Luca Cardone, Matteo Angelo Mollisi

Images beyond History. Jean Baudrillard's Apocaliptic Pharmacology

Abstract: The aim of our article is to highlight the key contribution of one of the fundamental categories of Jean Baudrillard's thought, namely that of "hyperreality", to the reflection on the post-historical character of the contemporary Western form of life. By highlighting the "pharmacological" feature of the historical dialectic defined by this concept, we will find its most significant divergence from the better-known pharmacology of Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler in the fact that a common appeal to the Heideggerian motif of the "*Zusammengehörigkeit*", redefined as a structural co-implication of empowerment and weakening of faculties and characters of experience as technically mediated, is used by Baudrillard to describe not so much the constitutive externalisation of the mnestic faculties, and thus the tendency towards oblivion that derives from it, but rather the structural eclipse of the real in the empowerment already always offered by its simulacrum. This is the theoretical core that allows Baudrillard's theses on the progressive expulsion of the negative from the virtual image, eminent condition of the onset of that "excess of positivity" that would characterise our post-historical stage, to add an extremely original chapter to a whole constellation of reflections on the mediation of contemporary devices that can be dated back at least to Benjamin, as well as to give a problematic apocalyptic twist to the pharmacological approach and its consequent "immunitarian" reading of actuality.

As it was re-proposed and reformulated in the twentieth century by Alexandre Kojève in his very influential lessons on Hegel, a real watershed of contemporary culture, the Hegelian problem of the end of history has essentially taken on two configurations, which are undoubtedly closely connected:

i) First of all, the question of the survival of negativity forms in post-history, i.e. the era during which what Kojève called "action in the strong sense of the term" (Kojève 1980, p. 159) comes to an end. This form of praxis, which is the real engine of dialectic, is the action "negating the given" in the double form of the transformation of nature through work and the fight to the death for universal and mutual recognition, as well as the philosophy that gives the concept. Having exhausted this form of praxis and negation in the proper sense, it is all about recognizing and describing the expressions of the "residue" of negatory activity that structures and characterizes our forms of life. These are forms of life and practices that are inevitably ludicized, formalized, "free" and in a certain way "animalistic" in the eyes of a still historical perspective, practices that no longer draw their lymph from war in view of a mutual recognition now guaranteed in its substance, but rather in the dimensions of eros, art and play, according to the Kojèvian triad valorized above

all by Bataille. Such, according to Kojève, are both the consumerist hedonism of the American way of life of the post-war period and the post-historical "snobbery" of the Japanese man, able to live according to completely formalized values and to carry out a "free" suicide completely unrelated to political and social claims. This is a problem that goes as far as the discussed pseudo-Kojèvian version of the end of history proposed by Fukuyama, and which more generally inherits all the anxieties about the "becoming mild" of customs and practices that would characterize the triumph of liberalism – a problem that is not only at the heart of the great liminal critics of the liberal orientation of history (Rousseau, Tocqueville, Nietzsche), but also of the concerns of liberal thought's pillars such as Montesquieu. It is also a central issue for a whole line of Marxist and neo-Marxist thinkers, who today are linked above all to the currents of accelerationism and the galaxy of xenoleft, who enthusiastically celebrate the virtues of an emancipated form of life, according to the Marxian post-historical perspective, not only from the negativity of conflict, but also – and above all – from that of work.

ii) This first configuration of the post-historical problem, questioning the forms of praxis that "survive" the completion of the dialectic, ultimately presupposes an acceptance and validation of the latter in a meaning that is not too far from its original Hegelian or Marxian expression. Now, a whole other director of contemporary thought strives instead to open up to a thought of the end of history starting from the redefinition of the dialectic itself and of its "form", showing below the Hegelian-Marxian scheme of the dialectical process the logic of a more original dialectic – if one can still call it that way. Such was undoubtedly the fundamental intent of all that philosophical and cultural climate labelled from time to time as the philosophy of difference, French theory, post-structuralism etc., which Baudrillard, together with thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard etc., is willingly referred to. The Nietzschean ancestry is rightly traced back to this intention. And yet, we believe, even more so than Nietzsche, it is Heidegger who has provided the philosophical tools and assumptions for an alternative thought of the end of history, which can be declined with reference to cultural, aesthetic and sociological phenomena, to many of these thinkers, including Baudrillard. And no less so than others, although the ancestry of Nietzsche and Kojève is explicitly claimed by him more than by Heidegger.

Heideggerian thought is in its essence, as Gadamer said, a "mysterious dialectic" (Gadamer 1972, p. 213). It is crossed from top to bottom, more or less explicitly and consciously, by the effort to propose an alternative "dialectic" to the Hegelo-Marxian one. There is at least one important aspect for which this dialectic formally differs from the Hegelian one, as well as from the Judeo-Christian anthropology from which both Hegel and Heidegger draw their concepts: the Heideggerian "dialectic", unlike the Hegelian one, can do without a residue of fullness and "presence" of the spirit, life and history that would exist as the principle of the dialectical process, and as such would be reawakened and regained at the end of this process as the completion of a chronological and linear event. For Heideg-

ger, as Derrida (2016) has highlighted better than others, life and history do not literally decay from an authentic condition and a state of fullness that they could later regain, and towards which they tend in their movement as towards a horizon; rather, alienation or laceration, exteriorization or objectification are for Heidegger structural, non trascendable. They can be only *modified* – such is the Heideggerian authenticity: "to get in the right way" in the circle of understanding, in a "modified grasp" of structural inauthenticity of everydayness (Heidegger 1996, pp. 143, 167) – and never drawn in the fullness of a gesture such as the Hegelo-Marxian one, that takes up the essential attributes of life and man alienated in religion, work, relations of capitalist society, etc.. Every movement of self-conquest, re-appropriation, understanding and revelation of our being and our truth corresponds structurally, in the form of togetherness ("*Zusammengehörigkeit*"), to a parallel loss, expropriation, oblivion, non-truth. Therefore, these presumed opposites belongs to each other with even more strength than in the Hegelian movement and scheme: we can only appropriate what we are by allowing ourselves to be expropriated, and vice versa we tend to lose what is proper to us because we cannot bear the "weight" of the "property" of our being; we can "see" what we are only to the extent that we become aware that every vision and truth presupposes an unattainable blind spot, an oblivion and an original secret, and vice versa we are condemned to oblivion and blindness precisely because we already have our condition always before our eyes, in its dazzling ineluctability. It follows that the end of history is not, unlike what Kojève states, the time of full and simple revelation, understanding and re-membrance of the historical event and its meaning, but rather the era of maximum revelation and *therefore* of maximum concealment, blindness and supreme alie-nation, as an expression of the fact that everything is at stake. An era, therefore, in which maximum risk coincides with maximum opportunity (as Hölderin said), in which the principle of life and history is revealed as a *pharmakon*: poison and remedy at the same time. We are faced, in short, with a dialectic of "the more... the more...": *the more* openness, memory, awareness of what is proper, opportunity, *the more* closure, oblivion, tendency to let oneself be expropriated, danger.

Our hypothesis is that the ontology of actuality proposed by Baudrillard, at least to the extent that it focuses on post-historical issues, can be fruitfully crossed with this "dialectic" of Heideggerian derivation. And this is not so much because of Heidegger's direct influence on Baudrillard – an influence that is also undeniable, although it is claimed by Baudrillard himself with less force than his ancestry from Nietzsche or Kojève; rather, this crossroads is due to the fact that both in the case of Baudrillard and Heidegger, and even more so in that of illustrious continuers of Heidegger's philosophical project such as Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, a similar alternative to the Hegelo-Marxian one has been revealed, so to speak, to the philosophical vision by the contemporary technical-media milieu, by the technologies of memory, representation and reproduction that shape our forms of life, and by the historical and social phenomena connected to them. In particular, a logic that is similar in many ways to that brought to light by Heidegger seems to be the key to Baudrillardian treatment of the themes of the image and the virtual

in relation to history and its end. In fact, the Baudrillardian conception of the end of history, and with it the fundamental contribution to the reflection on this theme that can be drawn from it, is inseparable from a reflection on the epochal ascent of a certain type of image, the virtual one, as well as from the speculation on the evolution of the relations between illusion, reality and virtuality – evolution that for Baudrillard constitutes the very movement of history – which is linked to this ascent.

We can first of all realize this by noting how what is notoriously the key category of Baudrillard's reflection on the relationship between reality and virtuality, i.e. the concept of "hyperreality", is to all intents and purposes a historical category, played by Baudrillard to outline a sort of philosophy of history and thought of the end of history – or rather, as Baudrillard prefers to call it, of the "vanishing" of history, its implosion, its collapse. In texts such as *The Illusion of the End* (Baudrillard 1994b), it becomes clear how this "dialectic" of history and its disappearance is, in Baudrillard's eyes, a privileged expression of the strange dialectic mentioned by hyperreality, that has led to the disappearance and implosion of reality – i.e. the "simulation" put in place by man to repress the otherwise unbearable original illusion of the world – by means of its own unconditional reinforcement (the virtual, the integral reality, the fidelity of the copy to the model, etc.). For Baudrillard, the hyper-realization of history coincides first of all with the process of total diffusion of the event by information, with evenemential and informational sophistication, with the excessive proximity of the event and its diffusion, with the impossibility of isolating the historical event from its model of perfection and simulation – a process that in turn is part of an overall social transformation characterized by the multiplication and saturation of exchanges, by the hyper-density of cities, commodities, messages and circuits. A transformation that Baudrillard, from a perspective that could fertilely cross paths with today's fashionable theories of social alienation (Rosa 2013), defines not only as an acceleration, but also as a sort of "slowing down": the rise of a force of inertia and immense indifference, overflowing with an "inert matter of the social" due precisely to the mad acceleration of circulation and information, and which prevents history, meaning and progress from finding their own speed of liberation, events from exercising the negative action in which historical transcendence consists (Baudrillard 1994b, pp. 1-10). And as with all the other phenomena in which the "dialectic" of hyperreality is declined (language, exchange, otherness, sexuality, freedom, etc.), the historical hyper-realization also generates, by means of a radical denial, a violent abreaction, a negative countertransference, an unamendable derealization of its own object: the "strike" of events, i.e. their no longer having time to take place, and therefore the absence of future, the historical future's implosion on the present, in the obsession of real time. And since, as Heidegger said, the past springs in a certain way from the future, this deformation implies also for Baudrillard a corresponding deformation in assuming of our past, whose eminent expressions are in his eyes the archaeological fetishism (recording, filing and memorizing everything of our own past and the past of all cultures), the fossilized irony that accompanies this museum-like hypostatization

of objects and subjects, the mania for trials and responsibility towards everything that has been.

Now, it is clear how all this analysis can rightly be understood as an update of Nietzsche's early denunciation of the indigestion of history that would risk collapsing our culture – a continuity that can be exploited on the basis of the debt that Baudrillard openly entertains with Nietzsche on a metaphysical level, that of a thought of the original illusion. At the same time, however, it seems to us profoundly close to the scheme of Heideggerian "dialectic", as it has been declined on a level of philosophy of history for example by the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1999). The common principle of the two dialectics in question is the idea that the more we feel the weight of our historicity, i.e. the more the reality, the seriousness, the depth of the praxis and the historical event are relaunched to the point of paroxysm, the more we are caught up in a movement of relieving ourselves of this same weight, of emptying this reality and this depth, in an impossibility of taking history and events seriously. These two poles – reality and unreality, weight and lightening, seriousness and irony – are seemingly opposite, but they reveal themselves to be in solidarity in their opposition, wrapped in a radical togetherness that takes the form of a sort of reversal of one into the other. But this togetherness and this reversal are far from delineating the space of "the same", as in the mediation and synthesis that closes the Hegelian dialectic: on the contrary, they relaunch each other in their paroxysm, maintaining themselves as opposites that cannot be reconciled: hyper-realization as derealization, seriousness as irony, without possible mediation.

The fundamental metaphor of the Hegelian dialectic was that of the bud, blossom and fruit, used by Hegel to affirm that the "reality" and the "truth" of the single historical figures consists in the fact that they, negating and surpassing each other, contribute to constitute the organic life of the whole (Hegel 2018, p. 4). On the other hand, the image of the alternative dialectic of Heideggerian derivation could be considered, as suggested by two continuers of this dialectic such as Patočka (1999, p. 117) and Derrida (1995, pp. 38-39), that of the "purloined letter" of a famous story by Poe: maximally hidden, paradoxically, precisely because under everyone's eyes, invisible in its extreme visibility. Such would be our own condition, as psychoanalysis has also thought, questioning itself deeply on this metaphor of the purloined letter (Lacan 1973). Absolute togetherness of revelation and concealment, truth and non-truth, closeness and distance from ourselves: the more the one, the more the other. This dark light, blinding in its extreme manifesting power, is also the light that illuminates the scene of post-history, an era in which we are blinded by the very revelation of the meaning of what we call history. Now, if it is true that Baudrillard does not take this image directly, very similar is the one he uses to account for the "dialectic" of hyperreality, i.e. our history as the history of the concealment of the original illusion of the world through that gigantic enterprise of simulation and fabrication of meaning in which the "real" consists. This enterprise, he says, is more profoundly the strategy of the world itself, which, like the God of the iconolaters of Byzantium, concealed in its existence through

its simulation in images, takes advantage of the images to disappear (Baudrillard 1996, p. 5). And today that is true more than ever, at a time when things seem to have swallowed up their mirror and become transparent to themselves, entirely present to themselves in a ruthless transcription – at a time when the decisive threat, raised by the development of technology and information, is precisely that of "eradication of the night", of the "precious difference between night and day", in a total illumination of all moments, "lethal sunstroke" and "blinding profusion" (Baudrillard 1996, p. 53).

Now, it is extremely relevant that this dialectic of the highest manifestation as maximum concealment is for Baudrillard the very dialectic of technique and mediation. It expresses, in fact, the "law" – or, in Baudrillard's terms, the "strategy" – of the constitutive technicality of existence and of the fact that life itself is always mediated – of *being* itself inasmuch as it is "absolutely mediated", as we could say provocatively taking up a Hegelian formula (Hegel 2018, p. 23). And it is here that the reference to Heidegger becomes explicit. First of all, for Baudrillard as for Heidegger, it is a matter of freeing oneself from the superstitious belief that our technologies are neutral means at the service of the subject, of his free initiative, of a pre-constituted intention independent of the very action of technologies and media (Baudrillard 2005, p. 83). This is what Heidegger, in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, defined "instrumental and anthropological definition of technology" (Heidegger 1977, p. 5), a concept that is clearly taken up by the "subjective illusion of technology" of which Baudrillard speaks (Baudrillard 1996, p. 71). On the contrary, it is about understanding how it is first of all the technology that has the "subject", that shapes our aims and intentions, according to an argument that in its substance was also that of a McLuhan, a Havelock or a Derrida in the 60s, and even before that of a Benjamin or the Husserl of the III appendix to the *Crisis of European Sciences*. By following in the footsteps of this constellation of thinkers and their genealogical inversion (the technology "before" the man, the medium "before" the message, etc.), Baudrillard maintains a declared closeness to Heidegger. He, in fact, rediscovers as the essence of the technique the "stellar course of the mystery", i.e. the stratagem by which the world hides behind the radical illusion of the technology and the universal banality of information (Baudrillard 1996, pp. 62, 73). This is because the "dialectic" of the constitutive technicality of life is not that of alienation or exteriorization in the dialectical sense, and not even of "extension" in the Mcluhanian sense, but rather a dialectic of "expulsion" and "acting out", proper to an energy that tends – similarly to the Heideggerian *Dasein* in its "motility" (*Bewegtheit*) – to get rid of something and first of all of itself (Baudrillard 1996, p. 35). This energy, in fact, derives the maximum mobilizing energy from the demobilization of one's own body. In doing so, it performs the fundamental task of relieving man from the "gravity of existence", progressively guaranteeing him total immunity, as Baudrillard states by significantly superimposing his immunitarian theme on the Augustinian suggestions that flowed into Heidegger (Baudrillard 1996, pp. 39-41).

Baudrillard, as mentioned before, is certainly not the only one to have formulated such a dialectic in the more or less direct groove of Heidegger's meditation. One thinks in fact of Derrida, and then, even more so, of his pupil Bernard Stiegler – more generally, of deconstruction understood as

> a thinking of technics, of tele-technologies, and, as a thinking of tele-technologies, of the "media" in all its guises – beginning with the most primal traces that launch the process of hominization (the emergence of the human species), and extending as far as the Web and all forms of technical archiving and high-fidelity recording, including those of the biotechnologies (Stiegler 2001).

On one hand, however, Stiegler and Derrida, undoubtedly more faithful to the Heideggerian line, put more emphasis on the deposition of self by the human being in the technical prosthesis in the form of the platonic oblivion involved in the mnestic exteriorization; on the other hand, Baudrillard traces the eminent expression of such deposition in the killing of the real in the repetition of the double and the copy – a much more Deleuzian, or Borgesian aspect – and therefore of the time originally deferred in the instantaneousness of real time, of the definition of the medium in that of the message, etc.. For him, the ruse of God that is eclipsed through images is first of all that of the original that is vanished beneath its many copies (Baudrillard 1996, p. 38), and not so much that of memory that is lost in oblivion implied by its own exteriorization. However, as a demonstration of this strong convergence in Heidegger's furrow, Baudrillard shares with deconstruction the "immunological" theme – very strong in this regard is the convergence with Derrida in the analysis on 9/11 and beyond – as well as the "pharmacological" perspective to which it is linked, being that of the *pharmakon*, according to a Derridian quotation that Baudrillard would certainly agree with, another name of the "logic" of the immunization of life and global civilization (Derrida 2003, p. 124). And yet Baudrillard's pharmacology, in comparison with Derridian pharmacology and even more so in comparison with the "positive" and "active" pharmacology proposed by Stiegler, has, so to say, changed its sign, in a direction that we should not hesitate to define as apocalyptic. In fact, according to Baudrillard, it is not so much "where danger grows, so does what saves", as for Heidegger and Hölderin, but vice versa: "where what saves grows, there also grows danger", i.e. the much graver threat of disintegration and death represented by our excess of security, prevention, immunity, and the fatal excess of positivity (Baudrillard 1996, p. 49).

In any case, this last theme of excess of positivity is undoubtedly the key to Baudrillardian attempt to overcome Hegelian dialectic and the concept of negation underlying it. In our opinion, this is such a radical and innovative theme that a critic as brilliant as Byung-Chul Han, in accusing Baudrillard of remaining ensnared in the remnants of negation like other immunological thinkers (Esposito, Agamben), finds himself reproposing a whole conceptual armamentarium of very clear Baudrillardian workmanship (Han 2015). The category of positivity, in a nutshell, constitutes the *trait d'union* between the two most relevant themes on

this side of Baudrillardian thought: that of hyper-reality and that of immunity. The "logic" that leads the real to implode under the weight of its own fulfilment, to be exterminated and de-realized by the hyper-reality of the virtual and unconditional simulacrum, is evidently the same as the world system whose rise in power ends up exacerbating the will to destroy it, secreting its own anti-device: which is why the winning tactic of the attackers of the 9/11 could consist in bringing about an excess of reality, thus fighting on the same ground as the hegemonic power, and in making the system collapse under such an excess (Baudrillard 2003, p. 18). Dialectic, once again, of a paroxysmal togetherness of the presumed opposites, which in reality do not oppose each other frontally, but rather advance together and grow in power at the same time, as a part of the same movement (Baudrillard 2003, p. 13): power as vulnerability, Good and Evil that implicate each other, reality that does not oppose fiction because it absorbs its energy. Of course, we must remember that the Hegelian dialectic had already firmly placed itself on the problematic terrain of reality: its concern was precisely to establish what is "real", "effective" (*Wirklich*). But the fact is, from the strictly Baudrillardian point of view, that the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic still remains entangled in the residue of an oppositional conception between reality and unreality: such is the residue that allows the critics, basing themselves on the concept of alienation, to demystify the unreal in the name of the real, as Baudrillard affirms also distancing themselves from the Debordian concept of spectacle (e.g. Baudrillard 1996, p. 27). It is not enough to say that the negative implies the positive because this comes from that, from overcoming it and from the criticism that promotes it, as in Hegelian determined negation. It is rather a question of thinking positive's hegemony over any form of negativity (Baudrillard 2003, p. 14), because it is precisely this hegemony that characterizes the historical dialectic: there is no more negation or possible overcoming, and not because the ideal has been realized – "the idea cannot be itself: if it happens, it does so by disavowing itself" (Baudrillard 1996, p. 69) – but because reality, at the height of its movement to remove the original illusion of the world, has multiplied infinitely like Warhol's cans and faces, decontextualized in a museal hypostatization like Duchamp's ready-mades, dissolved in its own parody and in the object's ironic function, driven out in its own reality, in its temporality, in its evementiality by high definition, by real time, by information. The dialectic has indeed been accomplished, but on the contrary, in a paroxysmal togetherness of opposites, in such an absolute negative that it cannot even be defined as such anymore: "the real and the rational have been overturned by their very realization" (Baudrillard 1996, p. 64).

As mentioned above, Baudrillard believes this paroxysmal reversal of real data and dialectic can be read first and foremost in the image, as well as it is evolved in the contemporary world. The image appears to be the real "place" of an alternative dialectic and its paradoxical double movement, to the extent that it takes the event hostage with the very act with which it exalts it, playing at the same time as multiplication to infinity and as diversion and neutralization – as Baudrillard states on the basis of the role it played in mediating the event of the 9/11 (Baudrillard 2003, p. 36). Once again, light as obscuration, blindness caused by the glare of

hyper-realization. Now, it is significant that in questioning this "primary scene of ours", marked by the upheaval of the negatory action starting from contemporary (virtual) images, Baudrillard crosses this theoretical-historical instance of dialectic's redefinition with the profound and long reflection on negative's suppression by contemporary media devices dating back at least to Benjamin. Along this line, photography lends itself to being read as the taillight of art defined as authentic, a moment before the "vanishing point" announced by Baudrillard himself. In its 19th and 20th century analogical dimension, the logical structure of dialectic in photography is not only still present, but consubstantial to it. It is in fact capable, as Baudrillard repeatedly affirms, of producing a remnant, the absence that makes the image vibrate, a decisive imperfection:

> The photo is not an image in real time. It retains the moment of the negative, the suspense of the negative, that slight time-lag which allows the image to exist before the world – or the object – disappears into the image, which they could not do in the computer-generated image, where the real has already disappeared (Baudrillard 1996b, p. 86).

Photography, as it is well known, is possible only by means of a negative, the recording (instantaneous only later) of a beam of light on a materiality-chemistry. However, it is not only at this organic level that dialectic operates within the photographic image, but also on a metaphysical level, so to say. Such is the plane to which Benjamin addresses in his *Small History of Photography*, recognizing the unique appearance of a distance, captured in his *hic et nunc*: the aura. Schelling's dress, photographed in 1848 by Biow, seems made to pass directly into immortality. Around the characters of the first daguerreotypes "there was an aura surrounding them, a medium that lent their gaze, which it suffused, fullness and certainty [...]. Photographs of groups, in particular, still preserve an animated togetherness that appears for a short interval on the plate before perishing in the 'print'" (Benjamin 2015, pp. 79-80). The evanescence of the first photographs, the *Mal* versus the positivity of the *Zeichen*, intertwined with those who were watching an unprecedented dialogical relationship respect the portraiture in the late nineteenth century. The images, in fact, manifested a negation that was not only always open and possible, but imposed. As Benjamin observed, the photographic ancestors' portraits cut out in the typical oval of his age, if looked at for a long time, always gave back a vivid look, since those eyes always betrayed by the real intentions of the lens reproduced the infinite exposure times – what Baudrillard would define as the non-immediateness of things – as they plunged into the image. Over the long duration of the pose they, so to speak, grew together and into the image. The negative, this possibility of dialogic criticism inherent in photography, translated into a sort of evanescence: what Susan Sontag called "a token of absence" (Sontag 1979, p. 12), or what Roland Barthes, with a curiously specular expression, called "the Spectrum: the return of a dead man" (Barthes 1980, p. 9). The escape of a presence and the appearance of an absence: the two ways of giving oneself of

negative at photographic image's heart. Precisely on the basis of this ambivalence, we observe with Kracauer, the grandchildren not only do not recognize their grandmother's photograph when she was young, but necessarily tend to look at it with suspicion, critically distancing themselves from it, as if she were a stranger (Kracauer 1995, pp. 48-49). And what only superficially appears as private, in this relationship between subject and photography, is actually shown as a public and political possibility. Precisely this negativity of the medium, its opacity and its link with contingency, tending towards destruction, is for Kracauer the space of historical confrontation between consciousness and nature: that is, the problematic of photographic representation allows it to function as an emblem, an index that shows and emphasizes the critical spirit of modernity (Hansen 2012, p. 34).

As far as the photography of the origins is concerned, therefore, it is clear to all the authors in question, including Baudrillard, that there is a balance between the positivity of the fact, of the recorded matter, and the critical evanescence of the negative. With cinema, on the other hand, the matter becomes more complicated. According to Benjamin, by allowing reality to blow up by tenths of a second, it sweeps away the auratic characters of the past, annulling the *hic et nunc* of the image in the perfectly objective reproposition of reality. But, above all, it is the "immunizing" character of cinema that emerges as a novelty. Society is shaken by the repeated shocks of modernity, which makes cinema necessary as a "vaccine", a buffer that cushions the physical stress of the masses by anaesthetizing (Benjamin 2008) – according to a trend that the Nietzschean Jünger could not avoid condemning – and allowing, through the lens, to experience the graces of the optical unconscious. In Benjamin's new *Spiel-Raum*, technique and nature are articulated according to a suppressed slave-master dialectic, the positive polarity (technique) being precisely that of a machine now directed towards full autonomy. The negative is completely bypassed. Also for Kracauer at the cinema the negative space tends to become rarefied, because little shoppygirls go to the cinema, and once out they are willing to find in the homeless guy they met on the street at the end of the screening a masked millionaire in search of true love (Kracauer 1995, p. 301).

To complicate the cinematic front, there is an underlying bipolarism found in Baudrillard's texts. According to what he argues in *The Disappearance of Art*, cinema, like contemporary photography, has contributed to the disappearance of history, secularizing it (Baudrillard 1994a). At the peak of its talent and technique, at the service of the reanimation of what it helped to liquidate, cinema only succeeds in resuscitating ghosts. Films like fetishes that leave us indifferent. But "the new fetish must work to deconstruct by itself its traditional aura, its power of illusion" (Baudrillard 2012, p. 18). There would be, for Baudrillard, an enlightening moment of simulation in which art falls into banality, as for Heidegger the man in his second fall, his modern destiny. Thus, a possibility is contemplated for which the simulation of images can be activated in an authentic or inauthentic way. The real simulation is the one that makes the image a sacred sign-goods in an ironic ritual. This already started with Baudelaire, who for Baudrillard undertook a heroic path, that is, the non-defense of the art object against the alienation of

goods, but its absolute and radical surrender. This perspective is for Baudrillard even beyond that of Benjamin, still bound to the loss of the aura. Here, it seems to us, a typical theme of the reception of the Heideggerian concept of structural inauthenticity, particularly in French post-structuralism: the idea that a remnant of "authenticity", if it can still be defined as such, can be obtained by turning to that "modification" of which Heidegger already spoke in the form of a certain "re-petition", an intensive and detached assumption of this tendency to decay and to go out of itself; a paradoxical *kenosis* that finds its eminent place in irony, in play and in a certain machinism. From this point of view, it is with Andy Warhol that Baudrillard considers it most prolific to confront himself, his work being the point where art becomes "negative ecstasy of representation", emancipated from the ne-gative and emancipation itself, and reaches the vanishing point (Baudrillard 2012, p. 19). The disappearance of art is then, for Baudrillard, in an accelerated motion, a "phantasmagoria", and this massive modern movement of art would already be over. The phantasmagoria of art would stand *tout court* in its own disappearance, and therefore in its completion. It no longer invites us to the aesthetic dimension of the glance, but to the tactile vertigo of the image, precisely in its becoming an image-goods. Art, which no longer offers a dialectic solution, having historically dissolved itself in syntheses-disappearance, challenges the world by surpassing *and resolving it*, deterring the symbolic.

In *The Illusion of the End*, on the other hand, Baudrillard declares without pos-sibility of misunderstanding that "photographic or cinema images still pass throu-gh the negative stage (and that of projection), whereas the TV image, the video image, digital and synthetic, are images without a negative, and hence without negativity and without reference" (Baudrillard 1994b, p. 55). The virtual, in fact, is precisely what puts an end to all negativity, dispossessing the happening of its own evenemetial character and abolishing the real object. As a consequence, immer-sion in the media network condemns us to be "exoterics of the screen, living their revolution as an exoticism of images, themselves exogenous, touristic spectators of a virtual history" (Baudrillard 1994b, p. 56). And it is no coincidence that, just moments earlier, Baudrillard quotes Benjamin himself, saying that it is precisely events that have lost their aura (Baudrillard 1994b, p. 21). Everything that is real becomes phantom, and everything that is fictitious, like images, becomes real. An-ders already noticed this: the world, now provided at home through television, has disappeared behind its image. The characteristic of every television image, in fact, is to say "I am now", not as I-transmission but as I-event (Anders 2018). The disconcerting result of this work of the television image for Anders was to exone-rate us from the necessity of our judgement – that is, of the negative itself – since television no longer provides even one fact, but a sort of prejudice, already chewed up, that we can only internalize. The image preaches, prepares events and does not camouflage, because camouflage is still an activity of the negative. Thus, for Bau-drillard, the television image is pure enjoyment of simulation that relives and at the same time suppresses the real in the hyperreal. The victim of the operation of the television program is the illusion, the real that must leave room for integral reality.

Not even the frightening images of 9/11 have been able to subvert this structure. It is still the image that came first even on that evil day. The real fear could only be added later: terrorism would be nothing without the media (Baudrillard 2003, p. 31). The history collapsed because the images stopped being signs in and for the world.

In order to find a useful temporal break in the decoding of pre- and post-television images, using aesthetic tactility as the keystone, one could also turn to Vilèm Flusser, who has established with theoretical clairvoyance the difference between the image composed "by abstraction" and the "computed" one. Image computation is the negative entropy process of automatic programs aimed at safeguarding and archiving information, creating cybernetic images – what Baudrillard defines as "cultural storage". Automation acts at the creative level on individual computational points (pixels) through a revolutionary medium: the button. Now, the work of the "uniformers" – the programmers – is, according to Flusser, a work beyond history, once the synthesis is complete. Image and video are treated according to criteria that are extraneous to the programmer himself, because in automation, critical intervention has disappeared. For technical images, history and prehistory are only pretexts to be nourished by. If history is made to run out, now the images feed on it. In the computational program we therefore find an eschatological time of eternal return; but, with a very Baudrillardian irony, for Flusser "not some series of catastrophes but rather technical images themselves are apocalyptic" (Flusser, 2011, p. 60). And so, going back to Baudrillard, if the events are on strike, the images inexorably follow the same destiny. If events refuse to enter the logical structure of dialectic, it is because the now transparent images of television have lost their opaque counterpart, the negative. Thus, Baudrillard announces the destruction of every illusion, the total entropy of reality with an incalculable deadline. Now it is the digital code's emanation, the code of the automatic disappearance of the world, that generates virtual reality. If television images anticipate the event, the intervention of digital and computational calculation has deprived man of his end. Baudrillard likes to remember the parable of Arthur Clarke. The world will end when a community of Tibetan monks will finish transcribing the nine billion names of God in the world. But to speed up the work, they have called in computer technicians. The computers finished the work in a month, and the virtual world thus concludes the destiny of the world (Baudrillard 1996, pp. 25-26; Baudrillard 2000, p. 42). However, its end is lived in real time. The code has deprived us of any form of *parusia*: one cannot wait for what has already arrived. The progress of the virtual coincides *tout court* with the regression movement of history. A disconcerting example of this is the proliferation of negationist web communities against the major historical events of the last century such as the Holocaust. This is the return of the negative in its violent and radical form that Baudrillard already anticipated at the beginning of the new millennium (Baudrillard 2002b). The image has consumed history, and the new sense of the image is trans-historical and trans-political, that is, it can have all possible meanings but without ever really having any. We are in the fourth phase of images of the world, which according to Baudrillard coincides with simulation and the end of the distinction between thing and sign.

Finding a direct link with *Götzen-Dämmerung*, we say that the virtual is the final Nietzschean fable of the world, neither apparent nor real. The acceleration of virtual exchanges takes place under the shorter shadow of midday announced by Zarathustra, at the end of the longest error (Weiss 2011).

Should we therefore say that for Baudrillard, unlike Benjamin and Derrida, no messianic can tremble on the margin of our age's "total mediation"? And that, even more so, a point of view such as that of Stiegler, whose activism attempts to reverse the entropy involved in this mediation by grasping the positive and salvific side of the technological *pharmakon*, is impracticable? To multiply the positive by the positive, to be more hyperreal than hyperreality itself, relaunching the objective irony of our age in the even more ironic spiritual exercise of writing: such are, as we know, the formulas of Baudrillardian "radical thought", the clearest indications of its Warholian accelerationism. And yet, a certain nostalgia for the negative filters through all the pores of his work, as when he states that "what we have forgotten in modernity, by dint of constantly accumulating, adding, going for more, is that force comes from subtraction, power from absence" (Baudrillard 1996, p. 4). Isn't his own work as a photographer a testimony of this nostalgia, of this search for the trembling and the lost event? Is it really possible not to have any nostalgia for history, even though we are aware that it will never return, dissolved as it is in the opaque transparency of our screens? Maybe we have never done anything but wait for the return of something that never came, that never took place; why, then, shouldn't we be waiting for something that will never come? In the midst of the obstinate silence of our images, through this same silence, Baudrillard cries out this question.

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