

A 'Pataphysics Engine: play, technology, and realities

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This article plays a game with Jean Baudrillard's thought and the intellectual traditions on which it draws. Or rather, it plays Baudrillard's game but with a cheat code. The game or program here is the hyperreality of the contemporary world, Baudrillard's integral or virtual reality characterized by the dominance of things, of objects over subjects. The cheat code identifies and accentuates the development, application, and interconnection of theories of play, waste, technology, and multiple realities in aspects of 20th century French avant-garde and social scientific thought and practice. It suggests ways in which everyday technoculture, not least videogame culture, can be addressed as at once playful and simulacral.

Keywords:

play; technology; Baudrillard; Bataille; surrealism, Situationist International, ethnography; waste; videogames; realities; simulation; simulacra

The only strategy against the hyperrealist system is some form of pataphysics, "a science of imaginary solutions"; that is, a science-fiction of the system's reversal against itself at the extreme limit of simulation, a reversible simulation in a hyperlogic of death and destruction (Baudrillard, 1976/1993, pp. 4-5)

In this article, I want to play a game with Jean Baudrillard's thought and the intellectual traditions on which it draws. Or rather, I want to play Baudrillard's game but with a cheat code. The game or program here is the hyperreality of the contemporary world, the integral, or virtual reality characterized not least by the dominance of things, of objects over subjects. The cheat code will, on the one hand, identify and accentuate the development and application of theories of play and the ludic in aspects of 20th-century French avant-garde and social scientific thought and practice. On the other hand, it will resist the homogeneity of Baudrillard's integral reality to emphasize the generation, proliferation, and multiplication of realities in simulacral culture.



Sega coin-op machine, *Dinosaurland*, Pembrokeshire, 2005

Ludic Gadgets

Though in Baudrillard's recent work (and certainly in its adoption by media studies), the screen looms large as a metaphor for the workings or nature of hyperreality, his early work in the late 1960s addressed everyday technologies in terms that have immediate relevance for the study of popular digital media today. For Baudrillard,

everyday technologies have an ironically playful hyperreality. In *The System of Objects*, his sociology of manufactured objects and technologies written in the 1960s, he outlined key distinctions between conventional notions of machines as developed and used for functional ends and the satisfaction of material needs and a proliferating range of noninstrumental consumer technologies. Each step in the incremental automation of everyday machines is a step away from the practical realities of use-value and toward the simulacral nature of fashion and sign value. Gadgets, for instance, are characterized by “irrational complexity, obsessive detail, eccentric technicity or gratuitous formalism” (Baudrillard 1968/1996, p. 121), they are only subjectively functional, the product of obsession. Alternatively, the functionality of gizmos (in French, machins) is vague and limitless:

“Machine” signifies, and so doing structures, a particular real practical whole; “gizmo” signifies nothing more than a formal operation though that operation is the total operation of the world. The virtue of a gizmo may be ridiculous in reality, but in the imagination it is universal. The electrical whist that extracts stones from fruit or some new vacuum-cleaner accessory for getting under sideboards are perhaps in the end not especially practical, but they do serve to reinforce the belief that for every need there is a possible mechanical answer....The real referent of the gizmo is not a plum stone or the narrow space under the sideboard, but nature in its entirety reinvented in accordance with the technical reality principle: a total simulacrum of an automated nature. (Baudrillard 1968/1996, p. 125)

Yet Baudrillard seems troubled by the playfulness of machines - the machin is technological instrumentality that has mutated into nonproductive uselessness, a fashionable practice, a toy not a tool. He later describes something of the intimacies with the technological that characterize contemporary media culture, yet the description is an anxious one. The Dictaphone, he asserts, demands that you

whisper your decisions, dictate your instructions, and proclaim your victories to it...Nothing could be more useful, and nothing more useless: When the technical process is given over to a magical type of mental practice or a fashionable social practice, then the technical object itself becomes a gadget (Baudrillard, 1990a, p. 77).

On one level, this account is fully consistent with Baudrillard’s critique of the Marxist valorization of use value (the economic reality of objects in human culture, produced to satisfy immediate and essential needs) over exchange value (the commodification of objects when they enter the market, satisfying needs they as commodities themselves generate). Developments in consumer technologies since the Dictaphone have only intensified this trajectory toward the intimacies of personal, mobile and playful technologies, generating new ludic practices. As Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly (2009), in a discussion of this passage, note

Digital personal organisers, text messaging on mobile phones, mobile phones themselves, may be sold as useful tools - but all seem to invite us to play. After all, who felt the need to “text,” to change a PC desktop’s wallpaper or nurture a Tamagotchi virtual pet until a consumer device suggested we might? (p. 252)

Though Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal is predicated on the disappearance of reality as it is commonly understood (not least the realities of objects' use value), his writing is haunted by this now absent register. Thus the Dictaphone is a fashion, a gadget and useless; it is a non-instrumental tool. Yet Baudrillard's own title for this short passage, "The Gadget and the Ludic," suggests a way of thinking beyond his irony-laced mournfulness for the death of the reality of technologies as instrumental objects. Gadgets are always ludic, everyday technologies are hyperreal in Baudrillard's terms, but also, as toys, their use or consumption (or the relationships between the human subjects and their objects) are playful games. Toys and games have always had their own noninstrumental functions and their own particular simulacral realities.

Play, Culture, Simulacra

Although human culture has always been artificial (in the sense, at the very least, of artifice as making, as art), the nature and implications of this artifice has been subject to historical change and rupture. Baudrillard establishes the Renaissance as the moment and location of a key historical and cultural transformation in which the culture of simulation, his precession of simulacra, begins. As pre-Renaissance societies were rigidly organized with no mobility across class or caste lines, there was no such thing as fashion. Signs in these cultures were, necessarily, fixed and totally clear, "each sign then refers unequivocally to a status." This status was policed, "any confusion of signs is punished: as grave infraction of the order of things" (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 84). The Renaissance marks the passage from this limited order of signs to "a proliferation of signs according to demand"; it is the moment at which both the false and the natural are born (Baudrillard, 1983, 1987). Without ritual or symbolic obligation, signs separate from the fixed order of things and become counterfeit. Significantly, it is specifically in the ludic realm of the theatre that the counterfeit ancestors of contemporary simulacra are fabricated(1). The interiors of the Renaissance theatre are fashioned from stucco, for Baudrillard an imitative substance, refashioning heterogeneous materials and material culture in plastic equivalence, and spreading out into other ritual architectures:

In the churches and palaces stucco is wed to all forms, imitates everything: velvet curtains, wooden cornices, charnel swelling of the flesh. Stucco exorcises the unlikely confusion of matter into a single new substance...a mirror of all the others (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 88).

As stucco (and the playful and spectacular technologies of baroque theatrical machinery) spread out to other ritual architectures (palaces and churches), so "[t]heater is the form which takes over social life" (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 87)¹. The counterfeit and the simulacral are born in seriously playful materials, behaviors, and technologies.

From Symbolic Exchange to Play

Although Baudrillard's account of the precession of the simulacra operates in a historical, diachronic, axis (the counterfeit signs of the Renaissance, mass-produced objects in the industrial era, the free-floating signs of the mediasphere, etc.), underlying and informing his understanding of ritual and the symbolic is an investment in concepts drawn from the synchronic registers of anthropology. It is this anthropological dimension, and in particular anthropology's approach to the nature of realities, that I now wish to explore and extend.

There is an elsewhere of reality (most cultures do not even have the concept). Something from before the so-called “real” world, something irreducible, linked to primal illusion and to the impossibility of giving the world as it is any kind of ultimate meaning whatsoever. (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 38)

Here, Baudrillard gestures toward a comparative cultural anthropology and specifically toward the French intellectual milieu in the first half of the 20th-century in which avant-gardism in art (particularly Surrealism) and political theory and action and the nascent social sciences of cultural anthropology and ethnography were intertwined. Georges Bataille’s interpretation of symbolic exchange in preindustrial societies is particularly influential on Baudrillard. In Baudrillard’s early work, at least symbolic exchange, primordial forms of gift exchange that lie outside of the logic of western orders of value” had the potential “to disrupt the precession of simulacra” (Gane, 2006, p. 283).

These primordial forms of exchange were exemplified by the *potlatch*, the “gift” economies of Canadian and Alaskan Indians recounted in Marcel Mauss’s (1950/1990) highly influential book *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. In potlatch, a chief might destroy or give away to another tribe much or all of his wealth. Writing about the significance of potlatch to the Situationist International, the post-surrealist radical art and politics group that also directly influenced Baudrillard. Peter Wollen (1989) describes it thus:

Potlatch was taken to exemplify the opposite of an exchange or market economy—objects were treated purely as gifts rather than as commodities, in the setting of a popular feast. Generosity and waste rather than egotism and utility determined their disposal. (p. 89)

It is important to note that Mauss, Bataille, and Baudrillard do not share the Situationists’ rather utopian vision of the waste economy of the potlatch. The giving of the gift is not generous in the contemporary sense: Mauss (1990) is clear that the gift is never free; that to give a gift is to obligate the receiver to give a gift in return:

The present generously given even when, in the gesture accompanying the transaction, there is only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit, and when really there is obligation and economic self-interest. (p. 3)

For the Situationists, the gift economy is a glimpse at a cultural and economic reality profoundly different from the utilitarianism and spectacle of late capitalism. Whereas for Baudrillard, it is precisely the disappearance of the obligation to return the gift that characterizes the loss of the symbolic more generally, hence the rise of the simulacra in the contemporary world (Baudrillard, 1993). Bataille (1967/1988) though found potlatch “strange yet familiar,” superseded - but not eradicated - by trade-based economic structures such as capitalism (Bataille, 1967/1988, p. 69). Potlatch in and of itself is not playful as such, but in the festive context in which it is conducted, in the wasteful nature of its economics, and in its sheer ludicrousness to the other realities of capitalist accumulation, it became contiguous in the avantgarde and ethnographic imagination with the carnivalesque, the counter-intuitive, the noninstrumental, and the excessive, and thus intertwined with theories of play, culture, and reality (2).

The Situationists, the Surrealists, and Ludic Realities

The worst error, the one committed by all our revolutionary strategists, is to think they can put an end to the system on the real plane: that is...the imaginary the system itself imposes on them, a system that lives and survives only by setting those who attack it to fight on the territory of reality, a ground that is always its own. (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 4)

“Be realistic: demand the impossible!”

“I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires”
(graffitti in Paris, May 1968, cited in Highmore, 2001).

The influence of the avant-garde art and the Situationist International, and that of its leading member Guy Debord, on Baudrillard is clear and familiar. So too is the influence of the Surrealist movement before and between the world wars on the Situationists, on their delight in the apparently paradoxical collaging of the everyday and the utopian, the mundane, and the marvelous. Surrealism’s central concern with the contestation of conventional concepts and experiences of reality was pursued through the identification of alternative realities: from the veiled worlds of the unconscious mind to the collisions of premodern and modern artifacts in the bricolage of the Parisian flea market.

Surrealism was founded on the play of chance. From the early 1920s, the aleatory aesthetic of Lautrémont’s chance encounter of the umbrella and sewing machine on the autopsy table, adopted by the Surrealists as a motto or call to arms, was pursued through automatic writing, photography, collage, and many games of *exquisite corpse*. Such games were deployed to catch out the conscious mind, to shake mundane reality, hint at, or proliferate, other realities in the gaps (3). Susan Laxton (2003) calls this “the Surrealist ludic,” the “deployment of chance meant to militate against means/ends rationality (4)”.

For Surrealism, the Situationist International, and for Baudrillard, the notion of a contestable everyday reality is central. However, Baudrillard is careful to distinguish his notions of virtuality and hyperreality from Debord’s “spectacle”:

Virtuality is different from the spectacle, which still left room for a critical consciousness and demystification...we are no longer spectators, but actors in the performance, and actors increasingly integrated into the course of that performance. Whereas we could face up to the reality of the world as spectacle, we are defenceless before the extreme reality of this world, before this virtual perfection. (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 9)

Though perhaps the most widely known product of the Situationist International, Debord’s (1967/1977) *The Society of the Spectacle* is by no means a summation of Situationist ideas. Much of the activity and output in the group’s early phase in the late 1950s and early 1960s was characterized by explicitly ludic and utopian theories and actions. Continuing the Surrealist project of developing a libertarian Marxism in opposition to the bureaucratic and work-centered nature of both capitalist and state socialist regimes, their fields of action, their playgrounds, were city streets, mass media, and everyday life:

Artists were to break down the divisions between individual art-forms, to create situations, constructed encounters and creatively lived moments in specific urban settings, instances of a critically transformed everyday life.

They were to produce settings for situations and experimental models of possible modes of transformation of the city, as well as to agitate and polemicize against the sterility and oppression of the actual environment and ruling economic and political system. (Wollen 1989, p. 68)

These situations were realized through playful (though seriously intended and practiced) activities such as ironic collaging, or détournement, of found materials such as comic books with revolutionary slogans, psychogeographic drifts through cities in search of chance encounters and ambiances (sometimes directed by guide books and maps for different cities). Influenced by Henri Lefebvre's insistence that meaningful social and political change is impossible without the transformation of the routines and controls of everyday life, play was central here, "play set consciously within the context of everyday life, not separated from it in the sphere of 'leisure'" (Wollen, 1989, p. 73). Huizinga's (1938/1986) *Homo Ludens* was another profound influence on the Situationists (e.g., on Constant's utopian plans for mutable buildings, for cities that would be shaped by the spontaneous and collective desires of their citizens). It is important to note that although such schemes drew on both Marxist critiques of capitalist economies and studies of premodern ritual and festivities, they called neither for a rejection of modern urban life and technology nor for the austerities of the contemporary communist parties. At least in this early phase, the Situationist International celebrated the revolutionary possibilities of the modern technological world, identifying standardization in industrial production and consumption as the enemy. Automation, however, had the potential to free people from the mundanity of work. The excesses of modern industry and technology were to be appropriated and redirected into a festive and playful culture:

The economy of standardization and quantity, of unending sameness, must be superseded by a civilization of "standard-luxury," marked by unending diversity. Machines would be playful, in the service of homo ludens rather than homo faber. Free time, rather than being filled with banality and brain-washing, could be occupied in creating brightly painted autostrade (freeways), massive architectural and urbanistic constructions, fantastic palaces of synesthesia, the products of "industrial poetry," sites of "magical-creative-collective" festivity. (Wollen, 1989, p. 92)

In setting up the excesses and wastefulness of festivities, rituals and play as both a critique of, and alternative to, the instrumentalism of capitalist and communist social and economic structures, the Situationists were drawing on Mauss. The Lettriste International, a precursor of the Situationist International, named its journal *Potlatch*, and the ideas and attitudes of the Situationists were characterized by "a common interest in the transformation of everyday life, in festivity, in play and in waste or excess (as defined by the norms of a purposive rationalism)" (Wollen, 1989, p. 89). Despite being rooted in this intellectual milieu and tradition, Baudrillard is clear, in his later work, that he sees little or no possibility of opposition or alternatives to the contemporary system. However, it is precisely in the loss of these anthropological alternatives, particularly that of symbolic exchange, that Baudrillard establishes this dystopian view. In general, though with significant exceptions, he does not pick up on the Surrealist and Situationist linking of play and the proliferation of realities.

This linkage between the ludic and the proliferation of realities in Surrealism is precisely the cheat code in play in this essay. Though Surrealism is popularly understood as the exploration of the alternative realities of the unconscious mind and

with the production of art works (painting in particular) that hinted at this psychic reality, there was another strand to Surrealism that asserted that the surreal was to be found in everyday realities. As Ben Highmore puts it, surrealism can be read “as a form of social research into everyday life” (Highmore, 2001, p. 46). These strands split in the late 1920s and “dissident Surrealism” went on to generate products that were not so much works of art “as documents of this social research.” Collage and montage can be seen then not only as artistic techniques but also research methods: “collage (or montage) provides a persistent methodology for attending to everyday life in Surrealism” (Highmore, 2001, p. 46). Surrealism as social research is predicated on a particular attitude to everyday reality as shot through with the marvellous and extraordinary: “In Surrealism the everyday is not the familiar and banal realm that it seems to be; only our drab habits of mind understand it this way. Instead the everyday is where the marvellous exists” (Highmore, 2001, p. 46). James Clifford has explored the intersections between Surrealism and anthropology in the 1920s. Both, he argues, see cultural norms such as beauty, truth and reality as “artificial arrangements susceptible to detached analysis and comparison with other possible dispositions” (Clifford, 1988, p. 119). Each “began with a reality deeply in question” (Clifford, 1988, p. 120).

It should be noted that the distinction between ethnography as a social science and the avant-garde Surrealism was far from clearly drawn in the late 1920s, particularly when the “dissident” Surrealists led by Georges Bataille set up the ethnographically oriented journal *Documents* in 1929 and later, in 1937, the Collège de Sociologie. Key contributors to *Documents* and members of the Collège shifted between Surrealist cultural production and ethnographic or anthropological study. For example, Michel Leiris, who set up *Documents* with Bataille, studied with Mauss and then undertook fieldwork in Africa. Roger Caillois, who had also studied with Mauss, joined the surrealists in 1932 and then the Collège de Sociologie. Caillois was of course also instrumental in disseminating and developing Huizinga’s theories of play and culture.

Such distinctions as there were between mainstream ethnography and ethnographic surrealism were to be found in the latter’s extension of cultural study from the Other to the Same. Though fascinated by the resources of alterity that exotic cultures offered, they conducted participant observation in the Western metropolis: “They reversed the logic of field work - to render the exotic and alien comprehensible?by working to make the familiar strange (Clifford, 1988, p. 121).

The members of the Collège de Sociologie “were preoccupied with those ritual moments when experiences outside the normal flow of existence can find collective expression, moments when cultural order is both transgressed and rejuvenated” (Clifford, 1988, p. 141). Bataille, in particular, was “obsessed with the power of sacrifice and wanted to reclaim the Place de la Concorde for ritual acts.” whereas Caillois’s notion of the sacré included “ritual expressions of primordial chaos, excess, cosmogony [check], fertility, debauchery, incest, sacrilege, and parodies of all sorts” (Clifford, 1988, p. 141) (5).

Ubu

If in Baudrillard’s later work, the power of symbolic exchange seems to wane – and he never looks to the “possibilities offered by ethnography for finding the sacred in the heart of the modern Western world” (Highmore, 2001, p. 57) (6) –it is still shot through with this Surrealist (and pre- and post-surrealist) complex of the sacred,

sacrilegious, and nonsensical. There is something seriously playful about Baudrillard's writing: its play on expectations and with contradictions. The provocative nature of his interventions into the popular media, such as his articles on the first Gulf War, is very much in the Dada-surrealist-Situationist spirit.

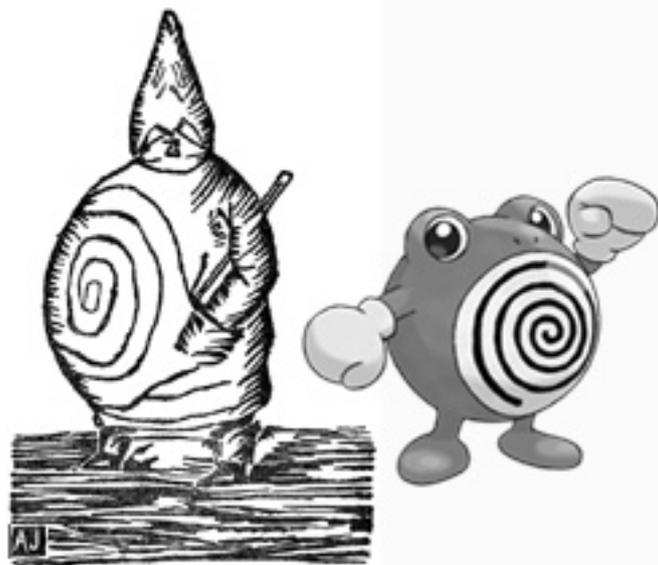
Perhaps the most vivid irruption of this surrealist trope in Baudrillard's writing is his invocation of Alfred Jarry's (1893) grotesque creation Pere Ubu and his proto-absurdist science of 'pataphysics. The scatological, satirical, provocative, and libidinal Ubu spawned in a series of performances from the end of the 19th-century was claimed as a direct ancestor by Dada and surrealism.

There is no more marvellous embodiment of Integral Reality than Ubu. Ubu is the very symbol of this plethoric reality and, at the same time, the only response to this Integral Reality, the only solution that is truly imaginary in its fierce irony, its grotesque fullness. The great spiral belly of Pa Ubu is the profile of our world and its umbilical entombment.

We are not yet done with 'pataphysics, that science which "symbolically attributes to their lineaments the properties of objects, described in their potentiality" (Baudrillard, 2005, pp. 44-45).

Ubu here, appropriately, is an ambiguous and unsettling figure in Baudrillard's worldview. Often summoned by the avant-garde in their assaults on the mundanity and coherence of bourgeois reality, Ubu, with his spiral-inscribed spherical belly, is now for Baudrillard the embodiment of the system itself. Yet the energetic and baroque imagery of this passage suggests that this collapsing of Ubu and plethoric reality should not be reduced to questions of the systemic appropriation of radical, unsettling alternatives. In the face of his persistent claims for the loss of any alternative, here Baudrillard hints at the generative nature of integral reality, the fantastic reality of simulacra. The suggestion is that hyperreality is not so much a substitute for a lost reality as a distension of reality as it is commonly understood, its runaway production in a monstrous spiral of positive feedback: "Reality, having lost its natural predators, is growing like some proliferating species. A little bit like algae or even like the human race in general" (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 27).

If reality is artificial, constructed, then new realities can also be fabricated (as of course they are; every second a new baby or a new oncomouse is made). There is a fierce irony here, but we are not yet done with 'pataphysics (7).



Cheating Baudrillard

Cheating Baudrillard thus might open up his work for the study of contemporary popular technoculture through other theories and ethnographies of play, of games and performance, for example Jon Dovey and Helen W. Kennedy's application of key concepts of the ethnographer Victor Turner's for the study of videogame culture (Dovey & Kennedy 2006). Turner distinguishes between the compulsory and ritual - liminal - aspects of culture, and the more individualized and commodified - liminoid - phenomena. Against the left pessimist nostalgic assertions of lost authentic culture (and I include aspects of Baudrillard's thought in this context), for Turner both liminal and liminoid phenomena are "seedbeds of creativity," but although the liminal (rites of passage, for example) reproduces social structures and the individual's place within them, the liminoid phenomena "are plural, fragmentary and experimental in their character...it is the liminoid which has the power to transform through radical 'manifestoes' and critique" (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006, p. 35). Against the lost authenticities of cultural critique should be placed the always already simulacral nature of play:

Play is artificial, as in mimetic illusions, yet it is characterized as a primal impulse. It is useless and it produces nothing, yet is understood psychologically as a form of practice, trial action for life. It is constructive, as when the smooth play of machine parts keeps up production, and it is destructive, as when too much play in a part can bring the whole to a catastrophic halt (Laxton, 2003).

As Susan Laxton's explication of the surrealist ludic here also suggests, to place the play card on the green baize of progressive cultural theory is not necessarily to play a trump. The ambivalence of play and games has always entailed their machinations in the persistence and reproduction of social orders and hierarchies (from rituals to playgrounds) as well as in their subversion or transformation. The symbolic, the authentic, and play can also be cruel and conservative. It has been argued that the magic circles circumscribing play, separating it from other everyday realities, have been thoroughly effaced in consumer society, as the play principle is commodified and becomes a "form of productivity... productive of enormous wealth," not least in the videogame industry (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006, p. 101). To argue that videogames are a different order of simulation to Baudrillard's hyperreality or integral

reality could well be to repeat the Baudrillard's famous Disneyland delusion: We play in virtual reality to reassure ourselves that the game will end, that we are not living in virtual reality (Baudrillard, 1992). But against this, I would maintain the productive ambivalence of play and simulacra - their generation of new realities and their maintenance, inversion, or destruction of existing ones. This ambivalence serves to counter both the consistently benign vision of videogame culture that characterizes game studies (8), and the left pessimist subsumption of play and games to the instrumentalities of consumer passivity and capitalist accumulation (or a totalizing integral reality). Other thinkers and discussions in recent decades have questioned humanist assumptions that the rise of objects and artifacts is always retrogressive. Haraway (2004) and Latour (1999) in particular offer ethologies of human and nonhuman behaviors and relationships.

Videogame play is a paradigmatic form of contemporary hyperreality. It generates virtual realities at the heart of everyday life and advanced media culture; it is marked by intense intimacies between subject and object, the human and the technological. The code of videogames renders virtual theme parks on the imploded and ubiquitous television screen. Again, it might be read as absolute confirmation of the domination of the human by things, or then again (following Mark Poster's predictions for networked virtual spaces) as a *multiplication* of reality (Poster 1995), perhaps even a ludic 'pataphysics of cyberculture.

Toward an Ethology of Ludic Simulacra

Nicholas Gane questions whether the orders of simulacra might be read in a genealogical rather than precessive fashion, playing agonistic games within the contemporary world:

The consequence of such a reading is that simulation is not a universalizable or totalizing end-point to history... but rather one powerful dimension of a global culture that continues to have many competing logics and principles. (Gane, 2006, p. 283)

This is consistent with the synchronic register of anthropology. We might adapt this first by questioning the general (fatal) assumptions about the simulacral and then by exploring the genealogy and behavior of simulacra within the overall order of ascendant simulation. The trompe l'oeil, stucco angels, computer code, robots, television, theme parks all coexist; they are all still in play. Game studies has begun, perhaps unwittingly, a surrealist ethnography (or hyperrealist ethology) of simulacral culture.

Notes

1. One of Roger Caillois's four main categories of play - simulation - is epitomized by play acting (Caillois, 1962).

2. An attempt at a more effective insertion of theories of play into Bataille's general economy would require careful distinctions between Huizinga's play-as-ritual (from religion to the courtroom) and his observations on the everyday and interstitial manifestations of play and games, perhaps along the lines of Victor Turner's categories of the liminal and liminoid (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006).

3. The nonhuman, artifactual nature of the parts assembled on, and including, the autopsy table is not coincidental. The surrealists were fascinated by early 20th-

century urban technoculture, from cinema (as everyday life and as artistic production: Fernand Leger's film *La Ballet Mecanique*, for instance) to industrial machinery. The artificial world was erotically charged, from photographs of gloves and shop mannequins to Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia's paintings and sculptures of libidinal machines. Leger's experiences as a soldier in the First World War led him to develop an aesthetic of the modern world as thoroughly manufactured and machinic:

The war had thrust me, as a soldier, into the heart of a mechanical atmosphere. Here I discovered the beauty of the fragment. I sensed a new reality in the detail of the machine, in the common object. I tried to find the plastic value of these fragments of our modern life. (quoted in Clifford, 1988, p. 120)

4 . There are direct links between Baudrillard, the Situationists, and Surrealism; notably Henri Lefebvre. Closely linked with the Surrealists through most of the 1920s, and taking from André Breton "the idea of the transformation of everyday life, a fundamental surrealist concept" (Wollen, 1989, p. 77), he gave talks attended by Debord, and Baudrillard worked as his assistant.

5. There are evident resonances with the Situationist International, in terms of an analytical concern with the quotidian and the here and now, a critique of both capitalist and communist models of social life, and in terms of the performative and disruptive nature of their activities and provocations. Bataille went beyond Debord's neo-Marxism, however, taking potlatch to be not only a kind of thought experiment to rattle the society of the spectacle but also an exemplification of a general economy of waste and excess that characterizes all life on earth (Bataille, 1967/1988).

6. Perhaps his American travelogues and collections of aphorisms and thoughts are the closest he comes, a kind of hyperrealist autoethnography (Baudrillard 1990b, 1996b).

7. Other iconic traces of this absurdist-Dadaist-surrealist trope are evident: Duchamp's transformation of a urinal into a readymade artwork, *Fountain*, is for Baudrillard the emblem of 20th-century hyperreality, the product of 'a violent countertransference of all poetic illusion on to the pure reality, the object transferred on to itself, short-circuiting any metaphor' (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 26). Again, like Ubu, the *Fountain* is identified with hyperreality, yet more ambiguously, not in terms of the co-option or appropriation of radical gestures by the system.

8. For a young field of study, the object – videogames – of which is regarded with abhorrence by large sections of the popular media, the academy, and policy makers, this optimism is understandable.

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