

Foucault After Baudrillard

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Sylvère Lotringer tells the story well. In December 1976, the up-and-coming sociologist Jean Baudrillard, soon after finishing his book *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, wrote a long 12,000-word review of the eminent sociologist Michel Foucault's recently published *The History of Sexuality*. Baudrillard originally offered it to the prestigious French journal *Critique*, on whose editorial committee Foucault sat, which not surprisingly rejected it. Baudrillard then showed the manuscript to his editor at Gallimard, the publisher of Baudrillard's previous books, hoping he could place it somewhere, but he also turned it down, fearing Foucault's reaction. (Foucault also published at Gallimard.) But then a little while later in a stroke of good fortune Baudrillard ran into the owner of the rival Éditions Galilée, who hearing about what had happened and despite the controversy he knew it would cause decided to publish it. So, *Forget Foucault* came out as a small pamphlet in early 1977, where it immediately caused a small sensation, and was perhaps even the first publication by Baudrillard—if only in a negative sense—that reached a wide French audience. As Lotringer puts it in his 'Remember Foucault':

Two weeks later, Baudrillard's pamphlet could be seen in the store-windows at La Hune and in every Latin Quarter bookshop in Paris, side by side with Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*—an eerie re-enactment of the killed *Critique* project. And this is what Baudrillard's essay became: not a pamphlet on Foucault's theory, but *Forget Foucault*, an attack on Foucault's intellectual power.¹

And the insult was all the greater because, after the great success of his earlier *Madness and Civilisation* and *Discipline and Punish*, the initial response to *The History of Sexuality* was to say the least mixed, with Foucault believing it was both under-rated and misunderstood and even his then-good friend Gilles Deleuze sending him a ten-page memo outlining his concerns.

At some point, after Baudrillard had sent his essay to *Critique*, but before the editorial committee had decided its fate, Foucault, tipped off as to its existence, invited him to his apartment so that they could meet. They spoke for a few hours, but apparently not at all about what Baudrillard had written, although just before leaving Foucault promised that he would respond to his essay, with the assumption that both would be published side by side in an upcoming edition of *Critique*. But, in fact, in a much-discussed gesture or even non-gesture, Foucault did not respond, and as we say soon after the editorial committee of *Critique* rejected the essay. In some quarters—most notably by Lotringer in a series of writings, but also by some others—Foucault's behaviour towards Baudrillard has been criticised, as though he deliberately did not tell him of his intention to do everything possible to forestall or even make impossible its publication.² In other accounts, it is Deleuze, who as we say at the time was a good friend of Foucault's, but whose sceptical response to the book was to lead to an increasing distance between them, who advised Foucault not to respond when Foucault was intending to. Again, as Lotringer puts it:

It was easy to see [for Deleuze] that Baudrillard was using Foucault for self-promotion... *Symbolic Exchange and Death* had just been published in the same select Gallimard series as Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*. It was not in Foucault's interest to write a response.³

Indeed, Foucault never did address—at least publicly—Baudrillard's essay on him at any point in his career. It was almost as though it did not happen, or at least Foucault behaved or perhaps wished as though it had not. But we suggest here that, against Foucault's and even Baudrillard's own understandings of their interaction, not nothing but *everything* happened in this encounter. After Baudrillard writes *Forget Foucault*, *everything* is different and *nothing* is the same. For what we propose, following the logic of Baudrillard's own essay, is that after Baudrillard writes what he does we have to read Foucault *entirely* through Baudrillard. Which is not only to say—although this is a big enough request—that we have to read those particular texts Baudrillard is addressing, principally *The History of Sexuality* but also *Madness and Civilisation* and *Discipline and Punish*, through Baudrillard, but *all* of Foucault,

including what comes after his essay. Indeed, in an uncanny way—although we will find better words for this as we go on—we can understand Foucault subsequently responding to Baudrillard's critique of him in *Forget Foucault*. Even if he doesn't intend to—and the distinction is irrelevant or does not hold—he is in fact taking Baudrillard's argument into account and seeking to correct those “errors” or “shortcomings” that he points out. If, as we will see, and as others have pointed out, we have to read the early Foucault as subject to Baudrillard's critique, we also want to argue—and no one that we know of has yet contended this—that the later Foucault is Baudrillardian, that Baudrillard altogether puts forward the best account of Foucault, not just “critically” of the early Foucault but “positively” of the later.

There is much that goes against not merely intellectual consensus but even conventional logic in all of this. A number of commentators, starting with Lotringer, are prepared to argue that Baudrillard's *Forget Foucault* is not simply critical of Foucault, but highly complementary of him, and even, more than his obvious followers and epigones, faithful to his logic.⁴ So that, before being critical of Foucault—or even at the same time as—Baudrillard offers one of the best early accounts of his work. Baudrillard does not only adopt the same “genealogical” account as Foucault—the evidence often cited here is those three “orders” of simulation in the essay ‘Simulation and Simulacra’—but also sees in Foucault a powerful inversion and rethinking of the prevailing logics of power and sexuality. In other words, for Baudrillard, the decisive thing about Foucault's account of power in a book like *Discipline and Punish* is that power works only because of a resistance to it. It is not unilaterally imposed from the top down but exists only within certain limits. This is Baudrillard in *Forget Foucault*: “[Foucault] substitutes a negative, reactive and transcendental conception of power, which is founded on interdiction and law, for a positive, active and immanent conception”.⁵ And the same thing goes for sexuality. Foucault does not see sexuality as something repressed but rather arising only because it is repressed. Indeed, as much as anything else, sexuality is repressive in that it can be understood to be operative only because of a certain resistance to it. It cannot become any kind of universal principle because there must always be something that it is against. This again is Baudrillard in *Forget Foucault*: “Repression is never the repression *of* sex for the benefits of who knows what, but repression *through* sex. And sex which has been repressed only hides that repression through sex” (36).

In all of these ways, Foucault's “genealogical” method is an important advance on previous accounts: it does not propose some predetermined goal, it does not totalise so that there is no other to what is, but points to things existing only in specific circumstances forever in the process of coming about. And yet the paradox

for Baudrillard is that it is in this that power and sexuality become new totalising principles outside of any limits. That is, if there is only a power and its variations—indeed, if there are only variations—there is still nevertheless behind these some total principle of power. And this new model of power and its resistances that Foucault develops in *Discipline and Punish* becomes the new model for that “deterritorialization/reterritorialisation” we find in Deleuze and Félix Guattari and “puissance/impuissance” we find in Jean-François Lyotard. Although in each there is that same refusal of totalisation and a power that is imposed from the top down and instead a power that is inseparable from its diffraction and works from the bottom up, Baudrillard’s point is that this does not go far enough, and that for all of its apparent being put into history and taking into account of resistance there is still nevertheless something about it that remains abstract and untouched by any particular circumstances. And the same goes for Foucault’s account of sexuality. Here again it is not some primordial unconscious sexuality that is subsequently repressed, but a sexuality that does not exist outside of its repression. Which means that it could only ever be partial, incomplete, social, historical. And this would be the model for Deleuze and Guattari’s “desiring machines” and Lyotard’s “libidinal economy”.⁶ But once more in each case there would be something outside of this, something about sexuality that comes before its repression, that at least in principle remains intact and undivided. This is Baudrillard in *Forget Foucault*: “The same fragment of gesture, body, gaze and discourse encloses both the positive electricity of power and the negative electricity of resistance... a balance is achieved in a discourse which in essence staunchly describes the only true spiral, that of its own power” (48).

As we say, in all of this Baudrillard acknowledges the decisive advance made by Foucault: the idea that there is not some pure power or sexuality that is subsequently resisted or repressed. His work forever breaks with the model of historical progressivism, which starts with some intact principle that is historicised, but then retrospectively grasped in an act of theoretical reflection. Foucault is very much acknowledged by Baudrillard as an inspiration for his own work, and Baudrillard very much sees his own work as a “continuation” of it. In an interview with the French literary journal *Lire*, given several years after the original text, Baudrillard is able to be more measured and distanced with regard to Foucault, more able to speak of him in his own language, but in *Forget Foucault* itself Baudrillard admits that Foucault’s account is definitional and he is only able to speak of him in Foucault’s own language.⁷ And, more than this, Foucault’s account is not merely definitional, as though there is something empirically testable about it or as though Baudrillard is in some way taking into account Foucault’s academic reputation, but

perfect. Foucault not only allows us to see those phenomena he is describing as though through his eyes, but even brings about those phenomena for the first time. In a sense—and this for Baudrillard is the true ambition of all theory—he actually *creates* those things he speaks about. They are, to use Baudrillard's own term for it, simulacra. This is to be seen in the opening words to Baudrillard's text, which can appear merely ironic or hypocritical, a form of empty praise, but are not. And, indeed, one of the signs of this is how closely Baudrillard's vocabulary and style—particularly in this opening section—mimics the magisterial overtures of such books as *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. This is the opening of *Forget Foucault*, in which Baudrillard remarks that there is literally no going beyond of Foucault, in the sense not merely that his work is now definitive but that what he wrote about literally did not exist before him: "Foucault's writing is perfect in that the very movement of the text gives an admirable account of what it proposes...The meaning never exceeds what one says of it... In short, Foucault's discourse is a mirror of the powers it describes" (29-30).

What then is Baudrillard's objection to Foucault in *Forget Foucault*? Or, given what he otherwise says, what kind of objection is it possible to make against him? It is precisely that, for all of the breaking up and making more modest of power and sexuality, the fact that they are not anymore some original principle that is then resisted or repressed, moving either from the top to the bottom or the bottom to the top, but always discursive and mediated, there is still something integral to them, something outside of what happens to them in the world. If they are subjected to a genealogical method in which they have no origin and are permanently open to historical contingency, they still appear as some principle outside of history to which something happens, as though they exist at least in some part outside of the world. The idea of power infinitely dispersed amongst micro-subjectivities or a sexuality that is disseminated in intensities is not a true challenge to their underlying principles, but rather a way of carrying them on in a time in which they would otherwise be seriously under threat. If not directly power and sexuality, these new forms are *signs* of power and sexuality, which is to say a meta-power and meta-sexuality, incorporating an internal distance onto themselves, as though power is always *about* power and sexuality always *about* sexuality. In this sense, Foucault is not at all critical of the forms power and sexuality take today, but as much as anything formulating them for the first time. Indeed, in a way, power and sexuality have taken on board their criticism and historicism in the forms Foucault speaks of them in. Foucault's criticism and historicisation of them are exactly not outside of them but inside of them, helping constitute the modern principle of power and sexuality themselves.

It is for this reason that Baudrillard speaks of Foucault's conception of power and sexuality—in a term that is rarely if ever noted by the numerous commentators on his essay—as enacting a kind of “spiral”. Both power and sexuality and Foucault's account of them—and, as we say, these are in some ways inseparable—constitute a perpetual folding back upon itself of what has come before. This is Baudrillard in *Forget Foucault*: “Foucault can thus describe to us the successive spirals of power, the last of which enables him to mark its most minute terminations, although power never ceases being the term” (31).⁸ And what Baudrillard means by this is that Foucault's account of power and sexuality is not at all to be thought as any kind of end or critique of these principles, but rather as an abstracting and universalising of them. Indeed, each successive stage of Foucault's “genealogy” of power and sexuality is to be understood not as any kind of historical progression in a linear sense or even some contingent break with what comes before, but rather as a successive rising of levels in a kind of repeated recursion. That place from where we might speak of the ends of power and sexuality, in both senses of the word, is also that place from where power and sexuality start again. Power and sexuality are evidenced not so much directly as in speaking about their end or dispersion. Thus, for example, the “rhizomes” of Deleuze and Guattari and “micro-desires” of Lyotard represent not something smaller and more modest but something higher and more abstract, some place or principle from where the limits of power and sexuality might be remarked. This again is why in Foucault the perfection of his writing matches the perfection of his object, or indeed his writing *is* the very thing Foucault is writing about. Power and sexuality in a sense exist only in Foucault writing about their end. Baudrillard puts all of this together in the following passage: “Foucault can only draw such an admirable picture since he works at the confines of an area now in the process of collapsing entirely. Such a configuration lends itself to the most dazzling display just before its terms have been recalled” (30).

What does Baudrillard offer as an alternative to this? Or what is his real objection to Foucault? The word or concept Baudrillard uses in opposition to Foucault—or perhaps better to think the limits to his system—is seduction or reversibility. He will begin by expressing it in arguably its most material and embodied of forms. With regard to power, it is the fact that power cannot go all the way because at that point it does away its subject and there is no one left to dominate: “If power were the one-sidedness of an act of submission, as in the traditional ‘optic’, it would long ago have been overthrown everywhere” (52). And similarly with sexuality, we cannot simply force the other to have sex or express their sexual desires, not only because it is morally repugnant but because this no longer counts as either sex or sexuality: “The sexual is the form of seduction that has been

reduced and restricted to the energetic terms of desire" (55). But the more abstract point Baudrillard is making in both cases is that this is a limit that comes not simply at the end of power and sex, either at the furthest extent of their realisation or at the conclusion of their history. Rather, it is a limit that occurs as soon as they come about and from which they are inseparable. In other words, from the very beginning we cannot hold power without taking into account that we cannot completely dominate without doing away with the other we dominate. We can have sex only with an other who cannot be forced or coerced and who remains outside of or unknown to our desires. So that, as opposed to any kind of limit proposed at the end of power and sexuality as a way of perpetuating them when they are under threat, it is a limit that takes place throughout and that makes power and sexuality possible from the beginning. That is to say, it is not a limit that power and sexuality can speak of from somewhere outside of it, but a limit that is inseparable from power and sexuality themselves, that power and sexuality are and effectively allows them to speak.

In other words, as opposed to Foucault's conception of power and sexuality, which maintains a certain discursive position of privilege from where their limits can be remarked—so that at each remarking of their limits there is a kind of jumping over them—for Baudrillard the system and its limit are simultaneous and inseparable. At the same moment as the system expands a further limit is opened up, so that there is always more to fill in. In this sense, the system does not so much expand as is circular. Or to put it otherwise, if in Foucault it is the system that leads to its limit, so that this limit is a product of the system and thinkable only within it, in Baudrillard in an impossible way it is this limit that leads to the system, so that not only does the system arise to fill its own limit but this limit arises and opens up only because of another limit that the system cannot see. Or even more precisely—and this is the very inseparability or seduction between Baudrillard and Foucault, and why it is not simply a matter of Baudrillard criticising Foucault—at the same time as the system reaches its limit, it is also its limit that leads to the system. At the same time as micro-politics and sexuality as repressive—and Baudrillard does not at all deny these and their totalisation, the fact that they are the only way we can think power and sexuality today—there is also something else that allows these and that they stand in for: their limit. In a way, that is, Foucault is right, what he is saying is true, but only for a reason that is beyond him, that he does not see, which Baudrillard provides, or to put it even more strongly, which *is* Baudrillard.

In other words, it is not that Foucault is wrong. His account of the endless diffraction and dissemination of power and sexuality, and even the way that they take this limit into account and turn it to their advantage, is correct. It is just that this is possible only because of another limit, this time occurring not at the end or

conclusion of the system but at the very moment it begins exercising its effects over its subjects. And it is *this* that turns Foucault's own system into a simulacrum: the fact that it is not simply what it is but a sign, that it needs to be explained for another entirely different reason than its own. In a sense, that is, Baudrillard reveals that Foucault's genealogy is not complete: if in a first moment, power and sexuality are pre-existing intact principles and in a second they speak through their other or limit, there is necessarily a third moment in which power and sexuality and their limits are simultaneous and cannot be separated. Importantly, however, each stage is not merely historical or sequential, or even arbitrary or contingent, but recursive, successively raising itself up on the previous one in a kind of loop or spiral. Each successive stage makes possible the one before. Indeed, in a paradoxical way, Baudrillard both "genealogises" and makes impossible genealogy. He shows at once what makes this "genealogical" unwinding possible and its limits. Baudrillard is at the same time the continuation and completion of Foucault and a doing away with of him, an explanation of him for entirely different reasons than his own.

It is at this point that we can see what Baudrillard means by "criticism" or "theory", and altogether what he thinks he is doing in writing *Forget Foucault*. It is something that the various commentators on the debate have tried to put their finger on, speaking of it, using Baudrillard's language from the immediately following *On Seduction*, as a kind of "duel" or "challenge" or even a kind of "wrestling match". In the interview with Baudrillard that follows the new English translation published in 2007, even Foucault is quoted sounding "Baudrillardian" in speaking of the way that, as in judo, the best answer to an intellectual adversary is not to retreat, but to "go along with it, turning it to one's own advantage, as a resting point for the next phase" (69). But, in fact, what exactly is at stake in the relationship between Baudrillard and Foucault is frequently misunderstood. Seduction is not some kind of reciprocal battle between opposites. Rather, each side is also seeking to step back from this relationship and speak of what makes it possible. (Which is to speak as well of what makes the other possible, insofar as they exist only in this relationship.) That is to say, in his dispute with Foucault, Baudrillard is neither simply saying Foucault is wrong nor conversely that he sets the rules for critics like Baudrillard and that he can only follow him, although he is undoubtedly saying both of these. Rather, what Baudrillard is seeking to identify is what makes Foucault's system possible, what are its conditions of possibility. (And the Kantian resonance is intended here). What is that gap, absence or lack that means that Foucault's system is perfect and complete and we can only ever criticise it in its own terms?

To put this another way, Baudrillard when he criticises Foucault can only point to a certain limit or resistance to power, which is the very thing that makes power for

Foucault possible and that power takes into account. Baudrillard himself can only further diffract power. And power—or Foucault's account of it, which is the same thing—immediately incorporates this resistance and turns it into more or better power. (And the same goes for sexuality and its repression.) There is no outside to power and Foucault's account of it, so that Baudrillard can only echo or reproduce it in his critique. But what Baudrillard wants to think is what allows *this*. What means that there is no outside to power and Foucault's account of it? What produces that relationship between power and its other and Foucault and his other? It is this “void” or “nothingness” that Baudrillard tries to think, what “precedes” the relationship between power and its resistance and Foucault and any critique of him. It is, of course, true—this is precisely the second stage in Foucault's genealogy—that power is not power until its resistance and sexuality is not sexuality until its repression. But what Baudrillard is seeking to think is that situation where power breaks down because there is no other to it, because there is only power. And this leads to the paradox both that it is this thinking of the true limit to power—that it has no other, that power comes “before” and “after” any other—that restores an other to power and that the true limit to power, the possibility of a non-relationship to it, can only be thought within this relationship. Seduction in Baudrillard is at once this possibility that there is no relationship to the other and that this non-relationship becomes a kind of relationship or is possible only within a relationship. And all of this is at stake in Baudrillard's statement that “nothing” came out of that meeting between him and Foucault.

That is to say, even at this point, in what we might consider the third “order” of the genealogy of Foucault, arguably introduced by Baudrillard, in which the limit to power and sexuality occurs no longer simply at the end but power and sexuality are inseparable from their limit from the beginning, we can still see Baudrillard repeating Foucault. For if what Baudrillard opposes in Foucault's account of power and sexuality is that there is a certain “remarking” of their limits from somewhere outside of them—and that for power and sexuality to acknowledge these limits is to overcome them—Baudrillard in pointing this out necessarily replays the same gesture itself. For the basis of Baudrillard's argumentative method is an extraordinary kind of “doubling”, in which the very perfection and self-containedness of a system, say a system of simulation, are possible only for a completely different reason than its own. (And again, the connection with Kant's project of “critique” and the logic of the sublime, in which it is not a matter directly of thinking the transcendental, but of thinking the fact that we *cannot* think the transcendental, is intended.) In other words, when Baudrillard speaks of the way that the systems of power and sexuality are total with no possible resistance or repression outside of them, the very fact that he can

say this implies a certain outside, a critical point of reflection. He is able to think the *absence* of things, which is that condition of possibility for what is. We are even able to think, again like Kant, that every attempt to think this “void” or “nothing” for which things stand in fails, is only to return it to the terms we already have—as we see when we say that Baudrillard is able to criticise Foucault only in the terms that Foucault has given him—but with this itself implying a certain outside. If there is therefore a kind of circularity between a system and its end in Foucault, there is also as Baudrillard says of Foucault a kind of “spiral”, a continual series of mounting recursions, each rising behind or on top of the one before. And—most difficult of all—these are the same thing: the circle is a spiral and the spiral is a circle.⁹

But, of course—and here we move towards what perhaps we really want to speak of here—all of this might be put another way, and it is not Baudrillard who imitates Foucault but Foucault who imitates Baudrillard. For the paradox is that Foucault's system would not have this perfection, this closure, this totality, this inability to be criticised or even discussed except in its own terms, until after Baudrillard writes about it. Put simply, Baudrillard *is* the condition of possibility of Foucault. Or it is only because Foucault's thought is forgotten like this that he is able to be remembered, or even it is only Baudrillard who is able to remember that we have forgotten Foucault. But what does this actually mean in “real” terms? How does this actually play out in the relationship between Foucault and Baudrillard? These are questions, of course, that now have to be understood in inverted commas, and whose answers likely challenge the possibility of them being asked, let alone answered. But the story of Foucault's response to Baudrillard's essay is undoubtedly an intriguing one. As the historical record shows and as any number of commentators have pointed out, Foucault after publishing the first volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Will to Knowledge*, ultimately took some eight years before publishing the next two books in the series, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. It is often suggested—of course, for reasons that have nothing to do with Baudrillard, whose essay is invariably disregarded in accounts of Foucault's career—that this occurs as a result of a long period of reflection and critical self-judgement by Foucault. As previously noted, he was disappointed by the critical response to *The Will to Knowledge*. And he was hurt by the sceptical or at least enquiring note Deleuze sent to him after reading it, in which he wondered whether “there are micro-systems immanent to the State” and “segments of the State apparatus have also penetrated the micro-systems”, and which led to a cooling of their friendship.¹⁰ (Foucault had previously written the preface to the English translation of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, which made Deleuze's reaction all the more unexpected.) And, indeed—and it is this that undoubtedly made it all the more hurtful—Deleuze's

response in fact repeats aspects of Baudrillard's argument, as though he had in fact read it and took it seriously, at least unconsciously so.

Indeed, what comes next in Foucault's career, which was of course cut short by his premature death, is widely seen as marking a third distinct stage in his career, after the first linear histories of *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, which are structured by oppositions, and the non-linear genealogies of *Discipline and Punish* and *The Will to Knowledge*, in which these oppositions are reversed. In this third period—and, of course, we would want the analogy with the third order of Baudrillard's simulation to be kept in mind—Foucault wrote the three subsequent volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Use of Pleasure*, *The Care of the Self* and the posthumously published *The Confessions of the Flesh*, continued to give his annual lectures at the Collège de France and delivered a series of papers for international conferences, including 'Technologies of the Self' and 'What is Enlightenment?'. And if we might broadly characterise this last period of work, we would suggest, following any number of other scholars, that it appears to be a rejection of or at least a moving away from the concerns of the earlier Foucault and particularly those of the immediately preceding *The Will to Knowledge*. Indeed, in some ways, after an eight-year gap and in reaction to the disappointing reaction to that volume, we cannot help but read it as something of a self-criticism of a career and an oeuvre that had previously received almost unqualified approval. And in light of this what we want to suggest here is that, far from "nothing" happening in the wake of Foucault's encounter with Baudrillard, *everything* happened. In fact, in that manner we have tried to describe, the very logic of Baudrillard's work is to remark that nothing, to make it stand in for everything. Put simply, what we want to suggest—in a way, too weak a word: rather, to insist or prescribe—is that, after Baudrillard's essay on Foucault, Foucault's work is deeply influenced by Baudrillard, in effect becomes Baudrillardian. Indeed, it must now be read and understood through Baudrillard or even can *only* be read and understood through Baudrillard, whether Baudrillard has actually written on it or not.

In 'Forget Neoliberalism? Baudrillard, Foucault and the Fate of Political Critique', an essay on Baudrillard's *Forget Foucault* and the relationship between the two that must be understood after that, Benjamin Noys is at first openly mocking of any possible influence of Baudrillard on Foucault: "The bad taste of the title simply reiterated the childish nature of Baudrillard's provocation, and so the book remained as a misfiring novelty rather than an incisive intervention".³¹ And even when later in his essay Noys does point to certain commonalities between them, insofar as both can be seen to be offering a critique of neo-liberalism, he nevertheless contends that they are approaching the problem from different perspectives:

While both Foucault and Baudrillard share a certain departure from Marx, Baudrillard moves in the direction of a hyperbolically totalising analysis, wracked by sudden and catastrophic reversals, while Foucault moves in the direction of pluralisation, the displacement of 'Capitalism' with a capital 'C', and a historico-institutional analysis.¹²

It is an argument repeated in slightly different terms by Morad Moazami in his 'Forgive Foucault, Forget Baudrillard: On the Other Side of Power—Toward the Ecstasy of Seduction', in which he argues that, although Foucault was prepared to concede that sexuality is something of a simulacrum, he was never prepared to admit that power also was: "In reality, though Foucault came to recognise simulation in the discourses of the clinical and sexual, he could not fathom power also to be set within the same categories. To Foucault, power—that irreversible network of force relations—was this great truth".¹³ For both authors, any possible influence of Baudrillard on the later Foucault—of course, it could not be a question of influence on the earlier—is subject to the usual academic criteria for assessment. What would be the evidence, where would it be seen, how would it manifest itself, what would it mean? It is this that would be at stake in the close and unbiased reading of the texts before arriving at a considered conclusion.

Undoubtedly, this must be seen as a provocation—or perhaps better a kind of seduction—but we would suggest contra Noys and Moazami that, if we are to read Baudrillard properly, that is, to take him seriously, to consider his argument in the terms in which he would want us to, it is precisely *not* a matter of determining what influence if any Baudrillard has had on Foucault, what objective evidence we have of any engagement between them. Rather, to the extent that Foucault's work constitutes any kind of unified intellectual project, we would want to say that Baudrillard explains *all* of Foucault's work, and *entirely* explains it. (And this goes moreover if we want to think that Baudrillard simply explains the socio-political context—that of empty simulation—that Foucault works within.) Baudrillard or what Baudrillard is speaking of does not propose some partial explanation of Foucault or any kind of minor correction, but the conditions of possibility for everything that Foucault says: *everything* Foucault says must be understood as possible only because of that seduction and reversibility Baudrillard sets out in *Forget Foucault*. And that, if before *Forget Foucault* and Foucault's encounter with Baudrillard, this can be considered as something of a coincidence, after *Forget Foucault* we must understand it as a question of "influence". Whether he admits it or not, whether he knows it or not, Foucault must be understood to be following Baudrillard, or at least

can—indeed, must—be read that way. And if we do want to point to a certain shift in Foucault's work around the time of his encounter with Baudrillard—which numerous scholars of his work have done¹⁴—it can, indeed, must be, understood as Foucault taking up Baudrillard's critique of him and attempting to incorporate it in his work.

To put it more modestly and back into the more orthodox academic terms of Noys and Mozami, we might want to suggest that Baudrillard's work provides a “productive” and “insightful” way of reading the later Foucault. It would be to suggest that the later Foucault, if not actually the result of him taking into account Baudrillard's earlier “criticism” or “explanation” of his work, at least can be seen as responding to the same problem of simulation Baudrillard speaks of in *Forget Foucault*, having turned another “spiral”, as it were. That if works like *Discipline and Punish* and *The Will to Knowledge* correspond to a diffraction of power and sexuality that still leaves their limits outside, Foucault in his later works tries to incorporate this limit into the objects being spoken of. In other words—and this seems impossible—Foucault in his later works becomes his own Baudrillard, writing the equivalent of such works as *On Seduction*, *Fatal Strategies* and indeed *Forget Foucault*. They are absolutely different in tone from Baudrillard—modest, non-totalising, concerned with historical detail and the close reading of texts—but they are in fact the same, doing the same thing, making the same argument. Baudrillard seduced Foucault, but Foucault is now seducing Baudrillard, for if in one way we are reading Foucault through Baudrillard, in another we are also reading Baudrillard through Foucault. The relationship between Baudrillard and Foucault changes the way we read Baudrillard, and, indeed, although we do not have the time or space to do this here, we suggest that in the light of the connection we are about to make we could go back and read a certain Baudrillard in the light of Foucault (and particularly the “late” Baudrillard, that is, the Baudrillard who has had a chance to read the late Foucault), and by this we mean not merely totally, prescriptively, irrefutably, but—although it is ultimately the same thing—thematically, empirically, in terms of a shared subject matter and sensibility. (It would be the Baudrillard of the *Cool Memories* diaries, such texts as *Radical Alterity* and his interviews with François L'Yvonnet, in which we can find a certain reflection upon “subjectivity” and his own personhood.¹⁵)

So where do we see this “Baudrillardian” thematic in the later Foucault? Where do we see him “responding” to Baudrillard's critique in *Forget Foucault*? Where do we see him thinking through the reciprocity between power and sexuality and their limits and not any simple remarking of those limits from somewhere outside of them? We pick only three excerpts or moments from Foucault's texts of the period, briefly contextualising each within Foucault's wider career at that point and outlining the seemingly impossible exchange or connection we see between Baudrillard and

Foucault there. We start with the two subsequent volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, both published in 1984. In an interview given to mark the publication of the first volume, *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault spoke of what the following volumes in the projected series would deal with: "In subsequent volumes, concrete studies—on women, children, the perverted—I will try to analyse the forms and conditions of this [sexual] misery".¹⁶ But, in fact, by the time he got there—and, of course, our thought is that this is mediated by Baudrillard—things were considerably different. In *The Use of Pleasure*, we go considerably back in time to the fourth century B.C. with Foucault engaging with the writings of such Ancient Greek authors as Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon. And in the succeeding *The Care of the Self*, he moves forward to the first two centuries of the Christian era, where he engages with the writings amongst others of Plutarch, Seneca, Epictetus, Artemidorus and Marcus Aurelius. We would want to begin by suggesting that in an obvious "historical" sense Foucault is going back before the nineteenth-century "bio-politics" of the first volume, as though in some way to escape or pre-empt them. But also—and this is ultimately what we are wanting to suggest—Foucault can be seen as wanting to think, if this historical continuum means anything, the conditions of possibility for the bio-politics of that first volume. In other words—and this, needless to say, has been much commented upon—the *History of Sexuality* books mark not any kind of an orthodox historical project, either tracing the consequences of some initial moment or in this case its antecedents, but are rather a kind of spiralling recursion, with each successive volume seeking to set out the preconditions of the volume before.¹⁷

In both volumes, as opposed to the extensive social contexts of the first volume—and this is controversial for Foucault scholars, insofar as previously Foucault had always denied the importance of the subject—there is an emphasis on the seemingly self-constituting subject. In *The Use of Pleasure*, there is a detailed treatment of the three registers in which the subject can practise *askēsis* or self-control (dietetics, economics and sexual behaviour), in which it is a matter neither of some natural impulse to which one must inevitably succumb nor of some final self-mastery by means of which one would be immune to temptation. This is Foucault on this ongoing "practice of the self" that at once brings the subject about and that the subject must pledge themselves to:

There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for a forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of an ethical subject without 'modes of subjectivation'; and an 'ascetics' or 'practices of the self' that support them.¹⁸

And in an often eclectic and idiosyncratic way, often criticised for its lack of academic rigour, Foucault reads a number of classical Greek texts on the exact nature of this ongoing task of self-control or self-mastery. To take just one example, this is Foucault writing on the question of the “domination” of others that Aristotle raises in his *Laws*: “The combat relation with adversaries was also an agonistic relationship with oneself. The battle to be fought, the victory to be won, the defeat that one risked suffering—these were the processes and events that took place between oneself and oneself”.¹⁹ And in the succeeding *The Care of the Self*, drawing on a wider and more eclectic group of texts, and relating to a less specific cultural moment, in which classical Greek culture is crossing over into Roman and early Christian thought, Foucault seeks to formulate the notion of a certain heautocratisation or “cultivation of the self”. This is Foucault outlining early in the book the overall terms of his argument, which he insists are also to be found in any number of the authors he takes up: “Here we touch on one of the most important aspects of this activity devoted to oneself: it constituted not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice”.²⁰ And later in the book, this time specifically in relation to Seneca’s *Letters to Lucilius*, Foucault will again make clear, as we saw in *The Use of Pleasure*, that any relation of domination of the other also involves a certain relation of domination of oneself:

[Politics] also concerned the rules that must be applied when one engaged in them, and the way in which one ought to govern oneself in order to take one’s place among others, assert one’s legitimate share of authority, and in general situate oneself in the complex and shifting interplay of relations of command and subordination..²¹

Of course, there has been much academic discussion, both positive and negative, of the meaning and consequence of Foucault’s turn to the “pre-modern” and how to understand this new “use of the pleasures” (*chrēsis aphrodisiōn*) and “care for oneself” (*heautou epimeleisthai*). How do these relate to the account of sexual repressiveness of the preceding volume? How in general are we to understand this concern with the subject and its accompanying notions of “ethical work” and “self-examination”? We could cite a great deal of scholarship on these matters, but for us—attuned by our reading of Baudrillard—what is most notable about this new thematic of the “self” in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* is the complex relationship it has with its limit or other that Foucault proposes. To go back to that

moment of “ethical work” in *The Use of Pleasure*, if it implies an attempted control of bodily pleasures and the setting of limits, in another way it also brings about the self in this very self-limitation. In other words, the self is not simply outside of the limits it sets, remarking on them from somewhere else—this is where Foucault differs from Descartes and why he sets his history before him—but the self and its limits are simultaneous. This is Foucault in a passage from the ‘Introduction’ typical of many: “Of course all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply ‘self-awareness’ but self-formation as an ‘ethical subject’”.²² And for all of the shift in time and culture, we see much the same thing in *The Care of the Self*, where there is a similar struggle by the self to set its own limits, not yet in terms of any mortal sin in the eyes of God, but in terms of more worldly temptations and interactions with social others, including one’s wife, fellow free citizens and even young boys. Again, in all of this, if the aim is to bring about a self with a certain moral autonomy, in another way it is also the case that we don’t know who we are before this relationship with others, and indeed it is uncertain what is that self that attempts to set these rules for itself. In this sense, we might even say that Foucault goes back in history as a way of attempting to find a time when the self was not already assumed. This is Foucault in the ‘Conclusion’ of *The Care of the Self*, again in a passage that is typical of many: “It is the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connections it should establish with others”.²³

What Foucault is explicitly suggesting here is that there is a reciprocal relationship between the self and its limits—whether it be a matter of the “domination of oneself by oneself”²⁴ or that, “in the practice of the care of the self, one appealed to another person in whom one recognised an aptitude for guidance and counselling”.²⁵ And it is not—and Foucault is explicit about this—a matter of some intact self remarking these limits as though there is some ideal being waiting to be realised. Rather, the self is entirely transformed in this remarking or even is discovered for the first time in it. Or perhaps more precisely—and here the real meaning of that incremental “moral teleology” or “conversion to oneself” (*epistrophe eis heauton*) that Foucault speaks of—at each successive act of self-mastery, the coming together of the self and its limit, there *is* a certain higher self that thinks this or from where this exercise is subsequently realised. It is what Foucault describes in *The Care of the Self* with regard to that *askēsis* by which the self is formed: “[The rule of the individual over himself] broadens into an experience in which the relation to self takes the form not only of a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance”.²⁶ But the real point is that there is no final resting point and that, if at

each moment the self is granted a certain autonomy or self-mastery, this is only to realise that all of this is only because of something “higher”. And the “highest” realisation of the self is to understand that it can never finally know itself, and there is no outside exception to this self-contradiction. It is what Foucault calls “moderation” or “*sophrosyne*” in *The Use of Pleasure* and speaks of in terms of the “difficulty in the manner in which the individual could form himself as an ethical subject of his actions” in *The Care of the Self*.²⁷

The other late text that we would like to single out in this regard—although there are any number of others we could similarly adduce—is Foucault’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’ ‘What is Enlightenment?’ is based on a paper Foucault was due to give for a seminar on the theme of modernity and the Enlightenment at the University of California Berkeley in 1984, but which was cancelled when Foucault died. The seminar was a prestigious opportunity for Foucault to explain his work, and in it he—frequently too—simply labelled an anti-Enlightenment thinker—aligns himself with the project of arguably the greatest Enlightenment thinker of them all, Immanuel Kant, in naming his lecture after a paper Kant wrote in 1784 after the completion of the first edition of his first *Critique*. Of course, both essays have been subject to an extraordinary array of academic analyses, but the aspect we want to bring out here is the way in which Foucault continues Kant’s project of “critique”, but with a decisive twist. For if on the one hand Foucault follows the Kantian project of posing the transcendental condition of the possibility of things, he also acknowledges that those supposedly necessary and universal concepts or categories in the name of which Kant made his intervention are not only unrealisable, as they were for Kant, but unthinkable. Critical values are able to be posited only in the same terms as that for which they are meant to account. In other words, unlike Kant, any critical value argued for is not transcendental but to be named and thought only in terms of this world. The project of the Enlightenment appears over or impossible, insofar as no higher value can be appealed to and there is no place outside of this world from which to think. This is Foucault in ‘What is Enlightenment?’ outlining this difficulty, with the obvious conclusion that all that remains to do is construct the genealogy of these various “critical” efforts in a Nietzschean style and that those values appealed to reveal more about the world in which they were posited than offer any transcendental thinking of it:

Archaeological—and not transcendental—in that sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say and do as so many historical events.²⁸

However, in his essay Foucault does not entirely give up on the Enlightenment project of critique and even self-critique. He offers not just a historical or genealogical consciousness of past failed efforts, but also attempts positively to go forward. For, if he can think the limits or failures of previous attempts at critique, he can at least, as we see in those two later volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, think *this*. And it is this ongoing thinking of the failure of the Enlightenment, of the fact that all attempts to think the underlying conditions of this world fall back into it, that *is* the Enlightenment for Foucault, that is the true “critical” project of Kant. It is for this reason that the Enlightenment or project of critique is ongoing and interminable for Foucault: because it is what thinks its own failure or end. And, indeed—and it is precisely this twist or spiral that Baudrillard forced him to construct as a result of *Forget Foucault*—this is not simply an end or limit that can be thought from somewhere outside of it, but *is* its very thinking. The Enlightenment we might say from the very beginning is its own end or limit. Or, if this is impossible, every attempt at critique is immediately subject to another one. This again is what Foucault suggests in ‘What is Enlightenment?’: “From this point of view, the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, and of the possibility of moving beyond them, is always limited and determined; we are always in the position of beginning again”.²⁹ And, indeed, we can find Foucault saying something like this in any number of other texts from this period. To take just one example, in his posthumously published ‘What is Critique?’, he similarly thinks the failure of the established critical values and then contends that the crucial task of proposing new values is inseparable from the thinking of this failure:

Meaning is constituted solely by systems of constraint characteristic of the signifying machinery. It seems to me that it is through the analysis of this fact whereby meaning only exists through the effects of coercion which are specific to these structures that, by a strange short-cut, the problem between *ratio* and *power* is rediscovered.³⁰

What we want to suggest here is that all of this is to repeat the terms, or is only properly readable in the terms, in which Baudrillard critiques Foucault. It is as though Foucault did in fact take Baudrillard seriously, or at least reached the same conclusion as him. Now in the later Foucault, as opposed to the earlier—although as we have seen this distinction is more complex than at first appears—it is not a limit that can be remarked from the outside, which leads to the constant expansion of the system, but a limit at the same time as the system, which means that if the system

forms a kind of expanding spiral it also like a circle stays in the same place. It is exactly what Baudrillard means by the “exchange” with death in a book like *Symbolic Exchange and Death*—and death in fact functions in much the same way throughout *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. This is Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* on this “symbolic” or let us say “seductive” exchange between life and death: “Throughout the entire order of political economy, we continue to exchange with the dead, even those denied rest, those for whom rest is prohibited”.³¹ And if we are to understand the relationship between Baudrillard and Foucault properly, it is not a matter of any external shared influence, any likenesses that have to be weighed up against their differences, as though we can stand anywhere outside of them, but a total explanation of each by the other. In effect—for all of their apparent dissimilarities of subject matter, periods treated and argumentative style—they are saying the same thing. And why would we want to say this? Because to speak from the point of view of Baudrillard, who was the one who initially seduced us, this is the way his argument works: not as any kind of correction, objective evaluation or even partial revision of Foucault, but as a total and incontestable explanation of his work. As the one who sets out, and actually is, its condition of possibility. But at the same time, if Baudrillard wants us to forget Foucault, Baudrillard in saying this is the very way that Foucault lives on. Foucault, like every great thinker, lives on through his forgetting, is the very name for his own forgetting. He is the place from which, the name in which, we would forget him. Foucault, as Baudrillard already well knew, is already his own Baudrillard. Foucault already comes after Baudrillard.

Notes

¹ Sylvère Lotringer, ‘Remember Foucault’, *October* 126, Fall 2008, p. 19. Lotringer speaks of the first volume of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* series by the title it was given for its English translation, whereas it later became known by the English translation of the title it was originally given in French, *The Will to Knowledge*, which is the title we use here.

² See on this Lotringer’s account in ‘Remember Foucault’, pp. 9-10, and David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, Verso, London, 2019, pp. 358-60. It is, of course, the idea that Baudrillard’s review and Foucault’s response were once going to be published together in *Critique* that leads to Lotringer’s remark above concerning the irony of *The History of Sexuality* and *Forget Foucault* now appearing next to each other in the windows of Parisian bookshops.

³ ‘Remember Foucault’, pp. 9-10.

⁴ See on this, as well as Lotringer’s ‘Forget Foucault’, pp. 17-8, David McFarlane, ‘Theory as Symbolic Exchange’, *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 13(2), July 2016, especially the section ‘Adversarial Springboard and Ecstatic Extremities’.

- ⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, CA, 2007, p. 34. All further references in brackets in the main text.
- ⁶ On the connection between Foucault and Deleuze and Lyotard with regard to power and sexuality, Baudrillard writes: "It's simply that in Foucault power takes the place of desire. It is there in the same way as desire in Deleuze and Lyotard: always already there, purged of all negation, a network, a rhizome, a contiguity diffracted ad infinitum" (35).
- ⁷ See 'The Apathy of the Masses', in Richard G. Smith (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: The Disappearance of Culture: Uncollected Interviews*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2017, pp. 56-70. The interview originally appeared in *Lire*, Juin 1987, pp. 24-31.
- ⁸ It is notable that Foucault himself uses the word "spiral" in *The Will to Knowledge*: "By what spiral did we come to affirm that sex is negated? What led us to show, ostentatiously, that sex is something we hide, to say it is something we silence", *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, New York, 1980, p. 9.
- ⁹ This is why, for example, at the beginning of his essay, Baudrillard posits two seemingly opposed but in fact mutually reinforcing accounts of the way both power and Foucault's account of power work: "on the one hand, a powerful generating spiral that is no longer a despotic architecture but a filiation *en abyme*" and, "on the other hand, an interstitial flowing of power that seeps through the whole porous network of the social" (29). And this is ultimately to suggest that the linear is circular or indeed a spiral.
- ¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, 'Desire and Pleasure', *Globe E-Journal* 5, 1997 (<http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/globe/delfou.html>).
- ¹¹ Benjamin Noys, 'Forget Neoliberalism? Baudrillard, Foucault and the Fate of Political Critique', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 9(3), October 2012 (<https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/forget-neoliberalism-baudrillard-foucault-and-the-fate-of-political-critique/>).
- ¹² 'Forget Neoliberalism?'
- ¹³ Morad Moazami, 'Forgive Foucault, Forget Baudrillard: On the Other Side of Power—Toward the Ecstasy of Seduction', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 13(2), July 2016 (<https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/forgive-foucault-forget-baudrillard-on-the-other-side-of-power-toward-the-ecstasy-of-seduction/>).
- ¹⁴ Perhaps the best account of this is Beatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2002, pp. xi-xiii.
- ¹⁵ There are five *Cool Memories* notebooks or diaries in all, spanning 1987 to 2006; *Radical Alterity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2008; and *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonnet*, Routledge, London, 2004.
- ¹⁶ 'Power and Sex', in Alan Sheridan (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 112.
- ¹⁷ To take two examples of this argument that Foucault's going back in history is a kind of "transcendentalism", see Joseph Margolis, 'Redeeming Foucault', in John Caputo and Mark Yount (eds.), *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1993, pp. 54-9, and H.D. Harootunian, 'Foucault, Genealogy, History: The Pursuit of Otherness', in Jonathan Arac (ed.), *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1988, pp. 125-34.
- ¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume. 2*, Vintage Books, New York, 1984, p. 28.

¹⁹ *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 67.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume. 3*, Vintage Books, New York, 1984, p. 51.

²¹ *The Care of the Self*, p. 94.

²² *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 28.

²³ *The Care of the Self*, p. 238.

²⁴ *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 65.

²⁵ *The Care of the Self*, p. 53.

²⁶ *The Care of the Self*, p. 68.

²⁷ *The Care of the Self*, p. 95. Altogether on this question of the self “folding back” upon the self, thus bringing the self about, we would refer to the eminent Deleuze commentator Daniel Smith’s ‘Foucault on Ethics and Subjectivity: “Care of the Self” and “Aesthetics of Existence”’, in which he writes: “The subject just is this form of circular relation to itself, the absolute immanence that we saw in the linguistic structure of the reflexive... If we were to give a diagrammatic representation of all the forces which act on the self, ‘freedom’ would designate the subset of those forces which emanate from the self itself, ‘folding’ back on itself, constituting and re-forming the very thing which is doing the constituting”, *Foucault Studies* 19, June 2015, pp. 144, 145.

²⁸ ‘What is Enlightenment?’, in Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, The New Press, New York, 2003, pp. 53-4.

²⁹ ‘What is Enlightenment?’, p. 54.

³⁰ ‘What is Critique?’, in *The Essential Foucault*, p. 270.

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Sage Publications, London, 2017, p. 155.