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{ Time will
return me to
my insoluable
pleasures. }

The world is naked, the king is naked, things are clear. All of production, and truth itself, aim to uncover things, and the unbearable "truth" of sex is a recent result of this. Luckily this is insignificant, and seduction still retains, from truth itself, the most sibylline answer, which is that "perhaps we only wish to uncover truth because it is so difficult to imagine it naked."

SEDUCTIONS
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BAUDRILLARD



The Sacred Horizon of Appearances
The Trompe-l'oeil or the Enchanted Simulation
The Secret and the Challenge
Seduction, it is Destiny

Notes

1. Expressions are all in English in the original. [Trans.]

2. Walter Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969) pp. 217-52. [Trans.]

Seduction, it is destiny

Are we to understand that this diffuse form of seduction, without charm, without stakes, this specter of seduction that haunts our circuits without secrets, our fantasies without affect, our contact network without contacts, that this is the pure form? As if the modern form of the happening with its participation and expressiveness, when the stage and the magic of the stage have disappeared, would be the pure form of theater? Or if the hypothetical and hyperreal mode of intervention in reality – acting pictures, land-art, body-art[1] - in which the object, the frame and the scene of illusion have disappeared, would be the pure form of painting and of art?

We do in fact live among pure forms, in radical obscenity, which is to say visible and undifferentiated, among figures that were previously secret and distinct. The same is true of the social, which rules today also in its pure form, that is, obscene and empty. The same for seduction, which in its actual form, has lost all risk, suspense, and magic to take the form of a faint and undifferentiated obscenity.

Need we refer to Walter Benjamin's[2] genealogy of the work of art and its destiny? Primarily the work of art has the status of ritual object, related to the ancestral form of the cult. Next it takes the cultural and aesthetic form, a system with less obligations, which still retains a singular quality, no longer immanent as in the ritual object, but transcendental and individualized. And the aesthetic form in turn gives way to the political form, where the work as such disappears in the inevitable destiny of mechanical reproduction. While in the ritual form originality was unknown (within the sacred there is little concern for the aesthetic originality of cult objects); it is again lost in the political form, which has become entirely the multiplication of objects without an original. This is the form of maximal circulation and minimal intensity.

Thus, seduction had its ritual phase (dual, magical, agonistic); its aesthetic phase (reflected in the "aesthetic strategy" of the seducer, whose sphere of influence approaches that of the feminine and of sexuality, of the ironic and the diabolic – it is then that it takes on the meaning it has for us: diversion, strategy, (possibly cursed) gaming, and appearances); and finally its "political" phase (taking up Benjamin's term, here a bit ambiguous), the phase of the complete disappearance of the original of seduction, of its ritual and its aesthetic form, in favor of an unlimited distribution where seduction becomes the informal form of the political, the demultiplied framework of elusive politics, which is devoted to the endless reproduction of a form without content. (This informal form is inseparable from its technical nature, which is that of networks, just as the political form of the object is inseparable from the techniques of serial reproduction.) As it was the case for the object, this "political" form corresponds to the maximum diffusion and the minimum intensity of seduction.

Is this the destiny of seduction? Or can we, against this involuntional destiny, take on the challenge of seduction as destiny? Production as destiny, or seduction as destiny? Is this the destiny of appearances as opposed to the truths of deep structure? In any case we live in non-sense, and if simulation is its disenchanting form, seduction is its enchanted form.

Anatomy is not destiny, nor is politics: seduction is destiny. It is what remains of destiny, of risk, of magic, of predestination and vertigo, and also of quiet efficiency in a world of visible efficiency and of stability.

The sacred horizon of appearances

To us, only those who can no longer produce are dead. In reality, only those who do not wish to seduce, nor be seduced, are dead.

But seduction takes hold of them anyway, as it takes hold of all production and finally annihilates it.

Because the void, an absence hollowed out at any point by the backfiring of any sign, the meaninglessness that is the sudden charm of seduction, is also what waits, but without illusion, for production to reach its limits. Everything returns to the void, including our words and our gestures. But some, before they disappeared, had the time, anticipating their demise, to exercise a seduction others will never know. The secret of seduction is in this evocation and reevocation of the other, in movements whose slowness and suspense are poetic, like a slow motion film of a fall or an explosion, because something has had, before fulfilling itself, the time to be missed and this is, if there is such a thing, the perfection of "desire."

Notes

1. Zempleny, *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 14.

2. *Leurre* is a seductive word whose polyphony resonates throughout this text, at times in the guise of "illusion," other times as "deception," and always as "lure." Although the word "lure" does not appear in this English version it is always present beneath (*il court sous*) the surface of the text. The reader should be(a)ware.
[Trans.]

3. Vincent Descombes, *L'inconscient malgr lui* (Paris: Minuit, 1977). [Trans.]

Seduction is that which extracts meaning from discourse and detracts it from its truth. It would thus be the opposite of the psychoanalytic distinction between manifest and latent discourse. For latent discourse diverts manifest discourse not from its truth but towards it and makes it say what it did not wish to say. It uncovers determinations and deep-seated lack of determinations. It always suspects depth behind the rupture; always suspects meaning behind the bar. Manifest discourse has the status of a labored appearance, traversed by the emergence of meaning. Interpretation is that which, shattering appearances and the play of manifest discourse, will set meaning free by remaking connections with latent discourse.

In seduction, conversely, it is somehow the manifest discourse, the most "superficial" aspect of discourse, which acts upon the underlying prohibition (conscious or unconscious) in order to nullify it and to substitute for it the charms and traps of appearances. Appearances, which are not at all frivolous, are the site of play and chance taking the site of a passion for diversion - to seduce signs is here far more important than the emergence of any truth. Interpretation overlooks and obliterates this aspect of appearances in its search for hidden meaning. This is why interpretation is so characteristically opposed to seduction, and why every interpretive discourse is so unappealing. The havoc interpretation wreaks in the domain of appearances is incalculable, and its privileged quest for hidden meanings may be profoundly mistaken. For we needn't search in some beyond, in a *hinterwelt*, or in an unconscious, to find what diverts discourse. What actually displaces it, "seduces" it in the literal sense, and makes it seductive, is its very appearance: the aleatory, meaningless, or ritualistic and meticulous, circulation of signs on the surface; its inflections, and its nuances. All of this effaces the content value (*teneur*) of meaning, and this is seductive. The meaning of an interpretative discourse, by contrast, has never seduced anyone. Every interpretive discourse (*discours de sens*) wants to get beyond appearances; this is its illusion and fraud. But getting beyond appearances is an impossible task: inevitably every discourse is revealed in its own appearance, and is hence subject to the stakes imposed by seduction, and consequently to its own failure as discourse. Perhaps every discourse is secretly tempted by this failure and by having its objectives put into question, changing its truth effects into surface effects which act like a mirror absorbing and engulfing meaning. This is what happens initially when a discourse seduces itself; the original way in which it absorbs meaning and empties itself of meaning in order better to fascinate others: the primitive seduction of language.

Every discourse is complicit in this abduction of meaning, in this seductive maneuver of interpretation; if one discourse did not do this, then others would take its place. All appearances conspire to combat meaning, to uproot meaning, whether intentional or not, and to convert it into a game, according to some other rules of the game, arbitrary ones this time, to some other elusive ritual, more adventurous and more seductive than the mastery of meaning. Discourse must struggle not so much against the secrets of the unconscious as against the superficial abyss of its own appearance. And if it must overcome something, it is not fantasies and hallucinations, which are full of meaning and counter-meaning, but rather the brilliant surface of nonsense and all the play that it makes possible. Only recently have we been able to eliminate the dangers of seduction, whose domain is the sacred horizon of appearances, in order to substitute for it "serious" problematics; problematics of the unconscious and problematics of interpretation. But nothing can guarantee that this substitution, or the obsession with latent discourse initiated by psychoanalysis, which is the equivalent of generalizing to all levels the violence and terrorism of interpretation, is itself not fragile and ephemeral. No one knows whether this strategy, in which we have eliminated or sought to eliminate all seduction, is not itself a very fragile simulation model, one that only pretends to be an invulnerable structure in order to hide the effects of the alternative, the effects of seduction which

have begun to threaten it. The worst thing for psychoanalysis, after all, is in fact that the unconscious seduces. It seduces with dreams. It seduces by its concept. It seduces when "the id speaks" and when it desires to speak. Everywhere there is a double structure in place. Everywhere there is a parallel structure in which signs from the unconscious connive with their exchange — a conniving that devours the other, the "work" of the unconscious, and the pure and simple processes of transference and counter-transference. The whole edifice of psychoanalysis is crumbling from having seduced itself and from seducing others in the process. Let us become analysts for a short moment, and let us say that this is the return of Freud's primary repression, the repression of seduction, a repression which is at the origin of the emergence of psychoanalysis as a "science."

The writings of Freud unfold between two polar positions, positions that radically challenge his intermediate construct. These poles are seduction and the death instinct. In *L'Échange symbolique et la mort* I have previously argued that the death instinct is a reversion to an earlier topical or economic model of psychoanalysis¹. Concerning seduction, which through some hidden attraction connects with the other pole, we should say that it remains something of a lost object of psychoanalysis.

It is traditional to look upon Freud's dropping of the seduction theory in 1897 as a decisive step in the foundation of psycho-analytic theory, and in the bringing to the fore of such conceptions as unconscious fantasy, psychical reality, spontaneous infantile sexuality and so on.² Seduction, as the primeval form, finds itself relegated to a condition of "primal fantasy." Consequently it is treated, according to a logic that is no longer its own, as residue, vestige, and smokescreen within a logic and structure henceforth triumphant over psychical and sexual reality. Rather than demoting seduction to the status of a normal phase in development, we must see it as an event which is crucial and full of consequences. As we know, seduction will eventually disappear from psychoanalytic discourse, or reappear only to be buried and forgotten again, in a logical repetition of the founding act of denegation by the master himself. Seduction is not simply dismissed as a secondary element in comparison to more significant ones, such as infant sexuality, repression, the Oedipus complex, etc. It is rather denounced as a dangerous form, which could potentially be fatal to the development and coherence of the future system.

It is exactly the same with Saussure as with Freud. Saussure also began in Anagrams by identifying a form of language, or of the abolition of language; a meticulous and ritualistic form of the deconstruction of meaning and value. He then ended all of this in order to turn to the construction of linguistics. Was this change of locus due to some apparent failure to achieve real knowledge or rather was it the abandonment of the anagrammatic challenge in favor of a constructive, lasting and scientific analysis of the mode of production of meaning, an avoidance of its possible extermination? It doesn't matter in any case. Linguistics emerged out of this irrevocable change of direction, and it becomes the fundamental rule and axiom for all who continue Saussure's work. We cannot return to what has been destroyed. And forgetting the original murder is part of the logical and triumphant development of a science. All of the energy of mourning and of the dead object will be transferred to a simulated resurrection in the activities of the living. Yet we should mention that in the end Saussure - he at least - sensed the failure of this linguistic enterprise. He left dangling a sense of uncertainty, one that provided a glimpse into a weakness, a possible flaw of his remarkable mechanics of substitution. But his successors, satisfied with managing a discipline, lacked such scruples, scruples that might reveal hints of the violent and premature burying of the Anagrams. They could no longer imagine the abyss of language, the abyss of the seduction of language, nor conceive of a radically different process of the absorption of meaning, rather than of its production. The linguistic sarcophagus was well sealed, re-lying on the veil of the signifier.

an end to every libidinal economy, every sexual and psychological contract, substituting in its place a staggering openness of possible responses. It is never an investment but a risk; never a contract but a pact; never individual but dual; never psychological but ritual; never natural but artificial. It is no one's strategy, but a destiny.

Challenge and seduction are extremely similar. And yet is there not a difference? The challenge consists in drawing the other within your area of strength, which is also his or her strength, given that there can be an unlimited escalation. Whereas the strategy (?) of seduction consists in drawing the other within your area of weakness, which will also be his or hers. A calculated failure; an incalculable failure: a challenge to the other to be taken in. Weakness or failure: is not the panther's scent a weakness, an abyss that other animals dizzily approach? In fact, the panther with the mythical scent is actually the epicenter of death, and from this weakness subtle fragrances emerge.

To seduce is to weaken. To seduce is to falter. We seduce with weakness, never with strong powers and strong signs. In seduction we enact this weakness, and through it seduction derives its power.

We seduce with our death, with our vulnerability, and with the void that haunts us. The secret is to know how to make use of death, in the absence of a gaze, in the absence of a gesture, in the absence of knowledge, or in the absence of meaning.

Psychoanalysis proclaims: "assume passivity, assume weakness;" but turns them into forms of resignation and acceptance, in terms still almost religious, in order to promote the development of a resilient, balanced psyche. Seduction, however, makes use of weakness, makes a game of it, with its own rules.

Everything is seduction and nothing but seduction.

They wanted us to believe that everything was production. The leitmotiv of world transformation, the play of productive forces is to regulate the flow of things. Seduction is merely an immoral, frivolous, superficial, and superfluous process: one within the realm of signs and appearances; one that is devoted to pleasure and to the usufruct of useless bodies. What if everything, contrary to appearances — in fact according to the secret rule of appearances - operated by (the principle of) seduction?

the moment of seduction
the suspense of seduction
the risk of seduction
the accident of seduction
the delirium of seduction
the pause of seduction

Production merely accumulates and is never diverted from its end. It replaces all illusions with just one: its own, which has become the reality principle. Production, like the Revolution, puts an end to the epidemic of appearances. But seduction is inevitable. No one alive escapes it - not even the dead through their names and their remembrance. They are dead only when echoes no longer reach them from this world to seduce them, and when rituals no longer defy them to exist.

No cycle comes to a halt in seduction. You can seduce this one in order to seduce the other, but also seduce the other for fun. The illusion (leurre)⁶ that leads from one to the other is subtle. Is it seducing, or being seduced, that is seductive? Yet being seduced is still the best way of seducing. It is an endless strophe. There is no active or passive in seduction, no subject or object, or even interior or exterior: it plays on both sides of the border with no border separating the sides. No one can seduce another if they have not been seduced themselves.

Since seduction never stops at the truth of signs, but operates by deception and secrecy, it inaugurates a mode of circulation which is also secretive and ritualistic, a kind of immediate initiation that plays only by its own rules.

To be seduced is to be diverted from one's truth. To seduce is to divert the other from his truth. This truth then becomes the secret that escapes him.⁷

Seduction is directly reversible, and this reversibility is constituted by the challenge it implies and the secret in which it is absorbed.

This is the power of attraction and distraction, the power of absorption and fascination, the power of collapse not only of sex but of the real in general, and the power of defiance. It is never an economy of sex and speech, but an escalation of charm and violence, an instantaneous passion, a moment when sex can occur. But seduction can just as easily exhaust itself in the process of defiance and death, and in the radical indeterminateness that distinguishes it from an instinct. While indeterminate in relation to its object, instincts are determined as force and as origin. The passion of seduction is without substance and without origin: it is not through some libidinal investment, through some energy of desire that it acquires intensity, but through the pure form of gaming and bluffing.

Likewise, the challenge, also a dual form, exhausts itself instantaneously, and derives its intensity from this immediate reversion. Also bewitching, like a meaningless discourse, to which, for this absurd reason, we cannot help but respond. Why do we answer a challenge? This is the same mysterious question as: what is it that seduces?

What could be more seductive than a challenge? To challenge or seduce is always to drive the other mad, but in a mutual vertigo: madness from the vertiginous absence that unites them, and from their mutual involvement. Such is the inevitability of the challenge, and consequently the reason why we cannot help but respond to it: for it inaugurates a kind of mad relation, quite different from communication and exchange; a dual relation transacted by meaning-less signs, but connected by a fundamental rule, and its secret observance. The challenge terminates all contracts, all exchanges regulated by law (the law of nature or the law of value) and substitutes for it a highly conventional and ritualized pact. An unremitting obligation to respond and to outdo, governed by a fundamental rule of the game, and proceeding according to its own rhythm. Contrary to the law which is always written in stone, in the heart, or in the sky, this fundamental rule never needs to be stated; it must never be stated. It is immediate, immanent, and inevitable (whereas the law is transcendental and explicit).

There could never be a seduction contract, nor a challenge contract. For seduction or challenge to exist all contractual relations must be nullified in favor of a dual relation. A relation that is comprised of secret signs removed from the exchange, and which obtain their intensity from a formal division and from an immediate reverberation. Likewise, the enchantment of seduction puts

Likewise the veil of psychoanalysis, the veil of hidden meaning, and of a hidden surplus of meaning, preyed upon seduction to the detriment of the superficial abyss of appearances; and to the detriment of the absorptive surface, the panic-inducing surface of the exchange and competition of signs established by seduction (hysteria being only a "symptomatic" manifestation, one that is already contaminated by the symptom's latent structure and is therefore prepsychoanalytic, and hence debased. This is why it has been able to serve as the "matrix of conversion" for psychoanalysis). Freud also abolished seduction in order to replace it with an eminently operational mechanics of interpretation, and an eminently sexual mechanics of repression, one which offers all the characteristics of objectivity and coherence (if we disregard all of the internal distortions of psychoanalysis, whether personal or theoretical: how can such a perfect coherence be frustrated; how does every challenge and every seduction buried within a rigorous discourse manage to reemerge, like the living-dead? - but then, claim the well meaning, this means that psychoanalysis is alive. Freud, in any case, broke with seduction and took the side of interpretation (until the last version of his metapsychology, where most explicitly, the break is made). But everything that was repressed in this admirable taking of sides reemerged in the conflicts and vicissitudes of the history of psychoanalysis. It is reenacted in the course of every cure (never will we hear the end of hysteria!) It is a delight to see seduction sweep through psychoanalysis in the works of Lacan. In the hallucinatory form of the play of signifiers, Lacanian psychoanalysis, with exigencies of rigor and form so favored by Freud, marks the death of psychoanalysis, just as assuredly as its institutional trivialization. The Lacanian seduction is certainly an imposture, but in its own way it corrects, repairs and expiates Freud's original imposture: the foreclosure of the seduction/form to the benefit of a science which is not one. Lacan's discourse, promoting a seductive version of psychoanalysis, in a sense avenges that foreclosed seduction, but in a form that is itself contaminated by psychoanalysis; that is to say, always under the bar of the Law (of the Symbolic). This is a specious form of seduction. It always operates under the bar of the law and in the effigy of the Master who rules with the Word over hysterical masses incapable of sensual gratification ...

After all, it is the death of psychoanalysis that is at issue with Lacan, a death brought about by the triumphant, yet posthumous, resurgence of what was initially denied. Is this not the fulfillment of a destiny? Psychoanalysis will at least have had the opportunity of finishing with a Great Imposture after beginning with a Great Denial. We should be excited and comforted by the fact that the most remarkable system of meaning and interpretation ever erected is collapsing under the weight and the play of its own signs, signs that have become the disguises of unrestrained seduction, of unrestrained terms, once full of meaning, in an exchange that is complicit and devoid of meaning (even in therapy). This is a sign, at least, that we will be spared the truth (and a reason why only imposters rule). And what would appear to be the failure of psychoanalysis is merely the temptation, as in every great system of meaning, to lose itself in its own image at the risk of losing all meaning. This is clearly the rebirth from its own ashes of primitive seduction and the revenge of appearances. Well then, where is the imposture? Having refused the form of seduction from the outset, perhaps psychoanalysis was simply an illusion, the illusion of truth, the illusion of interpretation, which the Lacanian illusion of seduction refutes and corrects. Thus a cycle is completed, perhaps giving other interrogative and seductive forms a chance to emerge.

It was the same with God and with the Revolution. Iconoclasts were under the illusion that by destroying appearances God's truth would shine forth. Since there was no truth to God, which perhaps they secretly knew, their failure resulted from the same premise as that of the idolaters of images: we can only live with the idea of an altered truth. This is the only way to live in truth. The alternative is unbearable (precisely because truth does not exist). We must not wish to destroy appearances (the seduction of images). This project must fail if we are to prevent the absence of truth

The secret and the challenge

from exploding in our faces, or the absence of God, or of the Revolution. The Revolution is alive only in the fact that everyone is opposed to it, especially that mimetic and parodic double, Stalinism. Stalinism is immortal because it will always be there to hide the fact that the Revolution, the truth of the Revolution, doesn't exist. It thus restores hope. "The people," says Rivarol, "did not want the Revolution, they only wanted the spectacle." This is the only way to preserve the seduction of Revolution, rather than nullifying it in its truth.

*"We don't believe that truth remains truth after it is unveiled."
(Nietzsche)*

The secret: the seductive and initiatory quality of that which cannot be said because it is meaningless, and of that which is not said even though it gets around. Hence I know the other's secret but do not reveal it, and he knows I know it but does not let it be acknowledged: the intensity between the two is simply the secret of the secret. This complicity has nothing to do with some hidden information. Besides, even if the partners wished to reveal the secret they could not, since there is nothing to say ... Everything that can be revealed lies outside the secret. For it is not a hidden signified, nor the key to something; it circulates through and traverses everything that can be said, just as seduction flows beneath the obscurity of speech. It is the opposite of communication and yet shares something with it. Only at the cost of remaining unspoken does it maintain power, just as seduction functions from never being spoken or desired.

The hidden or the repressed has a tendency to manifest itself, whereas the secret does not do so at all. It is an introductory and implosive form: we enter it, but are unable to exit. The secret is never revealed, never communicated, never even "secreted."⁵ It derives its strength from this allusive and ritual power of exchange.

Thus in Kierkegaard's *Diary of a Seducer*, seduction takes the form of an enigma to be resolved. The young girl is an enigma, and in order to seduce her one must become an enigma for her; it is an enigmatic duel, and seduction resolves it without disclosing the secret. If the secret were disclosed, the revelation would be sexuality. The true meaning of the story, if it had one, would be about sex — but in fact there isn't one. There is nothing in the place where meaning should be, where sex should occur, in the place where words designate, and where others think it to be. And this nothing of the secret, this unsignified of seduction circulates, flows beneath words and meaning, faster than meaning: it is what affects you before utterances reach you, in the time it takes for them to vanish. Seduction beneath discourse is invisible; from sign to sign, it remains a secret circulation.

This is exactly the opposite of the psychological relation: to share another's secrets is not to share in their fantasies and desires, nor is it to share an unspoken being. When "it" (the id) speaks, it is in fact not seductive. Everything derived from expressive energy, repression, or the unconscious; everything that wishes to speak and everywhere the ego must appear - all of this belongs to the exoteric order, and contradicts the esoteric form of secrecy and seduction. Yet the unconscious, the "adventure" of the unconscious appears to be the last ambitious attempt to fabricate secrets in a society without secrets. The unconscious would then be our secret, our mystery in a confessional and transparent society. But it really isn't a secret, for it is merely psychological. It does not exist in itself, since the unconscious was created at the same time as psychoanalysis; that is, together with the procedures to assimilate it and the techniques to abandon the secret to its deep structures.

But perhaps something is taking revenge on all interpretations and in a subtle way is able to disrupt its process? Something which decidedly does not wish to be mentioned and which, being an enigma, enigmatically possesses its own resolution, and therefore only aspires to remain in secret and in the joy of secrecy.

Despite all efforts to uncover it, to betray it, to make it signify, language returns to its secret seduction. We always return to our own insoluble pleasures.

Seduction does not have its moment, nor is there a time for seduction, but it has a rhythm, without which it would not happen. Unlike an instrumental strategy, which proceeds by intermediate phases, seduction operates instantaneously, in a single movement, and is always its own end.

Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, *L'Echange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). This book has been translated in part(s): *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton, and P. Beitchman, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) is a translation of *Simulacres et simulations* (Paris: Galilee, 1981) pp. 9—68 and *L'Echange symbolique et la mort*, pp. 77—117; also "The structural law of value and the order of the simulacra," in *The Structural Allegory*, ed. J. Fekete and trans. Charles Levin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), contains selections from *L'Echange symbolique et la mort* some of which have been reproduced and supplemented in the present volume (chapter 6). [Trans.]

2. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973) p. 405.

The trompe-l'oeil or the enchanted simulation

Since Machiavelli politicians have perhaps always known that the mastery of a simulated space is the source of power, that the political is not a real activity or space, but a simulation model, whose manifestations are simply achieved effects. The very secret of appearances can be found in this blind spot in the palace, this secluded place of architecture and public life, which in a sense governs the whole, not by direct determination, but by a kind of internal reversion or abrogation of the rule secretly performed, as in primitive societies; a hole in reality or an ironic transfiguration, an exact simulacrum hidden at the heart of reality, which reality depends on in all of its operations.

Thus the pope, the grand inquisitor, and the great Jesuits or theologians all knew that God did not exist; this was their secret and their strength. Similarly Montefeltre's studiolo in trompe-l'oeil is an inverse secret of nonexistence at the heart of reality: the secret of the ever-possible profound reversibility of "real" space, including political space; the commanding secret of the political which has since been completely lost in the masses' illusion of the "reality."

Disenchanted simulation: porn, more real than the real, and the height of simulation.

Enchanted simulation: the trompe-l'oeil, more false than the false, and the secret of appearances.

No fables, no narratives, no compositions. No scenes, no theater, no action. The trompe-l'oeil forgets all this and circumvents it by the slight figuration of certain objects. They figure in the great works of all times, but here they appear alone, as if they had abolished the discourse of painting. As a result, they are no longer "represented," no longer objects, no longer specific objects. They are the anti representation of the social, religious and artistic, blank and empty signs which are the expression of anti-formality. The detritus of social life, they react to it and parody its theatricality: which is why they are scattered, juxtaposed in the randomness of their appearance. Even this is meaningful: these objects are not objects. They do not describe a familiar reality, like a still life. They describe the void and absence found in every representational hierarchy which organizes the elements of a painting, as it does the political realm.

These are not mere stand-ins which have been displaced from the principal scene, but reappearances that haunt the emptiness of a scene. This seduction is not an aesthetic one, that of a painting and of a likeness, but an acute and metaphysical seduction, one derived from the nullification of the real. The unreal inversion of these haunted and metaphysical objects contrasts completely with the representative space of the Renaissance.

Their insignificance is offensive. Only objects without referents, out of context - like these old newspapers, these old books, these old nails, these old boards, these scraps of food - only destitute and isolated objects, ghostly in their deinscription from all discourse, could portray the mood of a lost reality, like a previous life that haunts an individual and his or her self-awareness. "The trompe-l'oeil tends to substitute the inflexible opacity of Presence for the transparent and allusive image that the art lover expects."⁴ Simulacra without perspective, "trompe-l'oeil" images appear suddenly, with sidereal accuracy, as if stripped of the aura of meaning and bathed in empty ether. Pure appearances, the irony is their excess of reality.

Nature is not represented in the trompe-l'oeil. There are no landscapes, no skies, no lines of flight or natural light; no faces either; neither psychology nor historicity. Everything here is artifact. A vertical backdrop creates, out of pure signs, objects isolated from their referential context.

Translucidity, suspense, fragility, obsolescence: thus the insistence on writing, the insistence of the letter (fringed on the edges), of the mirror and the watch – these are the lost and distant signs of a transcendence that vanished into the quotidian. The reflection of a worn plank whose knots and rings marked the flow of time, like a clock without hands that leaves us to guess the time: these are things which have already transpired, a time which has already occurred. Only anachrony stands out, the involuted image of time and space.

There are no fruits here, no meats or flowers, no baskets or bouquets, nor any of the elements of (still) life. Nature is carnal, a carnal arrangement on a horizontal plane, on a ground or a table. Even though it sometimes plays with distortion, with the undefined boundaries of objects and the ambiguity of their use, it always retains the gravity of real things. It is always underscored by the horizontal. Whereas the trompe-l'oeil functions in weightlessness, figured against a vertical background, everything here is in suspense, objects as well as time, even light and perspective.

Notes

1. *Trompe-l'oeil* means literally a painting which at a distance offers the illusion (*leurre*) of reality. Figuratively: a false appearance. On the trompe-l'oeil within the frame of representation see Michel Foucault, *This is not a Pipe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). [Trans.]

2. From Pierre Charpentrat, "Le trompe-l'oeil," *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* 11 (Autumn, 1971) 161. [Trans.]

While still life works with classical shapes and shades, the shadows of the trompe-l'oeil do not have the depth that a real source of light provides: like the obsolescence of objects, they are the sign of a (s)light vertigo, the vertigo of a previous life, of an appearance prior to reality.

This mysterious light without origin, whose oblique rays are no longer real, is like a shallow pool of water, a stagnant pool, soft to the touch like a natural death. Things here no longer have a shadow (a substance). The sun that shines upon them is very different. It is a much brighter star, without an atmosphere or with an ether that doesn't refract. Perhaps death illuminates things directly, and this is all the shadow means? This shadow does not move with the sun; it does not elongate at sunset; it does not budge; it is an inflexible band. Not a result of chiaroscuro, nor a complicated dialectic of shade and light (for these are still painterly effects), but simply the result of the transparency of objects to a black sun.

We sense that these objects are approaching the black hole from where reality, the real world, and normal time emerge. The forward decentering effect, and the advancement of the reflection of objects at the subject's encounter, is the appearance, in the form of insignificant objects, of the double which creates the effect of seduction and exhilaration that is characteristic of the trompe-l'oeil: a tactile vertigo that recounts the subject's insane desire to grasp its own image, and then vanish. For reality is gripping only when we have lost our identity, or when it reappears as our hallucinated death.

A weak physical desire to grasp things, but a desire which is itself suspended and therefore metaphysical, the objects of the trompe-l'oeil have the same remarkable vivacity as when the child discovers his or her own image, like an instant hallucination prior to perception.

If there is a miracle in the trompe-l'oeil, it is never achieved through realism, like the grapes of Zeuxis which are so real that birds came to peck at them. This is absurd. Nor is a miracle achieved from a surplus of reality but, on the contrary, from the sudden break in reality and from the vertigo of being engulfed in it. The surreal familiarity of objects is the expression of this disappearance of the scene of the real. When the hierarchical organization of space that privileges the eye and vision, this perspective simulation - for it is merely a simulacrum - disintegrates, something else emerges; this we express as a kind of touch, for lack of a better term, a tactile hyperpresence of things, "as if we could grasp them." But this tactile fantasy has nothing to do with our sense of touch: it is a metaphor for "seizure," the annihilation of the scene and space of representation. As a result, this seizure rebounds on the surrounding world we call "real," revealing to us that "reality" is nothing but a staged world, objectified according to rules of depth, that is to say, the principle upon which paintings, sculptures, and the architecture of a period are defined, but only a principle; a simulacrum which the experimental hypersimulation of the trompe-l'oeil undermines. The trompe-l'oeil does not attempt to confuse itself with the real. Fully aware of play and artifice, it produces a simulacrum by mimicking the third dimension, questioning the reality of the third dimension, and by mimicking and surpassing the effect of the real, radically questioning the principle of reality.

Release from the real is achieved by the very excess of its appearances. Objects resemble too much what they are, and this resemblance is like a second state, their true depth. It is the irony of excess reality, through allegorical resemblance, and diagonal lighting.

Depth is thereby inverted: in contrast to the whole space of the Renaissance, organized according to a receding line of flight, the perspective effect of the trompe-l'oeil is in a sense a

forward projection. Instead of fleeing panoramically before the scrutinizing eye (the privilege of the panoptic eye), objects here "fool" the eye ("trompent" l'oeil) by some sort of internal depth: not by creating the illusion of a real world, but by eluding the privileged position of the gaze. The eye, instead of being the source of structured space, is merely the internal point of flight for the convergence of objects. Another universe whirls forward, an opaque mirror placed before the eye, with nothing behind it - no horizon, no horizontality. This is specifically the realm of appearances where there is nothing to see, where things see you. Things do not flee from you, they stand before you in a light that comes from elsewhere, and with shadows that never quite give them a true third dimension. Because this dimension, that of perspective, is also still the bad faith of the sign in relation to reality. And because of bad faith, all of art since the Renaissance has been rot.

Unlike aesthetic pleasure, the trompe-l'oeil produces a disturbing unfamiliarity, casts a strange light on a brand new, Western reality that triumphantly emerged out of the Renaissance: its ironic simulacrum. This is what surrealism was to the functionalist revolution of the twentieth century, since surrealism is also simply the ironic delirium of the principle of functionality. Surrealism, like the trompe-l'oeil, is not really a part of art or art history. Surrealism and the trompe-l'oeil have a metaphysical dimension. Aspects of style are not their concern. They disrupt at the very point of impact with reality or functionality, and therefore with consciousness. They aim to reverse and to revert. They undermine the world's certainty. This is why their pleasure and seduction is radical, even if minor, for they derive from an extreme surprise within appearances, from a life prior to the mode of production of the real world.

Today the trompe-l'oeil is no longer within the realm of painting. Like stucco, its contemporary, it can do anything, mimic anything, parody anything. In the sixteenth century, it became the prototype of the malevolent use of appearances, a game of fantastic proportions which eventually eliminated the boundaries between painting, sculpture and architecture. In the murals and ceilings of the Renaissance and baroque periods, painting and sculpture converge. In the murals or streets in the trompe-l'oeil of Los Angeles, architecture is deceived and defeated by illusion; the seduction of space by the signs of space. We have said so much about its production, is it not the time to discuss the seduction of space?

And of political space as well, such as the studiolo of the Duke of Urbino, and Frederigo da Montefeltre, in the ducal palace of Urbino and Gubbio: minute sanctuaries of trompe-l'oeil at the heart of the immense space of a palace. This is the triumph of an informed architectural perspective, of a space deployed according to the rules. The studiolo is a reverse microcosm: cut off from the rest of the structure, without windows, literally without space, since here space is actualized in simulation. If the palace as a whole constitutes the architectural act par excellence, the manifest discourse of art (and power), then what do we make of the minuscule studiolo cell that adjoins the chapel like yet another sacred place, but one a bit magical? It is not very clear what is happening here in the organization of space, and consequently of the entire representational system that orders the palace and the republic.

Truly private (privatissime) space was the prerogative of the Prince, just as incest and transgression were the exclusive right of kings. A complete reversal of the rules of the game is in effect here, one which would ironically lead us to think that, through the allegory of the trompe-l'oeil, the external space of the palace and beyond it to the city, as well as the political space, the actual locus of power, would perhaps be nothing more than a perspective effect. Such a dangerous secret, such a radical hypothesis, the Prince must keep to himself, within himself, in strict secrecy: for it is in fact the secret of his power.