thus likewise to phenomenology, which raises the question of tradition for him in the first place. Phenomenology depends on representation, because it begins by “reiterating” the “procedures” of the “natural attitude.”²² But though we do represent our teachers, it would be wrong to say that we represent them *only*. If we do not represent them only, then we must go beyond representation to discover what more there is in the relation.

We must take what we have - indeterminacy - as a leading clue. In doing so we realize that interminability, the un-decidability between prior and latter philosopher that arises in the holographic of the “middle ground” or “tradition” is not the hallmark of right representation or productive interpretation, as Merleau-Ponty suggests (such would be, on the contrary, coherence and reversibility - the sign of a thing clearly refers its object; the principles of equivalence and exchange function without obstruction). Indeterminacy, rather, is the sigil of the highest order of simulacra, where the sign becomes the thing, where there is a sharing of kindred blood, and, by way of a symbolic transubstantiation, where there opens the possibility of a progression of a manifestly familiar lineage - the philosophical father takes his agency from his ancestral seat; the philosophical son takes his as he is consumed by his house.

XIV

It is said that Confucius died thinking that his life was a total failure.

²² *Ibid.*, 164.

This is not to say that representation and production cannot lead us part of the way to the co-sanguine. Merleau-Ponty, in fact, leads us as far as we can go with production and representation: to “carnal intersubjectivity” and “intercorporeality,” and to their gestalt relationship with “logical objectivity.”²³ Neither “carnal intersubjectivity” or “intercorporeality,” on one hand, or “logical objectivity,” on the other, can be said to be the primordial term in the system, as they are co-constitutive of each other and arise together as a functional circuit (the quintessence of the reality principle: its *functionality*); however, from either position, and even as we engage in the mental gymnastics of tracing the turning of each into each, there is a clear and coherent picture (even if previous stages or positions, *origins* are forgotten) rendered of perception and perceiving, and of the things we perceive: there is a positive account of the inputs and outputs of the system. Just as there is with a gestalt image, there is a reversibility that does not equal indeterminacy. Further, there is nothing that could account for a baseline where change, transformation, or transubstantiation, rather than essence, is the fundamental rule. “Intercorporeality,” unfortunately, does not equal co-sanguinity, because it lacks a symbolic aspect that could provide the energy for a ground set in fundamental change.

Merleau-Ponty is closer when he tells us that “[t]here is no dilemma of objective interpretation or arbitrariness with respect to these articulations,”

²³ *Ibid.* 173.

that is, between the writer and his work, which we claim is *identical* to the relationship between the student and the teacher (the student *writes*; the teacher *reads*), “since they are not objects of thought, since (like shadow and reflection) they would be destroyed by being subjected to analytic observation or taken out of context[.]”²⁴

XVI

We find another clue in Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1982). Baudrillard briefly describes the symbolic ground for the culture of a particular indigenous people, the Bororos of Brazil, the people with whom Claude Levi-Strauss spent time during his first visit to Brazil:

Once animals had a more sacred place, more divine character than men. There is not even a reign of the “human” in primitive societies, and for a long time the animal order has been the order of reference. Only the animal is worthy of being sacrificed, as a god, the sacrifice of men only comes afterward, according to a degraded order. Men qualify only by their affiliation to the animal: the Bororos “are” macaws. This is not of the prelogical or psychoanalytic order - nor of the mental order of classification, to which Levi-Strauss reduced the animal effigy [...] - no, this signifies that the Bororos and macaws are part of a cycle, and that the figure of the cycle excludes any division of species, any of the distinctive oppositions upon which we live. The structural opposition is *diabolic*, it divides and confronts distinct identities. [...] [T]he cycle, itself, is *symbolic*[.]²⁵

The relationship between the Bororos and the macaws is also *non-arbitrary*. The relationship cannot be *legally justified* by way of an external

²⁴ *Ibid.* 160.

²⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulation and Simulacra*. Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 133-132.

contract that would signify the relationship: there is no external value to the sign (the relational mutability between a person and a macaw) of Bororo culture that fundamentals it, nor can any object, whether or not it is a shared object, contractually and openly represent this relation. If such were so, as immediately as such an object would come to signify the relationship, it would be forced through so many registers of *exchange* (value, understanding, reality, etc.), and would therefore find itself subject to all the machinations of signification *à la* Saussure: the signifying object, once exchange becomes part of the circuit through which it must run, acquires all the trappings of the arbitrary relatability of signifiers to signifieds.

Rather, the relationship is justified by the indeterminacy of a secret, or a pact (or a *blood-pact*), which prefigures attitudes and directs actions, but cannot be identified by an external signifier, or perhaps more appropriately cannot be located anywhere in the marketplace of value(s) precisely because it is impossible to exchange and non-possessable.

The blood-pact cannot be rescinded, amended, or exchanged, and it has but one imperative: the continuity and continuous transformation of the bloodline.

The cultural firmament of Bororo culture - that they are indistinguishable from macaws in their cosmological constitution - shares the following commonalities with the student/teacher relationship:

(1) The relation is *non-arbitrary*.

(2) Yet, the relation has meaning, even if this meaning is marked by a fundamental indeterminacy. Thus, the relation is a *non-arbitrary sign*.

(3) Since this non-arbitrary sign directs action at the level of the form of life, it can be said to be a particular species of simulation: *non-arbitrary simulation*.

There are many characteristics of the logic of simulation (which is the logic of consumption, and is opposed to the logic of production: that of the singular and independent ego, man's relation to a universal present, work and needs, etc.). If there is, however, a baseline for what simulacra, it is thus: "Simulation is characterized by the precession of the model."²⁶

²⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulation and Simulacra*. Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 16.

Simulation, in a sense, shares precedence to inquiry with Husserl's "natural attitude" as described by Merleau-Ponty, in that it is...

..."prior to any thesis," [and a] mystery of a primordial faith and a fundamental and original opinion which are thus not even in principle translatable in terms of clear and distinct knowledge, and which - more ancient than any "attitude" or "point of view" - give us not a representation of the world but the world itself.²⁷

The difference is that simulation annuls the world by way of its precession to the world; it short-circuits the world in advance and directs it according to its own rules. We must be clear: simulation cannot be said to be a force that is *produced* by nature; otherwise the contra-positive between representation and the world itself would function invariably and effortlessly: where there is no representation, there must be the world; it is instead the force of *consumption*. Jean Baudrillard provides a definition of consumption in *The System of Objects* that will be useful for our purposes:

Consumption is not a material practice, nor is it a phenomenology of 'affluence'. It is not defined by the nourishment we take in, nor by the clothes we clothe ourselves with, nor by the car we use, nor by the oral and visual matter of the images and messages we receive. It is defined rather, by the organization of all these things into a signifying fabric: consumption is *the virtual totality of all objects and messages ready constituted as a more or less coherent discourse*. If it has any meaning at all, consumption means *an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs*.²⁸

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. Richard C McCleary, trans. "The Philosopher and His Shadow." (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 163.

When Merleau-Ponty argues, “I borrow myself from others; I create others from my thoughts. This is no failure to perceive others; it is the perception of others,”²⁹ he puts identity on the market, so to speak, as if identity was a commodity that is produced and exchanged, when identity is precisely that which cannot be exchanged, for if it were such, what would be given, what would be created, taken, bought, etc.? It may be impertinent, but we are inclined to ask: how is it precisely that another is created from my thoughts? It would be better to state that, rather than a logic of production, a logic of consumption is at play. It is the relation that is consumed in the order of the pact, and by way of this relation we are directed to action in a more or less total fashion. The consumption of systems of relations is the means by which we come to a virtue that is persistent, that precipitates what the existentialists called a ‘commitment’ to a form of life.

Simulation in the arbitrary sense, which pertains to the direction beings take with respect to the abstract categories posed by categories of objects, is the method by which consumption induces categories of people in relation to the arbitrary associations that adhere to the products they take up in their lifeworlds. Here, simulation is counterfeiting, denaturing, or geneticizing or nuclearizing (implying mere mechanical, genetic or nuclear functionality, and the consequent viral advance of such

²⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. (New York: Verso, 1996), 200.

functionality), and is fundamented specifically with respect to exchange functions. Arbitrary simulacra are the simulacra of Baudrillard's Orders of the Simulcra. In the next chapter we will show how it is that the simulacra of Baudrillard's Orders are constituted in the 'classical' age of sign relations.

Non-arbitrary simulacra, on the other hand, are not anticipated anywhere in Baudrillard's Orders. These simulacra are the simulacra of the symbolic and the co-sanguine, and are expressed with respect to the relations that specifically *cannot* be exchanged.

XVIII

What does it mean that *tian* left Confucius when Yan Hui's died? It is, firstly, not *lema sabachtheni*: no external agency has revoked its divine sanction for its agent. If such were so, there would still be a way forward: the way of the God forsaken, which is not a total abandonment, only a sentence. Between God and the damned, there still is a relationship; only the terms of the agreement have been modified.

When *tian* abandons Confucius there is no way forward, no future. This is because the relationship that precedes all other relationships and brings these subsequent relationships into order – *tian* – has evaporated. The

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

bloodline has been severed, and with its eviction has gone all the means by which a being brings the “the ten thousand things” into proper focus.

It is one thing to say that Yan Hui, by way of his integrity, brought *tian* to Kongzi, or that Kongzi, by way of his integrity, brought *tian* out of Yan Hui. But this would be to make the mistake of aligning *tian* with products and production. *Tian* cannot be produced, just as the co-sanguine cannot be produced. *Tian* and the co-sanguine can only be consumed in terms of a leading, harmonious relation. The active process, by which we seek out knowledge of *tian*, is the process of non-arbitrary simulation. It was neither Kongzi nor Yan Hui alone that brought forth *tian*. It was the mutual presence of both of them that allowed the harmony of *tian* to become intelligible. If there is a fundamental indeterminacy in the heart of the relation, which disturbs accounting for whose is whose and what is what, it is because the relation itself, which is the fundamental term, belongs to no one.

XIX

My teacher, David Jones, over drinks every now and then, will talk about Mike Ryan, his student who passed away in the middle of the semester a few years ago.

He will tell you that Mike was an exemplary student, bright and brilliant, who asked insightful questions and whose exuberance and generous spirit enriched all those who shared his life.

He will tell you that his generosity was abundant beyond measure, that he had a kind of goodness that seemed as if it could flow from him forever, so much that you felt he would never be emptied of it.

He will tell you that he was like a spring that you couldn't imagine ever running dry.

He will tell you that he was a student who was always *there*.

He will tell you that he was a paramedic too.

He will tell you that he died on the very same highway where, day after day, Mike pulled people from crushed cars and saved their lives.

He will tell you that it was his job to do that.

He will tell you that perhaps there is nothing so like a choir of angels than an ambulance's siren; when it comes for you, there is nothing like it.

He will tell you it that must have been Mike's friends who pulled him from his own crushed car, that maybe they came too late, or that maybe there was nothing that could have been done.

He will tell you that there could be no greater horror than seeing in a tangle of steel and broken glass the face of a loved one, and that he wonders if, in such a tangle, every face is a loved face.

He will tell you that maybe Mike Ryan saw it that way.

He will tell you that he found out about Mike's passing when he received the course register for recording final grades; beside Mike Ryan's name, in black capitals: DECEASED.

He will tell you that if only he could have given Mike a grade - the A he deserved; the incomplete he didn't - then...

He will not talk of Mike for long.

Afterwards, there is a silence, and he and I go back to our drinks and our thoughts.

I contemplate that, though Mike was my friend and my colleague, the loss I felt cannot be exchanged for the loss my teacher, David, felt. His loss and my loss are not exchangeable, and I can offer no consolation to him.

I contemplate that, though Mike was my friend, I never read any of his work.

The 'Classical' Age of Sign Relations

I

It is critically important for us to make and understand the distinction between a society of production and a society of consumption, and how we have, out of the former, come to be immersed in the latter. Where Kant, in his “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent” (1784), puts forward what we might consider to be the ‘good hypotheses’ of human progress, Baudrillard, conversely, puts forward the ‘evil hypothesis’ in *The System of Objects* (1968). The difference between good and evil in this sense amounts simply to the difference between a logic of production and a logic of consumption.

For Kant:

History – which concerns itself with providing a narrative of these appearances, regardless of how deeply hidden their causes may be – allows us to hope that if we examine the play of the human will’s freedom in the large, we can discover that strikes us as complicated and unpredictable in the history of the entire species can be discovered to be the steady progress and slow development of its original capacities.³⁰

³⁰ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Ted Humphries, trans. “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent” (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 29.

These “original capacities” are man’s reasonable faculties, and to the degree that the species accords in relation to these faculties and actively cultivates their development (for reason is not instinct), we are likely, if not absolutely destined, to see an equivocal degree of advancement in the enlightenment of the social apparatus at large. Kant maintains adamantly that in relation to his reason, alone, man must produce that which accords man harmoniously to the laws of Nature:

Nature has willed that man, entirely by himself, produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical organization of his animal existence and partake in no other happiness or perfection than what he himself, independently of instinct, can secure through his own reason.³¹

Production, in this sense, might be said to be directly correspondent to both brute need and social (status) need, and that which is produced as a result – remember: “entirely by himself” – is specifically and individually tailored to fit the demand of such needs. Reason itself is an expression of need, whose demand, according to Kant, is an enlightened society, and in direct correspondence with Reason’s demand - in fact, in willful obedience to it - the construction of the cosmopolitan state (which is Kant’s ideal, but which is formally irrelevant – relative coherence is not precipitated on the basis of the form the object takes, or what it signifies, but rather only *that* it signifies; in the foreground here is the ‘tailored to fit’, while the ‘what’ of the ‘tailored to fit’ recedes to general obscurity and unimportance) arises as the necessary sign for the existence of Reason itself. Following Saussure,

of course, the relationship between the signifier (in this case: the cosmopolitan state) and signified (in this case: Reason) is arbitrary in a formal sense; what is indispensable is the fact of the functional nature of the relation itself (in this case: the 'tailored to fit').

Brute need: a town needs water. They produce a well. It does not matter whether the well they build is square or round, walled with white bricks or black bricks. All that matters is that the product is tailored to fit the need; all that matters is that the well is wet.

Social need: an aristocrat needs to assert his status. He produces (or has produced for him) a purple robe. The robe, whose color – purple – asserts the sign of his aristocratic status need not, in truth, be any particular color. All that matters is that the prohibition against commons wearing purple functions coherently: those and only those who wear purple are aristocrats. The color itself is arbitrary (it just as easily could be blue, green, or red as it is purple) in terms of the relational linkage between the signifier (purple) and the signified (the aristocrat's aristocracy); but, as the signifier is tailored specifically to suit the needs of the signified, its function (concretizing the existence of the signified) completes itself without the least bit of friction – this, the logic of the utterance that makes it so, constitutes the quintessence of the 'classical' epoch of sign functions. The emphasis is on the subject's need, particularized in the specificity of his

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

emplacement, which sets the process in motion by which ‘universals’ or ‘naturals’ are concretized in the structure of signification.

Kant’s political theory from this period, historically situated alongside the advent of the industrial revolution, gives us numerous examples of the above logic of (sign) production as it exists with respect to the artisanal mode of production, where, according to Baudrillard, “objects reflect the contingent and singular character of needs.”³² We will consider Kant’s well known “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784) as particularly relevant to our discussion, simply because it is here that Kant defines enlightenment: the operative signified Kant believes will be concretized by the practical outlines for the ideal national and international governing structures we find schematized in “What is Enlightenment” and “To Perpetual Peace” (1795).

II

Enlightenment is defined negatively in “What is Enlightenment.” Enlightenment signals man’s emergence from mental immaturity, from the

³² Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. Anthologized in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998), 412. The editors of *Literary Theory* have made small adjustments to the translation of *The System of Objects*, which, in places, provides a degree of clarity superior to Benedict’s translation. For this reason, at times, I have decided to use this version of the text rather than the Benedict translation alone.

“inability to use one’s understanding without the guidance of another.”³³

When Kant describes the ciphers of “the immaturity that has *all but become [the subject’s] nature*,”³⁴ Kant’s imagery is agrarian:

Having first made their domestic livestock dumb, and having carefully made sure that these docile creatures will not take a single step without the go-cart to which they are harnessed, these guardians then show them the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone.³⁵

It is not altogether unexpected that Kant would employ an animal metaphor here to describe man’s condition in a state of mental immaturity, but not perhaps for the reasons we might immediately expect. Kant does not draw a hard and fast distinction between animals and man in a derogatory or anthropocentric way; on the contrary, man *is* an animal for Kant, but one whose reason cannot be reduced too an instinctual or habitual bottom line. Put another way, man is an animal whose needs (which are the needs of Reason) cannot be satisfied by instinct or habit. It is precisely man’s *refusal* to subsist on that which is merely guaranteed by instinctual drive and habituated thought structures that allows him to speculate on the possibility of hidden goodnesses. Kant writes in “Speculative Beginning of Human History” (1786):

Refusal was the feat whereby man passed over from mere sensual to idealistic, from mere animal desires eventually to

³³ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Ted Humphries, trans. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment” (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

love and, with the latter, from the feeling of the merely pleasant to the taste for beauty, at first only human beauty, but then also the beauty found in nature.³⁶

If there is reason at all, it needs first to refuse direction from authority. In the most basic sense, authority is the instinctual bottom line we discussed above. In a more complex sense, authority is obviously power. If this preliminary refusal is not accomplished, then man is not merely suppressed into some vaguely deficient mode of being, but forced into a wholly false, or *counterfeit*, being.

III

It is of no little consequence that where we see the most beautiful ideals expressed in particular terms in Kant's political theory in this period, they serve specifically to protect the purity of the arbitrary in specific and individual sign production. Kant's full ire is directed toward any social contract or peace treaty that would contaminate the fruits of production by inserting the demands of authority into the realms where the free exercise

³⁶ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Ted Humphries, trans. "Speculative Beginning of Human History" (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 52. We must note that Kant, in "Speculative Beginning of Human History," immediately supplements refusal with decency, reason's second step, "as the true foundation of all sociability." If refusal is the fundamental individual expression of reason, decency is its fundamental social expression. In both cases, since reason is not instinct, it must be exercised directly with respect to freedom. We might take the liberty to assert that Kant's prioritizing individual refusal as the first act of reason gives credence to our claim to align reason as production with the individual character of specific needs.

of reason ought to be expressed individually. Such would be to insert the plural into the production of the singular: a criminal act.

An example: what do we consider to be a work of art in what we here (following Baudrillard) call the 'classical' sense? A work of art is a singular, absolutely unique thing that is produced in passion by a single agent. Against the work of art in this sense, the *counterfeit* work, the false work is the most dangerous and insidious predator. The counterfeiter accepts a work as an authority, as an "unalterable symbol" of that which art is in its most crystalline form, and allows this authority to direct his production in exactly the same fashion as Kant claims man allows his production to be directed in his immaturity:

If I have a book to serve as my understanding, a pastor to serve as my conscience, and a physician to determine my diet for me, and so on, I need not exert myself at all. I need not think, if only I can pay: others will readily undertake the irksome work for me.³⁷

Kant might have said, "I need not think, *if only I counterfeit.*" Ultimately, it is the freedom of the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified expressed in the objects of individual production that is challenged by the counterfeit product. Where the signifier may *appear* to reference freedom in production, in the realm of hidden signifieds there lurks the collective stricture of the multiple, which Kant cautions us against

in no uncertain terms. To the question of whether or not a society as a group might by way of collective agreement fix an “unalterable symbol in order to secure a constant guardianship over each of its members [...] for all time,”³⁸ Kant answers that such would not only be “wholly impossible,”³⁹ but would exist as that which would “preclude forever all further enlightenment of the human race,” and which “would be a crime against human nature.”⁴⁰

IV

Understanding the above begs the question: why does Kant, so obviously and adamantly against the intercession of authority in free production, support Frederick II? Why is it superlative that, “Only one ruler in the world says argue as much as you want, *but obey!*”⁴¹ Admittedly, answers to this question do not leap forth immediately without reservations, and I would ask that we reserve a bit of skepticism as to whether or not Kant adequately defends his own admission in his text; however, if we understand “argue” in terms of production - far from being the fanciful excesses of trite conversations, here are arguments which are *products*, physical and resolute, whose existence even within the most restricted

³⁷ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Ted Humphries, trans. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment” (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

socio-political framework evidence that there is a ideal signified directly at play in man's labor (when it is his own "free" labor) - we might find adequate footing to continue in good conscience. Arguments in this sense must be viewed as evidence, as artifactual testimony. Secondly, we can propose that Kant's allowance for social deference serves to further protect the purity of the ideal signified from the threat posed by the counterfeit object (if there is a violent abreaction to one's duty, this would precipitate an internal resentment toward the individual agents of authority, who are no more or less human because of their position, which would contaminate the purity of public reason). Thirdly, Kant simply seems unwilling to propose or support any activity or political doctrine that would undermine the stability of the state.

Kant understands that no political system or social order can survive the persistent threat of chaos. This understanding stems from the simple, practical logic that states that if we imagine a situation that is sufficiently chaotic, in such a situation, though there will no doubt be some kind of reasoning at play (on the part of the individual or individuals involved), the kind of reason that such would be would not be 'reasoning for reasoning sake'. Reasoning in the face of the Assyrian, for example, his cohorts gleaming, come down like a wolf on the fold, would obviously be directed by the brute fact of the Assyrian, and could not be considered free. For Kant, where there are multiple agents directing the work of reason, where

the integrity of the atomic ego is not respected, reason cannot be called free. We might say, more generally, that when the use of reason is necessarily restricted by the situation in which one finds oneself, the use of reason is merely private; specifically, Kant defines private reason as reason whose use is restricted by position or by office: "I call the private use of reason that which a person may make in a civic post or office that has been entrusted to him."⁴² The champions of Kant's conception of private reason are police officers, governmental bureaucrats, taxpayers, and pastors – critically, officers *who are not yet workers* - who are *on duty*, and as such must conform to a particular standard of institutionalized behavior to preserve social order. Reason on duty, in this private sense, is to be part of the well-functioning machine of a harmonious state. "[I]t would be disastrous," Kant claims, "If an officer on duty who was given a command by his superior were to question the appropriateness or utility of the order. He must obey."⁴³ If there is a production in the sphere of private reason, it is limited, but we can identify it simply by pointing out that by keeping at bay chaos and "widespread insubordination"⁴⁴ private reason produces a space for the possibility of what Kant calls public reason to emerge.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

V

Off-duty thinking: Reason in its highest echelons requires in the very least a modicum of capricious leisure time, where one might pursue his or her scholarly interests un-pestered by the vexations of a country in turmoil, or the demands of a body.

VI

The above is a rhetorical overstatement, of course, but there is something to it. There is in Kant's formulation of public reason the nascent germ of what would become the concept of leisure time roughly a century later, once unionization and improved rail transportation allow for a more robust sense of leisure and leisure class living. This is implied by the necessary presence of freedom in both the negative (free from restrictions) and positive (free to produce) senses of the term in public reasoning. Kant claims that "[n]othing is required for [...] enlightenment [...] except freedom, namely, the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters," and further that "if [the social] is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable."⁴⁵ Kant tells us, "The *public* use of reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among mankind."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

Freedom here is, on one hand, freedom from one's officially deputized responsibilities. On the other hand it is the freedom to produce as a scholar: "By the public use of reason I understand the use that anyone as a scholar makes of reason before the entire *literate world*."⁴⁷ The space in which public reason is manifested is the "free" space of the writer, and its product, of course, is the written work. Most importantly, it is the space of *free labor* - remember: officers are not yet workers - it is labor for labor's sake, not labor for wages, which produces the sign of enlightenment. Kant claims that as such and only as such labor for labor's sake corresponds to the internal need of the subject, Reason's demand, whose arbitrary signifier (the book-product) always purely relates to the universal enlightenment project: Reason's guiding thread.

VII

The significance of the printed word would not have been lost on Kant, and no doubt the influence that the book, perhaps the most important product of early capitalist development in Europe, had on the very foundations of national identities within the European world, would lead Kant to emphasize that individual production that makes use of public reason must manifest itself specifically within the lineage of scholarly writings that appear before and are read by a popular market of readers.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

If we use the term 'lineage' here to describe the progression of scholarly production, it is to pay respects to the generational character of the scholarly conversation that takes place by way of books, which was critical in producing a sense of contemporaneousness and kinship between geographically distant urban centers prior to the advances in transportation and communication that would come with the broader flowering of the late Industrial Revolution. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), points out that "[t]he development of print-as-commodity is the key to generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity."⁴⁸ Distinct social systems which were previously only tangentially related had found a product that could be used to express the idiomatic contours of the common age in which they were collectively situated. Anderson suggests that post-Reformation novels and print periodicals precisely like *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (the periodical in which Kant's "What is Enlightenment" was first published), written in secular vernaculars rather than in Latin, were essential in cultivating a social imaginary that allowed for there to be a conscious linkage between multiple, spatially independent events arising within a temporally collective simultaneity: the framework of universal, progressive calendrical time.⁴⁹ The development of this social imaginary contributed, according to Anderson, directly to the concept of the modern nation:

⁴⁸ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. (New York: Verso, 1983), 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.⁵⁰

Armed with a new understanding of the possibility of a universal futurity, Kant patriotically declares that “[H]uman nature is so constituted as to be incapable of indifference toward even the most distant epoch through which our species must go, if only it can be expected with certainty.”⁵¹ Not only is the future of the social accessible to thought, but its presence in thought is so essential to thought itself that it demands the immediate extension of mankind’s ethical concern.

VII

Anderson’s analysis of the print industry of the Reformation, post-Reformation, and early Industrial Revolution allows us to take the liberty of assuming that Kant would also not have missed the significance of the impact that a *single author* could levy upon European culture as a cohesive social market. The glyph of such an impact can be represented by none better than Martin Luther. Luther’s writing was the catalyst that led to Europe to embrace the *public* book, that is the book that was printed in a local vernacular and was thus for the people who belonged to the vernacular, over the book that was printed in Latin and was thus only

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵¹ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Ted Humphries, trans. “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent”

accessible to the aristocracy, the religious gentry, and the wealthy, educated elite. As an economic good, the public book was more advanced: it boasted a broader market of readers. Luther's writing provided popular content for the print industry, which was eager to expand its production simply by at last making use of what had been, by way of the printing press, within its grasp since the Renaissance.

[W]hen in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his theses to the chapel door in Wittenberg, they were printed up in German translation, and "within 15 days [had been] seen in every part of the country." In the decades 1520-1540 three times as many books were published in German as in the period 1500-1520, an astonishing transformation to which Luther was absolutely central. His works represented no less than one third of *all* German-language books sold between 1518 and 1525.⁵²

Anderson provides another interesting point: "Luther [was] the first best-selling author *so known*. Or, put another way, the first writer who could 'sell' his *new* books on the basis of his name."⁵³ Here, we might acknowledge that the name of the author - Luther specifically - which accumulates its own value as a sign, stands out as the product's *brand*.

VIII

The Lutheran revolt, understood by way of its products, corresponds almost identically to Kant's conception of public reason, and will serve as

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 37.

⁵² Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. (New York: Verso, 1983), 39.

a concrete example of what Kant advocates in “What is Enlightenment” even if, in truth, we can have no idea if the case of Luther even ever crossed Kant’s mind. Here is a scholar (Luther) who in his ‘free’ time, and in correspondence with his Reason, creates a document (The *95 Theses*) that makes explicit the scholar’s “carefully considered and well-intentioned thoughts concerning mistaken aspects of [symbolized concepts], as well as his suggestions for the better arrangement of religious and church matters.”⁵⁴ Further, the scholar in our example disseminates his thinking by way of his product (the book) unto the “entire literate world”⁵⁵ (Europe as a book market).

IX

We must briefly make three points clear before we continue.

(1) For Kant, enlightenment is a possibility for society as a whole, and strictly speaking not for lone individuals; however, Kant cannot deny that it is the individual agency of distinct social beings that sets the enlightenment process in motion.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*. Ted Humphries, trans. “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment” (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

(2) Liberation from “the guidance of another” is accomplished not within the subject himself, but only with respect to that which he produces as a meaningful expression of Reason.

(3) Thus, the subject engages in the act or event of enlightenment when he or she produces a sign of Reason. We have shown the ‘what’ of this sign to correspond with books, particularly; however, we can easily see that such products cannot be mere material things only, and are more properly material things with meaning or value within a social contemporary.

X

Kant’s rigor in “What is Enlightenment” serves to ensure that the value of the signs produced in the name of enlightenment are not devalued by any possible collectivity, authoritarian censure or prior restraint, or counterfieture. As a result of his effort, we can now look upon Kant’s formulation of public reason as properly representative of the ‘classical’ age of sign production. In fact, public reason in form, due to the clarity and precision by which Kant concretized it, may well be the best example of ‘classical’ sign relation we have, if for nothing else other than the brevity of Kant’s article.

There is first an ideal signified: enlightenment. The product of public reason relates to it coherently and absolutely. This coherence is constituted by the singular integrity of the individual subject's need.

The book, again, will help us crystallize this point. The book is, as we have stated, the product of Reason. Though books are printed for the 'masses' (even before the term itself was produced for them), no objective order or technological process intercedes in or contaminates either the pure genesis of the product or its pure relation to Reason. We steadfastly believe that books are not made by machines, but written by subjects, and only as such can a book be called a book.

The printing press, which facilitated mass production and dissemination of knowledge in a format largely unchanged from its invention in ca. 1439 through the next three centuries, could not be said to differ too radically in terms of its place in thought from other 'tools of the trade' that existed within the artisanal mode of production, from the "spades and pitchers [which] were living phalluses or vaginas in whose 'obscenity' the instinctual dynamics of human beings lay open to a symbolic reading."⁵⁶ Further, the printing press, for all of its grandeur and all we owe to it, remains essentially linked to the 'rudimentary' functionality (or, perhaps more properly, 'pre-functionality') of the pen and the hand, in fact so much

⁵⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. (New York: Verso, 1996), 55.

so it cannot be clearly isolated against the pen/hand matrix, and carries with it the same “symbolic relationship associated with the traditional gestural system of work.”⁵⁷

Technology, in the case of the pen/hand and the printing press, has a direct link to the human body that is not only evidenced by the presence in the direct functioning of such technology of muscular and neurological activity - the work of machine and man conjoined in physical labor, with man providing the energy - but is also directly symbolic of man’s psychic depths. Following Bachelard and Durand,⁵⁸ Baudrillard contends that...

Gestures and physical effort are the vectors of a whole phallic symbolism, as deployed, for example in such notions as penetration, resistance, molding or rubbing. The rhythm of the sexual is the prototype of all rhythmical gestures, and all technological praxis is overdetermined by it. Because they press the whole body into the service of effort and accomplishment, traditional objects and tools acquire something of the deep libidinal cathexis of sexual exchange (as, at another level, do dance and ritual).⁵⁹

When effort, that is human effort, provides the energy by which any machine functions, there is a direct equivalence between the work invested in production and the product. The effort of the writer, whose labor produces the book, so too reaps such an equivalence. Since there

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁸ Baudrillard cites Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand’s *Les structures anthropologiques de l’Imaginaire* (second edition; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963) as leading his scholarship here.

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. (New York: Verso, 1996), 54.

is no *surplus*, no value that to be consumed outside of direct use, the product itself is open to any number of ideal linkages between itself as signifier and Nature, God, Enlightenment, etc. as signified.

XI

Baudrillard identifies all singular, distinct objects of production in terms of *parole*. They are each events with meaning; they are speech acts. So long as the productive effort and use of such objects as *parole* are uncontaminated, precisely in the sense of Kant's requirements for acts of public reason, there is absolutely no friction in integrating objects as *parole* into the form of life in which such objects are wrought.

In craft or the artisanal mode production distinct objects have not yet acquired a *langue*, a code out of which objects might assert their own demands and categories. In craft production, the system of needs and effort-based work supersedes the technological order. The subject provides the energy that drives the machinations of value, and further, which enforces a stable reality principle based on the integrity of the subject's sign production.

With the advent of the consumer good - manufacturing, technological specialization, the commoditization, etc. - comes the force of *l'ordre*

technique, the technological order, which enforces its own logic of coherence in signification by way of categories (models) and the general indeterminacy of an abstract economic structure. Commodities acquire a systemic or relational value.

The systemic value of a commodity is at first its status as a model, or a category. While distinct objects retain their status as parole, as independent acts of meaningful signage, they are also a “set of expressions,” a *langue*.⁶⁰

The systemic value of the commodity is at second a shroud; it relies fundamentally on the accidental symphonics of a multiplicity of abstract movers: supply, demand, liquidity, consumer ‘confidence’, etc. For Marx, this systemic value is precisely what makes the value of labor time in a hard or universal sense obsolete, or a “secret,” in Marx’s words (*Capital*). Rather than producing a value for itself by way of its labor, the worker must consume a systemic value for his or her labor which is determined by the vagaries of a speculative market; in addition, what is meant by production in definition is altered, as only that which is produced for the market can be properly called production. Marx:

In order to produce, [workers] enter into specific determinate connections and relations with one another and only within

⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. Anthologized in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998), 412.

these social connections and relations does their action on nature, does production, take place. [...] [T]he social relations within which individuals produce, the social relations of production, change, are transformed, with the change and development of the material means of production, the productive forces.⁶¹

There is a contraction in the efficacy of needs and work in sign production that directly corresponds with the prolific hemorrhaging of *l'ordre technique*. Baudrillard contends that the craft model of production, which required the unique, individual integrity of specific needs and work, loses coherence in the face of the more 'advanced' coherence offered by consistent manufactured goods, which restrict by way of such consistency the scope of what needs are given sanction by the technological order. If the linkages between needs and production were unlimited and integral in craft production, in the age of mechanical reproduction needs are filtered into categories determined by the categories of objects; in a sense, needs become mediated by *l'ordre technique*: "The fact is that the system of individual needs swamps the world of objects with its utter contingency, yet this contingency is somehow inventoried, classified and demarcated by objects: it thus becomes possible to control [needs]."⁶²

As soon as direct use and direct effort are excluded from the mode of production, the subject's reality principle fundamental as such begins to

⁶¹ Marx, Karl. "Wage Labor and Capital." Anthologized in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998), 265-266.

⁶² Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. (New York: Verso, 1996), 189.

come unglued as more and more the principles of reality are determined by *l'ordre technique*. The Orders of Simulacra, which follow the 'classical' age of the sign, are not produced, but rather consumed; they are systemic, rather than direct, sign relations that are absorbed corporately by the subject, and which induce properly codified responses. Baudrillard:

[The products of mechanical reproduction/production] offer as proof the spectacular *mélange* of needs and satisfactions, the abundance of choice, and the festival of supply and demand whose effervescence can provide the illusion of culture. But let us not be fooled: *objects* [of *l'ordre technique*] are categories of objects which quite tyrannically induce categories of persons. They undertake the policing of social meanings, and the significations they engender are controlled. Their proliferation, simultaneously arbitrary and coherent, is the best vehicle for social order, equally arbitrary and coherent, to materialize itself under the sign of affluence.⁶³

Man becomes more and more useless as more and more of his needs are determined for him in advance. The 'classical' system sign relations is concurrently unhinged by the preemptory position of the objective "set of expressions" (code, *langue*), which anticipates subjective needs and directs them according to its own logic: the "logic of simulation, which no longer has anything to do with the logic of facts and an order of reason."⁶⁴

⁶³ Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects*. James Benedict, trans. Anthologized in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998), 413.

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulation and Simulacra*. Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. (Ann Arbor:

Foucault views enlightenment as a persistent “attitude” bound up with our notions of the “modern” and the “contemporary.” Much in the way Merleau-Ponty identifies subjective thinking as having “infected” Western thinking since it’s “discovery,” so much so that “‘subjective’ thinking no longer allows itself to be ignored,”⁶⁵ Foucault identifies the irrepressibility of the question of enlightenment. One must take Kant’s “What is Enlightenment seriously so as to...

...emphasize the extent to which a type of philosophical investigation – one that simultaneously problematizes man’s relation to the present, man’s historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject – is rooted in the Enlightenment [and that] the thread which may connect us with the Enlightenment is not a faithfulness to doctrinal elements but, rather, the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that can be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.⁶⁶

We might question to what extent Enlightenment ideality functions today as a ‘critique’. In its direct mirroring of ‘classical’ sign functions, what is posited by Kant in “What is Enlightenment” can perhaps more rightly be identified as the standard by which we understand our reality principle in perfect stability, and if such is reactivated over and over again, it is to the credit of the model that was set forth by Kant. Of course, technological

The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 16.

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. Richard C McCleary, trans. “Everywhere and Nowhere.” (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 154.

⁶⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954 –*

production has advanced after the Enlightenment up to today and has become more infinitely more sophisticated. Addressing this development - which has disturbed the functioning of a stable, 'classical' reality principle by anticipating its needs and organizing them - but failing to address this development with not but the same presuppositions as those held by Enlightenment thinkers severely and radically limits one's ability to understand just how it is and how deeply the sign relations that promise a stable principle of reality have been altered as humanity has, more and more, gone over to the side of the object.

When someone was digging a hole with a spade when there only were spades, of course, he or she simulated others who had dug similar holes. But the simulation at present in such an act was dormant. Why would it ever be necessary to examine the simulation present in such an act when it was so clear that one's energy was directly related to the project at hand? Even if, say, I watched my father digging a hole and I simulated him, and felt pleasure in such a simulation, in becoming identical to him as I worked, by way of my energy, by way of the labor I alone exerted no one else could stand in for me. The reality principle which secured my integrity as an independent subject would never be jeopardized. If anything, the simulation I employed to facilitate my labor could be not but a silent accomplice, a shadow, or a cycle of symbolic transubstantiation. Such simulation, in the "dormant" or "secret" mode, is perhaps more properly

1984, Vol. 1). Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: New Press, 1997), 312.

said to be the simulacra of the non-arbitrary, which we discussed in the previous chapter. Simulacra that arises out of the 'classical' age of sign relations is *arbitrary simulacra*, that is, simulation that exists ever always in respect to the value(s) of products, labor, and exchangeable meaning(s).

This is not to say that there is anything substantially wrong with Enlightenment thinking as we have examined it; it is precisely because it is so perfect that we love it. Nor is this to say that people have only recently begun to simulate; people have always simulated. It is appropriate to claim, however, that this very perfection is what has stood in the way of simulation being questioned or being acknowledged as a fact of being until recently, until simulation in its arbitrary form, simulation as it relates to economic values and objects, at last, is so notably conspicuous in our forms of living that it can no longer be ignored.

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