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divergent in interest and emphasis although all argue against essence. These arguments are conducted in the venues of Marxist, feminist, and gay/lesbian theories, and also involve the theoretical fields of semiotics, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. In my thesis, the anti-essentialist concepts of simulation, hegemony and performance will not only be appropriated with an appreciation for their contexts, but they will also be put into play with one another in order to construct a combinatory model. While none of the appropriated terms escapes this process unchanged, I would argue that the model in which they operate carefully delineates its commitments and positions and produces an anti-essentialist strategy which delegitimizes oppressive narratives of "the real" in order to articulate a viable ethicopolitical theory.

In the chapters which follow this introduction I dismantle Enlightenment metanarratives in order to develop an anti-essentialist ground for my model. My second chapter examines the weak link between ethics and essence in liberalist discourse. Engaging a discussion of the subject of feminist inquiry -- woman/women -- enables me to distinguish clearly the radical subjectivist position of this paper from both liberal-humanist and radical objectivist epistemologies. In chapter three, Baudrillard's notion of simulation is extracted from his objectivist "system of death" in order to realize the latter's potential as a subversive, anti-essentialist logic in my ethicopolitical model. Baudrillard evolves the concept of simulation from his own perceptual history of the object/commodity in political economy. Simulation characterizes the perceptual condition of the object as a "hyperreal" commodity that floats free of absolute reference. Consequently, simulation can be viewed as an epistemic state contrary to the episteme of

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**Arguing with the Real:
Ethicopolitical Strategy towards Radical Democracy**

**submitted by Savio Barros, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of English

Carleton University

Abstract

In this thesis I endeavour to scrutinize both the demise of Enlightenment ethical codes and the construction of the space of ethicopolitics. This thesis takes up the challenges of ethicopolitical critique in the postmodern by forging links between a number of subversive concepts: Jean Baudrillard's notion of *simviation*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's conception of *hegemony*, and Judith Butler's notion of *performance*. While disarticulating the deployment of essence in left-liberalist theories of society, I attempt to enact a type of synthesis of these dissimilar theories along the theme of antiessentialism in order to derive a dynamic model of the social in which subjects can *act* toward ethicopolitical goals and argue with normative deployments of reality.

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Chapter One

Introduction

A fundamental paradigm shift is being thought amongst leftist and liberalist discourses in the academic community. The movement -- from universality to specificity, from consciousness to language, from Identity to difference, from knowledge to knowledges, from positive essence to negativity, from structuralism to poststructuralism -- may be linked to a disillusionment with the ethical and political foundations of liberal-humanism. Moreover, the movement points to a new epistemic situation -- a postmodern epistemic space. Initially the word "postmodern" was applied only to contemporary architecture and contemporary aesthetics, but it has now crossed traditional disciplinary boundaries and characterizes the current condition of culture in the post-industrial West. The term has become a provocative touchstone. It is greeted with displeasure and disapproval by liberal-humanists, those who privilege the notions of coherence and continuity which postmodernism challenges. Among the left there is little consistency of attitude towards postmodernism. For example, while Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson provides a hostile historicization of postmodernism as the faddish "cultural logic of late capitalism," cultural critic Jean-François Lyotard embraces it as the condition of knowledge in a technological society. Christine Di Stefano, a feminist philosopher, associates postmodernism with the attack on the "cultural-epistemological" foundation of modernism and is, as a result, sceptical of its usefulness for feminism. Despite such divergent opinions, I would argue that, if postmodernism is understood as defining a new epistemic space, it cannot, as detractors contend, simply be ignored, willed away or discounted.

This paper engages an examination of a postmodern epistemic space by reading Lyotard's notion of the postmodern in Michel Foucault's notion of episteme. Whereas the Platonic notion of *epistēmē* is knowledge that finds its referent in a universal, immutable, and essential "form," Foucault produces a non-foundational account of episteme as "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalised systems" (191). The term epistemic space, therefore, characterizes the regulatory operation of power/knowledge in particular periods. Postmodernism is articulated by Lyotard as the moment of absolute scepticism that is not only located diachronically as a temporal space after modernity, but also synchronically as the very precondition nascent in the modernist project that reveals the "lack of reality in reality" (9). According to Lyotard, modernism proceeded from this founding uncertainty through the paradigm of a "project" or "Idea" of universal emancipation from which Enlightenment metanarratives were derived.¹ Metanarratives function, then, like myths, to sustain and legitimate a particular notion of reality and hegemonic social practices within the epistemic space of modernity. In the postmodern, or the contemporary epistemic situation, the epistemological foundation of modernist universalization is debased. Clearly, thinking postmodernism begins with a radical questioning of the modernist, cultural construction of the real; postmodernism asks how any construction, contextualization and arrangement of knowledge epistemologically underpins certain ethical and political commitments.

Ethical thought attempts to negotiate the space of the real -- its shape, its dimensions, its location -- in order to determine what political subjects *ought* to do. To

argue with the real over the very negotiability of its space is a problem for ethicopolitics.²

"Ethicopolitics" attempts to articulate ethics in the postmodern, a place where ethics can find no essential ground in "reality." Consequently, ethicopolitics must be understood as a discursive space where ethics cannot transcend its horizon in politics (nor can politics transcend its own horizon in ethics), a theatre where the fictionality of truth calls attention to whose political service and to what political ends a narrative of the real is deployed.

Ethicopolitics rejects the Western ethical and political metanarratives of liberal-humanism, and thus it must also reject the founding act of those narratives: the imperialistic universalization of positively defined essences and of the relationship between these essences. A positive essence is either a self-reflexive, pre-discursive ontology or the most irreducible aspect of a material "being" that maintains it as a discrete entity. In the postmodern, the dissolution of essence is perceived to occur in both practical and theoretical terms. On a social level, essence is disabled by a fragmentation of community that has taken the form of a general crisis. On a theoretical level, poststructuralist discourses consistently attack the deployment of an essence, centre, or "transcendental signifier" and, consequently, replace the notion of the humanist "individual" with that of the discursively produced "subject."

What is ethicopolitically at stake in these "academic" discussions for left-liberalist discourses is the hegemonic rendering of a normative "reality."³ A deployment of reality that is hegemonic has/is the power to legitimate and to deligitimate, to foster and to put under erasure, discursive effects such as subject positions, bodies, peoples, and practices. Unfortunately, the dissolution of essence has put even left-liberalist thought in a

quandary because it, too, has constructed its critique of the social around the idea of positively defined essences. Clearly, if essence is no longer a credible basis on which to ground ethicopolitical critique, then new logics of the social must be explored. The problem for engaged radical critique, then, is that of reconstituting its ethical and political objectives on a terrain which is no longer that of universalized essence or essentialist identity politics. At this juncture, the problem of ethicopolitical critique involves not only delegitimizing the metanarratives that deploy an essential reality which constrain, bind, and put under erasure discursive elements, but also thinking through the resultant discontinuities in order to forge an ethical and active politics from anti-essentialism.

In this paper I take up this dual challenge of ethicopolitical critique by reading postmodernism as a peculiar epistemic space which challenges the traditional essentialisms of leftist politics and by forging links between a number of subversive concepts: Jean Baudrillard's notion of *simulation*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's conception of *hegemony*, and Judith Butler's notion of *performance*. While disarticulating the deployment of essence in left-liberalist theories of society, I attempt to enact a type of synthesis by connecting the dissimilar theories of these theorists regarding anti-essentialism in order to derive a dynamic model of the social in which subjects can act toward ethicopolitical goals. I will first examine the concepts of simulation, hegemony, and performance in the contexts in which they were articulated. This requires close narrative attention to the *logos* of particular texts: Baudrillard's Simulations, Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, and Butler's Bodies that Matter. Comparatively, each text is certainly dissimilar and markedly

divergent in interest and emphasis although all argue against essence. These arguments are conducted in the venues of Marxist, feminist, and gay/lesbian theories, and also involve the theoretical fields of semiotics, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. In my thesis, the anti-essentialist concepts of simulation, hegemony and performance will not only be appropriated with an appreciation for their contexts, but they will also be put into play with one another in order to construct a combinatory model. While none of the appropriated terms escapes this process unchanged, I would argue that the model in which they operate carefully delineates its commitments and positions and produces an anti-essentialist strategy which delegitimizes oppressive narratives of "the real" in order to articulate a viable ethicopolitical theory.

In the chapters which follow this introduction I dismantle Enlightenment metanarratives in order to develop an anti-essentialist ground for my model. My second chapter examines the weak link between ethics and essence in liberalist discourse. Engaging a discussion of the subject of feminist inquiry -- woman/women -- enables me to distinguish clearly the radical subjectivist position of this paper from both liberal-humanist and radical objectivist epistemologies. In chapter three, Baudrillard's notion of simulation is extracted from his objectivist "system of death" in order to realize the latter's potential as a subversive, anti-essentialist logic in my ethicopolitical model. Baudrillard evolves the concept of simulation from his own perceptual history of the object/commodity in political economy. Simulation characterizes the perceptual condition of the object as a "hyperreal" commodity that floats free of absolute reference. Consequently, simulation can be viewed as an epistemic state contrary to the episteme of

representation. This pertains not only to the commodity but to all cultural signs -- including the subject. Baudrillard develops the concept of simulation to critique the reductive nature of the Marxist analysis of the commodity within the deterministic base/superstructure argument. He therefore stresses the negativity of simulated identity because of its contingent and equivalent relations not only with itself, but also with other simulations. The negativity of simulation thwarts deterministic arguments because they rely on the positivity of essence. In the text of Simulations, however, Baudrillard attempts to contain the logic of simulation within his own nihilistic discourse. Fortunately, simulation has its own logic which frustrates the host discourse's efforts at containment. Attention to Baudrillard's own narrative will reveal the resistance and resilience of simulation. However, since Baudrillard is more interested in evacuating the social than developing the notion of simulation, the ethicopolitical potential of simulation will be explored by examining its constituent logic in other texts and contexts.

In the fourth chapter, the logic of simulation is taken up in Laclau and Mouffe's delineation of logics of contingency and equivalence. Like Baudrillard, these theorists contemplate the construction of essence and identity on a post-Marxist terrain of negativity. I will examine how Laclau and Mouffe evolve the logics of contingency and equivalence into the negatively grounded concept of hegemony. I will attempt to show that by reading contingency and equivalence as internal to simulation, hegemony can be appropriated as a spatial concept that adds a discursive depth to the hyperreal and interlinks simulated identities within that topography.

While the logic of simulation, through the internal logics of contingency and

equivalence, permits a spatial model of the social to be evolved, it is not yet in a position to produce a viable social goal because it has not brought the ethicopolitical subject into focus. To this end, chapter five will examine Butler's anti-essentialist notion of the performative subject which she develops in the theatre of gender construction. Her psycholinguistic analysis of identity production in the Western symbolic will add a new dimension to the logic of simulation: temporality. I propose that, with the above elements at hand, we can move away from the notions of essence and ethics and into the space of postmodernity where the ethicopolitical subject can act against oppressive deployments of the real.

The ethicopolitical initiative to argue with the real through the logic of simulation calls into question the deployment of reality in both liberal-humanist and radical objectivist paradigms. Consequently, this paper will first delineate the issues and problems of this twofold critique by briefly examining the problem of ethics and essence in a particular theatre of left liberalism, feminist inquiry.

Chapter Two

From Ethics to Ethicopolitics: The Subject of Feminism

The field of ethics is concerned with value-laden questions concerning human conduct: obligation, responsibility, the binaries of right/wrong, justice/injustice, and the legitimacy of such categories of judgement or evaluation. As an inquiry into the nature of morality in the Western philosophic tradition, ethics has tended towards monism in an endeavour to grasp the Good: a true self-referential form. This is evident in Immanuel Kant's deontics where moral law, as opposed to inclination (desire), is expressed in universally binding categorical imperatives. Kant's method is but one of many methods -- deontologic, contractarianist, consequentialist, axiologic, causuistic, descriptive, intuitive, normative, naturalistic ⁴ -- which, in the epistemic space of the Enlightenment, rationalize ethics into a variety of regulatory codes. These metanarratives serve as templates for moral action through which specific phenomena and practices could be viewed, mapped, and understood. Enlightenment ethics, however, relies on the assumption that reason is external to its conditions of existence and that "individuals" are actors capable of acting in full knowledge of a transcendental rational morality. Ethics is thus constructed on the fiction of the sovereign, ontologic, centred subject and are, therefore, connected to the "metaphysics of [the determination of being as] presence" (Derrida 279-80). Consequently, ethics presupposes that the subject is centred upon an *essence* that determines its identity and serves as a point of reference through which the particular may be universalized. Rather than provide a genealogy of the demise of Enlightenment ethical codes, this chapter will examine the epistemological failure of the deployment of

essence within the cultural critique of a particular counterhegemonic discourse: feminism.

Nowhere has the problem of ethics been as hotly contested as within feminism. Feminist discourses can be seen to have emerged in the twentieth century largely as a liberal-humanist call for universal emancipation. Feminism, however, has faced both practical and critical challenges in postmodernity. For example, the political splits within feminism from the 1960's to the 1980's have effectively challenged its collective subject. Groups such as black women, working-class women, third-world women, lesbians, and others have diverged as they questioned oppressive hegemonies within and without feminism. This splintering of feminism's collective subject is accompanied on the critical plane by the problem of determining the particular subject of feminism: the essence of "woman." A brief account of the relationship, for the subject of feminism, between essence and ethics will epistemologically delineate the differences between liberal-humanist and social constructionist perspectives, and the difference within social constructionism between what I call radical objectivist and radical subjectivist epistemologies. What is at stake in these schools of moral epistemology is a hegemonic deployment of a normative "reality." This chapter will examine the breakdown of Enlightenment ethics under the scrutiny of rigorous feminist interrogations — interrogations that also provide tools for thinking through the shift from universality to contingency in ethical thought.

Liberal-Humanist Epistemologies

Feminisms have, for some time, pointed out the shortcomings of ethical theory in

the Western philosophic tradition. Thinkers from Aristotle to Kant to Freud view women as having a significantly different character from men, one that does not allow them status as ethical agents. According to Carol Gilligan, Kant's ethics are built on duty and principle, both of which he believes are beyond the capacities of women, while Nietzsche's ethics are based on a deliberately chosen masculine model, the warrior (162). Even Freud's purported ahistorical psychoanalytics are coloured by his own concurrence with the contemporary cultural wisdom on women:

I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their superego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Characteristics which critics of every epoch have brought up against women -- that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feeling or affection or hostility -- all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of the superego which we have inferred above. (342)

Freud thus associates himself with a philosophical tradition in which women represent the "feminine," where the feminine is associated with the body and nature and the masculine with the mind and transcendent reason.. The linking of women to nature, the body, and "inclination" supports the notion that women are incapable of abstract thought and reasoning on the general level that patriarchy considers to be the necessary grounds for

ethical thought and agency (Parsons 387).

Kathryn Morgan has found that most traditional moral theories follow one or more of four basic patterns: they deny that women are capable of full moral reasoning; they draw a distinction between public and private moral thought, restricting women to the domain of the private and then denying that the private sphere really constitutes moral thought; they force women into a series of perverse moral double binds; and they make invisible the domains where women's moral decision-making is concentrated (146). Thus, Enlightenment ethics has been viewed by many feminists as patriarchal and indeed masculine or "malestream," because it refuses women access to ethical thought and concurrently denies them status as both ethical and political agents.³

Liberal-humanism is the epistemic matrix through which feminism historically and theoretically emerged. Liberalism is the desire for universal enfranchisement or democratic inclusion structured on the premise of the centred subject: the notion of a stable, self-reflexive, ontological "individual." Thus, liberal ideals function with the naturalistic *telos* of bringing to fulfilment the unique capacities of the "human." Because the "individual" is supposed to bear a positive essence, it has recourse to the fundamental ground of its being -- its internal principle -- with which it can allegedly extrapolate a transcendental right from wrong. The natures of the individual, the human, and the agent are never questioned in this imperialist doctrine which both obfuscates and secures difference under a universalized ethical norm.

Without critiquing the positivity of the "individual," liberalist and naturalist feminist epistemologies have supported the extension of the ethical and political "rights of

the individual" to women. Liberalist-feminism argues for this extension within the *logos* of Enlightenment rationality as Sue Parsons explains:

From the early days during the Enlightenment through to the development of utilitarian thinking in the nineteenth century, feminists have made use of this understanding of rational moral behaviour in order to plead the case of women's rights. It has been a strong point of their arguments that the liberation of women is not merely consistent with liberal views of morality but that opposition to such extensions of justice is self-defeating in that it contradicts its own presumptions. (386)

While liberal-feminism maintains that liberties that are normatively ascribed to men in Enlightenment ethics should be *rationaly* extended to women, an epistemology of "naturalism" questions the nature of rationality and the terms of inclusion. By leaving the sovereignty of the "individual" intact, naturalist critics maintain an equivalence between the oppression of women and the *phallogocentric* repression of a "feminine" principle in patriarchy -- held to be the essence of "woman." Many naturalist criticisms of patriarchy have thus attempted to articulate the essence of "woman," a principle that operates cross-culturally and exists outside of the patriarchal subjugation of women.⁶ A naturalist epistemology contends that if Enlightenment ethics reductively conflates the human with "man" and masculinity -- figured as a natural rather than cultural construct -- then, the naturalist epistemology contends, the liberal inclusion of "woman," and thereby the feminine, would necessarily change the character that is traditionally ascribed to the "human." Thus, naturalism questions the cognitive construction of justice which

privileges man, and argues that the *logos* of masculinity must be counterbalanced by the repressed feminine. Naturalist feminism proposes that a feminine principle may be located in qualities traditionally associated with the women such as mothering, nurturing, or caring.

Detractors of naturalism have questioned whether the feminine represents an authentic voice of "woman." Jane Duran notes that "[i]f the text of Western culture is essentially masculine, or 'phallogocentric,' . . . it is not clear that the female voice can appropriate this stance" without itself constructing yet another 'male' text (165). Sarah Lucia Hoagland takes Duran's consideration a step further:

Many claim that there is a feminine principle that must exert itself to counterbalance masculinism pervading world cultures, but what they seem to ignore is that the feminine has its origin in masculinist ideology and does not represent a break from it. (159)

If the masculine and feminine are considered to be structurally related, then the feminine is encultured and materialized by patriarchy and, consequently, cannot be considered the site of "female" authenticity. Consequently, nothing remains to guarantee either the equation of women with the feminine, or the strict separation of masculine and feminine.

The moral epistemology of liberal-naturalist feminism, like that of liberal-humanism, involves an essentialist reduction, and the distinction between Aristotelian and Platonic essences may be cited to delineate this. Aristotle identifies essence (*ousia*) as the substance of a thing, its stable and fundamental aspect that is necessary and unchanging, but for Plato essence is the underlying, immutable, invisible, and abstract

form to which the perceptible world can only refer and represent. Platonic essentialism is a metaphysical concept, whereas Aristotelian essentialism seems empirical. Thus, while the idea or category of "women" relies on the deployment of an Aristotelian essence, the idea of the feminine is a Platonic and metaphysical conception. Humanist and naturalist epistemologies reduce Aristotelian essences to Platonic ones: women to the feminine.

Naturalism, in seeking to contest Enlightenment rationalism, seeks not only the liberalist inclusion of women into the category of the "individual" or "human" but, by extending the essentialist premise of that rationality, also attempts to maintain the feminine as a metaphysical principle. It is the extrapolation of a feminine principle from a select group of women that calls attention to the normativity of the essentialist model. Certainly not *all* women are mothers, nurturers or caregivers. As the rational conception of the human served in Enlightenment ethical codes as a means of excluding others from the category of "individual" and agent, naturalist-feminism, in bringing attention to that exclusion, actually repeats the imperialistic gesture.

Social Constructionist Epistemologies

That women are oppressed in patriarchal culture is evident. As an emancipatory discourse, feminism is committed to undermining patriarchal power structures which disempower women. Maintaining a category of women is essential in this respect, but it is unclear what the category essentially designates. Social constructionist epistemologies do not necessarily mark a break from liberal-humanist social objectives. Rather, they delineate a break from the specific deployment of essence within liberal-humanism. In

social constructionist epistemologies, identities are not figured as discrete, self-contained, or pre-existing the social, but instead as produced by the social. A wide range of social constructionist perspectives may be broken down into radical objectivist and radical subjectivist epistemologies. The former perceives the totality of social relations as an intelligible rational object; hence, radical objectivism moves in the mode of an "empirical" science. The latter would view the social as overdetermined and, consequently, as a "symbolic order." While radical objectivism directly supports many of the social goals of liberalist and naturalist epistemologies, radical subjectivism, in disarticulating a direct relationship between women and the feminine, calls into question the metaphysicality of essence, whatever its deployment.

Radical objectivist epistemologies take up the cause of delineating the Aristotelian essence of woman. These epistemologies attempt to maintain active ethics and politics, not by eschewing the notion of a centred subject, but by affirming that essence does not pre-exist social arrangements but is constructed within the social. Consequently, radical objectivist theories attempt to access the immanent relations of power (or the law) that constitute all discursive systems. By negating the feminine as a construct external to the textuality of the social,⁷ radical objectivism examines the normative construction of women in relation to men. Patriarchy and women's resistance are viewed as a closed system at the cost of naturalizing this totality. Radical objectivist theories therefore appear to renounce the metaphysics of Platonic essence in favour of the "empiricism" of Aristotle; but if a conceptual and regulatory system such as patriarchy is equated with a social totality, then "objectivism" never escapes the metaphysical quagmire of determinate

identity, as with liberal-humanism. The explanatory power of radical objectivist moral epistemology has been effaced by the recognition that it presupposes the Platonism it claims to exclude: the metaphysics of being. In seeking out a set of determinate relations by investigating such textual effects as gender relations, a rational objectivity, or empiricism, is considered to be outside and *exterior* to social relations. Thus, while liberal-humanism has its point of reference for value in Platonic essentialism (the Good, God, transcendent human nature), radical objectivism also maintains its referent outside the social in an unquestioned rationality which constructs, engenders and determines a system of Aristotelian essences. Paradoxically, in claiming that the social is a rational intelligible totality, radical objectivism unwittingly allows human essence to serve simultaneously as the ground of ethics and occupy the site of its own dismissal.

In reading the problem of determining Aristotelian essences for a radical-objectivist feminism, two statements should be combined: Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "woman is made not born" and Monique Wittig's comment that "lesbians are not women."⁸ Both claims efface the notion of women as a natural group. De Beauvoir views women as a gendered social construction, and Wittig, in delineating a materialist-feminist, or a radical-lesbianist approach, questions the heterosexual matrix through which the "category of sex" is itself materialised, wherein sex is taken as a sensible, physical, immediate given but is actually only a sophisticated myth and an "imaginary formation" (12). With the above two statements in mind, it is easy to see how gender empiricism dissolves into a problem of its own construction through power/knowledge matrices.

The problem of who is "woman" is complicated by a further problem: who speaks

for woman? Beginning with Sojourner Truth's provocative question "ain't I a woman?" in her nineteenth century campaign for black women's rights, bell hooks argues that the ethical and political goals of American feminism are historically specific to middle and upper class, white women (160). For writers such as hooks, the fiction of woman's essence serves to erase "multiple differences among and within women [and] to reify, rather than to critically contest, transform, and escape the imposed myth of difference" (Di Stefano 65). Thus, a major problem with radical objectivism is precisely what is objectified as the "empirical" commonality of a group. Consequently, developing and maintaining active ethics and politics that analyze patriarchy and liberate women is problematized by the absence of a unitary category or even working definition of "woman" (Guard 137).

A final problem with radical objectivism is the menacing tension between the socially determined subject and the notion of an effective subject-agent. Radical objectivism centres the subject in an effort to maintain an active notion of ethics and politics. Yet it does this by claiming that the social is a totality which discursively determines the subject. If the social is a totality which constructs and determines positive (Aristotelian) essences then it is not clear that the subject, as an effect of discourse, can be considered an ethical agent, precisely because its actions are determined by discourse. As Parsons comments, liberalism poses a universal identity, and naturalism poses a human identity, but social constructionism (radical objectivism in particular) -- by positioning the subject as an effect of discourse -- verges on posing no identity and thus undermines agency (392).⁹ Consequently, while women have been denied moral agency in traditional

ethical thought, the problem of agency now becomes relevant, not only for women, but for *all actors* in their discursive contexts (Holland 102). Radical objectivism becomes ensnared in a logical tautology: how can a notion of an active and effective agent be maintained along with the notion of a deterministic society? Clearly, there is an identity problematic at the base of liberal-humanist and radical objectivist reactions to Enlightenment ethics, one which is imbricated in issues of essence.

Radical subjectivism offers an antiessentialist critique by decentering the subject. Rejecting a positive "metaphysics of presence," radical subjectivist theories maintain that radical alterity — an unspeakable, unthinkable, unknowable exterior to identity structures — belies the existence of a transcendental signifier within the social. Without such a referent, essence cannot be maintained because identity is never discrete or complete. There is, then, no reference point for establishing a rational objectivity; identity is constructed according to relational systems that do not have a centre. Decentering the subject calls into question not only the "individual" but also the inalienable "rights of the individual." Thus, radical subjectivism moves from the presupposition of essence to examine how that belief is constructed. It asks what the production of essence serves to authorize and to put under erasure, while recognizing that no critique has an objective exteriority and is, therefore, not immune to the effects of power/knowledge matrices.

Radical subjectivism cannot be considered directly as an epistemology because it does not secure knowledge but instead critiques the production of knowledge. Because radical subjectivism affirms the incomplete construction of the subject of knowledge, it may be closely associated with the postmodern which theoretically embraces gaps,

contradictions and unfinishedness in the social. Yet it is precisely because radical subjectivism does not afford a foundation that many feminists are ambivalent towards postmodernism; the absence of a universal essence seems to precipitate moral relativism where politics cannot function (Harding 86). Gayatri Spivak has postulated that feminism should posit a "strategic essentialism" within a postmodern epistemic space in order to strive toward modernist political and ethical goals. Butler, however, questions the validity of positing an essentialist ground: "Is it the case that all politics, and feminist politics in particular, is possible without these prized premises? Or is it rather that a specific version of politics is shown in its contingency once those premises are problematically thematized?" ("Contingent Foundations" 4). She points out that there can be no "outside" to politics because all articulations necessarily presuppose foundations. "theory posits foundations incessantly, and forms implicit metaphysical commitments as a matter of course, even when it seeks to guard against it; foundations function as the unquestioned and unquestionable within any theory " ("Contingent Foundations" 7).

Butler's point is echoed in Diana Fuss's argument that, while radical subjectivism provides an excellent tool for deconstructing essences, it is itself implicated in the essentialism/anti-essentialism binary: "the bar between essentialism and constructionism is by no means as solid and unassailable as advocates of both sides assume it to be" (xii). Fuss utilizes the example of "the body" to illustrate her point. She says that for essentialists the body is a pure, pre-discursive space: "The body is 'real,' accessible, and transparent, it is always there and directly interpretable through the senses" (5). the body is an empirical object. For social constructionists, however, the body is not so easily

available because it is "composed of a network of effects continually subject to sociopolitical determination. The body is 'always already' culturally mapped; it never exists in a pure or uncoded state" (Fuss 5-6). Fuss, however, marks the term "always already" as a flag to indicate that constructionism is not built on essentialism's demise but is itself a sociological essentialism, "a position predicated on the assumption that the subject is, in essence, a social construction" (6).¹⁰ Clearly, even radical subjectivism is based on a metaphysical proposition: there is no metaphysical source of unity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavoured to utilize the subject of feminism to evolve a conceptual framework with which to view the logical problem of essence -- which is the problem of universalist ethics and politics. The manner in which humanist, radical objectivist and radical subjectivist perspectives ascribe materiality and reference to essences is critical to outlining and challenging their respective deployments of the real. Naturalism and humanism find their point of reference in an underlying Platonic form. Consequently, materiality is ascribed to an abstract form that orders and governs the "empirical" world. Naturalist/humanist ethical and political epistemologies attempt to correct the phenomenal world by rationalising it to the universalist ideal. The Idea, however, is only an extrapolation from a particular subject position -- for Enlightenment ethics this extrapolation is based on the essence of a European, white, male subject position, and for naturalist-feminism extrapolation is based on counterbalancing the masculinity of the Enlightenment stance with the construct of the "feminine" that is itself

extrapolated from characteristics of a certain group of women. Radical objectivist epistemologies eschew the metaphysicality of the humanist paradigm by ascribing materiality and reference to Aristotelian essences. Such essences, however, are only constructed through configuring the social as a closed system and here the prejudices of humanism covertly return under the guise of "empiricism." Thus, the Aristotelian point of reference is a metaphysical ontological unity that is exterior to that which it classifies as "real" essences. Radical subjectivism rejects this ontological premise of liberal-humanism by de-essentializing the subject and, in turn, ascribing materiality to the textual field of discourse that ideologically constitutes the social and the subject. Within the order of signification, however, there is no stable point of reference, indeterminate signifieds instead compete temporally and spatially, within and between cultures of the radicalized social (the symbolic). While radical subjectivist perspectives problematize the construction of a Platonic or Aristotelian essential unity through the notion of alterity, it is important to note that they remain in the position of articulating essences even while they disarticulate others. However, in my succeeding chapters I will attempt to show that this bind does not dictate the necessity of universalizing positives, since negativity itself can become the ethicopolitical universal.

The major tension evolved within this chapter has been between a modernist space of objective relations -- wherein social identities are determinate representations of essence -- and the unfolding of the postmodern -- where the difficulty for left-liberalist discourses is to reconstitute universal ethical and political commitments in the ethicopolitical terrain of locality. In the chapters which follow I will pursue the subject of ethicopolitics on a

social topography which does not universalize essence but, rather, posits negativity as the structuring principle of the social. Ethicopolitics must negotiate the space previously occupied by the "presence" of ethics and politics; in order to follow the anti-essentialist seam of the social, I will enlist left-liberalist critical frames (post-Marxist, gay/lesbian) in addition to feminism. Issues raised by feminist inquiry such as the connectability of subject positions, problems of agency, and the subversive potential in sites of resistance will, however, remain central to the de-essentialising of a left-liberal ethicopolitical stance. If Enlightenment ethics is marked by an imperialism of the Same, ethicopolitics suggests a relationship with alterity and a respect for the specificity and difference of the Other.

Chapter Three

Tracing the Subject of Ethicopolitics

in Baudrillard's Simulations

That "modern" conception must give way to a new "postmodern" one in which criticism *floats free* of any universalist theoretical ground. No longer anchored philosophically, the very shape or character of social criticism changes; it becomes more pragmatic, *ad hoc*, contextual and local. (Fraser and Nicholson 21)

Fraser and Nicholson here delineate the critical tension between philosophy and social criticism and challenge the traditional assertion that philosophy is a founding discourse upon which social criticism is contingent. They claim that the postmodern abandonment of the metanarrative is an affirmation of the post-philosophical validity of social criticism. In so doing they mean to validate the contingent grounds for feminist practices that provide local narratives of the patriarchal use and abuse of power. With this in mind, they reject Lyotard's description of the postmodern as being precisely what it seeks to contest, a metanarrative, and a "tall tale" at that (20). Fraser and Nicholson's criticism of Lyotard is more striking in light of the fact that Lyotard's metanarrative is an attempt to think the contemporary world from a single principle: disintegration. Clearly, in the postmodern the dissolution of the privilege of grand narratives means that no single principle can dominate the social because binary positions cannot maintain discrete borders (i.e. essentialism/anti-essentialism and meta/local narratives). This is precisely the space to which Fraser and Nicholson allude; where the dissolution of the grand narratives of ethics and politics has not left a vacuum but, rather, "floating" ethicopolitical stances. Yet, if ethicopolitical positions are to "float," they must be theorized as existing in a space

in which they are free to do so, thus necessitating the creation of provisional metanarratives. These are necessary because all narratives operate in a relational context in which they are enabled or disabled by metanarratives. This chapter begins an effort to evolve a radical subjectivist model of the social in which ethics and politics are no longer grounded in the real. For this I turn to Baudrillard's discourse of the floating signifier, the logic of simulation.

Baudrillard is not often cited in left-liberalist arguments because his theoretical position as a disillusioned Marxist is one that overtly embraces nihilism and, as a result, belies a political agency central to most left-liberalist strategies. In fact, his articulation of simulation within the annihilation of meaning is one of the most menacing theoretical threats to any deployment of ethicopolitics. In *Simulations*, Baudrillard presents a *hyperreal* "system of death" where a meaning-vortex of simulation and an "implosion" of binaries present a confounding topography on which ethics can gain no foothold. This is, apparently, the non-foundational atmosphere *par excellence* where Western metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology can find no ground.

In one sense, the subject of *Simulations* is ethicopolitics. This sense is one of negation because Baudrillard's attack on value, need, desire, and on all forms of meaning is an overt dissolution of the fields of ethics and politics. In a second sense, following from the first, there is no effective subject/agent figured in Baudrillard's theory. I therefore undertake a textual effort to trace a subject which has been overtly excluded from the text. The effort is analogous to a murder investigation. The trace is like the chalk line at a murder scene which demarcates for the detectives the location of the fallen

body. What follows then is an investigation, an interrogation, and a scrutiny of the evidence, perhaps even an autopsy. The objective in this case is not to find the culprit, but to determine the scenario of the death of the subject of ethicopolitics, or even if the event of death has, in fact, taken place.

Foregrounding the subject of ethicopolitics in my investigation of Baudrillard's text crystallizes the tension in contemporary theory between radical objectivism and radical subjectivism. Radical critique, in general, has rendered Enlightenment ethical and political codes inert in the epistemic space of postmodernity by shattering the foundations of their transcendental desires, ontological commitments and totalizing universalities. It has also created a vacuum at the level of the subject that, in radical objectivist discourses, eschews any notion of the subject-agent thus threatening the deployment of an effective politics. As Butler points out, however, the "death of the subject" need only testify that the subject is constructed but not determined ("Contingent Foundations" 14). Moreover, objectivist discourses rely conceptually on metaphysical support for the totalities which they attempt to maintain. Consequently, it is the contention of this paper that the agent can only be sacrificed by means of exclusions, foreclosures, and disavowals that do not escape the circuit of desire: Simulations provides a prime example.

In the concept of simulation an ethicopolitical promise is lost in the "system of death" that Baudrillard evolves. While his anti-foundationalism denies the possibility of Enlightenment ethics (the Good), it opens the potential for articulating a new ethicopolitical topography in a floating, hyperreal space, where *goods* are exchanged through the relations of simulation matrices. Contrary to Baudrillard's nihilism, the notion

of simulation as a floating, hyperreal, epistemic space has the potential to delegitimize the essentialist excess of identity politics, while not only maintaining the subject as the site of meaning but also providing a forum for an ongoing critique of meaning production. In Baudrillard's presentation, however, the ethicopolitical potential of the logic of simulation is lost amidst his own logic of annihilation. In order to salvage ethicopolitics from the nihilism of Baudrillard's text, a wedge must be driven between the subversive concept of simulation and the deterministic totality of his "system of death." The *telos* of fatalistic determinism must be unfixed and surgically removed from simulation. Baudrillard's "system of death" involves certain foundational truth claims that are fundamentally opposed to the epistemic situation of the hyperreal evolved within his text. By means of a textual double-reading, which folds the text against itself, the enigmatic and impossible desire for meaninglessness -- the death-drive of the text's surface discourse -- is brought into relief by the reverse-discourse it cultures: a generative model of simulation. The logic of simulation can then serve as a valuable instrument for mapping the ethicopolitical subject, one which I will utilize in subsequent chapters..

Towards Postmodernism: Disarticulating Marxist Materialism

Simulations is a text whose aphoristic style often obfuscates Baudrillard's own critique and line of reasoning. Thus, in order to evolve simulation and to locate Baudrillard's nihilism, I will contextualize Simulations by his earlier text, The Mirror of Production, which is more rigorous in its argumentation. I hope to thereby make visible Baudrillard's commitments and desires and to show that both the concept of simulation

and the assertion of a "system of death" are founded on his critique of the deployment of transcendent meaning and transcendent value in Marxism which largely takes the shape of a critique of the commodity in political economy.

Through the Marxist doctrine of historical materialism it is traditionally understood that the commodity both hides and represents the labour that produced it (concrete value) and is appraised within capitalism for its exchange value (abstract value). Marx sets out the historical stages of development of the commodity in The Poverty of Philosophy:

There was a time, as in the Middle ages, when only the superfluous, the excess of production was exchanged. There was again a time, when not only the superfluous, but all products, all industrial existence, had passed into commerce, when the whole of production depended on exchange

Finally, there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic, and could be alienated

(29)

Marx goes on to develop the notion that all "true" values and social relations have been reified or distorted by capital. However, Baudrillard contends that by maintaining an underlying, concrete value -- in labour -- Marx constructs the Platonic essence of a value form:

We must not forget that according to Marx himself the revolutionary originality of his theory comes from releasing the concept of labour power from its status as an unusual commodity, whose insertion into the cycle of

production under the name of use value carries the X element, a differential extra-value that generates surplus value and the whole process of capital.

(Mirror 23)

By centering surplus value in a labour-value form, Marxism ascribes materiality to the economic mode of production of a given society that, in turn, is believed to *determine* social relations. Human labour is centered as the ground in all instances of a "real" value that transcends capitalist exchange value. For example, in capitalism the worker is alienated because s/he is separated from the product of his/her labour. According to Marxism, the possibility of revolution rests upon the forming of a class consciousness among the proletariat that would allow the working class to cast off the alienated social forms of capitalism and return the social to its true form.

In The Mirror of Production Baudrillard breaks not only with the concept of revolution but also with the fundamental tenet of Marxism, production, arguing that it fails to be a "radical" conception. Capital, he maintains, must deploy an essential reality in order to maintain itself and guard exchange value. This "reality principle," according to Baudrillard, is the fiction of transcendent use value that maintains the belief in *homo oeconomicus*, the belief that the human is the productive centre and ground of value and meaning. Baudrillard argues that Marxism fails to be a liberating alternative to capitalism because it actually accepts this fundamental ruse of capital and grounds its *formalism* (economic determinism) on the fundamental discourse of production. Framing his argument in Lacanian terms, Baudrillard says that within Marxism humanity remains trapped in the "mirror of production":

Through this scheme of production . . . the human species comes to consciousness. Production, labour, value, everything through which the objective world emerges and through which man recognizes himself objectively -- this is the imaginary. Here man is embarked on a continual deciphering of himself, through his works, finalized by his shadow (his own end), reflected by this operational mirror, this sort of ideal of a productivist ego. (Mirror 19)

By grounding Marxism's objectivity on production -- *pro-ducier*, the rendering visible of value -- the circuitous logic of capital is not escaped. Moreover, the essentialist discourse of Marxism is made vulnerable not only to flaws in its own logic, but also -- since it is complicit with capital -- vulnerable to those in the logic of capital.

Baudrillard argues that in order to maintain the "real" within its borders, capital fosters the illusion of referentiality within political economy. In other words, capital maintains the fiction of positive metaphysics by positing that the commodity's use value transcends the horizon of its exchange value and that the human is the centre of value and meaning. In Simulations Baudrillard comments that "[a]ll that capital asks of us is to receive it as rational or to combat it in the name of rationality, to receive it as moral or to combat it in the name of morality" (28). Marxist critique thus fails to be a radical departure from capitalism because it argues in good faith with capital. Moreover, Baudrillard notes, it remains hopelessly trapped within a system of referentiality that capital itself involuntarily negates:

For, finally, it was capital which was the first to feed throughout its history

on the destruction of every referential, of every human goal, which shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power If it was capital which fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it in the extermination of every use value, of every real equivalence, of production and wealth, in the very sensation we have of the unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation. (Simulations 43)

The loss of a referential form negates both capital and Marxism. There is no concrete value beyond the abstraction of exchange value, and the terms use value, production, and meaning also fall within this horizon (Mirror 22). The capitalist de-realization of the commodity also provides the condition of possibility for Baudrillard's critique. The irony of Baudrillard's disillusionment with Marx's historical materialism is that, having refuted objectivity, Baudrillard laments its loss and redeploys it in what amounts to an effort to construct a very discourse of reality.

Historical materialism, for Baudrillard, illustrates the violence of the Marxist universalization of the concept of production in its application to primitive societies. In Baudrillard's view, historical materialism is a "hallucinatory retrospective," an ethnocentric projection of the concept of materialist production onto non-capitalist orders. In The Mirror of Production Baudrillard argues that

history can only be, at bottom, the equivalent of the ideal point of reference that, in the classical and rational perspective of the Renaissance, allows the

spatial imposition of an arbitrary, unitary structure. And historical materialism could only be the Euclidean geometry of this history. (114)

Accordingly, historical materialism is a shape that displaces other shapes and, in the process, murders its object of study. This murder of the object takes place through the imperialism of Enlightenment moral philosophy and rationality. As soon as a concept is universalized, it is naturalized and ceases to be analytic (*Mirror* 48, 58). Yet, against the violence of the Marxist perspective, Baudrillard attempts, in the closing pages of *Mirror*, to find an *authentic* voice of humanity that would serve as a ground for revolution. He claims that capitalist modes of production are themselves responsible for constituting human consciousness in the Imaginary by disjoining subject and object:

Labour is an objective transformation based on carving out and technically abstracting the subject and the object. Their relation is based on the equivalence of the two terms as productive forces. What unifies them "dialectically" is the same abstract form. (55)

Baudrillard contends instead that a realm beyond political economy exists, one of "play, non-work and non-alienated labour " which comprises an objective and concrete truth (*Mirror* 39). Clearly, Baudrillard recoups the notion of objectivity in replacing Marx's abstract form with a "concrete" form that poses an authentic origin of meaning or value. Prior to capitalist intrusion, Baudrillard postulates an ideal unification of subject and object where humanity exists in a state of *symbolic exchange*. Symbolic exchange is described by Baudrillard as a primitive reciprocity:

The symbolic social relation is the uninterrupted cycle of giving and

receiving, which, in primitive exchange, includes the consumption of "surplus" and deliberate anti-production whenever accumulation . . . risks breaking the reciprocity and begins to generate power. (Mirror 143)

Although Baudrillard calls it "symbolic," this might better be understood as the "real" in Lacan's discourse — the real is that which is foreclosed when the subject enters the symbolic order of language. Before Simulations, Baudrillard makes this tenuous notion of symbolic exchange the site of a radical potential against the circuit of political economy. Baudrillard argues that capitalism's fatal malady is that while it could reproduce itself economically and politically it could not do so symbolically (in terms of social relations). Thus, he contends that the groups of the "disenfranchised" (women, Blacks, youth) who still practice the symbolic social relation of the uninterrupted cycle of primitive exchange are in a revolutionary position (Mirror 134-144). The association of these groups with the uncivilized and the "natural" is, however, just as condescending, imperialistic, and Eurocentric as historical materialism.

Simulation and Annihilation

In Simulations, Baudrillard gives up the notion of an objective and authentic human voice but he neither discards the notion that the space between subject and object is imaginary, nor gives up the Idea of objectivity. Clearly, when he critiques historical materialism it is for its complicity with its object of study, political economy. Marxism does not depart in a "radical" fashion from capital, when "radical" at once signifies both exteriority and objectivity. Simulations marks a second attempt by Baudrillard to form a

radical critique which would transcend political economy. Baudrillard develops the concept of simulation to characterize the current status of not only the commodity but of all cultural signs in political economy. Although his attitude towards simulation is often ambiguous, his desire is to be "radical"; he wishes to master and transcend his object of study, political economy, and, therefore, simulation as well. Thus, in Simulations, the logic of simulation is posited within a determining structure of the annihilation of meaning. Ironically, the logic of simulation is one which is fundamentally opposed to the *telos* of Baudrillard's own argument.

At the end of Mirror, Baudrillard departs from a Marxist analysis of the form-commodity to a semiological critique of the form-sign, "from the abstraction of the exchange value of material products under the law of general equivalence to the operationalization of all exchanges under the law of the code" (121). He calls the latter a much more subtle and totalitarian structure of hegemony than exploitation (121). From the Platonic "forms" to Husserl's *Lebenswelt*, Western thinking has been consumed by the idea that the form of the world reflects some principle which orders it. In Simulations Baudrillard moves from the representational concept that signs dissimulate something to the notion that signs dissimulate that there is nothing (5). Consequently, he builds the concept of simulation from an attack on the positive metaphysics of representation. "All western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange -- God, of course" (10). With simulation, however, there is no extra-textual (metaphysical) form that the textual superstructure

reflects. In simulation, there is no transcendent principle to which the commodity, or the sign within discourse, can be reduced. In this sense, the sign approaches its structural limit where it can only refer back to other signs and cannot designate an objective reality. At the textual precipice, value is internal to exchanges in the textual field, and is located in a *hyperreal* economy of commodities and signs. The topography is hyperreal because signs are no longer anchored to referents in the real. The codes of simulation models become the only instances of reference -- though they can never be absolute referents -- in a relational system. Obliterating the concept of representation, simulation spreads out in a flat array of signification with no depth. Consequently, it denies the credibility of depth models -- God (theology), the unconscious (psychoanalysis), or materialist economics (Marxist historical materialism) -- which themselves posit an ulterior meaning that controls the textual field.

In reaction to historical materialism, Baudrillard delineates in Simulations three historical orders that do not mark changes of production but rather delineate operational changes in technique, changes in the medium through which value is perceived and constructed. These are the counterfeit, where value was still ascribed to a base form through the perception of being and appearance and regulated through the natural law of value; production, where value remained centered in a labour value form and was exchangeable through the commercial law of value (pure and infinite series); and simulation, the present manner of value production, in which combinatory models compete and subsume one another through the structural law of value. The order of simulation differs from that of production and the counterfeit by not actually grounding

value on an outside form; rather, simulation is the model that generates the form.. As such, Baudrillard says that "[f]acts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of models" (32). In the order of simulation, meaning and value is dictated by command codes into the structure of a model. In simulation, knowledge is based solely on the model. The models in existence (ie. capital, patriarchy, racism) are as infinite in number as in their manipulatory effects.

In the first chapter of the text, "The Precession of Simulacra," Baudrillard contemplates the tale from Borges about the cartographers of the Empire to illustrate his point that in simulation the model generates the hyperreal: "the territory no longer precedes the map nor survives it." Within the body of the text, this chapter precedes the historical account given in "The Orders of Simulacra." This juxtaposition calls attention to Baudrillard's historical account of the perception of value. As Baudrillard's history explains how society has arrived at the epistemic state of simulation, simulation itself severs the possibility of formally delineating historical orders. The reified, simulated subject is locked in its own chronotope. Because of its reified status the subject is necessarily incapable of intuiting the (non-emergent) residuality of even its own culture, let alone the specificity of other historical cultures. Any attempt at History, then, is a narrative act of interpretation which belies sudden shifts, jumps, and ruptures. History falls to genealogy, a retrospective projection of itself. It is not surprising that Baudrillard has named this history the orders of simulacrum; it projects the crisis of simulation backwards, as Marxist historical materialism projected backwards the crisis of production. Although the theory of simulation obliterates the historical schema, it maintains the

structural value generated by circuitous models where, through the code, value is a mirror to itself. Simulation, however, reifies value and does not escape the circuits of political economy. It is not surprising, then, that the logos of the text attempts to contain not only value but also simulation itself by introducing a virus into the code of its model. The virus is the annihilation of meaning, in its specific and general contexts, by a "system of death."

To reiterate, Baudrillard's desire is to master his object, the subject of political economy. The absence of a value form, however, creates metaphysics as a null site and makes implausible any essentialist materialism ulterior to the textual precipice of simulation. Yet it is on this extra-textual lack that Baudrillard will focus his desire. In Simulations, Baudrillard attempts to contain the discourse of simulation within a logic of death through a privileging of operation over strategy, a privileging of nihilistic metaphysics of radical objectivism over political engagement. Ultimately, the discourse of simulation both frustrates containment and subsumes its container, "a system of death."

The operation of a "system of death" is programmed into the very logic of the model in Simulations and marks a final effort on Baudrillard's part to transcend the meaning circuits of capitalist political economy by folding meaning itself into non-meaning. He introduces the idea of *implosion* into the command code of simulation in order to effect an annihilation of meaning. That is, the implosive force of the collapse of the "meaning gap" appears to authorize a "system of death" where discourse is necessarily rendered inert by a lack of meaning. Baudrillard says that the "old polar schema" that separates subject and object, cause and effect, creates an apparent space between the poles: a "meaning gap." It is within the "meaning gap" that discourse takes place. For

Baudrillard, however, the "meaning gap" does not exist:

[N]othing separates one pole from the other, the initial from the terminal: there is just a sort of contraction into each other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapsing of two traditional poles into one another: an IMPLSION—an absorption of the radiating model of causality, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative electricity— an implosion of meaning. *This is where simulation begins.* (57)

This reconfiguration of the subject/object distinction uproots, in one swift motion, the foundation of Western ontology and its epistemological branches. In fact, discourse itself is imploded, taking with it all meaning and value and, of course, political economy as well.

Implosion marks Baudrillard's second attempt to transcend political economy. His first attempt, symbolic exchange, also contains the notion that the subject/object distinction is a fiction of political economy. However, while symbolic exchange collapses use value, it maintains a meaning exterior and prior to political economy in primitive social relations. In Simulations, implosion is used to secure a system of death that operates through two codes of deterrence (neutral de-realizing violence): every principle of meaning is absorbed by implosion and every deployment of the real is impossible. Beginning with the capitalist de-realization of the commodity and ending with the implosive annihilation, all that is left is a land of shadows and the play of shadows in a game without meaning.

Baudrillard's desire to transcend political economy -- which underlies his nihilism and denies the possibility of an ethicopolitics -- is further evident in the compositional

logic of annihilation, for which he borrows generic features of both capitalism and Marxism but tries to outdo them. Like capital, annihilation is an operational system that is fixed in place. But while capital can only offer strategies of the real -- such as attempting to maintain the human as the centre and producer of value and meaning -- it cannot subsume the parodic effect of simulation that encompasses it. The system of death works through simulation to de-realize Capital itself. With respect to Marxism, the determinism of a productive base is dematerialized by simulation. Simulation itself is then imploded as a meaning system by the superstructural determinism of a system of death through the superstructural closure of the meaning gap. In Baudrillard's analysis, the subject is an effect of the system and completely subject to the macrocosmic operations of that system. Baudrillard thus provides a deterministic radical objectivism that both outflanks and contains objective determinism.

According to the logic of annihilation, the subject and object have never been separate terms and, therefore, discourse, meaning and value are all hallucinations. Political economy, then, marks a state of imaginary relations with respect to the Real state of meaninglessness. Meaninglessness relies not on simulation, but on implosion that is programmed into simulation to secure a final absence of meaning. Whereas simulation poses a circuit of hyperreal cultural and subjective value, a "system of death" poses a hyperreal objectivity and determinacy. Charles Levin explains how Baudrillard links the autonomy of simulation with annihilation:

In his interpretation, the death instinct is Freud's unconscious idea of a destructive principle that is inevitably brought into play when the trend of

fomalization, implicit in all culture, is "autonomized," and set apart from the ambivalent symbolic process from which it derives Baudrillard's response is a flamboyant inversion in which the death instinct appears as *the return of the symbolic*. (51)

The "return of the symbolic" that Baudrillard orchestrates in his text would be equivalent to a return of the Lacanian "real." It is the principle of unification and objectivity that is perceived to lie outside discourse. Baudrillard's system of death, however, is unconvincing because it naturalizes death into a primordial drive operating on the binary process of "cyclical reversal" that takes place within a metaphysics of meaninglessness where death *is* essence. When Baudrillard asserts that "[d]eath is an event that has *always already* taken place" (*Forget Foucault* 80, emphasis added), he is, as Fuss has pointed out, essentializing antiessentialism by means of a foundational truth claim..

Since the logic of annihilation cannot contain the logic of simulation, cracks in the logos of the text begin to appear. Baudrillard cannot effect a closure of the meaning gap. He is unable to fuse subject and object or cause and effect in his analysis, and is unable to escape discourse. In fact, his "system of death" is nothing more than discursively constructed. It has been said that "[o]ne can never destroy the master's house with the master's tools." In the case of Baudrillard's text, discourse is clearly both the master's house and the master's tools. The effort at closure becomes, in fact, a foreclosure -- a denial that the meaning gap ever existed -- because implosion in an unattainable ideality. Baudrillard's desire for a meaninglessness so pervasive it would destroy political economy is clear in his configuration of implosion. He attempts to secure an objective referent for

the textual field in a metaphysic of meaninglessness through implosion. By inserting meaninglessness into an extratextual space the "system of death" itself becomes an underlying form that the textual field represents. Thus, in Simulations the annihilation of meaning becomes a mirror to itself. With this in mind, his own words seem to haunt him: "The limits of cultural critique are clear: its reflection on itself leads only to the universalization of its own principles" (Mirror 89). The systemic annihilation Baudrillard professes has its referential form in metaphysics and, consequently, the edifice of a "system of death" is subsumed as a simulation in a field of simulations. Inserting meaninglessness in the place of absence is a reductive move on Baudrillard's part, and it is evident that his system does not spell the death of metaphysics as he claims.

I have argued that Baudrillard's text makes a double gesture: first, it introduces the subversive concept of simulation, and second, it posits its own simulation model with the implosion of meaning programmed into the model's command code. I have tried to show that the logic of the former dismantles the latter. While Baudrillard develops the concept of simulation in order to counter the objective, representational machinery of historical materialism, simulation subverts the operation of all objectivist accounts, including Baudrillard's own "system of death." With the demise of this nihilistic system, the subject of ethicopolitics begins to rematerialize on a terrain of floating signifiers.

The Logic of Simulation: Beginning an Appropriation

To recapitulate, the logic of simulation runs counter to a logic of the Real. This logic does not entirely displace the Real; rather, it subsumes it by effacing the distinction

between the real and the fake. Both emerge in the theatre of the "realer than the Real" -- the hyperreal. In the flat topography of the hyperreal, the machinery of representational logic is rendered dysfunctional. The meaning of an object, then, cannot be determined on an exterior plane as the Marxist base/superstructure argument would have it.

Consequently, meaning is internal to discourse and the relation -- or exchange -- of discourses. Maintaining the notion of discursive materiality, however, does not signify that the external world does not exist. Instead it implies that the "reality" of an object or an event is always constructed within discourse; maintaining a theory of discursive materiality means simulations produce effects which are not restricted to the realm of "thought." By affirming the materiality of discourse, simulation also affirms the existence of power -- which ethicopolitics attempts to manipulate -- as a hyperreal commodity, cut off from reference and relations of force but still producing effects.¹¹

According to Baudrillard, in political economy "the law of equivalence" is responsible for an entropic de-realization of the social. "Serial repetition of the same object" and "coded similarities and dissimilarities" have created the Real as "*that of which is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*" (99, 110, 146). Power, Baudrillard says, has/is the power to produce the Real (44). But Simulations does not produce a correlation between the proliferation of equivalences and entropy. The logic of simulation is not merely a logic of dissolution as Baudrillard maintains, but equivalence is a formative principle. For left-liberalist ethicopolitical stances, simulation can be an effective tool for delineating the basis for unity and a post-philosophical method of cultural critique.

Understood as existing within a perceptual or epistemic space where simulatory identity is

autonomous and can "float," the process of signification is then not anchored by reference. Rather, it is governed by models and the discursive play of their codes that attribute value and engender facts within the horizon of exchange. If simulated identity may be perceived as autonomous because it is not grounded in essence, its autonomy is produced by discourse and it is therefore relative and substitutable under the "law of *equivalence*" because of its reified status. The similarities of a simulated group, such as women, men, children, lesbians, and caucasians, occur through equivalence -- not essence -- in the hegemonic construction of a social group. Oppressive discursive simulations such as capital, patriarchy, racism, and colonialism function through a "strategy of the real" wherein their ontopolitical quest is to consolidate their position by fixing meaning and thus discursively constructing an impossible positivity: the real. Simulation introduces negativity into all social constructions, however, and negativity provides provides a tool for critiquing deployments of the real. While the real attempts to fix meaning through an empirical objectivity, simulation unfixes meaning and renders it *contingent* because no stable referent exists outside the discursive circuit of meaning to guard its exchanges. In the hyperreal, the question is no longer whether the sign is justified, but what the sign authorizes. By analyzing techniques of knowledge and structures of enablement, cultural forces such as racial and patriarchal systems of domination can be deconstructed on the basis of the essences they propose in the ideological *logos* of their simulations.

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate that simulation is an invaluable concept for radical subjectivist initiatives; it radicalizes left-liberalist thought by challenging objectivist positions within both Marxism and Baudrillard's own "system of death." I will

now attempt to develop simulation as a topographical concept of the social for situating, characterizing, and evaluating other discourses. Because it emphasizes negativity, simulation is not an imperialist code that puts difference under erasure. Unfortunately, at this point, the subject of ethicopolitics still lacks acuity because the logic of simulation as articulated in Baudrillard's text is insufficient; in the interests of staging the disappearance of the social, the subject of ethicopolitical critique is dismissed. Yet, even separated from Baudrillard's nihilism, the hyperreal spreads out as a vast terrain of ethicopolitical relativism. In order to reduce this relativism, a number of problems must still be addressed. Precisely how simulation functions on the level of the subject and the social must still be explored. I must, therefore, deal with questions concerning the relationships within and between simulations, the discursive depth of the hyperreal, and consider if the negativity of the social suggests a particular conception of radical democracy. These problems will be addressed by extending the logic of simulation through the internal logic of equivalence and contingency through an appropriation of the theories of Laclau and Mouffe and of Butler that consider the negativity of the social.

Chapter Four

Expanding the Logic of Simulation:

Contingency and Equivalence

Consider the proposition of simulation in the form of a fraction. If the subject is considered the numerator and the object the denominator, then the hyperreal is the thin horizontal line, the bar that separates the two principal parts of the equation. The numerator and denominator are figured in liberal-humanist thought as the full positivities of the "individual" and "reality," a representational construct which does not recognize the discursive separation of the subject and object. In Baudrillard's radical objectivism, both the numerator and the bar are rationalised to the denominator, a determining "system of death." Approached from within the hyperreal, however, neither the subject and object (as in liberal-humanism) nor the object alone (as in radical objectivism) can be constituted as full presences, because simulation lacks the essence that is necessary to transcend its discursive space. In Baudrillard's formulation of simulation the hyperreality of the "floating signifier" is a surface without depth, the thin line. This formulation, however, does not adequately describe the discursive space in which the signifier floats. The consequence is that on the flat topography of the hyperreal, a field of moral relativism comprised of autonomous, floating signifiers, an ethicopolitical stance cannot have access to and affect systems of domination. I will deal with this problem in this chapter by scrutinizing the discursive space of simulation. Continuing the numerical metaphor, the bar between signifier and signified must be magnified so that its discursive depth is

revealed.

In order to examine the discursive space of simulation, I will examine two constituent logics within simulation: contingency and equivalence. Baudrillard's objectives and commitments do not lead him to develop these concepts. Consequently, they will be developed by extending a logic of simulation into Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, wherein their own concepts of contingency and equivalence are examined in their discourse of the "floating element." Although Laclau and Mouffe do not cite Baudrillard, their discourse is one that, like the logic of simulation, attacks the conceptual essentialism of Marxism. It attacks the positivity of the Marxist model and attempts to reconfigure the left-liberalist objectives of Marxism on an anti-essentialist terrain by building the logics of contingency and equivalence into the concept of hegemony. While a critique of Laclau and Mouffe's social objectives is certainly forthcoming, I will also endeavour to appropriate hegemony to the logic of simulation in order to elucidate the discursive depth of the hyperreal, enabling an illumination of the construction of identities or signs and their interrelationships.

A Logic of Contingency and Equivalence: Disarticulating the Double Void of Essence

According to Laclau and Mouffe, the Marxist conception of hegemony traditionally refers to the split between the class nature of a task and the historical agent carrying it out (49), and rests on the ontologic unity of class structures. The essence of class assures a separation between the hegemonic and the hegemonized through the unity of the hegemonized task and its "natural class agent." In order to articulate a non-

foundational account of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe break with the "essentialist aporia" that attempts to fix the meaning of events, objects and articulatory practices through an *a priori* determination of "agents of change, levels of effectiveness in the field of the social, and privileged points and moments of rupture" (179). In order to rethink the specificity of the hegemonic relation, without the essentialism of Marxist *doxa*, Laclau and Mouffe target the positive nature of the dialectic in historical materialism. Like Baudrillard, they view the dialectic as attempting to fix the social by ascribing materiality to a determining economic base. According to Laclau and Mouffe, this essentialism is structured on the conceptual assumption of a "sutured society" which operates through a dialectic antagonism, the *double void* of necessity and contingency.

The double void in Marxist thought posits a dialectical relation between two positive entities in an antagonistic relation. Because they are considered positive entities that bear an essential nature, the relation between the two poles is configured as a relation of discrete frontiers. The relation of necessity and contingency is exemplary of the manner in which the positivist tradition of Marxist thought has conceived of antagonism. In this tradition, contingency is viewed as the "negative reverse" of necessity such that necessity, in effect, determines contingency. Because necessity frames the dualism, the double void "does not seek to determine differential degrees of efficacy *within* the topography of the social, but to set limits on the embracing and determining capacity of every topographical structuration" (Laclau and Mouffe 47). Consequently, Laclau and Mouffe point out that specific conditions are treated as variable and contingent to the universal category of necessity (economic, productive) rather than to the particularity of

their conditions.

The effect of the double void in Marxist thought has been to validate economic determinism and thereby preserve an ontological theory of proletarian class unity. But it has also rendered the relationship between the political and the economic ambiguous, creating a fundamental practical dilemma because "the economic base is incapable of assuring class unity *in the present*, while politics, the sole terrain where that present unity can be constructed, is unable to convincingly guarantee the class character of unitary subjects" (36-37).¹² Laclau and Mouffe's response to this dilemma is to reevaluate conceptually the double void of essence. They discredit the double void on two counts because it conceives of the social as a positive totality, and because of its dialectical function.

Laclau and Mouffe's critique of the concepts of totality and of the Hegelian dialectic involve thinking contingency into all social relations by delineating the relation between "elements" and "moments." In *Hegemony*, elements are conceived of as differences which are not discursively articulated, while moments are differential positions as they appear articulated within a discourse (105). Laclau and Mouffe propose that these two terms suggest two radically different types of social organization: either the social organization and the identity of organised parts are conceived of as moments of a relational transcendental totality (empiricism) or both the organization and the identity are contingent and external to the parts (94).

An Hegelian dialectic depends on the rational construction of the former where the Idea, though complex, is "always that of a plurality of moments in a single process of

"I" is reconstituted; then she posits the question, "can the 'I' ever repeat itself, cite itself, faithfully [?]" ("Imitation" 18). Thus, repetition is the very space of instability: "if the 'I' only achieves a semblance of identity through a certain repetition of itself, then the 'I' is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it [For] there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated ("Imitation" 18). Thus, Butler maintains that performativity is not a singular "act" but a reiteration of norms where the subject materializes as "the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the 'I'" (Bodies that Matter 15).

Whereas identificatory mimeticism removes the prediscursive agent, and citational practices describe the subjects temporal mode of being, phantasmic idealization explains how mimetic desire is frustrated by citational limitation resulting in "hyperbolic conformity" and its degradation. Butler comments that "heterosexuality is always in a process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmic idealization of itself -- *and failing*" ("Imitation" 21). This failure is due to the fact that the regulatory norm of heterosexual sex also functions in a performative fashion to materialize the body's sex. Consequently, the object of desire and incorporation is a hyperbolic ideal, those phantasms of absolute heterosexual Being -- "man" and "woman" -- whose ultimate presence is always deferred. The phantasmic ideal of gender identity is thus precisely what Baudrillard calls a third-order simulation, or as Butler says, "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" ("Imitation" 21). Unhinged from a gender binary, homosexuality can no longer be viewed as a copy, a faked heterosexuality. In

implies that they lack an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law. There are no two places, one of essences and the other of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing an ultimate literal sense for which the symbolic would be a second and derived plane of signification. Society and social agents lack any essence, and their regularities merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain order. (98)

Laclau and Mouffe analyze the discontinuities which break the unity of the objectivist discourse of the double void and attempt to reconstitute unity among scattered elements (18). The absence of a referential plane precipitates a reconfiguration of dialectical antagonism through a fundamental reworking of the significance of relations of equivalence and antagonism, along the theme of contingency.

Laclau and Mouffe incorporate the notion that identity is relational, non-totalizable and therefore contingent into a reading of the double void which may be extended to all binary oppositions by rearticulating the Marxist notion of antagonism.¹⁴ If identity is contingent and relational, according to Laclau and Mouffe, it is because the discursive presence of the Other prevents identity from being "in itself." Laclau and Mouffe comment, "Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence to myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence" (125).¹⁵ Thus the double void cannot be the relation of two positive frontiers because that would presuppose perception of the duality through an external, positive and objective facility. Rather, "antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity, which is revealed as a partial and precarious

objectification" (Laclau and Mouffe 125).

Through antagonism Baudrillard's notion of implosion might be reconsidered. Baudrillard programs implosion into the generative model of simulation, but the relationship between the two is a contradictory one where implosion determines, in the last instance, simulation. If the objectivist bent of Baudrillard's thought is removed, implosion can be configured differently. Implosion is commensurate with simulation if it is configured as delineating, not the death of discourse, but the limitations of discourse and the subject. Implosion can then be seen as the founding lack on which discourse, desire, simulation, and the subject rest.¹⁶ Rather than securing objectivity, implosion, as the *antagonistic* boundary of the discursive, signifies the social limitation of objectivity.

Even if the social is delimited by antagonism, according to Laclau and Mouffe, its compulsion is to arrest the field of differences and construct a centre in order to produce intelligibility. They maintain that this dynamic is not an underlying principle but a necessary effort at literalization, an attempt to constitute "a set of differential positions in a sutured space (114).¹⁷ Even difference is discursively produced through the effort of literalization. Laclau and Mouffe assert: "Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be *a* meaning in a relational space unable to constitute itself as such -- of a field dominated by the desire for a structure that was always finally absent" (112). They claim that articulatory practices construct discursive "nodal points" that partially fix meaning. The subversive potential of the social exists because it is only a *partial* fixing and nodal points are always subject to rearticulation; there is nothing necessary about their character.

With the desire of the social to constitute itself as a positivity in mind, Laclau and Mouffe articulate the notion of a relation of equivalence. A relation of equivalence links positions within the same camp of a particular antagonism. Laclau and Mouffe insist that in the ideality of a social space divided into two camps a relation of *total* equivalence between identities would produce a peculiar event.¹⁸ They comment that "If *all* the differential features of an object have become equivalent, it is impossible to express anything positive concerning that object; this can only imply that through the equivalence something is expressed which the object *is not*" (128). Thus, in a relation of total equivalence, all the positive determinations of a discursive moment are absorbed in a reciprocal subversion of the contents of each, so that the impossible "real," negativity, attains a form of "presence" (129). Since it is impossible for identities to come into total equivalence in the overdetermined space of the social, neither equivalence nor difference can ever be fully achieved.

Laclau and Mouffe bring the insights of the logic of contingency and equivalence to illuminate the social space of hegemony. They contend that the concept of hegemony, from the time of its articulation in Russian Social Democracy to its complex theorization by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, has been extended, not by maintaining an ontology of class but by expansions of a logic of the contingent wherein hegemony "already alludes to a kind of *contingent* [political] intervention required by the collapse of what would have been a 'normal' historical development" (7). As the logic of the contingent expands -- from Rosa Luxemburg's notion of "spontaneism" to Althusser's use of "overdetermination" -- into a fundamental nodal point in Marxist theory, "historical necessity," the cornerstone

of classical Marxist economism, recedes. Contingency is a theoretical space which has had to be strategically maximized in order for Marxist theory to pragmatically function in society. In fact, it dislocates and displaces the orthodox paradigm (Laclau and Mouffe 49).

Through a logic of contingency and equivalence, Laclau and Mouffe articulate a new concept of hegemony. Since the social cannot be divided into two camps by a single antagonism, hegemony cannot construct a centre. Without a centre, it is not possible to gain a vantage point exterior to discourse in order to maintain the stable ontologic presences. The hegemonic relation between the hegemonic and the hegemonized is not a stable relation between discreet parties but one that, through antagonism, affects the character of both parties. Thus, the hegemonic relation is itself affective in that it partially deconstructs the identities of both the hegemonic and hegemonized.¹⁹ Hegemony functions in the conflictual space of plural and contradictory antagonisms. Here, chains of equivalence attempt to fix meaning discursively within a given social formation. Yet, in any social formation there can be a variety of hegemonic nodal points which structure the antagonisms.

For a relation of hegemonic equivalence to occur, an antagonism must form in the first place. This requires a "relatively" sutured political space that can be divided into two opposing camps (Laclau and Mouffe 132). The field of the social, however, is criss-crossed with antagonisms where discursive identity is overdetermined because it is constructed and perceived from multiple and contradictory sites. Consequently, Laclau and Mouffe contend that in a relation of equivalence, "the identity of the object is split: on

the one hand, it maintains its own 'literal' sense; on the other, it symbolizes the contextual position for which it is a substitutable element" (63). Feminism, for example, connects the subjugation of women across an variety of discursive practices, where "women" are constructed across such, calling attention not only to oppressive contextual positioning of women by patriarchy, but also to the fact that the conditions of possibility for feminism is women's substitutability within patriarchy. Moreover, the autonomy of each social movement within a system can similarly be equated: "For feminist or ecological political subjects . . . are up to a certain point, like any other social identity, floating signifiers" (Laclau and Mouffe 141). Laclau and Mouffe note that "[o]nly the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps -- which implies a constant redefinition of the latter -- constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic" (136). It is the symbolic quality of the "floating signifier" which creates the venue for hegemony and its subversion. The instability of ontopolitic frontiers separating antagonistic forces is precisely what results in the proliferation of overdetermined signifiers and an "organic crisis" of social identities and "historical blocs" -- hegemonic formations (Laclau and Mouffe 136). This subject position is the site not only of this symbolization but also of the crisis. At this juncture relations of subordination--merely an established differential set of social positions -- can become recognized as antagonistic relations of oppression (Laclau and Mouffe 153-154).

In this chapter I have attempted to extend the logic of simulation by examining its constituent logics of contingency and equivalence, through an articulation of Laclau and Mouffe's conception of hegemony. Hegemony, through these logics, can be used to

expand Baudrillard's logic of simulation. As I have shown, Baudrillard used this logic to posit an entropic system in which substitutability effaces identity construction, and the contingency of the social collapses meaning and identity. By reading Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of antagonism within the logic of contingency and equivalence, equivalence can be seen to in fact construct a network of linkage between floating signifiers. This approach, then, enables an ethicopolitical practice -- rather than a "system of death" -- one which, for Laclau and Mouffe, takes the form of a strategy toward radical democracy.

Radical and Plural Democracy

Laclau and Mouffe's theories are not sufficient in articulating a truly anti-essentialist ethicopolitical space. This becomes evident in their own goal of radical democracy, as it both overlooks the exclusions that identity is produced upon and attempts to secure a new hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe posit radical democracy through the logics of contingency and equivalence. But if we align contingency with negativity and equivalence with positive identity the trajectory of their paradigm is apparent. In building their concept of radical democracy, they privilege equivalence over contingency to maintain the semblance of a unitary subject for political purposes. This leads decidedly into the terrain of Identity politics. Here they assert that a new hegemony can -- and must -- be constructed to combat forces of the right. This hegemony is to be founded, they assert, in the principle of plurality:

Pluralism is radical only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without having

to be sought in the transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning. And this radical pluralism is *democratic* to the extent that the autoconstitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary. Hence the struggle for a radical and plural democracy, *in a primary sense*, is nothing other than the maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalential-egalitarian logic. (167)

In this approach toward a purportedly radical pluralism, Laclau and Mouffe clearly reinscribe what they have been so careful to conceptually disarticulate: essentialism. Their notion of an "internal principle" functions as an Aristotelian essence, and admittance to the status of ethicopolitical agent is rationally configured through an imperialism of the Same. Thus, we are left to ask: who and what does the construction of a new hegemonic relation hegemonize? What is foreclosed in the construction of any identity? As I have shown earlier, Laclau and Mouffe theorize that antagonism is the limit of objectivity and the mutual implication of self in Other. However, they have themselves overlooked the fact that antagonism, at the heart of contingency and equivalence, produces Identity through repudiations of the Other. This calls attention to the fact that while pluralism enhances the connectability of existing subject positions, it does not facilitate or make viable the production of *other* subject positions which do not yet have internal principles of identity -- this is a logic of contingency which we will have to look for elsewhere. The hegemonic articulation of pluralism would delimit radical democracy by staging it within the terrain of normative identity, instead of upon the negativity of social arrangements.

Thus, Laclau and Mouffe's social theory has a radical insufficiency which moves prematurely to articulate a new hegemony instead of questioning the hegemonic form of politics. Perhaps by raising the contingency and negativity of the social as Butler does, by introducing temporality within social construction, a negatively grounded ethicopolitics can be articulated.

To recapitulate, hegemony is not a topographical concept as simulation is, but adds a discursive depth to simulation; whereas simulation can be viewed as *langue*, hegemonic relations are *parole*, connecting, combining and linking simulation codes through constituent logics of contingency and equivalence. Laclau and Mouffe's theorization of relations of contingency and equivalence is primarily a spatial one which takes place on a social topography of simulation to articulate the floating and interconnected status of floating elements such as ethicopolitical stances of social criticism.. Departing from Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic strategies, it is now possible to address the particular subject of ethicopolitics in the field of simulation through Butler's notion of the subject of performance.

Chapter Five

The Subject of Performance

Judith Butler is a feminist philosopher and gay/lesbian theorist who articulates a theory of performance in order to displace the ethical and epistemological grounding of feminism in the "category of sex." Her performative theory of the subject is one that subverts the materiality of the body yet maintains a minimalist agent while re-examining the production of the subject. This chapter will view her theory of performance as a simulation model whose critical insights enable a closer scrutiny of the mechanisms that produce the subject. Butler theorizes the cultural production of manners-of-*being* within a temporal framework with an acuity that neither Baudrillard nor Laclau and Mouffe can muster. She melds linguistics and psychoanalysis with a notion of effective politics to argue that performativity is the power of discourse to produce effects through the reiteration of hegemonic norms; the subversive potential of the social relies precisely on the reiteration of norms. This chapter's purpose is to link the logic of simulation not only with the logic of performance, but also with the extension and critique of radical democracy performance precipitates. Whereas simulation is a topographical concept and hegemony a contingent spatial concept, Butler's articulation of performance is a "scenic" concept that will add a fourth dimension to the subversive logic of simulation.

While Laclau and Mouffe attack the ontology of the "working class," Butler attacks the essentialist notion of a binary gender identity. The locus of her attack is on the materiality that essentialists ascribe to the body -- its unquestioned "natural" status.

Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir, Butler positions the body as a "historical idea" where *woman* and *man* are historical constructions within a field of possibilities ("Sexual Ideology" 86). She says "bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of a certain highly gendered regulatory schema" (Bodies that Matter xi). According to Butler, "[t]hinking the body as constructed demands rethinking the meaning of construction itself" (Bodies that Matter xi). In this endeavour, culminating in an ethicopolitical theory of the performative subject, Butler thematizes sexuality in order to examine the construction of gendered bodies.

Butler challenges the humanist positioning of discrete, positive, gender identities. Rather than attack directly the binary antagonisms between man/woman, male/female, and masculine/feminine as a positivist assertion, Butler attacks the edifice of the binaries, the discursive matrix of heterosexuality. She asks: "how is it that treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own emergence?" (Bodies that Matter 10). Butler maintains that as a domain of cultural intelligibility and discursive identity, the materiality of gender is only constructed through the exclusion, expulsion, and abjection of a domain of unthinkable bodies. She examines the normative regulatory schema itself as a matrix of heterosexuality that abjects homosexuality in an effort to secure its own identity. Heterosexuality, then, disavows its constitutive relation with homosexuality, according to Butler, in order to posit itself as pure positivity -- an ascription of a seemingly incontestable materiality, the real. Consequently, Butler views the deployment of a normative materiality as "power's most productive effect" (Bodies that Matter 2), because, as a deployment of the real, it marks

the discursive power of a hegemonic attitude to reproduce itself. Conversely, Butler maintains that, while gender codes create the conditions of possibility for the meaning of sex (anatomy), attained through the repudiation of an antagonistic relation, sexuality is an inclusive field that is delimited and displaced through the social meaning sex assumes when it is reduced to gendered positions. Butler's interest is in how the regulatory schema of sexuality is upset, where sites of resistance appear, and what the subversive potentialities are within the schema itself. Her responses to these questions may be examined under the rubric of her theory of performance.

Perhaps the best place to begin an articulation of Butler's theory of performance is with her analysis of "drag." Butler comments that "drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed . . . [and] constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done" ("Imitation" 21). Butler says that what is performed in drag is the sign of gender, but a sign that is ostensibly discordant with the body that it figures. She continues:

The sign, understood as the gender imperative -- "girl!" -- reads less as an assignment than as a command and, as such, produces its own insubordinations. The hyperbolic conformity to the command can reveal the hyperbolic status of the norm itself, indeed, can become the cultural sign by which that cultural imperative might become legible. (Bodies that Matter 237)

By subverting the stability of the gendered body, drag and homosexuality problematize what can serve as the true and material determinant of gender's meaning: "the phantasy structure, the act, the orifice, the gender, the anatomy" ("Imitation" 17). In articulating

drag as performance, Butler stipulates a relationship between "hyperbolic conformity" and the "command." In order to delineate Butler's theory of performance, these two notions will be examined in detail.

Hyperbolic Conformity

Hyperbolic conformity is an umbrella term that encompasses *identificatory mimeticism, citational practice, and phantasmic idealization*. These factors unite not only to explain hyperbolic conformity but also the temporal production of the subject. Hyperbolic conformity is an effect that arises, according to Butler, from the primary structure of "identificatory mimeticism." This psychoanalytic concept rejects a positive conception of identity by melding together the notion that the self is antagonistically implicated in the Other, and Freud's account of "melancholic incorporation" (due to refusal of loss), as Butler explains:

Mimeticism is not motivated by a drama of a loss and wishful recovery, but appears to precede and constitute desire (and motivation) itself

Whether loss or mimeticism is primary (perhaps an undecidable problem), the psychic subject is nevertheless constituted internally by differentially gendered Others and is, therefore, never, as a gender, self-identical.

("Imitation" 26-27)

Identificatory mimeticism is a powerful explanatory principle. It affirms that identities are formed only by foreclosing their constituent primary antagonisms. It suggests that primary antagonisms themselves destabilize identity structures and thwart any final

suturing of identity. Finally, it bypasses a Freudian drive theory that would reduce gender to biology by asserting that drives are themselves constructed. These three effects converge in Butler's contention that gender identity is not intentionally constructed as the act of a subject-agent, but rather that it constructs subject-agents. Butler comments:

For if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an "I" or a "we" who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of "before." Indeed, it is unclear that there can be an "I" or a "we" who has not been submitted, subjected to gender, where gendering is, among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being. Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the "I" neither precedes nor follows the process of gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves. (Bodies that Matter 7)

Identificatory mimeticism thus empties the subject of an ontologically intact reflexivity, of a prediscursive intentionality: "[t]here is no volitional subject behind the mime who decides which gender it will be" ("Imitation" 24). Accordingly, rather than the humanist notion of a natural agent who confronts an external political field, Butler says that *"agency is always and only a political prerogative"* ("Contingent Foundations" 13) available at points of intersection between discourses, rather than prediscursively.

Identificatory mimeticism removes the agent behind the mime of performance and allows the "presence" of identity to be understood as a reiterative and citational discursive practice that has the performative power to produce what it names. If the "I" does not precede discourse, Butler maintains, it is only through the repeated play of gender that the

"I" is reconstituted; then she posits the question, "can the 'I' ever repeat itself, cite itself, faithfully [?]" ("Imitation" 18). Thus, repetition is the very space of instability: "if the 'I' only achieves a semblance of identity through a certain repetition of itself, then the 'I' is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it [For] there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated ("Imitation" 18). Thus, Butler maintains that performativity is not a singular "act" but a reiteration of norms where the subject materializes as "the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the 'I'" (Bodies that Matter 15).

Whereas identificatory mimeticism removes the prediscursive agent, and citational practices describe the subjects temporal mode of being, phantasmic idealization explains how mimetic desire is frustrated by citational limitation resulting in "hyperbolic conformity" and its degradation. Butler comments that "heterosexuality is always in a process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmic idealization of itself -- *and failing*" ("Imitation" 21). This failure is due to the fact that the regulatory norm of heterosexual sex also functions in a performative fashion to materialize the body's sex. Consequently, the object of desire and incorporation is a hyperbolic ideal, those phantasms of absolute heterosexual Being -- "man" and "woman" -- whose ultimate presence is always deferred. The phantasmic ideal of gender identity is thus precisely what Baudrillard calls a third-order simulation, or as Butler says, "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" ("Imitation" 21). Unhinged from a gender binary, homosexuality can no longer be viewed as a copy, a faked heterosexuality. In

Baudrillard's terms, one could say that genders proliferate in the field of the hyperreal. In Butler's terms gender identity is a *performance*.

Gender as a Command: Symbolic Law and Transgression

To the extent that Butler maintains that gender as a non-volitional performance, she reveals it as a command performance integral to the formation of the subject within the symbolic order. Casting the Lacanian symbolic production of "gender positions" as a Foucaultian "regulatory ideal," Butler comments on the specious foundation for heterosexuality:

It may be that the very categories of sex, of sexual identity, of gender are produced or maintained in the *effects* of this compulsory performance, effects which are disingenuously renamed as causes, origins, disingenuously lined up with a causal or expressive sequence that the heterosexual norm produces to legitimate itself as the origin of sex. ("Imitation" 29)

"Sex" does not so much concern *having* or *being*, as the norms by which viability is constructed. The Lacanian model, however, solidifies symbolic law as incontestable, and Butler maintains that Foucault is not concerned enough with modalities of transgression. It is Butler's theory of performance that questions the authority and incontestability of the laws, codes and ideals which regulate the symbolic.

According to Butler, gender identity is the effect of the cultural *matrix* through which culture *materializes* viable subjects to maintain existing social formations. The classical association of femininity with materiality (the body) can be traced to the

etymological linkage between "matter" and "matrix" (the womb), and thus points directly to the problem of the social reproduction of gender (Bodies that Matter 31). This is a problem of the *symbolization* of "viable subjects" to support the social. Baudrillard maintains that, in simulation, the matrix of reproduction is the logic of the model's code, but he does not theorize how such codes compete with and contest each other. Butler, however, considers how codes function to produce meaning — and how they may change — by reworking the Lacanian notion of symbolic law with the insights of poststructuralist linguistics and psychoanalysis.

Lacan distinguishes between "the imaginary" set of relations ensuing from the "mirror stage," the *symbolic* order of language which the subject enters under fear of prohibition and taboo, and the *real* which is a space outside of the symbolic and distinct from the imaginary. The subject is formed only through entry into the symbolic order wherein it remains, consciously and unconsciously constrained within language — conceived of by Lacan as a closed relational system. Two salient criticisms may be made of Lacan: first, Lacan's grounding of desire and lack in the subject has brought the criticism that his presubject is an *hommelet*, a volitional entity before the subject, and, second, as Derrida has pointed out, while language is a relational system it is also an open one. Butler's reconfiguration of the symbolic authority takes into account precisely these two criticisms.

Butler positions the symbolic as the site where the subject, desire, and sex materialize, where "sexed positions" or "gender" appears. Her concern is with how this materialization takes place and at what expense. She maintains that the symbolic is

composed of a set of hegemonic "normalizing injunctions" that operate performatively within discourse to interpellate the subject (Bodies that Matter 106). Whereas Lacan invested the "Name-of-the-Father" as the absolute law and authority which produce the subject, Butler questions the authority and the limitations of this law. She considers it as a citational practice within a signifying chain through the example of the juridical system:

[T]he judge does not originate the law or its authority; rather, he 'cites' the law, consults and reinvokes the law, and in that reinvocation reconstitutes the law The performative speaking of the law, an "utterance" that is most often within legal discourse inscribed in the book of laws, works only by reworking a set of already operative conventions. And these conventions are grounded in no other legitimating authority than the echo-chain of their own reinvocation. (Bodies that Matter 107)

Butler uses this example to show that in lieu of an origin, the grounds for authority become its own "perpetual deferral." Consequently, if the law has no validity other than its citation within a signifying chain, then *"this is citation, not as enslavement or simple reiteration of the original, but as an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original, and which calls into question the power of origination"*

(Bodies that Matter 45). This is significant because Lacanian "sexed positions" are re-articulated not merely as localities in a fixed spatial system but as temporal practices. Citation upsets the space of a monolithic law and allows the discursive space for the subversion and the recasting of the symbolic within its specific interdiscursive contexts

Although symbolic law is not, and cannot be, a uniform single principle (i.e. the

exclusion of the feminine), discursive identity remains constructed through exclusions related to specious but nevertheless hegemonic norms. The subject is "forced" or "compelled" by the symbolic. Moreover, no act outside the regularized and sanctioned practice of the symbolic is a performative that can simultaneously produce and declare (Bodies that Matter 107). If sex is always produced through the reiteration of hegemonic norms, this reiteration is not performed by a subject but, instead is "what enables the subject and constitutes the temporal condition for a subject" (Bodies that Matter 95). Symbolic law therefore controls what can and cannot be said and confers legitimacy. But Butler disagrees with Lacan that this comprises an "immutable law" whereby, even if the law produces mutations, such points of resistance are only temporary escapes from the law because they cannot enter into the dynamic whereby the symbolic reiterates its power (Bodies that Matter 106). Although Lacan's structural determinism might be attacked as a Hegelian double void, Butler upsets this determinism psychoanalytically at the level of phantasmic identification.

With phantasmic identification, Butler not only unfixes the law, but also delineates the site of subversion and resistance. Through phantasmic identification and under the threat of psychosis, desire is both produced and prohibited when the sexed subject is symbolically formed. Butler maintains, however, that this occurs in a situation where the Lacanian phallus is already "specular," and thus a lost referent. Consequently,

[T]he phallus is always already lost, and the fear of castration is fear that phantasmic identification will collide with and dissolve against the symbolic, a fear of the recognition that, in some already operative way, one

has already made. (Bodies that Matter 102)

Hence, while identification figures as a desired event or accomplishment, it can never be said to have taken place; it is, rather, the "phantasmic staging of the event" (Bodies that Matter 105). Butler thus contends that identifications are

phantasmic efforts at alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation; they unsettle the "I,"; they are the sedimentation of the "we" in the constitution of any "I," the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the "I." (Bodies that Matter 105)

Butler maintains that identifications are proper to the *imaginary* because they permit entry into the symbolic and yet remain specious ideals that are themselves subject to the "logic of iterability." Because identifications are never complete, however, symbolic law never attains a full presence and is in constant pursuit of a phantasmic ideal. This suggests that symbolic law itself may be reworked through the resistances that imperfect repetitions generate which are new spaces at the level of the imaginary. According to Butler, this unfixing of the law means that the symbolic law should not be considered as a given because it would preempt the social and historical criticism necessary to examine the exclusions which the assumption of identity necessitates (Bodies that Matter 206). The imaginary is precisely the site at which the symbolic is reconfigured. While the imaginary is the site of the hegemonic norm where

iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act," but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and

even death controlling and compelling the shape of production, but not, I will insist, determining it in advance. (Bodies that Matter 95)

Since it is not predetermined, Butler argues, symbolic law deviates at the level of the social imaginary producing aberrations. Some such mutations find a home in the symbolic and in turn engender new ones. The limits of cultural intelligibility, though constrained, are never stable, resulting not only in a changing symbolic subversive potential, but also in a "densely populated" zone of unviable subject positions, zones of resistance. In this way Butler highlights the subject as the site at which a resignifying potential emerges.

Butler is not seeking recourse to a liberal humanist agency where actors act in full self-awareness and traffic in transcendental truths. She claims that "no subject is its own point of departure" and that is instead, "fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce . . . a viable subject" ("Contingent Foundations" 9). This comment underscores her reading of Foucault, which is "that subjects who institute actions are themselves instituted effects of prior actions, and that the horizon in which we act is there as a constitutive possibility of our very capacity to act" ("Contingent Foundations" 10).

Butler goes on to say,

neither ground nor product, but the [subject is] permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process, one which gets detoured and stalled through other mechanisms of power, but which is power's own possibility of being reworked. ("Contingent Foundations" 13)

Her critique thus stems from an interrogation of the foundational premises of the subject, one that adds a temporal dimension to the potential to ethicopolitical critique.

Radical Democracy

Butler contends that every discursive formation is constituted through and against a constitutive antagonisms, and that every social identity is thus predicated on contingency or negativity. She comments that "[t]he subjection of every ideological formation to a rearticulation of these [incomplete] linkages constitutes the temporal order of democracy as an incalculable future" (Bodies that Matter 193). Laclau and Mouffe, according to Butler, situate an argument for "radical inclusivity" which seeks to establish a relation between those positions excluded in the formation of identity and a set of future possibilities. Thus, the ideal of radical inclusivity deploys the discursive exterior to the social as a potential future horizon. Butler limits the discourse of universal emancipation by explaining that while radical inclusivity is, of course, an impossible ideal it is one that "nevertheless governs the political field as an [phantasmic] idealization of the future that motivates the expansion, linking, and perpetual production of subject positions and signifiers" (Bodies that Matter 193). Throughout her analysis, Butler expounds her own neo-liberalist, anti-humanist, ethicopolitical imperative:

The task is to refigure this necessary "outside" as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not

included in a given truth regime acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. (*Bodies that Matter* 53).

Butler comments that the founding violence of an identity, or of a truth-regime, cannot merely affirm the exclusionary force of its own constituency as a "sad necessity," one which amounts to a "cruel strategy of erasure." This would indicate a purely spatial reading of identity formation. To underscore this point, Butler says that the liberalist aim of radical democracy cannot be merely to numerically proliferate positions within an existing symbolic.²⁰ This is implicitly a critique of the liberalist ethic of Laclau and Mouffe's text. Rather, the radicality of her vision of democracy is to to "interrogate the exclusionary moves through which 'positions' are themselves invariably assumed; that is, the acts of repudiation that enable and sustain the kind of normative 'citing' of sexed positions" (*Bodies that Matter* 112). Butler says,

In this sense, radical and inclusive representativity is not precisely the goal If there is a violence necessary to the language of politics, then the risk of that violation might well be followed by another in which we begin, without ending, without mastering, to own -- and yet never fully to own -- the exclusions by which we proceed.

This marks a decisive break with the liberal-humanist notion of progress and universal emancipation. Consequently, radical inclusivity must refute the logic of mutual exclusion.

Political signifiers too, can be useful rallying points for inclusivity. Butler says to take up a political signifier is to be oneself constituted and initiated into the chain of prior usages of that signifier (Bodies that Matter 219). Positions themselves may thus be performatively and provisionally named by political signifiers. The appellation "woman," writes Butler, can be used to the extent that it remains differentiated, and that this differentiation serves political goals. If the citation is essentialised to the point where it attempts to find a referent, Butler says that it will "sever its constitutive connections with other discursive sites of political investment and consequently undercut its own capacity to compel and produce the constituency it names" (Bodies that Matter 218). The exclusions that a term of identity performs will return to haunt any claim to identity. Consequently, radical democracy must begin not with the coherence of identity structures but with with a fundamental incoherence. The insistence on coherence presumes a ready-made subject with a fixed positionality that can negotiate its place in the world. Butler maintains that a democratizing reiteration of a political signifier means maintaining it as a site of permanent contest because there can be no closure on the category (Bodies that Matter 221).

Performance and Simulation

As a scenic concept which articulates the subject as a temporal construction, performance extends the logic of simulation towards an effective ethicopolitical notion of radical democracy, if performance is carefully delineated as a modality of simulation. To this end, three points of conflict between simulation and performance will be observed:

first, the centrality of sexuality in performance, second, the relationship between materiality and discourse, and third, the relationship between simulation and dissimulation. All three points must be negotiated if the logic of performance and simulation are to be combined.

Reading performance as a modality of simulation necessarily causes a revisioning of the centrality that Butler assigns gender in her model of performance. Considering gender as simultaneously a materialization and displacement of the infinity potentiality of sexuality, Butler poses gender as a modality of sexuality. The problem with this positioning becomes clearer in regard to the construction of race. Butler comments that,

it is not a matter of relating race and sexuality of gender, as if they were fully separable axes of power, the pluralist theoretical separation of these terms as "categories" or indeed as positions is itself based on exclusionary operations that attribute a false uniformity to them and that serve the regulatory aims of the liberalist state. (*Bodies that Matter* 116)

Butler is correct in that race and gender do not necessarily need to be read as separate axes of power however, this does not authorize subsuming them under the same axis of power. Butler, however, makes sexuality a topographical concept for both gender and race. It would be a valid critique to assert that sexuality is a term which gains meaning within a signifying chain; thus it relates antagonistically with other terms. Sexuality, in this sense, cannot be understood as outside a plurality of gendered positions and possible gendered positions. A conflation becomes apparent Butler's text when she asks "How is race lived in the modality of sexuality?" and then provides a number of contingent

questions which put race in the modality of gender (Bodies that Matter 117). This is further evident in the psychoanalytic frames with which Butler negotiates or maintains a central position of gender identity to the production of the subject. Clearly there are parallels and intersections between race and gender but one is not a modality of the other.

Another point of conflict between performance and simulation concerns materiality itself. When signs are in the field of the simulation they are hyperreal -- overdetermined, floating signifiers. This is to say that every object is an object of discourse. Butler however, maintains a Lockean distinction between materiality (real) and language (ideal). She admits that any attempt to refer to "materiality" takes place through signification but maintains that "materiality cannot be collapsed into identity with language" (Bodies that Matter 68). However, this position that an absolute objectivity exists outside of language necessarily maintains meaning in that "outside." But discourse does not permit an outside which is not interior to it.

Finally, Butler employs the term dissimulation to name what Baudrillard would call a "strategy of the real"; a repudiation and abjection of the constituent antagonisms on which identity is founded to create the semblance of positivity, or the real. This is evident in Butler's comment concerning the ascription of materiality to the body:

These material positivities appear *outside* discourse and power, as its incontestable referents, its transcendental signifieds. But this appearance is precisely the moment in which power/discourse regime is most fully **dissimulated** and most insideously effective. (Bodies that Matter 35)
[emphasis added]

Similarly, Butler says that the hegemonic power/discourse regime is one which seeks to maintain the agent through what Butler claims is a "dissimulated citationality" (*Bodies that Matter* 13). One last example will suffice. Butler notes that the investment of absolute authority in symbolic law is a "dissimulation whereby prior authority proves to be *derived from* the contemporary instance of its citation" (*Bodies that Matter* 109). Butler clearly uses dissimulation to name a strategy of the real on the part of a hegemonic practice that denies a constituent negativity.

Baudrillard articulates dissimulation differently from Butler. He says that "[t]o dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence" (*Simulations* 5). According to Baudrillard, to claim to dissimulate maintains the "reality principle." In his interest to evacuate the subject and the social, however, Baudrillard does not carry the logic of simulation very far, although a revision of his position is possible. If an identity simulates positivity it does this by denying negativity. Consequently it denies its constituent negativity and it dissimulates antagonism. The method of simulation, then, can be read as dissimulation. Consequently, performance is a modality of simulation within whose topography it is positioned.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

If the "real" is an obsolete concept in the epistemic space of the postmodern, then the function of ethicopolitical strategy must be to contest the ontopolitical operation of hegemony in constituting itself. In this thesis I have sought to theoretically challenge liberal-humanist and radical objectivist deployments of reality. In practice, I have challenged the deployment of reality in the texts of Baudrillard, Laclau and Mouffe, and Butler while constructing an ethicopolitical model that is grounded in negativity

Baudrillard's concept of simulation has provided a negative ground for this particular articulation of ethicopolitics. It is a "postmodern" topography in that it eschews objectivity and affirms a notion of hyperreal, discursive materiality -- no doubt much to Baudrillard's objectivist chagrin. I have attempted to expand the logic of simulation by appropriating the activist theories of other antiessentialist critics namely, Laclau and Mouffe and Butler. By utilizing Laclau and Mouffe's text Hegemony it has been possible to expand the logics of equivalence and contingency that are internal to simulation but which Baudrillard only considers in a system of entropy. Laclau and Mouffe's text has enabled a scrutiny of the social space of the hyperreal such that, when antagonism informs contingency and equivalence, it is possible to articulate a non-foundational conception of hegemony. When read within simulation, as I have done, the hegemonic relation effaces the ethicopolitical relativism of floating autonomous signs by adding a discursive depth to the hyperreal. Simulated meanings are interlinked through a

web of social relations that is not only a condition of existence for identity but also the space in which identity floats. Butler's notion of performance has added yet another dimension to my model in its theorization of the temporal production of identity. Her critique brings into focus the particular and collective subjects of ethicopolitics because she theorizes not only the acquisition of identity in a field of constitutive antagonisms, but also constitutive exclusions. Thus, the concepts of hegemony and performance expand the negativity of simulation as a tool for arguing with the ontopolitical deployment of a normative and essential reality.

By incorporating the contingency or negativity of the social, the logic of simulation actually affirms ethicopolitical agency in the space where the social is unable to constitute itself as a determining totality. Here, agency occurs only under conditions of possibility and at intersections within and between discourses. Here the subject can be said to act or "perform." The problem for acting is then that of forming a goal, *radical democracy*. This paper has argued that radical democracy should not be constituted on the terrain of identity politics, but seek to displace that terrain and collapse it into the topography of simulation. Thus the goal should not be to constitute a new hegemony but to contest all ontopolitical simulations and their debilitating effects. Radical democracy should be configured through the quest to expand the social imaginary for, as Butler demonstrates, this is the site of subversive potential.

In this thesis I have endeavoured to think along an antiessentialist seam of the social in order to foreground negativity as a universal that thwarts the imperialism of Enlightenment ethical and political codes. Perhaps the universalization of negativity or

alterity is the founding moment of the model herein developed . But it is the universalization of negativity which calls attention to the problems of prior universalization of positive essences and advances negativity and differences as organizing principles of the social, alongside unity and coherence, calling into question any desire for the imperialist ethics and politics of the Enlightenment. As Rosemary Hennessy notes, any current desire for a universalist positivist ethics is an attempt at "a symbolic resolution of the crisis of the subject, one of many cultural efforts to quell anxieties over the shaken foundations of western [sic.] philosophy" (56). It is, then, perhaps the acknowledgement of alterity or difference, as Lorraine Code suggests, that makes ethical theorizing difficult, but genuinely ethical (12).

Endnotes

1. Lyotard describes the Idea of emancipation:

The progress of the sciences, technologies, the arts, and political freedoms will liberate the whole of humanity from ignorance, poverty, backwardness, despotism. Not only will it produce happy people, but, thanks to education in particular, it will also produce enlightened citizens, masters of their own destiny. (81)

This is the basis of Enlightenment liberalism: "The emancipation of freedom, reason; the emancipation of humanity from labour through capitalism and technology, and the salvation of creatures through conversion to the Christian narrative of martyred love" (17-18)

2. In *Etica e politica*, Benedetto Croce utilized the term "ethicopolitical" to name a type of history which would treat intellectual and cultural life and the activity of the state as a material unity. Thus, ethicopolitical history contrasted with other forms of historiography such as; a Marxist history which ascribes materiality to economic activity in relations of production, a factual narration of a "positivist" history, an Hegelian history which privileges the state above the individual as ethical reality, and even a positivist history which attempts a merely factual narration of the relationship between positive identities (qtd. by Gramsci 104n). Moving away from Croce, if the project of history is replaced by either genealogy or epistemology, ethicopolitics becomes useful because it creates a link between anti-essentialism and cultural critique.

3. In one sense, because these debates are "academic" -- philosophical, rhetorical and self-absorbed disputes conducted in a language inaccessible to the lay person -- it is feared that their ethical and political message will never have an influence beyond the ivied walls of the university.

In another sense, because they are carried out by academics, such arguments have a certain authority. They can affirm or refute the legitimacy of hegemonic opinions constructed in a cultural consciousness.

4. Traditional ethics, with their commonality in impersonal reasoning, can be divided into a number of categories based on their teleological framework for deciding moral issues: deontic, consequentialist and contractarianist, axiologic, casuistic, descriptive, intuitive, normative, naturalistic. Briefly, deontologists believe in an abstract moral law that always supersedes specific circumstances and consequences; consequentialists believe that the moral worth of an action is dependant on the *telos* of its consequences for society; contractarianists consider morality is a rational option to limit dangers when human beings in a society are seen in the Hobbesian view, as self-interested competitors. (For a full feminist analysis of these perspectives see Susan Sherwin's article "Ethics, 'Feminine' Ethics, and Feminist Ethics" in A Reader in Feminist Ethics) Axiology utilizes transcendent value to determine a the morality of specific action. Casuistry involves a Machiavellian stretching of ethical rules to validate dubious moral rules or actions which result in the affirmation of universal principles. Descriptivism is an objectivism which attempts to locate essential ethical rules and determine if they are universal. Ethical intuitionism locate ethics in the subject by maintains that ethical universals are available to the individual to intuit. Naturalism posits that ethics have there source in objective nature and can be reduced to factual statements about nature. These ethical codes might all be considered normative in that they provide general guidelines based on universals which would regulate the singularity of actions in particular circumstances.

5. Perhaps the popular witticism "malestream" is misleading because it obscures the fact that

the philosophic tradition referred to is as much eurocentric as it is phallogocentric. Moreover, the term "malestream" tends to erase differences among men and distribute patriarchy along lines of sex rather than culture.

6. This attempt finds its most sophisticated expression in the concept of *écriture féminine* (Fuss 2).

7. Radical objectivist theories appear to deny the existence of a feminine outside the social. Cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argued in his study Elementary Structures of Kinship that the subjugation and exchange of women is responsible for producing the social and symbolic value (497). According to Jacques Lacan, the feminine is necessarily repudiated in the symbolic formation of the subject, thus his famous comment, "woman as such does not exist."

8. See de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and Wittig's The Straight Mind.

9. Parsons does not distinguish between radical objectivism and radical subjectivism.

10. According to Fuss, the difference between the essentialism of radical subjectivism and that of the Aristotelian is that of linguistic and ontologic essentialism. Fuss locates this in the Lockean distinction between real and nominal essences. Real essence connotes the Aristotelian notion of essence as the most irreducible or unchanging quality of a thing, while nominal essence was, for Locke, an essence of "linguistic convenience, a classificatory fiction we need to categorize and label" (4). This relation between real and nominal essences is precisely what Gayatri Spivak has called "catachresis." When proper nouns no longer have a referential power they become masterwords.

To use *this* [any masterword] name to describe a generality inaccessible to intended description, is necessarily to work with the risk that the word 'wrested

from its proper meaning,' that it is being applied to a thing which it does not properly denote' (OED). We cannot find a proper place -- it must be effaced as it is disclosed. (29)

Spivak argues that terms such as "women" should continue to be utilized for their strategic value in political struggles even though they lack a stable referent. Insofar as catachresis maintains the binary distinction between real and nominal essence, however, it maintains the ideality of the Real and the nominal essence as a fiction. This distinction must be itself effaced for radical critique to proceed. In the following chapter this will be accomplished through "simulation."

11. In Forget Foucault, Baudrillard directly attacks Foucault's notion of "power." While calling Foucault's discourse a "mirror to itself," Baudrillard also acknowledges Foucault's nominalism:

Foucault's is not therefore a discourse of truth but a mythic discourse in the strong sense of the word, and I secretly believe that it has no illusions about the effect of truth it produces. That, by the way, is what is missing in those who follow in Foucault's footsteps and pass right by the mythic arrangement to end up with the truth, nothing but the truth. (11)

Ironically, the truth is precisely what Baudrillard attempts to grasp by evacuating power in a system of annihilation. Gayatri Spivak comments that Jean Baudrillard

understands the need for catachresis in his Forget Foucault But he is so intent on proving his own idea that the real is forgettable that he seeks to demolish Foucault's notion of power by claiming that there is no such example of power to be found in reality. (31 note 25)

In fact, power is the adhesive that binds discourse into particular simulations. With Baudrillard's objective annihilation destabilized by simulation itself, power may be understood not as a fundamental ontology of relation of force, but as cut off from its referent and floating in the hyperreal. This, significantly, does not mean that the effects of power are less than real. If ethicopolitical systems of domination are to be undermined they must be understood as operating within a grid of power. Simulation enables an anti-essentialist conception of power.

12. Laclau and Mouffe comment that dilemma ensues from the crisis of class

What is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism which rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution, with a capital 'r', as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to another, and upon the illusory project of a perfectly unitary and homogenous collective will that will render pointless the moment of politics. (2)

13. The crisis of the Real and the unfixing of the social is a condition of possibility for the articulation of hegemony because the latter runs contrary to the rational foundation of Marxist categories. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of hegemony fills a space left vacant by this crisis:

It is only when the open, unsutured character of the social is fully accepted, when the essentialism of the totality and the elements is rejected, that this [radical political and theoretical] potential becomes clearly visible and 'hegemony' can come to constitute a fundamental tool for political analysis on the left. (192-193)

14. Laclau and Mouffe differentiate an antagonistic relation from both logical contradiction and real opposition. Real opposition is configured as the event of a physical force meeting

another physical force, and logically, it is only when (A) is considered a full presence that not being (A) is a contradiction. Thus, both real opposition and logical contradiction postulate a full presence. Laclau and Mouffe comment that "the condition of existence for a full presence is the existence of a closed space where the differential position is fixed as a specific and irreplaceable moment" (127). Consequently, a full presence is impossible if identities cannot be totalized.

15. Laclau and Mouffe explain the lack of presence in terms of overdetermination

[I]ts [the oppressive identity's] objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevents its being fixed as a full positivity. (Laclau and Mouffe 125)

16. A lack manifest diachronically (in the pre-subject) and synchronically in each of the succession of "nows" which the subject inhabits. The non-discursive, non-volitional "presubject" of simulation can be directly linked to the subject of performance described by Judith Butler.

17. In psychoanalytic terms this desire may be considered as constructed under the threat of psychosis.

18. Multiple and contradictory antagonistic sites are, according to Laclau and Mouffe, a characteristic of democratic subject positions. If an antagonism can divide the political space into two camps then it is a popular subject position. To illustrate a popular subject position they utilize the example of the relation between colonizer and colonized. In a total equivalence -- where differences do not express an Identity -- between colonizer and colonized, differences of dress, custom, skin colour, and of language create a situation where the differences actually cancel each other out. Laclau and Mouffe explain that this is a "negative identity."

19. Yet for a hegemonic relation to take place, the poles of hegemonic and hegemonized

must have some exteriority with regard to one another. Laclau and Mouffe assert that the difference between subject positions space of exteriority, one that exists within discourse (135).

20. Butler explains that this is a partial goal in that viable positions are necessary for subjects to "become recipients of health care, to have partnerships honoured legally, to mobilize and redirect the enormous power of public recognition" because the multiplication of subject positions along a pluralist axis would entail a multiplication of exclusions and greater factionalization (Bodies that Matter 114).

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identity, as with liberal-humanism. The explanatory power of radical objectivist moral epistemology has been effaced by the recognition that it presupposes the Platonism it claims to exclude: the metaphysics of being. In seeking out a set of determinate relations by investigating such textual effects as gender relations, a rational objectivity, or empiricism, is considered to be outside and *exterior* to social relations. Thus, while liberal-humanism has its point of reference for value in Platonic essentialism (the Good, God, transcendent human nature), radical objectivism also maintains its referent outside the social in an unquestioned rationality which constructs, engenders and determines a system of Aristotelian essences. Paradoxically, in claiming that the social is a rational intelligible totality, radical objectivism unwittingly allows human essence to serve simultaneously as the ground of ethics and occupy the site of its own dismissal.

In reading the problem of determining Aristotelian essences for a radical-objectivist feminism, two statements should be combined: Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "woman is made not born" and Monique Wittig's comment that "lesbians are not women."⁸ Both claims efface the notion of women as a natural group. De Beauvoir views women as a gendered social construction, and Wittig, in delineating a materialist-feminist, or a radical-lesbianist approach, questions the heterosexual matrix through which the "category of sex" is itself materialised, wherein sex is taken as a sensible, physical, immediate given but is actually only a sophisticated myth and an "imaginary formation" (12). With the above two statements in mind, it is easy to see how gender empiricism dissolves into a problem of its own construction through power/knowledge matrices

The problem of who is "woman" is complicated by a further problem: who speaks