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VIRTUAL WORLDS:
Simulation, Suppletion,
Seduction and Simulacra

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Virtual worlds: simulation, suppletion, seduction, and simulacra

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Abstract: *As 'virtual reality' technologies promise to abolish the friction of space-time, we contemplate in this paper the poverty of considering the virtual as either a 'false approximation' of the real or a 'hyperrealization' of the real. Such badly-analyzed conceptions of the virtual disclose badly-analyzed conceptions of the real. For the real is always already virtual; whilst 'virtual reality' is anything but virtual—being dedicated (impossibly) to the total realization of the world. The paper resolves these badly-analyzed conceptions of space-time through a deconstruction of four configurations of virtual reality—simulation, suppletion, seduction and simulacra.*

Virtual worlds: simulation, suppletion, seduction, and simulacra

Plato blushes for shame (Nietzsche, 1968: 41)

Introduction

If we let slip a yawn at the mere mention of virtual reality, cyberspace, and embodied virtuality, or roll our eyes at the naming of telepresence, teletopia, and electronic cloning, it is because something has been missed in the headlong rush to exit the common-or-garden experience of everyday life for the apparent wonderment of the latest technologies. According to Robins (1991: 64), the ‘new technologies promise ... nothing less than the ‘re-enchantment’ of our mundane existence’, acting as a timely antidote to the long-standing disenchantment and alienation wrought on humanity by machines. More often than not, however, what accompanies discourses on both these latest technologies and the new articulations of space-time that they imply—whether utopian, dystopian, or measured—is an impoverished understanding of the real and the virtual; that is to say, an impoverished understanding of space-time. What is striking about this impoverishment is that it infiltrates both the virtual *and* the real, to the point where the virtual is invariably collapsed into a badly-analyzed version of the real—wherein the real and the virtual are no longer distinguishable according to *qualities* (powers and affects), but only according to *quantities* (more or less). This ‘collapse’ in the configuration of space-time typically takes one of two paths: the virtual as a ‘false approximation’ of the real (Platonism); and the virtual as a ‘hyperrealization’ of the real (inverted Platonism). In the following two sections of the paper we consider in detail this bifid collapse of the virtual into the real, before

turning to consider more directly the implications for the real of 'virtual reality' technologies—in terms of the 'virtual illusion'—and, in the final section, the virtual character of the real itself.

'Virtual reality' 1: Simulation. Or, the 'false approximation' of the real

In commonsensical terms, *the virtual is to the real as the copy is to the original*. Such a conceptualization is dominated by a correspondence theory of re-presentation, in which the (virtual) image/imaginary is subordinated to the original self-identity of the real. According to Robins (1991: 61; citing Stone, 1990: 32), 'The terms 'virtual' and 'artificial' reality 'refer to the computer generation of realistic three-dimensional visual worlds in which an appropriately equipped human operator can explore and interact with graphical (virtual) objects in much the same way as one might in the real world''. Thus, the virtual can never be anything more than a pale imitation of the real; a mere simulation. Hence, 'Telepresence is the extent to which one feels present in the mediated environment' (Steuer, 1992: 76). Yet this subordination of the virtual to the real *does not depend on ontological referentiality*; it does not require the virtual to represent an actually existing fragment of reality.¹ Rather, it rests upon a strict separation of the real and the virtual, such that there is an immutability of essential forms. For whilst there can be a localized *transfer* of affects between them (as in the visions and spells of diabolism and witchcraft); there can be no *becoming-other* (as in the transmutations of alchemy and the transmogrifications of lycanthropy) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Doel, 1996).

As an analog of the real, the virtual necessarily degrades it. Hence so much of the agitation concerning the emergence of virtual communities, virtual democracies, virtual companies, virtual wars, virtual sex... Hence also the increasing fascination and queasiness with regard to apparent boundary disputes between the real and the virtual. These concerns are underwritten by an inkling that 'what is significant' in 'the virtual microworld' 'is that the user is removed from the fullness of 'real' human existence' (Robins, 1991: 66). Or as Hayles (1993: 91) pleads in her parting shot on *Virtual bodies and flickering signifiers*: 'As we rush to explore the new vistas that cyberspace has made available for colonization, let us also remember the fragility of a material world that cannot be replaced'.² Almost inexorably, then, the badly-analyzed concept of 'false approximation' leads to an onto-theological cult of authenticity, in which the real is figured as a mundane, fragile and passive victim of a virtual seduction.³ Or rather: of a virtual *s(ed)uction*; for 'the fantasy is structured round the *evacuation* of the real world. ... The real world that was once beyond is now effaced: there is no need to negotiate that messy and intractable reality' (Robins, 1991: 65-6, emphasis added). Little wonder, then, that virtuality in the discourses of false approximation should be so easily conflated with parasitism and vampirism.

Evidently, the privilege granted to the real vis-à-vis the virtual as a 'false approximation' is not so much temporal as *ontological*. But as we shall see, this ontology will have always already been witness—in the spectral transpearance of a veritable *hauntology* (Derrida, 1994)—to a ghostly, ghastly revenge.⁴ Suffice it to note for now that there is nothing new in this prioritization of the so-called original over *its* copy. As Abrioux (1995: 61) stresses, 'Western culture remains largely under

the cruelly watchful eye of its Platonic superego'. Accordingly, the virtual—like all images, concepts and ideas—must be kept in its place; it must be anchored in and be subservient to that which it re-presents and/or dis-places. The real must not be eclipsed by *its* shadows. Thus, whilst the latest image technologies are frequently defined as 'post-photographic'—a claim that betrays a very poor understanding of photography—in that they carry the inscription of light beyond the mere representation of the visible spectrum into pure simulacra; to the point where the digital manipulation of an anterior reality passes over into a self-sufficient generation of digital images;⁵ they are nevertheless characterized in Platonic terms. For example, Mitchell (1992: 225) closes his study of *visual truth in the post-photographic era* with a reassurance, a warning, and a return: 'For a century and a half photographic evidence seemed unassailably probative', he recalls. But today, 'we must face once again the ineradicable fragility of our ontological distinctions between the imaginary and the real, and the tragic elusiveness of the Cartesian dream. We have indeed learned to fix shadows, but not to secure their meanings or to stabilize their truth values; they still flicker on the wall of Plato's cave'.

Now, not only do post-photographic, computer-generated 'images' embrace a 'Platonic ideal', as Youngblood (1989: 15) puts it—'They refer to nothing outside themselves except the pure, 'ideal' laws of nature they embody'—but also the computer *itself* aspires to becoming a 'universal machine', inasmuch as it can simulate, encompass, and become every other medium. In such a universal machine, not only would the medium become the message, but the medium would also become a purely transparent screen. 'The 'virtual reality effect' is the denial of the role of

signs (bits, pixels, and binary codes) in the production of what the user experiences as unmediated presence. ... As in the *tromp l'oeil* of illusionist art, the medium must become transparent for the represented world to become real. ... 'with a VR system you don't see the computer any more—it's gone. All that's there is you.' (Ryan, 1994: §8; embedded quotation from Lanier and Biocca, 1992: 166). That is to say, the universal machine would no longer be modelled on the virtual depth of a mirror (re-flection), since it would be instantaneously self-present, re-transmitting itself without *différance* or degradation (cloning, ghosting). Indeed, the very term 'cyberspace', with its etymological link through 'cyber' to the Greek *kybernan* (meaning to control or steer), displays a certain fixation on the construction of a 'control-space' that would enable one to exorcise, or at least contain, the ghosting of presence that would accompany such a universal machine; it betrays a Platonic yearning to dominate the image in the name of a community of users. Furthermore, one should not overlook the fact that 'The frequent use of the city as a model for cyberspace suggests that discipline—as a set of power relations between subjects, space and visibility—is transferred, as a 'matrix of regulations', from the state to cyberspace' (Bradley, 1995: 14. See also Crary and Kwinter, 1992; Alliez and Feher, 1989). Nor should one overlook the various social apparatuses that regulate the production, mercantilization and dissemination of data (Lyotard, 1984; Poster, 1990, 1995). But suffice it to say that these property and control relations no longer hold—if indeed they ever did (Kearney, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). For the real never holds sway over ~~its~~ images and virtual realities. 'Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum' (Baudrillard, 1994a: 6). Hence,

the virtual is not cast—thrown off, shaped, projected, conjured—by the real. For as we shall see, it comes forth from an altogether different dimension.

‘Virtual reality’ 2: Suppletion. Or, motionless tripping in hyperspace

By contrast with characterizations of the virtual as a false approximation of the real, versions (mis)taking the virtual as a hyper-realization work through an *inverted* Platonism. This inversion effectively repeats the structure of Platonism, falling short of any *deconstruction*, which would *pervert* it—‘in the literal sense of ‘turning away from’’ (Massumi, 1992: 145), or of twisting it to destruction (See Patton, 1994; Wigley, 1993). In this case, *the virtual is to the real as the perfect is to the imperfect*. Here the virtual exudes wonderment by ‘correcting’ defects in the real; by surpassing the constraints and limitations of the real—particularly the drag of (real) space-time. In this way, the virtual no longer degrades the fullness of some original position (as in the first case); rather, it *adds* to it, completing and supplementing it.⁶ The real always already has room for the supplement within itself. Thus, the real originally *lacks* what the virtual will have come to furnish. *Reality does not suffice*. Baudrillard (1995a: 106) refers to this repletion-to-come as the ‘virtual realization of the world’. The *originary* position of such a full realization of the real—rather than the *original* position of an imperfect reality—is not an *ex nihilo* gift of nature; it must be produced. Hence the fact that ontological privilege and priority is accorded to the *full* supplement, insofar as it will have come to displace the *lack* in the original. ‘Today’, writes Baudrillard (1994a, 1), ‘abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. ... The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is ... the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—that

engenders the territory ... today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map'. Forget the onto-theological quest for authentic re-presentation. For there are no Second Comings in this or any other world. But there is a *duty* in the forced realization of the world. Consider, for example, the hyperbole surrounding genetic engineering and the Human Genome Project. Yet, once again, there is nothing new in rendering the real as a flawed version of some ideal. Nor is there anything new in discerning something in the real which nevertheless gives (assured?) access to this ideal. And whether this rendition is given an idealist or materialist slant, the virtual is always framed in terms of a *realization*. It realizes the latent potential of the world; hence its *hyperreality* effects. (Hence also its exhaustion and ex-termination of the real.) Thus, 'when we finally come to be immersed in this 'cyberspace' we should be able to realize our true and full potential' (Robins, 1991: 59).

One cannot, however, escape the anthropocentrism of this version of the relationship between the real and the virtual, which evidently requires the presence of a subject to *embody* the difference (Braidotti, 1994; Grosz, 1990, 1994). For the wonderment of the virtual is not just confined to its *immersive* reality-effects (simulations and simulacra); it extends to its *interactivity*: 'Whereas immersion may be a response to a basically static representation, interactivity requires a dynamic simulation', and 'Virtual reality ... reconciles immersion and interactivity through the mediation of the body' (Ryan, 1994: §25 and §39). In the virtual realization of the world, the subject acts as a pivot between the flaws of the real (especially the drag of space-time) and the perfection of the virtual (a universal telepresence—from which we can withdraw); and technology increasingly allows the real (that is to say, flawed) user to function in the

virtual (that is to say, perfected) register. For example, prosthetic virtual reality body-suits and head-sets do not simply help realize the latent potential of the body by sublating the all-too-real limitations of the user's space-time embedment; they simultaneously *produce* this embedment/embodiment *as a limitation and a flaw*. Paradoxically, virtual reality technologies dis-able the body in order to sublimate the flaws it retroactively generates (Virilio, 1992).⁷ To that extent, they function rather like the criminal justice system: both process heterogeneous bodies into recognizable and manageable forms. Thus, there can be no flaw without perfection, no original repletion without originary suppletion, and therefore no reality without virtuality.

In contrast to the discourses of false approximation, therefore, there is no radical disjunction of immutable and inalienable forms between the real and the virtual, between the real and the hyperreal. And with this recognition, Wark (1994: vii) draws a distinction not between the real and the virtual—'virtual geography is no more or less 'real'', he insists; 'It is a different kind of perception, of things not bounded by rules of proximity, of 'being there''—but between virtual *reality* and virtual *geography*: 'If virtual reality is about technologies which increase the 'bandwidth' of our sensory experience ... then virtual geography is the dialectically opposite pole of the process. It is about the expanded terrain from which experience may be instantly draw'. Or again: "'real time' is not ... to be contrasted with 'recorded time', but rather with present time alone', argues Virilio (1992: 79); 'teletechnologies of 'real time'. ... kill present time by isolating it from its here and now, to the benefit of a commutative elsewhere which is no longer that of ... our 'concrete presence' in the world but of a discontinuous 'remote presence''. At this point we find ourselves in an all-too-

familiar situation: the real and the virtual are no longer distinguishable according to *qualities* (powers and affects), but only according to *quantities* (more or less). Henceforth, the difference between them will be *measured* in terms of the range and the territory that they can command, and it will be *exposed* in terms of instantaneity and (tele)presence: 'the notion of exposure supplants ... that of succession in the measurement of present duration and that of extension in the area of immediate expanse' (Virilio, 1992: 81. See also Virilio, 1994; 1995). The virtual, then, is more, not less, (real) than the real.

So much for the false approximation and hyperrealization of the world. Without further ado, let us simply wrap things up by noting how this twofold collapse of space-time turns out to entail a mutual and reversible predication: no virtuality without reality *and* no reality without virtuality. In short: no (tele)presence without (tele)presence. Yet in this reversible becoming-real of the virtual and becoming-virtual of the real—a double-take on the system's degree of realization—what remains of their respective specificity? (Almost) nothing. For what is hinted at in this bifid collapse of space-time is a badly-analyzed composite: (tele)presence. It is as if the real were collapsed into a succession of integral points, such that each 'point' in real space-time can be occupied by only one Thing *and* that these points are mediated through an invariable contiguity. Hence the striated drag of real space-time. Likewise, it is as if the virtual were collapsed into an array of differential points, such that each 'point' in virtual space-time can be occupied by an infinite number of Things *and* that these points are immediated through a supple discontinuity. Hence the absolute speed of virtual space-time. Such a collapse gives the real its physical security and the

virtual its ghostly telepathy. Henceforth, the real will connote the drag of matter, whilst the virtual will connote the flight of spirit: arduous voyages *versus* motionless trips; ontological fixity *versus* hauntological drift; real bodies *versus* virtual ghosts (Derrida, 1994). But there are problems with this characterization of the real and the virtual in terms of integral and differential instants (presence *versus* telepresence).

‘Virtual reality’ 3: Seduction. Or, the virtual illusion

‘What is the idea of the Virtual?’ asks Baudrillard (1995a: 101): ‘the unconditional realization of the world’. Virtual reality would amount to exhausting all of the world’s possibilities through the execution of ‘the code *for the automatic disappearance of the world*’ (*ibid.*: 102). The ideal of the virtual, therefore, amounts to living in the (tele)presence of a full realization of the world’s possibilities. The accomplishment of the virtual in real space-time would entail forcing the world to confront the limits of its possibilities. This is the specificity of the technological version of the virtual. And it is with regard to such a situation that the real is increasingly being seen as a (real) drag. This drag should be taken literally: it is the friction, extension, and duration of space-time. Conversely, the world of cyberspace, telepresence and virtual reality would be ‘an ideal world, a world beyond gravity and friction’ (Robins, 1991: 60). They would actualize, in the here and now, an expenditureless superconductivity that knows no bounds: ‘at once *NowHere*, simultaneously nowhere and everywhere’ (Frieland and Boden, 1994: 45). Such is the dream of a literal freedom from the drag of space-time

‘Fortunately’, says Baudrillard (1995a: 106), ‘all this is impossible. ... There is no place for both the world and for its double’. Accordingly, it must be recognized that virtual reality technologies are anything but virtual. They have hijacked the idea of the virtual, insofar as they are dedicated to the *unlimited realization* of the world (which is to say, correlatively, to the *total annihilation of illusion*; to radical *disillusion*). For the real is always already predicated in terms of its opposition to the illusory (which it renders as subordinate; as a *flawed version* of itself—which is thereby amenable to sublation by the real); whereas the illusory rests on the *non-opposition* of the real and the illusion; on their reversibility and indiscernibility; and on their duality/duelity and irreconcilable antagonism.⁸

Insofar as ‘virtual reality’ is dedicated to the forced realization of the world—pitched against the world as illusion—it belongs to modernity. Yet those technologies associated with the accomplishment of the full realization of the world’s possibilities are also implicated in a more fundamental shift. This situation, suggests Baudrillard (1995b: 94), ‘is perhaps the only case in which we can take the term ‘postmodern’ seriously’—inasmuch as the modern world (the world ‘of terms and the opposition of terms’ (*ibid.*: 93)) has reached its end. Or, more precisely, it has already passed *beyond* its end (Baudrillard, 1994b; Clarke and Doel, 1994). Baudrillard (1995a: 101) speaks of ex-termination,⁹ and the final (re)solution¹⁰ implied by this ideal of hyperrealization and radical disillusion. For this passing beyond the end itself indicates a certain casting adrift from the irreversibility of the reality principle in its pure form—not at all in the sense of a return to the reversibility and reciprocity of *symbolic exchange* (Baudrillard, 1993), which would be the pure form of reversibility

characterizing the world as illusion; but in the form of a general *indeterminacy* characteristic of a world with no terms at all. We already inhabit a world where such indeterminacy holds sway: 'we are in the fractal, the molecular, the plural, the random, the chaotic' (Baudrillard, 1995b: 93). At a certain point, therefore, the level of reality effects cast off by the virtual illusion attained a critical mass, or else the process of realization reached a certain limit, which we have since passed beyond: 'And having to make sense of a world where the end is not ahead of us but behind us and already realized, changes everything' (Baudrillard, 1995b: 95).

'Virtual reality' 4: Simulacra. Or, real virtu(al re)ality

The simulacrum, 'having been banished ontologically to the margins' (Genosko, 1994: 28), continues to haunt Western culture's Platonic superego. 'The platonic dialectic commands that one distinguish between the model and its copies and, among them, the correctly copied from the flawed' write Alliez and Feher (1989: 55). And where the good copy (*eikon*) is endowed with *resemblance* (inasmuch as it *belongs to* the ideal or model; that is, it *participates in* the Idea of the thing), the bad copy (*phantasma*) is marked by a mere *semblance* (which only *appears*—with bad will—as a likeness, having no claim to filiation with the ideal). Furthermore, the simulacrum (*eidōlon*) is a bad copy that produces 'an effect of *resemblance*' (Deleuze, 1983: 49). And in so doing the simulacrum establishes itself as the corner-stone that would bring down the entire Platonic edifice. For it is a category with neither fixed identity nor essential form, operating within 'a dimension in which objects may be said to be simultaneously both hotter and colder, bigger and smaller, younger and older' (Bogue,

1989: 56). This is not, as Deleuze's (1993: 39) remarks on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* make clear, a simultaneity of being(s), but of becoming:

When I say 'Alice becomes larger,' I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. ... It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa.

The logic of becoming heralded by the category of the simulacrum discloses a virtual world that eludes the present—a world characterized not by the full completion of presence usually associated with the real, but by a ghostly presence; a haunting (Derrida, 1994). But let us be clear: this is a world where the virtual is disclosed as being more, not less, than the real (Deleuze, 1991: 17–21). Thus, the *hyperreality* of the virtual is not one of full realization or actualization; it is one through which the Event eludes the present and evades every actual state of affairs: to grow, to cut, to live, to die. The virtual is the becoming of the Event: *this* is what happens. There is no reality effect without virtuality, no being without becoming, and no living presence without a ghostly repetition.

Accordingly, to the subject who would wish to embody the difference between the drag of real space-time on the one hand, and the absolute speed of a virtual false approximation and/or hyperrealization of the world on the other, one should recall that a ghostly or virtual presence animates this subject—inasmuch as 'There is no subject without, somewhere, *aphanisis* of the subject' (Lacan, cited in Borch-Jacobsen, 1994: 80). This '*aphanisis* of the subject' refers to the perpetual process of becoming-only-to-fade that characterizes subjectivity—in terms irreducible to the completed self-

presence of the Cartesian *Cogito* (Lacan, 1979: 207). For the subject is always marked by a wholly *imaginary* promise of complete self-presence—which issues from the sense of lack stemming from an entirely mythical originary completeness. This sense of lack results from the subject being afforded a position by the Other (the Symbolic) that cannot contain it; that it necessarily exceeds. And, moreover, it is a *constitutive* condition of subjectivity that it incurs this cost of division, insofar as subjectivity is *necessarily* split between the conscious of intended meaning and the unmotivated Other of the (collective) unconscious.¹¹ The fact that the Other is also figured by lack—in accordance with the patriarchal Law structuring the Symbolic order, whereby Oedipalization operates in terms of the *Name-of-the-Father* (that is, in terms of a *signifier* standing in for an *absent* Father and therefore a *lack*)—entails that the subject's desire (which amounts to the desire for complete self-presence) is necessarily insatiable; that the subject can never attain a full self-presence, except in the virtual dimension of a *retroactive* mo(ve)ment.¹² To the extent that such a self-presence marks out a disadjusted temporality—inasmuch as it is discontinuous with the present—the subject is *itself untimely*: it is, in short, a virtual, *ghostly* presence. As Lacan (1977: 304) remarks, as a subject, I am always already 'the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming'. Thus, there is no complete, authentic identity for the subject *as such*.

In line with this portrayal of a world always already subject to virtuality, it should be recognized that the virtual is most definitely not *separable from* the real, either as a false approximation (mere simulation), or else as a forced realization (sublation of real limitations; actualization of latent potential). The real is always already virtual; that is

to say, disadjusted and untimely. *Reality evades actuality*. Hence, the wondrous powers and affects to annihilate the drag of (real) space-time promised by cyberspace and virtual reality will never have taken place. And this insistence hangs not on so many new-fangled technologies—which pin the subject between a full/flawed reality and a degraded/perfected virtuality—but on the ghosting of presence itself. Thus, even before the embodied subject dons a body-suit or helmet, casts itself into the Internet, or recodes its genetic makeup, it is always already caught up in the disadjusted play of doubles. The subject does not so much exist as transpear through the suturing of this disadjustment. Hereinafter, the common-or-garden technologies of virtual reality have nothing to do with (real) virtuality, insofar as everyday life is itself always already a virtual reality.

Conclusion

The monks of Tibet are devoting themselves to the fastidious work of transcribing the 99 billion names of God, after which the world will be accomplished, and it will be the end. Exhausted by this everlasting spelling of the names of God, they call IBM people, computer experts who fulfil the work in a few months. A perfect allegory of the achievement of the world in real time by the operation of the virtual. Unfortunately this is also the end of the world in real time. For with this virtual countdown of the names of God the great promise of the end was realized, and the technicians of IBM, who left the site after work (and didn't believe of course in the prophesy) saw the stars in the sky fading and vanishing one by one.

(Baudrillard, 1995: 101–102)

The unlimited realization and the virtual programming of the world would amount to the *perfect crime* (Baudrillard, 1995c): not only would it yield a perfect world—from which we would be expunged—it would annihilate all traces of its production. The 'absolute real' (Baudrillard, 1995b: 95), which amounts to the technological

dream of virtual reality, would leave no room at all for the dangerous imperfection of humanity. For the conflation of the virtual and the real implied by technological dreams of virtual reality would amount to a state of *aphasia*—a condition in which the subject is coextensive with a state of affairs, tied to actuality, and paralyzed by (tele)presence: a subject *possessed* (Grosz, 1994). Environmental determinism *par excellence*; technological determinism *par excellence*. Everything would have been accomplished in real space-time. Utopia achieved: the final (re)solution of the world. And so, while ‘the ‘original’ crime is never perfect, and always leaves traces—we as living and mortal beings are a living trace of this criminal imperfection—the future extermination, which would be the result [of] the absolute determination of the world and all its elements, would leave no traces at all’ (Baudrillard, 1995a: 106). And yet, it would be undecidable whether or not this perfect crime would have automatically generated the *perfect alibi*. Insofar as an alibi is ‘a being-elsewhere’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 38), the very condition of possibility of such an alibi would have been short-circuited by the abolition of the drag of space-time. Hence, the perfect crime always already amounts to the perfect conspiracy. There is no redress. But, fortunately, such a world is impossible. There are always traces. And yet we still ‘dream of perfect computers’, notes Baudrillard (1995a: 102), ‘But ... we don’t allow them to have their own will. ... No liberty, no will, no desire, no sexuality. We want them complex, creative, interactive, but without spirit’. Nevertheless, ‘It seems that they have an evil genius for dysfunctions ... which save them, and us in the same way, from perfection and from reaching the end of their possibilities’ (Baudrillard, 1995a: 102–3). For if the absolute real of virtual reality were finally accomplished, we would be obliged to step out of the world. We would never have been there.

Notes

¹ In virtual reality 'The question isn't whether the created world is as real as the physical world, but whether the created world is real enough for you to suspend your disbelief' (Pimentel and Texeira, 1993: 15).

² Bradley (1995: 10) distinguishes two discourses on cyberspace. 'The first portrays cyberspace as a new frontier, an empty and/or formless space 'discovered' in the interstices of information and communication technologies: a new frontier which awaits socialization. The second raises cyberspace to the status of a mission to be carried out according to the 'inevitability' of human, social and technological development'.

³ One should not overlook the importance of how the discourses of 'false approximation' gender the real and the virtual (Hollinger, 1995).

⁴ 'If ... tangible certainty and solidity corresponds to ontology, then ... how to describe what literally undermines it and shakes our belief?' asks Jameson (1995: 86). 'Derrida's mocking answer—hauntology—is a ghostly echo if there ever was one, ... which promises nothing tangible in return; on which you cannot build; which cannot even be counted on to materialize when you want it to. ... all it says ... is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity'.

⁵ Strictly speaking, such digital generation does not produce an 'image', since it no longer reflects anything. And insofar as the digital product is without original, archetype or prototype, it amounts to a simulacrum rather than a simulation.

⁶ The difference between these two versions of suppletion—progressive degradation of an original (negative evaluation); perfectible rendering (positive evaluation)—is replayed in the difference between analog and digital reproduction (Mitchell, 1992. See also Deleuze, 1992).

⁷ Virtual reality technologies succinctly encapsulate this paradoxical reworking of the body: 'Far from being left behind', notes Richards (1995: 35), 'the flesh forms the essential site of VR'. The sensors and effectors that are attached to the user's flesh not only enable 'an idealized, bodiless 'experience'', they also place the body in a state of sensory-deprivation with respect to its immediate environment. Moreover, this interface between machinic sensors and effectors on the one hand, and bodily

receptors and actions on the other, attests to the fact that 'no matter how imperceptible it becomes. ... It is an intimate layer always watching' (*ibid.*: 36).

⁸ Similarly, whilst good is predicated on *its* opposition to evil, the principle of evil amounts to the *non-opposition* of good and evil, on the insistence of a duel between indiscernible and reversible terms. (Accordingly, evil is more, not less than good; the illusory more, not less than the real.)

⁹ 'Ex-terminus: what has passed beyond the end, so to speak' (Baudrillard, 1995b: 95).

¹⁰ Resolve derives from the Latin *re-solvere*: to re-release; to unfasten again.

¹¹ The unconscious is described by Lacan (1979: 20) as being 'structured like a language'.

¹² The interminable yet temporary *suturing*—stitching or joining—of the Imaginary register (characterized by mythical completion) and the Symbolic register (marked by lack) is the mechanism whereby the lack in the subject and its Other is, perpetually differed and deferred through dissimulation and dissemination.

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