

Forgive Foucault, Forget Baudrillard:

On the Other Side of Power,

Toward the Ecstasy of Seduction

Though especially meaningful, it might be that the title of Jean Baudrillard's 1977 book, *Forget Foucault*, is more polemical than the argument it contains. Despite availing himself of Michel Foucault's mode of analysis in order to make plain the flaws of the thinker's argument, Baudrillard's own argument is Foucauldian in essence, laying bare the obscured strings behind the veil of reality. By using Foucault's analysis of sexuality, Baudrillard attempts to demonstrate that the mechanisms that have instituted the modern discourse on sexuality function similarly with respect to the discourse of power, which Foucault's methodology exhausts as well. For Baudrillard, power, much like sexuality, has no computable basis in the real world; and as a result, Foucault's postulations through a power-based discourse are essentially inconsequential, because they are steeped inside a simulacrum of something that has ceased to exist. Be that as it may, though his sentiments concerning Foucault's alleged misconception of power help illuminate the evasive nature of the concept itself, Baudrillard's notion of seduction gradually reveals itself as a picture no less problematic. By negating Foucault's semiotic understanding of

power through his own equally objectified notion of seduction, Baudrillard indirectly suggests that it is not only Foucault that should be forgotten, but himself as well.

Power, Dissolved

Forget Foucault's main line of contention is that Foucault's power discourse functions in the same manner as the powers outlined in *Discipline and Punish* and the *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, establishing practices with no previous, actual foundation. For Baudrillard, the problem with Foucault lies in the fact that power is no longer as clear-cut as the thinker contends it to be. In fact, power has "dissolved,"¹ and through its dissolution, it has been made "hyperreal,"² a term that the theorist defines in *Simulacra and Simulation*, as "a frisson of vertiginous and phony exactitude, a frisson of simultaneous distancing and magnification, of distortion of scale, of an excessive transparency."³ Something that is hyperreal, therefore, has been transformed into that which is too real for reality by being driven to its limits and being stripped of its enigmatic features. Hyperreality is, essentially, the domain inhabited by the "obscene."⁴ Moreover, to put it plainly, obscenity is visibility steered toward its most extreme form – the "all-too-visible, the more visible than visible."⁵ As a consequence, that which has been made obscene is no longer able to maintain its "secret" characteristics; instead, it is

¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. 31.

² Ibid.

³ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra: The End of the Panopticon."

⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. 22.

⁵ Ibid. 22.

hewn into an intelligible, tangible form, ripe for solubility “in information and communication.”⁶

Brought forth into palpability, what has been made obscene no longer bears the markings of its original, symbolic and opaque self, and transmutes, in turn, into something “produced... legible... real, visible, accountable.”⁷ As acknowledged by Baudrillard, this state of hyperreality is the primary characteristic of contemporary society; a state, where semiotic production - as a formalization, “by force,” of “what belongs to another order”⁸ – supersedes symbolic “seduction.”⁹ Fundamentally, Baudrillard criticizes Foucault for the latter’s discourse within this productive framework; by converting power into a visible system, Foucault promises a “truth”¹⁰ that is, in reality, as simulated and signified as the myth of sexuality that he challenges.¹¹

Baudrillard: Foucauldian Beyond Foucault

The fact that Foucault’s discourse on sex, which seeks the “instances of discursive production,” “production of power,” and “propagation of knowledge,”¹² is limited to a discourse of power troubles Baudrillard. He sees “the current revolution of the system”¹³ to be a pivotal moment in history, which sees relationships transfigure from a symbolic form into the semiotic, resulting in the once-concealed structures of the “original

⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. The Ecstasy of Communication. 22.

⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. Seduction. 34-35.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 30.

¹¹ Ibid. 31.

¹² Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 12.

¹³ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 34.

machines”¹⁴ within society being forcefully made visible by the “frenzied semiurgy that has taken hold of the simulacrum.”¹⁵ Needless to say, Baudrillard’s disappointment stems from Foucault’s emphasis on the particular discourse of power, which the former now deems obsolete in view of the simulation that society’s principal structures have been beset with. Baudrillard criticizes Foucault for not having gone a step beyond power, overlooking the fact that Foucault’s endeavor was to precisely investigate those discourses affected by the inescapable network of power relations.

According to Baudrillard, power is itself a simulation, and Foucault should not have settled on power as the ultimate layer of society’s machinations as the original, symbolic form of power succumbs to semiotics in the process. Baudrillard’s *Forget Foucault*, therefore, almost serves as an addition to Foucault’s historical investigations, condemning Foucault for remaining within the discourse of power, but at the same time, utilizing Foucault’s discourse as the point of departure from which the book begins its own assessment of power and sexuality. With an approach different from but complementary to its predecessor, Baudrillard plays the role of a Foucauldian in his engagement with Foucault, endeavoring to find the hidden layer of truth subsisting underneath the subjects whose discursive investigations Foucault first undertook. Gazing deeper into a discourse initially introduced by the thinker whom he effectively criticizes for not having looked deep enough, Baudrillard attempts to go beyond the mere discourse of power.

¹⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. 33.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Power, Like the Simulated Sexual

Characteristically, Baudrillard's analysis does not intend to shake the foundations of only a singular strand in Foucault's inquiries within the realm of power, but to entirely undercut power itself. Using the sexuality discussed in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* as a stand-in for the concept of power, Baudrillard attempts to show that Foucault's argument remains so thoroughly entrenched in the hyper-real formation of power that it results in Foucault taking no notice of the moment in time when the concept of power also dissolves into obscenity at his hands.¹⁶ Baudrillard, therefore, does not allude to the discourse of sexuality merely to criticize Foucault's explorations on the subject; his employment of sexuality is meant as a metaphor for power itself.

In this manner, it is indeed possible to imagine the term "power" substituting almost all mentions of "sexuality" within *Forget Foucault*'s references and attempts at refutation. For instance, when Baudrillard asks about the repercussions of sex's reality effect dissolving, he is referring back to a previous argument that power has also dissolved in the same way, "giving way to other simulacra and dragging down with it the great referents."¹⁷ In the case of sexuality, these "great referents"¹⁸ are classified as "desire, the body, the unconsciousness."¹⁹ When power is made hyper-real, its referents are also dragged down in much the same way as sexuality. By alluding to *Discipline and Punish*, it is conceivable to catalogue power's great referents as the "the body,"²⁰

¹⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 33.

¹⁷ Ibid. 32.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish. 25.

“knowledge,”²¹ and the “political,”²² all of which Baudrillard pinpoints in his attempt to demote power to the discursive level of Foucauldian sexuality.

Just as Marxism hypostatizes class struggle, Foucault, according to Baudrillard, is guilty of the same process of hypostatization with respect to power. Foucault’s concept of power has been dragged down from its symbolic form, and converted into a semiotic object: one that is visible, tangible, and easily categorizable. Resembling the manner in which sexuality was hypostatized by psychiatry – as revealed by Foucault’s own analysis with respect to its production – Foucauldian power is, in essence, another concept that has been “produced”²³ and rendered visible. Through this act of production, Foucault has forced power, which “belongs to another order (that of secrecy and seduction),”²⁴ to formalize, rendering it obscene as a result. On account of this, Baudrillard claims that Foucault’s analysis on the simulation of sexuality is obsolete, because the study itself is enveloped by an all-encompassing simulacrum, which is the discourse of power itself. By dint of Baudrillard’s own Foucauldianism, therefore, the Foucauldian concept of power is rendered and reduced, like sexuality, into a subsidiary discourse.

Semiotic Societies, So Empty of Seduction

At the moment when power is made obscene, “seduction”²⁵ also disintegrates. By once again subtly substituting the concept of power with sexuality, Baudrillard summarizes how a pornographic and obscene body is stripped of its seduction on account

²¹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. 27.

²² Ibid. 25.

²³ Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. 37.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. 34-35.

of its symbolic form being supplanted by a sign-based, hyper-realized construction that produces “sexual acts in a frenzied activation of pleasure.”²⁶ Fittingly, by delineating the disintegration of seduction, Baudrillard also manages to put into words the characteristics of the enigmatic, seductive concept.

The main purpose of the productive push toward the pornographic body is to take sexuality to its very limit, says Baudrillard – a limit that is clearly “paradoxical,”²⁷ since the radical and objectifying production of the sexual leads it to dissolve and disappear. Moreover, by “instancing” and “instrumentalizing”²⁸ sexuality, Western society distances itself from those cultures that do not use sexuality as a formalized end or a “deadly seriousness of an energy to be freed, a forced ejaculation, a production at all costs, or of a hygienic reckoning of the body.”²⁹ Rather than observing sexuality as capital like the West does, Baudrillard maintains that other cultures merely engage with it as “long processes of seduction and sensuousness, in which sexuality is one service among others, a long procedure of gifts and counter-gifts.” In these cultures, sex is a form of gift-exchange; its end is not production, but the performance of a rhythmic and perpetual ritual. Naturally, this form of performative gift-exchange applies to power as well.

This is precisely what Baudrillard points to when he speaks of symbolic exchange as opposed to the semiotic. Gift exchange, ritual, as well as the act of “seduction”³⁰ that encompasses them both, are the gauges of a symbolic society. Seduction is thus the clear-cut performance of a symbolic society, as against the operation of a semiotic society,

²⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 38.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. 39.

³⁰ Ibid.

which concerns itself only with the act of “actualization”³¹ and the “materialization of an energetic substance.”³² Seduction, the fulcrum of the symbolic, is missing in semiotic society: In the latter society, sex is observed as production, power is observed as productive force, and all the rest, as Baudrillard himself maintains, is “literature.”³³ In a symbolic society, however, every concept operates seductively rather than productively.

Semiotic Power, Weaving with the Sexual

To return to Foucault – by endeavoring to investigate precisely the *production* of power, and the *propagation* of knowledge, Foucault already discloses his firm position within this semiotic culture of production.³⁴ The fixation on “liquidity, flow, and an accelerated circulation”³⁵ is unabashedly manifest in Foucault’s study. He sees in society an economy of power, a collection of “micro-powers”³⁶ with “localized episodes”³⁷ that influence discourse in an inter-relational manner. Though the correspondence between these micro-powers functions similarly to the very notion of seduction, Baudrillard’s chief concern is that Foucault’s study is already so naturalized and contingent on capital that it unconsciously reflects the market-based, economical procedures of production to the extent that he cannot see beyond it. The symbolic is thus completely superseded by the semiotic in Foucault’s thinking. In this fashion, Foucault’s all-encompassing power systems circulate like capital, comprising a chain of infinite “investments and

³¹ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 39.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 12.

³⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 39.

³⁶ Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish. 27.

³⁷ Ibid.

reinvestments,”³⁸ and observing only the exchange-value, use-value, and sign-value of objects instead of their cultural and symbolic value, which are “seduced” and understood rather than produced.³⁹ Upon deeper inspection, it can thus be discerned that Foucault’s economy of power greatly resembles the manmade libidinal economy of sex that he chronicles in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*.

Though Foucault’s discourse acknowledges the existence of a power-based jurisdiction in historical society, the power relations “are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.”⁴⁰ As specified by Foucault, it is therefore within the domain of power that other discourses, like that of “sexual jurisdiction”⁴¹ are developed. Paradoxically, however, though he presents the power network as the locus of production, this locus, in its actualized form, also appears to be produced by the very force relations that contain it. Power with its numerous networks of connections that consists of “the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions,”⁴² is already made visible, hypostatized, and buried in a “theoretical project”⁴³ in Foucault’s writing; each strand in the abovementioned network having a specific function within the production of power, fostering “redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of the force relations,”⁴⁴ and engaged with the process of production, as well as the dissemination of signs and capital.

³⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 40.

³⁹ Ibid. 39.

⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 94.

⁴¹ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 40.

⁴² Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 94.

⁴³ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 32.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Remarkably, Foucault's concept of sexuality functions in the exact same manner, having been deployed through the compound nodes of hysteria, masturbation, perversion, and moral restraint.⁴⁵ Rather than being an all-encompassing network, power is thus no different a discourse than sex. Though certainly distinctive, the two discourses operate on equal plains; the deployment of sexuality launching with the designation of "the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult,"⁴⁶ and the deployment of power being perpetuated by a multiplicity of force relations, one of which ironically comprises Foucault himself.

Power, the Paradoxical Simulation

In his objectification of power, Foucault fails to grasp that the power network is itself a production, a simulacrum of an even greater overarching layer of influence. If this trajectory is to be followed, then power itself can finally be discerned as a simulation, hypostasized and metastasizing into amplitudes of secondary simulations such as sexuality, illness, surveillance, and punishment. These are the capitals that power perpetuates. Furthermore, the liquidity that is made existent through the sexual discourse is also present in power. From the "psychic capital, libidinal capital, sexual capital, unconscious capital" with "each individual... accountable to himself for his capital, under the sign of his own liberation"⁴⁷ in the sexual arises the sexual capital, clinical capital,

⁴⁵ Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 105.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 40.

and disciplinary capital prevailing within the domain of power, brought to light by Foucault and made into another form “which rules market value.”⁴⁸

In light of this, Baudrillard maintains that “power no longer succeeds in producing the real, in reproducing itself as real, or in opening new spaces to the reality principle.”⁴⁹ It is only made real upon reference to it, precisely like sexuality and no different from the micro-referents such as “desire, the body, the unconsciousness.”⁵⁰ Due to his semiotic understanding of power, Foucault reduces the concept to a capital of something greater, to a micro-discourse perpetuating nano-discourses such as sexuality. In doing so, he also manages to hyper-realize power, revealing, indirectly, that power, too, is a simulation that is not only produced, but also capable of supplementary production.

Foucauldian power, along with Deleuzian “desire”⁵¹ and Lyotardian “intensity”⁵² are all what Baudrillard believes to be “shattered notions,” which remain “miraculously intact in their current acceptance.”⁵³ In spite of the fact that power is particularly defined as a concept that has dissolved into every node of contemporary society, Foucault nevertheless deems it as the all-encompassing model that society is somehow ruled under. In his persistent attempts to put power into words, however, Foucault's conception begins to collapse. Most problematic for Foucault's attempted hypostatization of power is his account of power as a concept with distinct characteristics, ostensibly “permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing” as a result of the force relations that it consists

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 32.

⁵¹ Ibid. 49.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

of;⁵⁴ but this form of irreversibility is dubious, especially when Foucault already maintains that the network of power is also the underlying layer “of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but... are always local and unstable.”⁵⁵

According to this principle, power not only underlies force relations, but is prone to it as well. In this manner, both the substratum of power and the force relations it contains operate as productive forces, engaging with one another not with the aim of seduction, but with the intent to duplicate “states of power,”⁵⁶ and thus production. Moreover, by defining power as the “multiplicity” of the very “force relations”⁵⁷ that it allegedly underlies, Foucault contradictorily transmutes power into a substratum of something that it is already the multitude of. Power is thus concurrently the collection of productive forces as well as their bedrock; it is a productive force engendering additional productive forces, while at the same time being produced by the forces that it harbors. Power itself is thus a reflection of the relationship that underlies its particular system of force relations, and the concept of power, as a hypostasized form, is therefore a simulation of an abstraction that does not necessarily exist.

With power revealed as a simulation, it is also made plain that the realm in which Foucault operates – where power is an irrevocable network that, unlike the concepts of sexuality and madness, is impossible to reverse or revert – is an illusory sphere. Within the structure of society, Foucault portrays power as the “final principle,”⁵⁸ rather than as one discourse subsumed by another, greater discourse. If Foucault’s line of thinking were

⁵⁴ Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 93.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 92.

⁵⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 50.

to be followed, it would also lead to the assumption that beyond power unfurls an abyss that no longer concerns the human condition – that power, the great irreversible a, is the final discourse within which every human event transpires. This, however, cannot be true, as power is itself a simulation, at once bound to a network of force relations and at the same time comprising an abundance of those relations within itself, while also perpetually beholden to a system of relations that thrusts it into its cycle of productivity. But what is power a simulation of exactly? This is the moment when Baudrillard finally asks us to forget Foucault.

Seduction, the Skin of Power, the Rule of All

By now, the term “Forget Foucault” has come to connote a thoroughly different property. To “forget” Foucault, in Baudrillard’s manner of speaking, is to go beyond Foucault in order to find an additional layer concealed above the clouds of discursive power. In the same vein, it can be maintained that Foucault, too, in his discourses on sexuality, madness, the clinic, or the prison, “forgot” particular, antecedent discourses so as to arrive at the dominion of power. This ritual of forgetting does in no way imply neglect or repudiation, but a thrust past a prior discourse, a ceremonial “potlatch”⁵⁹ of previous discourses per se, and a movement through a “truth” once endorsed as all-embracing, with the aim of crossing its threshold into an outlying sphere that, for all one knows, could be enveloping the discourses already under critical scrutiny – discourses such as power, which for lack of further investigation, are entrenched as irreversible,

⁵⁹ Mauss, Marcel. The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies. 7.

wide-ranging, and permanent concepts. For Baudrillard then, the forgetting comes only after the critique.

So far, what has amounted to the bulk of his criticism of Foucault is Baudrillard's conviction that power is not the final mark of society's socializing cogwheel; Foucauldian power is a simulation of a much greater force as-of-yet unknown. Power, as it stands today, is a dissolved concept; so dispersed, in fact, that it has been removed from its symbolic and enigmatic essence, and hypostasized as a determinable, obscene concept – one that even Foucault could reify only contradictorily – only so as to be rendered material. This already-simulated, anomalous and yet wholly established concept of power can only escape its obscene semblance if it is, as Baudrillard specifies, “pushed to its conclusion at the point where [it] cancels itself out or where it has never been.”⁶⁰ When this occurs, simulated power will be met with its death, reverting once more to its real, symbolic form.

Simulated power collapses when it is driven to the breaking point of its “ecstatic” form.⁶¹ Baudrillard defines the ecstatic as the “that quality specific to each body that spirals in on itself until it has lost all meaning, and thus radiates as pure and empty form.”⁶² Moreover, if simulation is defined as “the ecstasy of the real,”⁶³ then power, upon its collapse, will be revealed as the ecstasy of its signified concept. This is what will be revealed upon power's push towards its nethermost ecstatic limit. Under these circumstances, when confronted with this ecstatic amplification, power will finally

⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. 50.

⁶¹ Baudrillard, Jean. “Fatal Strategies.” 187.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

materialize and “occur”⁶⁴ in its symbolic form. This symbolic configuration of power is seduction; and power is, therefore, no more than the ecstasy of seduction.

Circular and reversible, seduction is the authentic, symbolic manifestation of power.⁶⁵ Rather than rigidly reflecting permanent force relations, seduction carries itself out cyclically, seeking, as all phenomena do according to Baudrillard, its own “death”⁶⁶ through a game of challenges and one-upmanship.⁶⁷ More accurately, this will to death constitutes a yearning for exchange, reversibility, or extinction. Power, like all capital, seeks death, and the Foucauldian lens denies it its wish to die on account of the irreversibility it cosigns to it. That conception of irrevocable power can only satisfy a type of “hegemonic logic,”⁶⁸ without belonging, in any way, to the symbolic order that is unmoved by processes of production. In place of producing, seduction deceives.⁶⁹ Its essence, Baudrillard explains, is to “die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion.”⁷⁰ Seduction is itself the rule to the game; it functions only as a circular dynamism encompassing the world. The refusal to be hyper-realized, therefore, is the principal purpose of seduction. It is invariably symbolic because it has no specific form, and hence, can be neither a signifier nor that which is signified.

While the act of production merely supplies one with mere capital for the power simulacrum through its creation of signs, seduction is itself the rule behind the illusion of power. Seduction, the mirror full with illusions, is the skin that encrusts the world with its sense of itself as something meaningful. Foucauldian power relations dwell beneath this

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. “Fatal Strategies.” 201.

⁶⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 53.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 55.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. Seduction. 69.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

illusory blanket of seduction, ceaselessly reproducing and propagating the hyper-real while simultaneously rendering itself obscene. Beyond power lies seduction, says Baudrillard, but beyond seduction, there is nothing. “Power,” he says, “is no more held than a secret is extracted, for the secrecy of power is the same as that of the secret: it does not exist.”⁷¹ Likening the world to a naked king, Baudrillard maintains that acts of production and truth-creation are all attempts to corroborate that the emperor is clothed, when, in fact, seduction most calmly attests that there is no truth. Instead “we wish to uncover the truth because it is so difficult to imagine it naked,”⁷² and seduction perpetuates the game of mirrors, within which humanity seeks its counterfeit answers.

That which is secret shares the same realm with the seductive. Clearly, neither secret nor seduction reveals itself. What can be signified is instead relegated to the outside layers of the secret, circulating in the sphere of illusions that the rules of seduction propagate.⁷³ Moreover, the quality of being hidden is different from secrecy. In the confines of a secret, and accordingly, within the bounds of seduction, “one enters... but cannot exit.”⁷⁴ Seduction, therefore, operates in the form of a secret in need of solving. In this sense, the enigmatic, which is the secret itself, needs to be seduced in order to be solved. The cycle, however, is endless, because there is no truth to be found in this process, as secrets do not exist so as to be revealed.⁷⁵ These enigmas secretly possess their “own resolution,” and thus aspire “to remain in secret and in joys of secrecy.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 58.

⁷² Baudrillard, Jean. Seduction. 181

⁷³ Ibid. 79.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 80.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

What is particularly distinctive about seduction is that it has no particular purpose beyond its initial challenge. “The passion of seduction,” Baudrillard reveals, “has neither substance nor origin.”⁷⁷ It is merely a rule to an eternal game, in a world with a naked king whose nudity is also of no substance or origin. In the world of production, however, all supposed truths, products, and organisms are held liable to a particular substance and origin. “The king is naked for a reason,” productivity contends, “and truth exists.” However, like “the great bankers who know that money is nothing, that money does not exist,” the original propagators of the political concept of power also knew that power did not exist, that it was a simulation of something else, just as the propagators of the sexual knew that sexuality was not as explicit in origin. Foucault does not understand this, according to Baudrillard; to him, “we never get out of” political power.⁷⁸ In reality, though Foucault came to recognize simulation in the discourses of the clinical and sexual, he could not fathom power to also be set within the same categories. To Foucault, power – that irreversible network of force relations – was this great truth.

Power, Simulated Seduction, Seducer of Seduction

As remarked by Baudrillard, production seeks to eradicate seduction in order to give credence to the world’s invented clothedness. It wishes to establish a singular truth in an essentially enigmatic realm where truth does not exist. In order for this truth to materialize, Political power, as a concept, manages to establish itself over “the single

⁷⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. 82.

⁷⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. 63.

economy governing force relations,”⁷⁹ having been produced, effectively, as a hyper-real likeness of seduction. As a simulation of the rule of the game itself, power engenders illusions in the same vein as seduction does, establishing discourses such as the clinical, the sexual, and the penal. Interestingly enough, many of the cases presented by even Foucault resemble the act of seduction. Foucault even goes on to describe these events as “jousts,”⁸⁰ as games played between the principal actors of a given situation. The only difference is that power “produces,” while seduction merely “seduces.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, it is palpable that the relations inherent in each product of the power simulacrum indeed functions in the same manner as seduction, in a game of one-upmanship and death – or a “joust,” as Foucault, too, admits.

Although Foucault’s conception of power functions similarly to Baudrillard’s seduction, its first point of divergence is that political power’s fabricated illusions are simulations of simulations, which, within their reproductions, misplace their origins and rootedness. Further distinguishing the two from one another is the fact that the former sees power as a non-secret mode of production, while seduction is entirely secret, manifest only as a rule whose end is death. In gauging the similarities between power and seduction, however, the most crucial aspect that comes to light is that this juxtaposition indeed provides the key to unlocking Foucault’s problematic definition of power.

With respect to the two above-mentioned divergences between power and seduction, the contradiction within Foucault’s description of power – as a network concurrently prone to and consisting of force relations – can finally be resolved.⁸²

⁷⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 55.

⁸⁰ Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish. 41.

⁸¹ Baudrillard, Jean. Seduction. 7.

⁸² Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I. 92.

Bearing in mind that power is a simulation of seduction and that production, which simulated power partakes in, seeks to annihilate seduction, it can thus be ascertained that, just as one would in the game of death and seduction, power is, in fact, imitating seduction in order to destroy it. Through ecstatic amplification, power seeks to exterminate seduction entirely, precisely in order to establish itself as the singular, wide-ranging discourse for society. With power triumphant, all symbolism, all secrecy, and everything contra the hyper-real, will disappear. The king will finally be clothed, and the hyper-real would supersede the symbolic, illusory mirrors of seduction. Unbeknownst to Foucault, who does not recognize seduction and already sees power as the vast wing that swaddles all society, power is, in reality, locked with seduction “in a close fight that requires an immediate response – or death.”⁸³

Foucault Forgets Foucault?

Baudrillard maintains that to escape this fatal battle between power and seduction, power must forget its greatest secret – its secret being that it does not exist.⁸⁴ In the violent exchange between sign and symbol, therefore – between power and seduction – it is possible to consider that Foucault, in an accidental manner, is contributing to the death of the power simulacrum, which he accepts as authentic. As already demonstrated, seduction’s rule is unknown to Foucault; to the thinker, power is the ceiling under which the world operates. In Baudrillardian terms, therefore, the secret of power is lost on him. Following this, when the power simulacrum is further hypostasized to the point that it

⁸³ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault. 49.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 64.

forgets its origin and begins to pretend “to find a truth, a substance, or a representation... then it loses its sovereignty, allowing others to hurl back the challenge of its own life or death, until it dies in at the hands of that... imaginary concept of itself.”⁸⁵

Foucault’s discourse, being a discourse that pivots on the simulation of political power, therefore propels power toward its state of extreme ecstasy, rendering it obscene. Upon its inevitable implosion at the end of this game, the seductive retains its enigmatic quality, and the simulation of power, in turn, dies, falling short on the seduction it initiated against seduction itself. In such a state, it would be apt to proclaim that though Baudrillard also attempted to “forget” Foucault, it was Foucault who actually succeeded in forgetting Foucault first, shedding light on the power discourse, before consequentially driving it towards its ecstasy, and opening up a space for seduction to be revealed.

Forget Baudrillard?

Upon Baudrillard’s declaration that the constant referencing of power indicates that the concept is already dead, seduction is thus cast into a curious situation as well. Similar to power, the concept of seduction is also problematic; it is unceasingly referenced and expounded throughout Baudrillard’s work, and yet it is expected to remain extant and enigmatic. Though it is distinctive for its reversibility and its formulation as a “rule”⁸⁶ rather than a “conception,”⁸⁷ seduction’s lack of origin is still problematic: Foucauldian power also lacks a distinctive origin; hence, a possibility might

⁸⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. *Forget Foucault*. 64.

⁸⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. 132.

⁸⁷ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I*. 82.

exist that Baudrillard's seduction, akin to Foucault's concept of power, is a simulation of an even more symbolic, hidden plane.

To maintain that nothing exists beyond the rule of seduction is no different than Foucault's unsaid assumption with respect to the power network's singular influence. A further forgetting is thus imperative to the excavation of social life. Just as Baudrillard correctly forgot Foucault in order to push past power into seduction, further insight into the domain of the seductive also seduces one to challenge it, and to perhaps, declare its death en route to another ecliptic of understanding. Similar to Foucault, therefore, by hypostasizing seduction and steering it toward its ecstasy, Baudrillard has already opened up a space for another layer to reveal itself – if another indeed exists. All that remains is for us to forget Baudrillard as well.

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