

REALER THAN REAL

The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari

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There is a seductive image of contemporary culture circulating today. Our world, Jean Baudrillard tells us, has been launched into hyperspace in a kind of postmodern apocalypse. The airless atmosphere has asphyxiated the referent, leaving us satellites in aimless orbit around an empty center. We breathe an ether of floating images that no longer bear a relation to any reality whatsoever.¹ That, according to Baudrillard, is simulation: the substitution of signs of the real for the real.² In hyperreality, signs no longer represent or refer to an external model. They stand for nothing but themselves, and refer only to other signs. They are to some extent distinguishable, in the way the phonemes of language are, by a combinatorial of minute binary distinctions.³ But postmodernism stutters. In the absence of any gravitational pull to ground them, images accelerate and tend to run together. They become interchangeable. Any term can be substituted for any other: utter indeterminacy.⁴ Faced with this homogeneous surface of syntagmatic slippage, we are left speechless. We can only gape in fascination.⁵ For the secret of the process is beyond our grasp. Meaning has imploded. There is no longer any external model, but there *is* an immanent one. To the syntagmatic surface of slippage there corresponds an invisible paradigmatic dimension that creates those minimally differentiated signs only in order for them to blur together in a pleasureless orgy of exchange and circulation. Hidden in the images is a kind of genetic code responsible for their generation.⁶ Meaning is out of reach and out of sight, but not because it has receded into the distance. It is because the code has been miniaturized. Objects are images, images are signs, signs are information, and information fits on a chip. Everything reduces to a molecular binarism. The generalized digitality of the computerized society.⁷

And so we gape. We cannot be said to be passive exactly, because all polarity, including the active/passive dichotomy, has disappeared. We have no earth to center us, but we ourselves function as a ground--in the electrical sense.⁸ We do not act, but neither do we merely receive. We absorb through our open eyes and mouths. We neutralize the play of energized images in the mass entropy of the silent majority.

It makes for a fun read. But do we really have no other choice than being a naive realist or being a sponge?

Deleuze and Guattari open a third way. Although it is never developed at length in any one place, a theory of simulation can be extracted from their work that can give us a start in analyzing our cultural condition under late capitalism without landing us back with the dinosaurs or launching us into hypercynicism.

A common definition of the simulacrum is a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be said to be a copy. It stands on its own as a copy without a model. Fredric Jameson cites the example of photorealism. The painting is a copy not of reality, but of a photograph, which is already a copy of the original.⁹ Deleuze, in his article "Plato and the Simulacrum," takes a similar definition as his starting point, but emphasizes its inadequacy. For beyond a certain point, the distinction is no longer one of degree. The simulacrum is less a copy twice removed than a phenomenon of a different nature altogether: it undermines the very distinction between copy and model.¹⁰ The terms copy and model bind us to the world of representation and objective (re)production. A copy, no matter how many times removed, authentic or fake, is defined by the presence or absence of internal, essential relations of resemblance to a model. The simulacrum, on the other hand, bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to a putative model. The process of its production, its inner dynamism, is entirely different from that of its supposed model; its resemblance to it is merely a surface effect, an illusion.¹¹ The production and function of a photograph has no relation to that of the object photographed; and the photorealist painting in turn envelops an essential difference. It is that masked difference, not the manifest resemblance, that produces the effect of uncanniness so often associated with the simulacrum. A copy is made in order to stand in for its model. A simulacrum has a different agenda, it enters different circuits. Pop Art is the example Deleuze uses for simulacra that have successfully broken out of the copy mold:¹² the multiplied, stylized images take on a life of their own. The thrust of the process is not to become an equivalent of the "model" but to turn against it and its world in order to open a new space for the simulacrum's own mad proliferation. The simulacrum affirms its own difference. It is not an implosion, but a differentiation; it is an index not of absolute proximity, but of galactic distances.

The resemblance of the simulacrum is a means, not an end. A thing, write Deleuze and Guattari, "in order to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states and to slip into states of forces that serve it as masks. . . . underneath the mask and by means of it, it already invests the terminal forms and the specific higher states whose integrity it will subsequently establish."¹³ Resemblance is a beginning masking the advent of whole new vital dimension. This even applies to mimicry in nature. An insect that mimics a leaf does so not to meld with the vegetable state of its surrounding milieu, but to reenter the higher realm of predatory animal warfare on a new footing. Mimicry, according to Lacan, is camouflage.¹⁴ It

constitutes a war zone. There is a power inherent in the false: the positive power of ruse, the power to gain a strategic advantage by masking one's life force.

Ridley Scott's film Blade Runner shows that the ultimate enemy in this war of ruse is the so-called "model" itself. The off-world replicants return to earth not to blend in with the indigenous population, but to find the secret of their built-in obsolescence so they can escape their bondage and live full lives, and on their own terms. Imitation is an indication of a life force propelling the falsifier toward the unbridled expression of its uniqueness. The dominant replicant makes a statement to the man who made his eyes that can be taken as a general formula for simulation: if only you could see what I have seen with your eyes. If they find out how to undo their pre-programmed deaths, the replicants will not remain on earth as imitation humans. They will either take over or flee back to their own vital dimension of interplanetary space to see things no human being ever has or will. Their imitation is only a way-station en route to an unmasking and the assumption of difference. As Eric Alliez and Michel Feher observe, the best weapon against the simulacrum is not to unmask it as a false copy, but to force it to be a true copy, thereby resubmitting it to representation and the mastery of the model: the corporation that built the rebellious replicants introduces a new version complete with [second-hand](#) human memories.¹⁵

I said earlier that the simulacrum cannot adequately be discussed in terms of copy and model, and now I find myself not only talking about a model again, but claiming that it is in a life and death struggle with the simulacrum. The reality of the model is a question that needs to be dealt with. Baudrillard sidesteps the question of whether simulation replaces a real that did indeed exist, or if simulation is all there has ever been.¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari say yes to both. The alternative is a false one because simulation is a process that produces the real, or, more precisely, more real (a more-than-real) on the basis of the real. "It carries the real beyond its principle to the point where it is effectively produced."¹⁷ Every simulation takes as its point of departure a regularized world comprising apparently stable identities or territories. But these "real" entities are in fact undercover simulacra that have consented to feign being copies. A silent film by Louis Feuillade illustrates the process.

Vendémiaire takes place in the final days of World War I. The plot is simple: members of a well-to-do family from the north of France who cannot fight in the war flee to unoccupied territory in the south to contribute their efforts to the wine harvest. There they meet one of the daughters' husband-to-be and a sinister pair of German prisoners of war who have obtained identity papers by killing two Belgians and try to pass themselves off as Allies until they can get enough money to flee to Spain. The Germans' plan is to steal from the vineyard owners and pin the theft on a gypsy woman who is also working on the harvest. The plan fails when one of the Germans, about to be found out, jumps

into an empty grape storage tank. He is killed by poisonous gases produced by grapes fermenting in the next tank. His corpse is found still clutching the loot, and the gypsie woman is saved. His lonely comrade later betrays himself by getting drunk and speaking in German.

The film is bracketted by grapes. The grape harvest supplies the initial motivation that sets up the situation of the plot, and the grapes themselves rather than any human hero resolve the dilemma. The film is not only bracketted by grapes, it swims in wine as its very element. Every crucial moment is expressed in terms of wine: love is expressed by the scintillating image of the faraway wife dancing in the husband's wine cup; the German menace in its highest expression is one of the escapees stomping on the grape vine; heroism is exemplified by an altruistic trooper who braves death to bring wine back to the trenches to give his comrades a taste of the homeland that will revive their will to victory; when victory does come, it is toasted to with wine, and the movie ends with a sentimental tableau of the vines and a final intertitle saying that from these vineyards a new nation will be reborn. "Simulation," Deleuze and Guattari write, "does not replace reality . . . but rather it appropriates reality in the operation of despotic overcoding, it produces reality on the new full body that replaces the earth. It expresses the appropriation and production of the real by a quasi-cause."¹⁸ The undivided, abstract flow of wine is the glorified body of the nation. It arrogates to itself the power of love, victory and rebirth. It presents itself as first and final cause. But the war was obviously not won with wine. Its causality is an illusion. But it is an effective illusion because it is reinjected into reality and sets to work: it expresses love, and thereby motivates the man to be a good husband and give sons to the nation rising; it expresses patriotism, and thereby spurs the soldiers to victory. That is why it is called a quasi-cause. It abstracts from bodies and things a transcendental plane of ideal identities: a glorious wife, a glorious family, a glorious nation. ("It carries the real beyond its principle...") Then it folds that ideal dimension back down onto bodies and things in order to force them to conform to the distribution of identities it lays out for them. ("...to the point where it is effectively produced.") It creates the entire network of resemblance and representation. Both copy and model are the products of the same fabulatory process, the final goal of which is the recreation of the earth, the creation of a new territory.

The power of the quasi-cause is essentially distributive. It separates the good bodies from the bad, in other words the bodies that agree to resemble the glorious illusion it presents them as a model from those that do not; and it polices for renegade copies operating with a different agenda. The quasi-cause enables the French patriots to unmask the conniving Germans,¹⁹ and it shows up the gypsie for the true, hard-working Frenchwoman that she is despite her apparent otherness.

This account overcomes the polarity between the model and the copy by treating them both as second-order productions, as working parts in the same machine; but it seems to leave intact the dichotomy between the real and the imaginary--until it is realized that the bodies and things that are taken up by this fabulatory process are themselves the result of prior simulation-based distributions operating on other levels with different quasi-causes. Simulation upon simulation. Reality is nothing but a well-tempered harmony of simulation. The world is a complex circuit of interconnected simulations, in which Feuillade's own film takes its place. It was made in 1919, just after the war. Every war, especially one of those dimensions, has a powerful deterritorializing effect: the mobilization of troops and supplies, refugees from other countries, refugees to other countries, families broken, entire regions levelled... The film itself is a simulation meant to insert itself into that disjointed situation to help induce a unifying reterritorialization, to contribute to the rebirth of the nation. Vendémiaire is the first month of the Republican calendar.

So what we are left with is a distinction not primarily between the model and the copy, or the real and the imaginary, but between two modes of simulation. One, exemplified in Feuillade's film, is normative, regularizing, and reproductive. It selects only certain properties of the entities it takes up: hard work, loyalty, good parenting, etc. It creates a network of surface resemblances. They are surface resemblances because at bottom they not resemblances at all but standardized actions: what those entities do when called upon (the gypsie in this respect is as French as the French). What bodies do depends on where they land in a abstract grid of miraculated identities that are in practice only a bundle of normalized and basically reproductive functions. It is not a question of Platonic copies, but of human replicants. Every society creates a quasi-causal system of this kind. In capitalist society the ultimate quasi-cause is capital itself,²⁰ which is described by Marx as a miraculating substance that arrogates all things to itself and presents itself as first and final cause. This mode of simulation goes by the name of "reality."

The other mode of simulation is the one that turns against the entire system of resemblance and replication. It is also distributive, but the distribution it effects is not limitative. Rather than selecting only certain properties, it selects them all, it multiplies potentials: not to be human, but to be human plus. This kind of simulation is called "art." Art also recreates a territory, but a territory that is not really territorial. It is less like the earth with its gravitational grid than an interplanetary space, a deterritorialized territory providing a possibility of movement in all directions. Artists are replicants who have found the secret of their obsolescence.

In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari invent a vocabulary enabling them to discuss both modes of simulation without lapsing into the terminology of representation. The key concept is double becoming. There are always at least two terms swept up in a fabulous process that transforms them both.²¹

David Cronenberg's film, The Fly, presents an instance of this, although a failed one. A scientist named Brundle accidentally splices himself with a fly as he is experimenting with a machine that can dematerialize objects and transport them instantly to any chosen location, in defiance of gravity and Newtonian physics generally. When the accident occurs, Brundle does not so much become fly, nor the fly human. Rather, certain properties or potentials of both combine in a new and monstrous amalgamation: a Brundle-Fly that can walk on walls and think and speak well enough to describe itself as the world's first "insect politician." It tries to purify itself of the fly in it by repeating the process backwards, but only succeeds in combining with the machinery itself. In limitative or negative becoming as portrayed in Vendémiaire, one of the terms is an abstract identity and the body in question must curtail its potentials in order to fit into the grid, or at least appear to. In nonlimitative or positive becoming, as in The Fly, both terms are on the same level: rather than looking perpendicularly up or down, one moves sideways toward another position on the grid for which one was not destined, toward an animal, a machine, a person of a different sex or age or race, an insect, a plant. The fabulatory process, though as abstract as subatomic physics, is immanent to the world of the things it affects, and is as real as a quark.²² The transporting machine is on the same plane as the terms it combines. Its operating principle dips into that world's quantum level, into its pool of virtuality, to create an as yet unseen amalgamation of potentials. It produces a new body or territory from which there is no turning back. The only choice is to keep on becoming in an endless relay from one term to the next until the process either makes a breakthrough or exhausts its potential, spends its fuel, and the fabulous animal dies. Likening this to interplanetary space can be misleading: there is nothing farther from free-floating weightlessness than this. There is no such thing as total indetermination. Every body has its own propulsion, its own life force, its own set of potentials defining how far it can go. And it moves in a world filled with the obstacles thrown down by sedimentations of preexisting simulations of the "real" persuasion. There is no generalized indetermination, but there are localized points of undecidability where man meets fly. The goal is to reach into one's world's quantum level at such a point and, through the strategic mimicry of double becoming, combine as many potentials as possible. Deleuze and Guattari, of course, are not suggesting that people can or should "objectively" become insects. It is a question of extracting and combining potentials, which they define as abstract relations of movement and rest, abilities to affect and be affected: abstract yet real. The idea is to build our own transporting machine and use it to get a relay going and to keep it going, creating ever greater and more powerful amalgamations and spreading them like a contagion until they infect every identity across the land and the point is reached where a now all-invasive positive simulation can turn back against the grid of resemblance and replication and overturn it for a new earth. Deleuze and Guattari insist on the collective nature of this process of becoming, even when it is seemingly embodied in a solitary artist. Revolutionary or "minor"²³ artists marshal all of the powers of the false their community has to offer.

They create a working simulation that may then reinject itself into society like Feuille's wine assemblage, but to very different, though perhaps equally intoxicating, effect.

Returning to The Fly, the former scientist's only hope for a breakthrough is to convince his former girlfriend to have a child by him and the fly. His hope, and her fear, is that he will infect the human race with Brundle-Flies, and a new race with superhuman strength will rise up to replace the old. The overman as superfly.²⁴ Reproduction, and the forging of a new ethnic identity, are aspects of this process of simulation, but they are not the goal. The goal is life, a world in which the New Brundle can live without hiding and repressing his powers. That possibility is successfully squelched by the powers that be. Brundle-Fly is deprived of an escape route. The original formula, as inscribed in the bodies of Brundle and the fly, was apparently flawed. They did the best they could do, but only reached obsolescence.

How does all of this apply to our present cultural condition? According to Deleuze, the point at which simulacrum began to unmask itself was reached in painting with the advent of Pop Art. In film, it was Italian neo-Realism and the French New Wave.²⁵ Perhaps we are now reaching that point in popular culture as a whole. Advanced capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is reaching a new transnational level that necessitates a dissolution of old identities and territorialities and the unleashing of objects, images and information having far more mobility and combinatory potential than ever before.²⁶ As always, this deterritorialization is effected only in order to make possible a reterritorialization on an even grander and more glorious land of worldwide capital reborn. But in the meantime, a breach has opened. The challenge is to assume this new world of simulation and take it one step farther, to the point of no return, to raise it to a positive simulation of the highest degree by marshaling all our powers of the false toward shattering the grid of representation once and for all.

This cannot be done by whining. The work of Baudrillard is one long lament. Both linear and dialectical causality no longer function, therefore everything is indetermination. The center of meaning is empty, therefore we are satellites in lost orbit. We can no longer act like legislator-subjects or be passive like slaves, therefore we are sponges. Images are no longer anchored by representation, therefore they float weightless in hyperspace. Words are no longer univocal, therefore signifiers slip chaotically over each other. A circuit has been created between the real and the imaginary, therefore reality has imploded into the undecidable proximity of hyperreality. All of these statements make sense only if it is assumed that the only conceivable alternative to representative order is absolute indetermination, whereas indetermination as he speaks of it is in fact only the flipside of order, as necessary to it as the fake copy is to the model, and every bit as much a part of its system. Baudrillard's framework can only be the result of a nostalgia for

the old reality so intense that it has diffomed his vision of everything outside of it. He cannot clearly see that all the things he says have crumbled were simulacra all along: simulacra produced by analyzable procedures of simulation that were as real as real, or actually realer than real, because they carried the real back to its principle of production and in so doing prepared their own rebirth in a new regime of simulation. He cannot see becoming, of either variety. He cannot see that the simulacrum envelops a proliferating play of differences and galactic distances. What Deleuze and Guattari offer, particularly in A Thousand Plateaus, is a logic capable of grasping Baudrillard's failing world of representation as an effective illusion the demise of which opens a glimmer of possibility. Against cynicism, a thin but fabulous hope--of ourselves becoming realer than real in a monstrous contagion of our own making.

NOTES

1. Jean Baudrillard, Simulations, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11.
2. Ibid., p. 4.
3. Ibid., pp. 145-46.
4. Jean Baudrillard, In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 56.
5. Ibid., pp. 35-37.
6. Baudrillard, Simulations, pp. 55-58, 103-115.
7. Ibid., pp. 56-57, 134-35.
8. Baudrillard, In the Shadow, pp. 1-2.
9. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism," New Left Review, no. 146 (July-August 1984). p. 75.
10. Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," October, no. 27 (winter 1983), pp. 52-53.

11. Ibid., 48-49.

12. Ibid., p. 56.

13. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 91.

14. Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 99. Cited by Eric Alliez and Michel Feher, "Notes on the Sophisticated City," Zone, no. 1/2 (1986), p. 55 n.1.

15. Alliez and Feher, p. 54.

16. For example, In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, pp. 70- 83.

17. Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. 87.

18. Ibid., p. 210.

19. Parenthetically, it is no accident that there are two German escapees: the simulacrum is a multiplicity that poses a threat to identity and is travelling a line of flight that must be blocked at all costs. Here, the multiplicity is reduced to a doubling because under the Oedipal procedures of capitalism the nonidentity within identity takes the form of a splitting of the subject into a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement: one of the Germans is obliged to remain mute. On the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement, see Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. 265 and Mille Plateaux (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 162 (English translation forthcoming under the title A Thousand Plateaus, tr. Brian Massumi [University of Minnesota Press, 1987]).

20. Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. 227.

21. Deleuze and Guattari, Mille Plateaux, p. 360 and chapter 10 generally ("Devenir-intense...").

22. On the "Abstract-Real," see Mille Plateaux, pp. 177, 181-82. "Real" in this context has a different meaning from the definition given above: here, it refers to the "intensive" realm of the virtual which "subsists" in reality understood as an extensive system of actualized simulations. On the concept of virtuality, see in particular Deleuze, Le Bergonisme (Paris: P.U.F, 1968), pp. 26, 55-56, 96-105.

23. On "minor" art, see Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16-27, and Deleuze, "Un manifeste de moins," in Carmelo Bene and Gilles Deleuze, Superpositions (Paris: Minuit, 1979), pp. 87-131.

24. The allusion to Nietzsche is not gratuitous. For Deleuze, the "power of the false" is another name for the will to power (Cinéma 2: L'image-temps. Paris: Minuit, 1985. P. 172), and what I have been calling positive simulation is described by Deleuze and Guattari as the eternal return (Anti-Oedipus, pp. 330-31).

25. Gilles Deleuze, Cinéma 2: L'image-temps, pp. 7-22.

26. Deleuze and Guattari, Mille Plateaux, chapter 13, "Appareil de capture."