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**THE SEMIOTICS OF TIME TRAVEL:
STUDIES IN SIMULATION AND CAUSALITY**

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University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada
2003**

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Abstract

The Semiotics of Time Travel: Studies in Simulation and Causality is a study of the philosophical/literary idea of simulation as defined mainly by Jean Baudrillard. The thesis, however, does not aim to be a commentary on Baudrillard. It uses his ideas as a starting point, and then proposes its own definition of simulation, with emphasis on temporality and causality. Specific cases of simulation are traced in *Oedipus Rex*, *Macbeth*, Italo Calvino's short stories, and Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. In each case, a detailed literary analysis of the work is used to advance the theoretical argument. The approach is best described as interdisciplinary, covering a range of ideas in philosophy, semiotics, and literature. The strong unifying thread in all the chapters is a semiotic analysis of temporal paradoxes, as well as the underlying definition of temporal paradoxes as a subset of simulation, a connection whose various aspects are explored in the different chapters. The thesis also seeks to broaden the definition of simulation, making connections between simulation and other concepts, such as analytical statements (Hans Reichenbach), performative statements (Stanley Cavell), scientific observation (John Searle), narrative structure (Aristotle), and the nature of signs (Umberto Eco). The aim is a philosophical platform for the analysis of simulation as a tool for a semiotic analysis of temporal and causal paradoxes.

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This dissertation is for Assen, who taught me to trust my intuition, and who showed me how thinking about impossible questions can be fun and how doing impossible things can be real ("real," Jean, get it?). Many thanks to Stela, for keeping me sane when I needed to be, and to Russ, for the opposite. Special thanks to Natalie, Darren, and Ryan for the Fridays and the tea.

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INTRODUCTION

the idea

Initially, I was planning to write about the theoretical and literary phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy. I found, however, that the name is too long. And the abbreviated version (sfp) didn't have a ring to it, so I scrapped the idea partly for aesthetic reasons. More importantly, however, I found that the sfp, which poses the ultimate question of free will, is only a very specific manifestation of a larger concept which poses the same question: temporal simulation. More specifically, I was interested in going beyond the individual example of the self-fulfilling prophecy and trying to find out why it is exactly that it is so interesting, trying to isolate the elements that make it work. In the course of the study, it turned out that this phenomenon breaks down nicely into a few basic ideas: simulation, causality, and temporality, and that it is the interaction among these that I am in fact interested in.

Needless to say, all three of these are defining concepts in the contemporary theoretical quest. Simulation: "modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical. The modern world is one of simulacra. Man did not survive God, nor did the identity of the subject survive that of substance. All identities are only simulated" (Deleuze xix). Causality: "Cause is the cement of the universe; the concept of cause is what holds together our picture of the universe, a picture that would otherwise disintegrate into a diptych of the mental and the physical" (Davidson xi). Time: "The

time-directedness of the world has often been considered as more fundamental than the laws of nature themselves” (Zeh 6). These concepts are obviously so broad that no statement can be made about any of them without being preceded by a series of qualifications longer than this thesis. However, the area where they all intersect is relatively small and can be a safe starting point to focus the discussion. In the idea of temporal simulation, all of these concepts (simulation, causality, time) come together as the three planes of a coordinate system to question and define something we can call human agency (to avoid the connotative burden of the traditional, and very broad, term “free will”).¹ To position (but not to “locate”) this variable in this coordinate system is the purpose of this thesis.

This does not mean that the idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy itself is less of a concern for the thesis; it has in fact proven very useful, since it establishes the basic terms and structure of the phenomenon of temporal simulation. The self-fulfilling prophecy has also fascinated many theorists, for example Davidson: “There are, of course, cases where wanting, trying, choosing, or even intending, to do something prevents us from doing that very thing, even though there may be a sense in which we could have done it (if we hadn’t wanted to, tried to, etc.)” (70). In *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, Hans Reichenbach talks about “the doctrine of Greek fatalism. We may try to escape our fate by many means; we shall then only fulfill our fate in other ways” (105). Furthermore, trying to escape fate is the only way to fulfill it, a paradox which i ek is also aware of, as he talks about “the customary process of trying to evade an evil prophecy (whereby one unwittingly brings about its realization)” (*They* 129).²

The paradoxical nature of this structure lies in the causality breakdown or shortcut from prophecy to event: what a person like Oedipus decides to do depends on what he knows the oracle

said he would do, so that the awareness of the prophecy is key to the truth of the prophecy. At the same time, Oedipus is not aware of what his awareness of the prophecy would mean³: “the prognosis itself, as soon as it is uttered, bears upon the predicted outcome, and it is never able to take into account this effect of its own act of enunciation” (i ek, *They* 15). In other words, the paradox is in trying to conceptualize the vicious circle of being conscious of the futility of being conscious of an environment which has already accounted for our being conscious of it. If this environment is temporal, then the awareness becomes prediction. Ultimately, the event is both predicted and unpredictable, pre-determined and unknown, and it is impossible to say where the prophecy ends and the event begins.

In this sense, the value of the self-fulfilling prophecy as a model is in its ability to cancel the various binaries that get in the way of theoretical analysis. As Deleuze says, “[t]he task of modern philosophy is to overcome the alternatives temporal/non-temporal, historical/eternal and particular/universal” (xxi), and the self-fulfilling prophecy does just that. Simulation in general is a model which undermines binary distinctions while acknowledging the impossibility of erasing them. From here, it is only a small, 300-page step to seeing how simulation in fact *creates* the binary pairs.

the terms

The analysis as a whole revolves around the idea of temporal simulation. Baudrillard’s definition of simulation⁴ is “the situation created by any system of signs when it becomes sophisticated enough, autonomous enough, to abolish its own referent and to replace it with itself” (qtd. in Levin 196), and the thesis very much follows this definition. It is important to note that, as Rex Butler says in *Jean*

Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real, simulation

is not an empirical phenomenon, something that actually happens. Baudrillard is very well aware of the paradox that, insofar as the simulation he is describing exists, it makes any way of verifying it impossible. It means that the very real which we say is lost in simulation and against which we compare it is now only conceivable in simulated form. Indeed, we might even say that, insofar as we can speak of simulation at all, it has not yet occurred, that simulation is proved in its absence. Simulation is not real, then, but a kind of hypothesis . . . not a real phenomenon but only a hypothetical one, not a description of how things actually *are* but of how they *could be*" (24-25).⁵

This passage describes perfectly the imaginary quality of simulation. As a theory, a model, an interpretative tool, it has no reality outside Baudrillard's imagination, or this thesis.⁶ Simulation exists only when we are aware of it, and when we are aware of it we are no longer *in* it. Here Eco's simple question, "What do you mean by exist?" (*Pendulum* 174), becomes relevant, because the fact that simulation does not exist outside of the works dealing with the concept of simulation does not undermine its reality in any way: "The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual. . . . The reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations which form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have*" (Deleuze 208-209). Simulation is one of those things where "the concept that names the phenomenon is itself a constituent of the phenomenon" (Searle 78). In other words, the idea of simulation is as real as the idea of reality, and conversely, the idea of reality is only as real as the idea of simulation. Butler says that "if its increased perfection takes the system further away from the real, it also means that it is more real than ever" (47). The movement away from reality means that there are fewer and fewer instances of imperfections and gaps in the simulated system, which means fewer clues to reveal that it is simulation. And as long as the system is not revealed, not known as simulation, it will be known as reality.

As an analogy of the relationship between simulation and reality, I propose the visual representation of graphic paradoxes, since they show a way in which a figure/ground image is completely reversed without physically changing anything in it. In the figure/ground⁷ paradox of the two faces and the vase, for example, when we see the faces, the vase does not exist, and vice versa.⁸ Neither of them is more “real” than the other; as Butler says, “simulation is not a real phenomenon, does not take place in the real, but is rather a *doubling* of the world” (145). To call something “reality” would be equivalent of calling the graphic paradox “a picture of two faces” (and, alternatively, to call it simulation would be to call it “a picture of a vase”). When we are in one mode of seeing, we can look for clues leading to the existence of the other, the object we fail to see, but the moment we manage to see the vase, the faces disappear (or, when we see simulation, it becomes real and reality disappears). But there is no chronological shift or development “from” reality “to” simulation, just as there is no movement over time from the faces to the vase. The faces never *become* the vase; both images coexist at all times and occupy the same space (are made up of the same physical substance), even though, in a Möbius way, we are exposed only to one “side” of the picture.

When the image “changes” from faces to vase, it is not because the lines which make up the faces themselves change, but because their relationship with the rest of the drawing changes from foreground to background in the eyes of the observer. In these paradoxical drawings, the observer is the one who changes the meaning of the image, just as in the self-fulfilling prophecy the person who hears the prophecy can change its meaning, making it true rather than false. The role of the observer is pre-inscribed in the drawing just as the role of free will is pre-inscribed in the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The belief that something is hidden from us is another essential characteristic of the reality/simulation structure which is nicely illustrated by the drawings of the faces/vase type. We obviously see the whole drawing when we look at it (there's nothing hidden), and yet we see either the faces or the vase, but not both. In the same way, simulation is always the other side, the thing we don't see, or rather, the thing we suspect we don't see. Simulation doesn't have a specific content (it shares the same content as reality) but it is a different way of seeing. It gives the image the illusion of depth, of hidden meaning, which is not really an illusion, since the alternative, the "hidden" image actually exists; it's just an illusion to think that it's hidden (for example, if we're looking at the faces and suspect the image of a vase is hidden in there, we would be wrong, not because there is no image of a vase, but because it is not hidden). Besides, how can we see *that* something is hidden?

Does simulation then involve time? Only in the sense in which we need time to switch from a view in which we focus on the faces as the figure and the vase as the background to a view in which we see the faces as the background (or rather, don't see them at all) and the vase as the figure. The self-fulfilling prophecy is the same spatial paradox transferred to a temporal dimension, where we are able to see the same thing once as an event, and then as the story of that event (once as the effect, and then as the cause), whereas the "material" of which they both are made remains the same, just as the color and shape of the vase are always the same, whether we perceive it as a figure or as a background. In this sense, the prophecy and the event it predicts (engenders) are the same thing (this doesn't mean that the event does not exist as such, but only that the event, the physical equivalent of the story, is a variation in perspective, a ripple in the visual field). Just as the event and the story are the same thing, everything is simultaneously reality and simulation. In other words,

simulation does not undermine reality; it *is* reality. (And if one has to have a catch-word like “always already” or “no longer,” mine would have to be “always also.” The faces are always also a vase; reality is always also simulation.) Here I’ll have to disagree with statements like Deleuze’s: “difference does not lie between things and simulacra, models and copies. Things are simulacra themselves, simulacra are the superior forms, and the difficulty facing everything is to become its own simulacrum” (67). I agree that things are simulacra, but not to the exclusion of reality. In this thesis, I wouldn’t “rate” simulacra as superior, or speak of simulation as a historical process; things will not “become” simulacra over time.

The relationship between simulation and temporality is a complex one.⁹ As William Bogard says in “Baudrillard, Time, and the End,” “simulation is the cancellation of distance, space, and ultimately (linear, historical) time itself” (317). However, there is another sense in which simulation is also the creation of linear time, of the illusion of causality. The simulation of temporality is as central to this thesis as the negation of temporality.

In the course of the thesis, I have discovered that approaching temporal paradoxes with temporal tools and notions does not lead very far. I have found it much more helpful to use semiotic terms to discuss temporal problems. In other words, time is occasionally seen as a certain kind of signification (and signification, in turn, is only possible in time). The connection between signification and time is not as obvious as, for example, the connection between time and causality: “Time order reflects the causal order of the universe” (Reichenbach 150).¹⁰ At the same time, physics has testified to “the *elimination of any concept of absolute time*” (Zeh 8)¹¹, leaving all temporal analysis subject to an observer-related relativity, of which signification can take advantage, as in Ricoeur’s “Narrative Time”: “Philosophers writing on time, too, usually overlook the

contribution of narrative to a critique of the concept of time” (166). There is no absolute time, and if causality and narrative define time, they are in turn defined by semiotic mechanisms which we use to make sense of events, to establish categories and connections between events in the interests of signification and the creation of meaning; it is only later that these connections take on the qualities of causality and temporality.

the works

While each chapter has a “main” author in the heading (which could have been any one of a number of authors, and I’ve simply chosen my personal favorites), it also refers to authors other than the “main” one: Oedipus and Eco, Macbeth and Beckett, Calvino and Pratchett, Auster and Poe.¹² The unifying thread in each chapter, as well as in the thesis as a whole, is not a single author as much as a single idea. In this sense, the thesis does not propose to be a study of specific authors, but a study of ideas, so that, for example, Reichenbach would be more relevant to *Macbeth* than *Hamlet* is, i ek can tell us more about Calvino than Calvino-specific research, and, as I find in many instances, Eco is more enlightening in the understanding of *Oedipus* than most studies of *Oedipus* are, because, while Eco does not refer specifically to *Oedipus*, he tells us about the kind of simulation which is central to it. This approach requires a radical de-contextualization, which I feel is necessary because there are certain things about Oedipus that we cannot learn from Greek culture or history but only from *Foucault’s Pendulum*. I am aware that this approach is less mainstream in the humanities than in the sciences, where the idea of the atom, for example, is a radical de-contextualization which makes it irrelevant where a given atom comes from, how it grew up, and what other atoms said about it. In this sense, this approach is simply working on a different scale, one where the basic unit is not

the author but the ideas in his work. To oversimplify a bit, the human body is to the atom as the author is to the idea. However, I would like to think of the change in scale not as abolishing context altogether but as creating a different context, one composed of synchronic ideas rather than diachronic history (this is also convenient because it helps me avoid discussing temporality from within temporality, as much as possible).

The variable which carries the focus of the argument is the idea, not the author. While there obviously are other works by these authors (and theorists) which are not discussed here (such as other plays by Sophocles, other works by Ibsen, or other episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), I feel that, even if multiple instances of simulation can be found in these works (which is not necessarily true), including more of these at some point becomes counter-productive; in this regard, I have followed the structuralist method of identifying a pattern rather than the formalist method of listing and categorizing individual instances. In other words, once an idea is identified and developed, tracking down more instances of this idea is no longer the object of the study. In this case, a large array of further literary and theoretical examples will necessarily remain outside of the scope of the thesis.¹³

The names featured in the chapter headings (two of them belonging to fictional characters and two of them to authors) follow a roughly chronological sequence, with Oedipus being the oldest and Auster the most recent. However, this is not in any way essential to the argument and is the result of an aesthetic rather than logical choice. Similarly, I feel I should discourage further attempts at finding a unifying pattern in the choice of authors other than the ideas of simulation and causality. To make it easier to refrain from grouping the authors according to criteria outside the specific texts (or rather, from grouping the authors rather than the texts), I must point out, for example, the range

of their geographic origins (Greek, English, Italian, American), as well as the impossibility of any direct influence among them: while both Eco and Calvino talk about Marco Polo, and i ek talks about Escher, who is on the cover of Calvino, and Auster often alludes to Poe, whose methods are discussed in a critical collection on detective semiotics edited by Eco, and Baudrillard was apparently influenced by Calvino (Levin 16), and *The Matrix* (which influenced me) was influenced in turn by Baudrillard, and who wasn't influenced by Shakespeare (and no doubt other traces of influence can be woven throughout the history of ideas that would lead, indirectly, from Sophocles to Auster), I feel that such an endeavor would not be relevant, since this thesis is not about the causality of ideas but about the idea of causality.

the method

The method is one of exploring the ideas as far as they would naturally go, and then resorting to the somewhat unnatural means of conjecture, oversimplification, and wild guesswork. As Pratchett says, “[l]ogic could take you only so far, then you had to get out and hop” (*Last* 291). However, I have tried to keep the argument as logical as possible, with occasional raids on the territory of the abstract when data is not available (or rather, when data is not possible), and on the territory of the metaphorical when I have felt the need for visualization, fresh perspective, or simply entertainment.

In his discussion of Calvino's work, Joseph Frank says that “we need presume no oversimplification through answers” (qtd. in Carter 124).¹⁴ Frank's is a strategy which this thesis often embraces, as it has tried to avoid final answers, because, since answers are not available anyway, setting out to find them would lead to failure whereas setting out not to find them would lead to success.¹⁵ In that respect, the thesis has succeeded. (Whether this strategy precedes or

follows the discovery that no answers are available is another one of those temporal paradoxes.) Or, as Baudrillard says, “we are not interested in generating one more truth. We are trying to recover the traces of the illusion” (*Vital Illusion* 74).¹⁶ This thesis will not answer the questions posed by reality and simulation, of cause and effect, of free will and determination; it won’t even ask them. In fact, it will try to make asking these questions impossible in those binary terms.

I have tried to keep the ideas complex and the language simple, to help any fundamental flaws in the argument crystalize (although I hope they have not crystalized). Occasionally, however, complexities of a grammatical nature have proven unavoidable, as they usually are when language (which is inherently causal and linear) is used to describe simulations and other temporal paradoxes (which are inherently not). In these cases, I have found myself stopping just short of using tenses like Douglas Adams’s “Future Semi-Conditionally Modified Subinverted Plagal Past Subjunctive Intentional” (216).¹⁷

the chapters

I start out with *Oedipus*, the classical case of the self-fulfilling prophecy; it can be taken as the official beginning of the problem of causality in literature, and it illustrates the basic properties of simulation. Then I continue with “Oedipal” interpretations of other, more contemporary puzzles of causality. (“Oedipal interpretation” here means an analysis of the Möbius qualities of time and causality in a semiotically conditioned simulation of cause and effect.) *Macbeth* gives us a more in-depth analysis of the semiotic angle, where the temporal terms are replaced by semiotic terms (the temporal becomes the performative). Calvino establishes the impossibility of an origin (t_0) of simulation (simulation has no beginning), and Auster the impossibility of overcoming simulation

(simulation has no end).

Chapter One: The fate of Oedipus is an intricate network of inverted causality, temporal paradoxes, and the question of free will (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). Oedipus finds himself in a court of law where he is both the accused and the accuser, the criminal and the detective, the murderer and the witness. These double roles coincide in the figure of Oedipus and collapse both causal and temporal distinctions to suggest that Oedipus becomes the murderer in the process of investigating the murder. There is a sense in which he kills his father only after he convicts himself; the conviction precedes the murder, the future causes the past. In other words, Oedipus inhabits a simulation of his own creation. The chapter explores the mechanism whereby the creator of a simulation is taken in by the simulation, which becomes as real to him as it is to anybody else. In other words, there is no privileged position from which a person (even if he is the creator himself) can observe simulation from the outside. This raises two questions: the question of the origin of simulation (further discussed in Chapter Three) and the question of the outside (further discussed in Chapter Four, as the question of detecting simulation). These can also be seen as a single question, since the origin is nothing but a temporal outside. *Oedipus*, then, introduces us to the temporal properties of simulation. The relationship between creator and simulation is one of simultaneity; it is not that the creator comes first and simulation comes second, but they both come to life at the same time. This means that the creator cannot separate himself from the simulation not only spatially but also temporally. The role of the creator also includes the task of “naturalizing” the artificial system he has created, of denying his own role as a creator (a theme which continues with *Macbeth*).

Chapter Two: *Macbeth* shows us how temporal structures and notions can be conceived of as semiotic categories. The theme of Macbeth being always ahead of the king, always preceding him in terms of time, taking titles before they are given to him, is transformed into a semiotic power struggle in which Macbeth robs the king of his power to make things happen, to *cause* things. The king's orders are usually statements of the performative type (whatever the king says, happens), but in *Macbeth* the causality between the king and the events is broken, and the witches take over this performative power in the eyes of Macbeth. Free from the semiotic power of the king, Macbeth can make his own rules, give himself titles, and assume the role of the creator, the first cause. In this sense, he reverses the rules: it is no longer the case that whatever the king says becomes an event (takes on reality); now whoever is the first to say it becomes the king (takes the throne). The temporal primacy of Macbeth's actions over the king's is made possible by Macbeth's realization that the king is a semiotic variable whose content can be replaced as long as its structure remains intact. He finds that the royal power is arbitrary and can shift from person to person. However, he renounces this knowledge when it comes to his own power as a king, which he desperately wants to be inherent in himself rather than in his semiotic position. Here, Macbeth is again the creator who renounces his role in his own creation in order to give it objective reality. In other words, afraid that someone else might take over his position the way he did, Macbeth denies the temporal dimension of his power, the notion that his power has an origin external to it.

Chapter Three: Temporal simulation stands precariously balanced upon the impossibility of its origin (t_0). Calvino studies this point of origin, as well as the movement from the origin to the next moment (from t_0 to t_1), which is usually called "evolution."¹⁸ I use the word "evolution" in the broad

sense of a) the change of something over time and b) the adaptation of that something to its environment, which is in effect the synchronized change over time of two seemingly independent things. For example, let's say we have two things, a_1 and b_1 , which coexist in the moment t_1 . Over time, a_1 evolves into a_2 , and b_1 evolves into b_2 . However, since a_2 and b_2 again coexist in a symbiotic relationship with each other (for example, a creature and its environment), b_2 must be "designed" to be compatible with a_2 even before a_2 has evolved; b_1 does not wait to see what will become of a_1 before it decides to evolve into b_2 . In a sense, b_1 "knows" what a_1 will evolve into. So, then, if we want to trace the "cause" of b_2 , we cannot just trace it back to b_1 , because a_2 also has an influence on the development of b_2 . However, since a_2 and b_2 are simultaneous, we enter temporal paradox territory, saying, in effect, that the cause and the effect are simultaneous. In other words, by "evolution" I mean not the strictly scientific study of the subtle changes in species on a geological time scale, but the dynamic and abstract notion of the paradoxical temporality of synchronized change, of "knowing" the future (reminiscent of the paradoxical synchronization that goes on in the famous double-slit experiment in physics). A similar phenomenon is the mirror image, discussed in Chapter One, in which the effect (the mirror image) and the cause (the source of the image) are perfectly simultaneous (they cannot exist with any temporal distance between them at all), and yet they are still in a causal relationship with each other.

Chapter Four: This chapter discusses Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and talks about detecting simulation, or the impossibility thereof. A simple analogy will do to illustrate the basic point. Imagine a multiple-choice test with two answers, **a** and **b**. The right answer is **a**. A person who knows the right answer chooses **a**. A person who doesn't know the right answer guesses, and

chooses either **a** or **b**. Simulation is where he chooses **a**, which looks like he knows the answer. Reality is where he chooses **b**, which shows that he doesn't know the answer (everything has a 50% chance of being reality). In simulation, the first person would be indistinguishable from the second person (let's call the second one **S**), since they both achieve the same result; they show the same appearance of knowledge, and the knowledge is measured only by its appearance (since appearance is defined as that which is available for measurement). According to the laws of probability, of course, there is no reason why **S** cannot guess the right answer every time. If he has guessed thirty answers correctly, the probability of guessing the thirty-first answer is still 50%, as it was with the first answer. What simulation does is give depth to the appearance, making the behavior of **S** cumulative by suggesting that he actually has the knowledge he appears to have, and that the chances of answering the 31st question correctly are better than 50%. In this way, simulation inhabits the past with a cause (**S** has studied for the test) and the future with effect (the next answer will be correct, like the previous ones). It creates the illusion of temporality where there is only the present moment where **S** is forever faced with the 50% chance of guessing the next answer, independently of all the previous answers. And it creates the illusion of free will where there is only chance.

Of course, this analogy can only take us so far. There is the more complicated case (related to the mechanism of the self-fulfilling prophecy), where the right answer changes according to **S**'s response to the last question, so that **S** himself, like Oedipus or Auster's protagonists, can influence the outcome, the "right answer." If the "system" which asks the questions can enter into a contest of wits with **S**, as Poe suggests, each of them will have to react to the other's actions and take into account the possibility of the other's taking this into account, and so on.

the stakes:

What is at stake here is not reality. Plato compromised reality a long time ago, by suggesting that there is something “more real” and hidden from us (an “outside,” in fact, appropriately located outside the cave). In other words, in his role of a metaphysical detective, he suspected that his “reality” was only a simulation from which he expected an eventual escape, just as Baudrillard is seeking the “outside,” a way to outsmart the system.¹⁹ But, in time, we learn that what is to be compromised is not reality, but the outside. There is no outside, no “other,” at least not in the sense of a system opposed to us. We are the creators of the system, and our alienation from it is our way of giving it reality by making it objective, independent of our free will. Paradoxically, the illusion of objectivity seems to be the highest manifestation of subjectivity, and the denial of free will appears as the ultimate expression of free will. We want things to happen not because we arbitrarily decided so, but because they happen of necessity. So we create this necessity and, as Nietzsche said, choose to forget that it ever originated in us, that it has any origin at all. In other words, we deny the temporal history of the simulation, the causality that traces it back to us, and instead look at simulation as a thing of the present and without a past, a thing severed from its timeline, like a time-traveler.

NOTES

1. The term “free will” can still be used (and it is, occasionally), since only part of it intersects with the problem of simulation, and only a fraction of *that* falls under the discussion of causality; and when we add temporality as a third sieve, the “free will” that emerges on the other side of this sifting process is a concept focused enough to be meaningful. (In mathematical terms, T (temporality) \cup C (causality) \cup S (simulation) \cup F (free will). And the string is reversible, so that each term can serve to qualify and narrow down the other three.) E.g., we will not be discussing time in general, but only time as it relates to the intersection of causality, simulation, and human

agency; in the same way, we are interested in simulation only as it relates to agency, causality, and temporality. This qualification holds for the thesis in general, so that any occurrence of one of these four broad philosophical terms should be referred back to it.

2. i ek also hints at the idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy in this passage (although he never quite takes that route): “an act always, by definition, involves a moment of externalization, self-objectivization, of the jump into the unknown. . . . [It] means to assume the risk that what I am about to do will be inscribed into a framework whose contours elude my grasp, that it may set in motion an unforeseeable train of events, that it will acquire a meaning different from or even totally opposed to what I intend to accomplish. . . . [It is] radical self-externalization” (*Tarrying with the Negative* 31). What Oedipus does and what he thinks he is doing would be two different things.

3. For another example of this problem we can refer to Calvino:

The teacher says: “This is the Wall of the Serpents. Each serpent has a skull in its mouth. We don’t know what they mean.” Mr. Palomar’s friend cannot contain himself: “Yes, we do! It’s the continuity of life and death; the serpents are life, the skulls are death . . .”

[Mr. Palomar] asks himself: “What did death, life, continuity, passage mean for the ancient Toltecs?” (*Mr. Palomar* 98)

Calvino concludes that “every translation requires another translation, and so on” (98), and this is true of the self-fulfilling prophecy as well: Oedipus knows what his actions mean, but he doesn’t know what this knowledge of his actions itself means.

4. “Simulation is undoubtedly the word most closely associated with Baudrillard, although it is rarely understood in the sense he himself intends it. When Baudrillard’s commentators speak of simulation, they often mean simply a form of illusion, the replacement of the world by its image, so that we do not experience things originally but only as a copy of something else. It is to make of Baudrillard’s work a description of the ‘take-over’ of reality by the sign, like some science-fiction scenario” (Butler 23).

5. I agree with this definition completely, as long as the phrase “could be” is not taken to imply a possible future but a way of looking at the present. In this sense, I disagree with Douglas Kellner’s account of simulation, where Baudrillard

provides a futuristic perspective on the present, much like the traditions of dystopic science fiction, ranging from Huxley to some versions of cyberpunk. Indeed, I prefer to read Baudrillard’s work as a science fiction, which anticipates the future by exaggerating present tendencies and thus provides early warnings about what might happen if present trends continue. It is not an accident that Baudrillard is an *aviciendo* [sic] of science fiction, who has himself influenced a large number of contemporary science fiction writers. . . . Baudrillard’s simulations theory does not really represent reality as much as simulate what is to come or what might come to pass if present trends continue and accelerate. (13-14)

I don't believe that simulation "exists" or that it will ever exist, except as an idea. Simulation will never be more "real" than it is now, just as reality cannot become "more real" (e.g., Newton's idea of gravity will never be more or less of an idea with the passage of time; we won't get "more gravity" if present tendencies of bodies falling to the ground continue; and conversely, the idea of the unicorn will not disappear just because we know there is no such thing as a unicorn). Ideas develop over time, but they develop into *other* ideas, and the original idea never disappears. In this sense, they all exist simultaneously. The idea of simulation already exists, and it cannot exist "more."

I am aware that there is a sense in which various tendencies toward political, economic, and social manipulation (e.g., media or advertizing) can seem to invite the idea of simulation, and it is quite possible these would increase over time (though never reach the science fiction scenario of absolute manipulation, which will always fail). What I mean by "simulation," however, is a purely theoretical device of approaching temporal and other paradoxes and trying to make sense of them. Or, if you will, it is just another way of accounting for the influence of the observer on the processes and events that are being observed. In this, I borrow certain notions from Baudrillard, and I leave out others; I generally do not take the time to list the points where my ideas about simulation diverge from Baudrillard's, an approach which would be more appropriate for a comparative study rather than this thesis.

6. However, the fact that simulation is a concept does not in itself undermine the physical reality of simulation. There are many concepts with a legitimate physical manifestation which is not available to the senses: "We know that the world consists of solids, but we always see and touch *only surfaces*. We never see or touch *a solid*. A solid is already *a concept*" (Ouspensky 77). That said, the physical elements that go into simulation are very much accessible and visible; they are the same parts that go into the making of the "reality" we know. To say that what they make up is not reality but simulation is a matter of semantics, or rather, of semiotics, and there are certain advantages in changing the term, which this thesis perhaps clarifies.

7. Calvino, for example, is very sensitive to matters of figure and ground in the formation of meaning. In *Invisible Cities*, he creates a character for whom the city is the background and the field is the foreground: "I am a wandering herdsman. . . . Cities have no name for me: they are places without leaves, separating one pasture from another" (152). While we tend to think of cities as the points of reference and of the fields as the underlying "empty" space, Calvino reverses this assumption to show us another face of reality, one in which an uninterrupted megapolis covers indiscriminately the face of the earth, with the scattered fields here and there the only points of interest, the only carriers of meaning against the background of sameness.

This concern is not trivial. To conceive of cities as one single thing and of fields as many individual things is akin to a problem we encounter in Davidson's study of the meaning of "event": "Is it plausible that when we say 'Jack and Jill got married in May, and Dolly and George did the same thing in June' we are saying that the event-sum of all marriages continued after a pause? Perhaps: 'The marrying resumed in June with Dolly and George'" (184). He hurries to point out, however, that "talk of the same event recurring no more requires an event that happens twice than talk of two tables having the same length requires there to be such a thing as the width both tables have" (184). In terms of the Calvino example, this would mean

that there is no such thing as “the city” seen as a background, as a single word for all the “empty” space unoccupied by grazing animals. Needless to say, simulation complicates things by introducing the possibility of the reverse.

8. Brown, in *Observation and Objectivity*, calls this a “gestalt shift” (86).

9. The temporal simulation I discuss is not exactly the one Baudrillard hints at: “Many of Baudrillard’s texts produce this paradoxical sense of time inversion and reversal, of histories written before their events (but which none the less are not prophecies), of pasts inhering in presents and futures in pasts. This is because Baudrillard adopts in his writing the temporal frame of simulation, which is *repetition in advance*. Baudrillard can and does claim, without contradiction, that the future has already happened, or that the past we thought occurred never took place, except in simulation” (Bogard 316). While Baudrillard is interested in simulation as temporality (the “true” event as an echo of its own subsequent repetitions), my aim is rather to see temporality as simulation.

10. Also: “Causation cannot exist without time” (Ouspensky 26).

11. Zeh also shifts the emphasis to the subjective observer by saying that “physics does not even offer any conceptual means of characterizing a *present* which might objectively separate the past from the future” (9).

12. The obvious question is, “Why Pratchett?” He is not just comic relief, although he is that too. The examples I use from his work (and they are not so many, but this defense goes for any off-beat author found in here) are simply very concise, short-circuited to absurdity versions of the larger problems and ideas which interest other authors, such as Calvino. The value of the off-off-Broadway writers is in their absurdity, which takes to the extreme the implications of various philosophical ideas. It is like putting an organism in an artificially nourishing environment to foster accelerated growth, making it possible to observe or summarize processes that would normally take whole centuries (or whole novels) to develop. While this is not a substitute for the “real thing” (and I don’t use Pratchett as a substitute for Calvino or *Buffy* as a substitute for Auster, although a definition of the “real thing” would be suspect in itself), it makes it possible for ideas to interact directly, ideas which would otherwise be separated by the time it takes a longer work (a work longer than a joke) to develop them, to see where they lead, to get to the punch line.

Deleuze says that “[a] book of philosophy should be in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction” (xx), and if that is true, then the works discussed here cover, in different degrees, all three categories, from philosophy to science fiction to the detective novel. Perhaps this is necessary because each of them is lacking something; if that is true, then the role of this analysis would be to take the relevant parts from each and put them together to complete a theoretical puzzle which goes beyond any given genre and whose various pieces come from different genres and works. In other words, it is not that Pratchett is incongruous amidst the philosophers, but any given philosophical idea that Pratchett develops is incongruous in his novel and would fit better with other philosophical ideas, such as those of

Reichenbach and Eco. The question then (if there is one) would be not one of method (“Why do I choose Pratchett?”), but one of content (“Why do I want to discuss this specific idea about evolution which is found in Pratchett?”). What is being questioned is not the means but the end, not the sources but the topic, not the route but the destination.

13. In other words, a dilemma similar to Terry Eagleton’s (in a book with the practically indefensible title *William Shakespeare*) has been resolved in roughly the same way Eagleton resolves his: “The Monty Python team once presented a ‘Summarize Proust’ contest, in which competitors were given twenty seconds to summarize the plot of Proust’s novel, first in bathing costume and then in evening dress. The present project seems only slightly less foolhardy. I have made no attempt to deal with the whole of Shakespeare’s work, though I have written, however briefly, about most of what are generally agreed to be his major plays. This is done with only rough respect for chronology and no particular attention to generic distinctions, the importance of which seems to me overrated” (ix).

14. From “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” *Sewanee Review* 8 (1945): 221-40, 433-56, 636-53.

15. Cf. Baudrillard: “Both [the attempt to succeed and the attempt to fail] are doomed to fail. But, whereas the failure of an attempt at completion is, necessarily, negative, the failure of an attempt at annihilation is, necessarily, vital and positive. It is for this reason that thought, which knows it will fail in any case, is duty-bound to set itself criminal objectives [i.e., the objective to fail]. An undertaking directed towards positive objectives cannot allow itself to fail. . . . If the system fails to be everything, nothing will remain of it. If thought fails to be nothing, something will remain of it” (*The Perfect Crime* 151).

16. Or, to borrow from Calvino again: “If I don’t stop to watch any of these programmes it’s because they’re not the programme I’m looking for” (*Numbers* 255); if we never cease analyzing the illusions, it’s because they’re not the truth.

17. Douglas Adams on the grammar of time travel (a topic which no one else has discussed with such a healthy sense of unadulterated paradox):

The major problem [with time travel] is quite simply one of grammar, and the main work to consult in this matter is Dr Dan Streetmentioner’s *Time Traveller’s Handbook of 1001 Tense Formations*. It will tell you for instance how to describe something that was about to happen to you in the past before you avoided it by time-jumping forward two days to avoid it. The event will be described differently according to whether you are talking about it from the standpoint of your own natural time, from a time in the further future, or a time in the further past and is further complicated by the possibility of conducting conversations whilst you are actually travelling from one time to another with the intention of becoming your own mother or father.

Most readers get as far as the Future Semi-Conditionally Modified Subinverted Plagal Past Subjunctive Intentional before giving up: and in fact in later editions

of the book all the pages beyond this point have been left blank to save on printing costs. (216-17)

It is interesting to see that, as far as the grammar of time travel is concerned, Adams is the theorist and people like i ek and Baudrillard are the end-users.

18. The use of the word “evolution” is not meant to refer to the actual evolutionary process; there is no question that this process takes place. But just as there is an obvious physical connection between our minds and our bodies and yet the theoretical mind/body problem is less than obvious and has been debated for centuries, or just as Zeno’s paradox of the impossibility of covering any distance is purely theoretical, since, in practice, we have no difficulty getting to where we are going, in the same way there is a difference between the physical process of evolution, which is not at all under question; or even examination, here, and the concept of evolution, which is taken very broadly and interrogated on a purely theoretical level as a device to approach temporal paradoxes.

19. “‘The Precession of Simulacra’ is in a sense Baudrillard’s definitive statement of simulation, one which he will never go beyond. (Later, in *The Transparency of Evil*, he will speak of a so-called fourth order of simulacra, one based on a ‘viral’ or ‘fractal’ order of value, but this is in fact no different from the third [TE, 5].) And it is this ability of the third order of simulation to produce its own other that is to be the abiding concern throughout Baudrillard’s work, for the essential problem he addresses there is how to name a limit to the systems of simulation he looks at, *how to think what is outside of them* or what they exclude” (Butler 46) [italics mine].

CHAPTER 1: OEDIPUS

“I have known the story before you told it” (13), says King Oedipus in the beginning of Sophocles’s play. We normally assume that Oedipus does not really know what the real story is, and that the apparent reason why he does not know the story is precisely that he thinks he does know the story¹; but, to complicate things further, we shall see that Oedipus also denies having known the story in order to construct an objective story which convinces even himself; he denies his power of language in order to gain an even greater power of language. His language becomes powerful because it is not his and because it is not language.

The tragedy of Oedipus has generated widespread speculation about the human unconscious, and that is what it is famous for²; but this simple paradox of Oedipus as a man who fulfills his destiny by trying to avoid it has other implications as well, such as how we can or cannot acquire knowledge without experience, or how we can use knowledge to create experience. It speaks to some philosophical problems which have been around for a long time: the problems of cognition, causality, temporality, and the agency of the subject. It also speaks to simulation. In fact, it is simulation. The self-fulfilling prophecy, as we shall see, emerges as a form of simulation: a temporal one. Just as we usually think of simulation as recreating a spatial phenomenon, the self-fulfilling prophecy recreates something in time. It takes something which has not yet happened, and drags it into the present in order to present it as something that will inevitably happen. It takes something absent and turns it into something present, so that the act

of foretelling the event is equal in certainty to the happening of that event. The future has the certainty of the past. The story about the event has the truth of the event, and none of the characteristics of a story. The Oedipal story, then, is that of an illusion which is powerful because it is not an illusion, and this is the kind of illusion which we will call simulation.

The Oedipal self-fulfilling prophecy does not deal with language³, but with truths and with “things themselves.” When a prophecy is uttered, it is not accepted as a story, a recommendation, or a warning about the future, but as the actual future made visible and present (with a presence deeply uncharacteristic of language). As Giovanni Manetti says in *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, “the gods do not speak the same language as mortals. The words contained in the oracular response, for example, are human only insofar as they are human sounds, for they fail to produce meaning when the code of human verbal language is applied to them” (15). The oracular language is structured around a denial of narrativity and an emphasis on simulation. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, language seems to be undermined from the beginning.

Oedipus: I pity you, children. You have come full of longing,
but I have known the story before you told it
only too well. (13)

From the first lines, we have a story that has not been told yet and is discouraged from ever being told; in fact, Oedipus asserts that the story is unnecessary, because he already knows what is going on (in this case, the story is that of the city’s misfortune: no children are born, the city is dying). Furthermore, what Oedipus knows is not the story of the city’s suffering, but the suffering itself; rather than hearing about it from a messenger, he has seen the misfortune with his own eyes, which makes the story unnecessary:

**The town is heavy with a mingled burden
of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense;
I did not think it fit that I should hear
of this from messengers but came myself (11)**

In other words, Oedipus refuses to hear the story of his people, explaining that narrative is redundant if the knowledge of reality is already available to him. Countering language with knowledge/truth, Oedipus continues to deflect any talk of narrative or story in the direction of deeds (which makes sense because he himself has enacted but not told/admitted to himself the story of his life).

**Hark to me; what I say to you, I say
as one that is a stranger to the story
as stranger to the deed. For I would not
be far upon the track if I alone
were tracing it without a clue. (19)**

Two things become apparent here: first, word and deed become entangled⁴ in a classical knot of correspondence and representation, whereby the words reflect the truth of the actions, so that one cannot be more or less true than the other (later in the play, Oedipus reinforces this point: “Come—it’s unfit to say what is unfit / to do” [71]). At the same time, Oedipus undermines his own authority as a storyteller, first asking the people to listen to him and then suggesting that he is a “stranger to the story,” that he has no story to tell, which means he is not really eligible to be a storyteller. A bit later in the play Oedipus again undermines his own narrative power by saying, “What is it? / I look at every story” (22), when he is looking for a clue to find the murderer of Laius. These words again position Oedipus as a spectator of the story, rather than a storyteller; he “looks” at stories but does not “tell” them. He wants to “observe” even stories, which are supposed to be substitutes for observation: another way in which Oedipus publicly

rejects language. And if words and deeds are equated, making Oedipus incapable of words would make him incapable of deeds too. Jocasta, for one, is convinced that Oedipus is far from being a master of language: “he [Oedipus] is always at the speaker’s mercy” (49). Oedipus does everything possible to convince us not only of his own alienation from narrativity, but of the uselessness of language in general. He claims he is the one people should listen to, and if he does not have a story for them, then nobody else does either, since the storypower has already been shifted to Oedipus. Not only does Oedipus not have a story, but he tries to prevent anyone else from telling a story: “Hark to *me*,” he says (*italics mine*). In this way, he identifies himself as the locus of storytelling, only to declare that locus empty and futile, to negate not only his own power of language, but language in general. This strategy will give him a tactical advantage later, when the distrust of language (as language) will make it possible to trust language (as reality).

The manner in which knowledge is acquired stands in the center of the Oedipal problem. The whole play is structured around a murder investigation (a quest for knowledge), and the ability of Oedipus to solve the mystery is predicated on his former epistemological feat of solving the riddle of the Sphinx. What people need from Oedipus, from the very beginning, is knowledge, as we see from the words with which the priest addresses Oedipus:

You came and by your coming saved our city,
freed us from tribute which we paid of old
to the Sphinx, cruel singer. This you did
in virtue of *no knowledge* we could give you,
in virtue of no teaching; it was God
that aided you, men say. . . .
Perhaps you’ll hear a wise word from some God,
perhaps you will learn something from a man” (12) [*italics mine*]

The cure for the plague, just like the cure for the sphinx, is bound up with the need for knowledge. Put in epistemological terms, the plague afflicting the city is that of the failure of normal, human, inductive knowledge. Explanations of the city's affliction are lacking, and this shortage of knowledge, the absence of a reason, meaning, or cause behind the suffering is as important as the suffering itself. When the people turn to Oedipus, they seek other, super-human kinds of knowledge from him, since the human ability to know has been tried and exhausted. The people assume that he has access to information about the future which comes from a god through the oracle or through a man (but that could only be a super-human man, Tiresias). This is a conclusion Oedipus has already reached by this point, and he has sent for an explanation from the oracle, thereby acknowledging (and making us believe) that he himself lacks the epistemological powers the people expect from him:

I know you are all sick,
yet there is not one of you, sick though you are,
that is as sick as myself. (13)

In light of the cognitive problem facing Oedipus, we can understand his words to mean that, although everyone in the city is suffering from an inability to know, Oedipus is suffering even more than the rest, being subjected to an even more severe, and ironic, lack of knowledge (about himself, his parents, his origin, etc.). Here is where the essential difference between the successful solution of the Sphinx's riddle and the disastrous solution of the city's disease riddle becomes apparent: during his argument with Tiresias, Oedipus admits that, when he solved the riddle of the Sphinx, he did so without the help of any divine power, but trusting solely his own human "wit," which succeeded where Tiresias' prophetic powers failed:

And yet the riddle's answer was not the province
of a chance comer. It was a prophet's task
and plainly you had no such gift of prophecy
from birds nor otherwise from any God
to glean a word of knowledge. But I came,
Oedipus, *who knew nothing*, and I stopped her.
I solved the riddle by my wit alone.
Mine was no knowledge got from birds (27) [italics mine]

As we can see from this passage, the only time when Oedipus' quest for knowledge was successful, it was successful because he did not have any access to knowledge other than his own, however limited, and because he was following a path "without a clue" (19); when he solved the riddle, he did it without the help of higher powers and without disparaging the human in himself. The answer to the riddle, in fact, is "man," which suggests that a person calling on powers greater than himself would not have found the answer; and vice versa, in the case of the oracle, Oedipus' power is superhuman, because it is the human power to fool itself that it is not human, to create the simulation of its own exclusion.

That is why Oedipus calls on the divine powers even before anyone has asked him to do so, thereby denying the epistemological powers that the people suspect he has. He needs to refer to the mythic powers because, unlike the sphinx story, this time his ambition is not to get to the truth, but to construct a simulation. And the first step in constructing a simulation is to deny his ability to construct a simulation. That is why the people's suspicion that he has knowledge that no one else has may prove dangerous; in order to construct the future, he must make it clear that he does not know the future. His actions during the murder investigation are those of a man who admits the existence of objective, oracular knowledge of the consequences of his own actions in the future, consequences that he cannot observe (or engender) himself, because the future has not

happened yet. In this sense, he is apparently giving up the power and influence of the subjective observer in favor of some larger objective scheme. But, as we know from modern science, the presence of the subject/observer is not something to be trifled with: it can influence the final outcome of the experiment. In Sophocles' play, too, the ultimate act of observation that Oedipus performs by hearing the prophecy is essential to the outcome of the play. And yet Oedipus denies his own involvement in the events and relinquishes the observer privilege, a privilege which is significant even without reference to contemporary physics, since we know the events in the play will happen differently depending on whether or not Oedipus can observe them: if Oedipus was not aware of the prophecy and forced to leave his country to flee the terrible oracle, he would never have encountered his real parents and fulfilled the prophecy.⁵ However, he insists that he is unable to observe anything, acting as metaphorically blind throughout the play (he needs to call on higher powers to see the future), and then reinforces the claim that he is not an observer at the end by blinding himself and becoming "a father seeing nothing, knowing nothing" (74).

The parallel between seeing and knowledge is easy to make, but its temporal implications about seeing/knowing the future should be emphasized here. "And knowing that he knows nothing," Griffith observes, "he can no longer see, for to know is to have seen" (75). To "see" is to "observe," and the statement of blindness suggests that he does not claim any responsibility (the responsibility of the observer) in the preceding events. With his final gesture of blinding himself, then, Oedipus confers the same objectivity on the events that he was advocating throughout the play; his blinding does not appear to be a departure from his previous position⁶, except that it solidifies that position further. In other words, while earlier in the play he

relinquishes his status as an observer by thinking, "Only the oracle can see the future," at the end he seems to re-enforce that same position by saying "I cannot see the future."

Later we will see why Oedipus insists, through bemoaning his temporal blindness, that he cannot see the future. Seeing the future, unlike any other form of knowledge about the future (for example, the uncertainty of simply guessing the future), implies an ability to simulate the future, an ability that Oedipus wants to disassociate himself from. Knowledge about the future is different in kind from knowledge about the past.⁷ As Reichenbach points out, "[o]bservation informs us about the past and the present; reason foretells the future" (80). When he insists on seeing the future, or when he is upset about not being able to see the future, or even when he is satisfied that someone else can see the future for him, Oedipus denies the human mode of knowing, which is through hypothesis, through stories, thereby denying the possibility of any human involvement in the construction of the future. In other words, Oedipus manages to place the whole burden of knowledge and responsibility on the shoulders of some abstract, non-human power, since for him direct observation is the only way to know; or, to know with certainty is the only way to know, and that is not within the human realm of possibility. Humans are capable only of talking about the future, of constructing hypotheses about the future, not constructing the future itself.

Oedipus' strategy is to deny all other forms of knowledge and set up seeing as the only way to know (this is also true of Jocasta's death, when the Second Messenger tells the people (the Chorus), "The worst of what was done / *you cannot know. You did not see the sight*" [65] [italics mine]). Once seeing has been established as the way to know, Oedipus can later prove that, being unable to see the future, he cannot have influenced it in any other way either; from the

start, he is trying to deny any narrative approach to future events, which will help him deny that he has made up any events, keeping the objectivity of the events intact. That is why Oedipus is impatient with stories and prophecies and is searching for a witness, someone who saw the murder, someone who can vouch for the objectivity of the events. It is significant that both times Oedipus sends for prophetic guidance, the bearers of the wisdom, Creon and Tiresias, seem to Oedipus late in arriving (13, 22), although in both cases we hear that they are late at the same time we hear that Oedipus has sent for them, so we do not get any sense of delay in either case. Oedipus has, in fact, anticipated the advice of the people and taken action before anybody has even suggested oracular consultation: "Even in this my actions have not been sluggish" (22). If there is any delay, therefore, it is to be sought in Creon and Tiresias, who are at fault even before they arrive, by being late. This does not mean that Oedipus distrusts the oracle itself; he simply resents the mediation of the oracle through humans, which is a process fraught with errors, since the prophecy (which is not normal language, not language at all) becomes a mere story in the hands of its bearers. And even in the absence of any visible transmission errors, Oedipus is quick to detect a deliberate "error," a conspiracy. But while Oedipus suspects a conspiracy, he does not suspect it is his own.

The fact that Oedipus is paranoid and suspicious of conspiracies suggests that he might be the creator of a conspiracy himself; this logical structure inverts the normal positions of victim and perpetrator, and it is usually unconvincing and humorous (as in, "I am qualified to be a writer because I've read a lot of books," or, in a real example, "I'm a great cook, in theory. I've eaten a lot"⁸), but in the case of conspiracies, the intention is what counts, even more than the actions. Thinking it makes it so. The thought of committing a crime *is* the crime, and the idea of a

conspiracy is enough to qualify someone as a conspirator. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, conspiracy is “[t]he *action* of conspiring” [italics mine], but if we read further we see that “conspiring” is not necessarily an action; it could be merely “an agreement between two or more persons to do something criminal, . . . a plot.” And if it is a “plot,” it is also a story. If Oedipus suspects that Creon is engaged in a conspiracy, the thought of the conspiracy resides in Oedipus, who makes up the “story” of the conspiracy, rather than in Creon. And if it is the thought that counts, then Oedipus is more guilty than Creon, and of exactly the same conspiracy he suspects Creon to be guilty of: by accusing Creon of thoughts 1, 2, and 3, Oedipus is *making up* thoughts 1, 2, and 3, which did not exist before Oedipus spoke of them and which, as we saw, need only to be spoken of in order to exist as a story or a “plot,” and, we assume, this plot would belong to the person who is making up the story. In this sense, Oedipus is the author of at least one conspiracy before the investigation has even started. Another quality of the conspiracy is that it involves more than one person.⁹ The ability of a single person who creates a simulation to convince everyone (including himself) that he could not have done this alone (a murderer would, at the very least, need a victim to “assist” him in committing the crime) is part of his talent for using the objective as a camouflage for the subjective; hence his preference for objective guilt to subjective innocence: if he is guilty of reality, then he is not guilty of conspiracy.

In order to cover up his guilt, transfer all authority to some objective source of knowledge, and deny any interference from language or subjectivity, Oedipus publicly criticizes the narrative contamination of the oracle in the face of Creon and Tiresias, who need to use words to convey truths. In contrast, he finds no fault in the shepherd, who is a material witness and who, presumably, lacks the elaborate linguistic arsenal to manipulate the events he describes

(although he did, apparently, lie the first time he was questioned, a fact that Oedipus chooses to disregard). And although a much longer time actually passes between the time when Oedipus expresses his wish to see the shepherd, the murder witness (44) and time when the man shows up (59), the witness, who does indeed take longer to come, is not “late,” not at fault, in the mind of Oedipus.

The importance of the witness increases in the course of the play, as Oedipus keeps asking about him: “Was there no messenger, no fellow traveller, / who knew what happened?” (15). In the Oedipal vocabulary, the “messenger” is not so much one who tells the story, but one who observed the events. If the messenger were simply someone in possession of the story, then he would not have had any advantage over Oedipus himself, who also knows the story: “I heard that, too, but no one saw the killer” (22), and Oedipus would not have had to call for the witness. As it is, Oedipus repeatedly asks to see the shepherd, a behavior which suggests that the shepherd has something Oedipus does not have (or does not want it to be public knowledge that he has), namely, the truth. (Oedipus seems reluctant to advertize and make public his knowledge, but quick to point out his lack of knowledge, his inability to see, etc.) Oedipus is then obviously anxious to see the witness of the crime, to see him who has seen (and his anxiety, as well as the whole investigation, he chooses to make public [14]):

Oh dear Jocasta, I am full of fears
that I have *spoken* far too much; and therefore
I wish to *see* this shepherd” (44) [italics mine]

Oedipus presents the stories as unreliable and would rather see the witness who has seen the events unfold, thereby trying to bring himself as close to an immediate observation of history as possible. Of course, he can only listen to, rather than see, the story of the witness, but his

emphasis throughout falls on the act of seeing, sight, and blindness, which serves to distract us from the inherent linguistic contamination of the “truth.” Seeing, as opposed to language, is what Oedipus is apparently looking for, and that is what leads us to believe that losing his sight is an especially harsh punishment for him at the end. What Oedipus deliberately fails to acknowledge is that all seeing is filtered through language, and all reality through illusion. He is aware that what he has to accept as true can only be some form of self-consistent fiction: “if I find that his story is the same as yours, I at least will be clear of this guilt” (47). In other words, “proof” simply means that two stories agree. In order for a story to be accepted as truth, the teller does not need to subtract from its fictitiousness but only to add more to it, in the guise of a second story; one tale is fiction, two tales are truth.¹⁰

While Oedipus strives for the immediate certainty of observation, rather than the indirect probability of language, he manages to denounce the role of the real, human observer at the same time, since he posits an ideal, objective observer. He attributes an elusive certainty to observation, neglecting to mention that observation cannot bring certainty when it comes to the future. A real observer can never have observational knowledge of the future. As Reichenbach says, “knowledge of the future is not of the observational type” (91). If a person is to know the future at all, he must know it with probability, not with certainty. Oedipus sets up the future as a fact, even though the fact is “that we wish to know the truth of predictions before the predicted events occur, and that when knowledge has become observational knowledge it is no longer a knowledge of the future” (Reichenbach 91). Knowledge of the future exists only in a narrative form, as a hypothesis. If in fact Oedipus has committed a crime, it is the epistemological crime of not knowing what it is impossible to know. Or at least that is what he wants us to think (that

is the crime he confesses to and is punished for), so that there can be an objective, free-standing simulation of the future, which Oedipus would have had nothing to do with. If in fact we have anything to say about the future, it can only be stories, and Oedipus rejects stories (hypotheses) and language as ways of knowing.¹¹ This rejection means that he wants us (and himself) to believe that the only way of knowing the future is seeing the future, an act free of language and uncertainty. And, having set up seeing as the only way of knowing the future, Oedipus proceeds to convince us that he is in fact blind, so he could not have seen the future. (This is the same strategy we saw in operation in Oedipus' earlier renunciation of language in general, when he claimed to be the locus of the story, and then denied having a story to tell.)

Oedipus wants to convince us that words are unreliable and irrelevant to the chain of events they refer to, that the story of what will happen cannot really have any material influence on the course of events:

Teiresias

Of themselves things will come, although I hide them
and breathe no word of them.

Oedipus

Since they will come
tell them to me. (24)¹²

The reference to things which happen "of themselves," and which are probably things "in themselves," in combination with the negative "no word" again brings up the uselessness of language and the primacy of "things." The telling, Oedipus *tells* us, will not make a difference, suggesting that knowledge cannot influence the future events slated for happening.¹³ But the self-fulfilling prophecy depends on setting up a misleading independence of the prophecy from the subject, to make it seem as if the prophecy does not operate on the expectation that the

subject will take action, whereas the action of the subject is the only thing that guarantees the prophecy will come true. So, paradoxically, while Oedipus denies his own involvement, the prophecy itself reinforces his agency by lying to him about his agency. The prophecy, as a simulation, needs the agency of its creator, even though part of his task in creating the simulation would be to deny that he (or anybody else) has created it, to deny that it is a human creation and not an objective history.¹⁴ (Simulation treads on that treacherous ground between determinism and free will.) Oedipus then publicly undermines his own role as an active subject, leaving it to the oracle to define his role (even if it can turn out to be the role of an active subject). Strictly speaking, the prophecy does not lie; it is not a misleading construction. On the contrary, the prophecy is a way for Oedipus to cover up any traces of artificial construction of events, to disguise his agency; it is the abstract alibi of the human perpetrator. It is not that the oracle lies to Oedipus about the predetermination of events; rather, it is Oedipus who lies to the oracle (and to himself) about the ability of the human mind to simulate the future, and then uses the oracle to solidify the authority and reality of the simulation he has created and to prevent its human source from being revealed. The prophecy is not a lie any more than any other simulation is a lie, and simulation is by definition indistinguishable from the truth. In this sense, Oedipus simulates his guilt right down to the last detail, right down to actually committing the crime he pretends he committed. He simulates reality by living it.

In a sense, although simulation appears to reflect the truth (being indistinguishable from it), and so has the “right” appearance, this appearance is deceiving precisely because it is not deceiving. Pure simulation looks exactly like something it is, which is deceptive, and it is deceptive because there is no deception; the real thing is the appearance itself. In other words,

the “in itself” is not opposed to appearance but coincides with it. To illustrate this point, I ek, in *Tarrying with the Negative*, quotes a Marx brothers joke on Ravelli: “You look like Ravelli. - But I am Ravelli! - No wonder, then, that you look like him! . . . [to which Ravelli responds] ‘So I do look alike’” (74).¹⁵ The context of simulation seems to be the only context where we can legitimately speak of “the thing itself,” which is “the appearance itself,” “the illusion itself,” or “the lie itself.” The point where an illusion becomes simulation is the point of transition between “illusion” and “the illusion itself.” The accuracy, self-identity, and truthfulness of simulation are possible because, in its very definition, simulation is something that is not a true “itself” but something else, an “itself” that is simulated, that rejects the very notion of an “itself.”¹⁶ The simulation of the “itself” is true to itself, as it claims to be nothing more than what it is, which is a lie about the “itself.”¹⁷ In a more familiar formulation, simulation is not just a lie, but the lie of the liar who says he is a liar (in this case the Cretan who says that all Cretans are liars).¹⁸ The apparent lie has the function of truth, and the apparent truth is a lie. In this sense, the initial statement of Oedipus, “I have known the story before you told it” (13), is in fact true, as long as it sets up its own impossibility of being true, since throughout the play Oedipus is showing us that there is no human way in which he could have known the truth. In other words, the true and the false are not aligned precisely because they are.

To illustrate this further, we can mention Martin P. Nilsson’s remark, in his historical study of myths and oracles in ancient Greece, about a specific oracular prediction: “apparently the oracle is genuine, for the issue did not correspond to it” (125). Here, Nilsson does not test the event in light of the prophecy as much as the prophecy in light of the event. In other words, he concludes that the prediction was a true prediction, articulated before the event it predicts, rather

than after the fact, and his conclusion is based on the historical evidence that the event did not happen at all, or did not happen as predicted. This is a situation where the non-happening of the event is a proof: not a proof that the prophecy was true, but a proof that the prophecy was a prophecy, and in that sense a “true” prophecy, one that comes before the event and therefore can be wrong about it. The self-fulfilling prophecy, on the contrary, is always true, because it is not really a prophecy. We are not comparing two things (the prophecy and the event) to say that if they match, then the prophecy is true; we do not have the option of a false prophecy (of a comparison) at all, and that is because the prophecy and the event happen simultaneously. And just as the prophecy is never “prophetic” (fallible), the event it predicts is never really “predictable” since we cannot speak of “predictability” in simultaneity. Simulation “predicts” something with such accuracy that it practically causes it to happen, and the illusion of it happening is so indistinguishable from the truth, and the appearance reflects the essence so closely, that it ceases to be an appearance and becomes the truth.

It is the word “becomes” that compromises this “truth” produced from a truthful appearance because, generally, we think of “truth” as something that cannot “become” but that already is. In a court of law, for example (and the Oedipus play describes the proceedings in a court of law, in a way), people usually try to uncover a pre-existing truth, rather than create a new one; the same apparently holds for Oedipus’ project in the play, with the exception that in its Oedipal version the investigation results in an inability to decide whether the truth Oedipus finds is one that has been there all along, or one that has come into being during the course of the investigation. That the investigation does not succeed a pre-existing truth but is simultaneous with an emerging truth also becomes clear in the Messenger’s words (the messenger from

Corinth, who brings with him his knowledge of the final pieces of the puzzle), when he tells us about his business with Oedipus: “But I’ll make him remember what he does not know” (60).

The ability of simulation to create a new truth that was not there before goes against the temporal imperative of the very concept of “truth,” which requires it to already be, rather than become true, situating it in the past rather than the future.¹⁹

What seems to separate the prophecy from truth most obviously is the timeline of events: both the prophecy and the truth refer to the same events and say the same things, but the prophecy refers to them before they have occurred, while the truth will refer to them after they have occurred. In this sense, the prophecy imposes a present tense on the future events. Rebecca W. Bushnell observes that “Oedipus’s viewpoint [is] entirely in the present tense” (78), and this hints at more serious complexities in the temporality of the prophecy than are visible on the surface. There are, of course, various ways to account for the time paradox in the play, the paradox of shaping the future by knowing the future.²⁰ The easiest way to dispose of the problem, as R. Drew Griffith does, is to bring Apollo in as an independent agency with its own temporal characteristics, such that they allow Apollo to have a convenient deific view of the future and articulate the prophecy without interfering with the events. The argument is that of any divine power, which is usually presented as omniscient yet non-deterministic (or, we can say, it is presumed to be implicated in temporal matters only passively, rather than actively)²¹:

Suppose I videotape a group of playing children and, before playing back the tape, I state that during the play-session Lee will steal Tom’s teddy bear. My prediction is unconditional and will be brought to pass, and yet I did not compel Lee to act in this way; I may even wish that it had not happened. . . . I am, in fact, incapable of imposing my will on the children or of removing theirs from them, but I can accurately predict how they will act because I do not experience time as they do, as a chronometric, impersonal medium. (54)

This theory, as any other theological explanation which needs to reconcile predestination with free will, merely sidesteps the problem by postulating a divine intelligence with characteristics precisely designed to explain the temporal impossibilities we observe, characteristics that do not cause the events they must explain, but are derived from those events to form a retrospective explanation.²² In other words, the conclusion about divine omniscience is transformed into the premise of divine omniscience, and that argument, although as unbeatable as any other analytical statement, does not lead very far. Griffith does acknowledge afterwards that the situation in the play has more to do with Oedipus himself and perhaps less with Apollo, but he still wraps up the issue by an appeal to Apollo's peculiar powers and the inevitability of fate:

The situation in the play is more complex than the videotape example because Apollo does not predict the event to a disinterested third party but to the protagonist himself, and Oedipus reacts of his own free will to the god's prediction. Yet such is the nature of fate that any action that Oedipus might have taken in response to any prediction that Apollo might have made would have ended in the same result, albeit brought about by a different chain of intermediary events. (54)

It seems that Griffith is aware of a fundamental difference between an impersonal prediction and a prediction which is specifically communicated to the protagonist, but he ultimately glosses over this distinction by a general reference to fate. As Manetti says, "[g]ods rule time by means of a simultaneous 'sight' of past, present and future. . . . Mortals, in contrast, can see only the present, while the other dimensions of time remain inaccessible to them, except through the mediation of the gods" (15). The play, however, seems to focus on the specific situation in which Oedipus himself has the same knowledge of the future that Apollo does, and the suggestion is very strong that Oedipus would not have killed his father if he had not been warned about killing him. We could dismiss this paradox, the way Griffith does, and say that

regardless of what Oedipus knows and regardless of what he chooses to do, he will still end up in the exact spot that Fate reserved for him. But dismissing the paradox does not mean that it is solved; it simply means that it is not discussed. Apparently unsatisfied with his own explanation, Griffith later returns to the question of the time paradox:

If Apollo's foreknowledge does not limit Oedipus's free will, does not his prediction of the event, not to a disinterested third party but to the protagonist himself, add a deterministic element? In other words, does not Oedipus, in killing Laius, unintentionally send through the medium of Apollo's prophecy a message backward in time to himself to the effect that he will kill Laius, so that from the time of his receiving the message onwards he has no freedom not to commit the crime? The *answer* to this question can be found in an analogy from contemporary physics. Physicists suspect the existence of subatomic particles called tachyons, which have a velocity greater than the speed of light. (The speed of light is the speed limit of the universe in the sense that no particle may be accelerated to that speed; but nothing in theory prevents the existence of a particle that from its inception travels faster than the speed of light, provided only that it never decelerates to that speed.) If tachyons exist and could be harnessed to practical effect, they could convey messages that would arrive before they were sent. . . . The application of this example from the philosophy of science to the case of Oedipus is obvious. (65) [italics mine]

What Griffith gives us here is not an "answer" but a re-statement of the question. While the similarities between the physics of time travel and the Oedipus tragedy are obvious, even a reference to a "tachyon telephone" (65) does not solve the problem; it only re-articulates it in a more familiar 21st-century way. The means of acquiring knowledge about the future is irrelevant, and Sophocles' play has its own mechanism of doing that, a mechanism as efficient as the tachyons. Oracles or superluminal subatomic particles: we are still faced with the fundamental problem of an apparent temporal impossibility.²³

Temporal impossibility seems to be the same as impossible causality: when Reichenbach asks the question, "How can we tell that one event is earlier than another?" (147), the answer he

gives is, "The cause must precede the effect. . . . What we have to explain, however, is how to distinguish the cause from the effect" (148). This question becomes especially important for Oedipus, where it is not clear whether the prophecy precedes the event in the same way a cause would precede an effect. Judging by the results, it seems that that is the case, and that the two variables of time and causality are in fact identical: "Time order reflects the causal order of the universe" (Reichenbach 150). However, the narrative is structured in such a way as to suggest a simultaneous independence of the event from the prophecy, in the sense that, if we accept the legitimacy of the prophecy as a cause, we must also accept the legitimacy of the prophecy's claim that the same events would happen with or without the prophecy, that the same effect will occur with or without the cause. And this is, again, a characteristic of simulation, since we know that simulation distorts the normal causality of events: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—it is the map that engenders the territory" (Baudrillard, *Selected* 166).²⁴ If the "territory" is taken to be the future events as they happen, and the map the prophecy that precedes them, this formulation illustrates the crux of the Oedipal epistemological struggle: the undermining of causality.

While the analysis of a normal chronology cannot take us very far, one way to address the problem of time and causality would be to define it in different terms, the terms of semiotics. Going beyond strictly linear timelines, we can, instead, consider the kindred paradox of language and the construction of meaning, which may appear to give meaning a temporal dimension where there is none. In *Oedipus, Oracles, and Meaning: From Sophocles to Umberto Eco*, Walter

Burkert includes the following cursory quotation from Umberto Eco: “‘There was no plot’, he says, ‘and I discovered it by mistake’” (qtd. in Burkert 25). Although Burkert does not pursue this thought further or explicate it in any way, it reveals exactly the paradoxical nature of time when it comes to the prophecy: the discovery of something that did not exist until it was discovered has perhaps the same mechanics as the fulfillment of a prophecy that was not true until it was fulfilled. Of all the simulation scenarios available in fiction, those of Eco’s conspiracies are the most elaborate and philosophically explicit. Eco’s mystical plots do not exist until they have been discovered, much like, it seems, the Oedipal prophecy was not true until it came true, or, in a Möbius way, was true even before it was proved to be so by the occurrence of the event. The Möbiusness of this structure consists of its ambivalence as to the number of things we are talking about: are we talking about a prophecy separate from the events it predicts, a hypothesis about reality and reality, or about a prophecy that constitutes reality rather than predicting it? Just as the Möbius strip is eternally undecided about whether it has one or two sides²⁵, the self-fulfilling prophecy wavers between having one or two events, one or two points in time. While the Möbius paradox is admittedly spatial, it is possible to transpose it to the temporal dimension of the prophecy; or rather, we can use the Möbius analogy to analyze the apparent temporality of the Oedipal paradox, no longer in terms of time, but in terms of language and signification.

Critics have pointed out the double nature of Oedipus himself, who is suspended between his various social roles, geographical locations, and biological allegiances. As Griffith tells us,

the course of Oedipus’s life-journey traces out that most wonderful topological mystery, the Möbius strip, in that Oedipus comes back to whence he started but in an inverted position, for, having left as legitimate (if unwanted), he returns as a

usurper; having left as Jocasta's son, he returns as her husband; and two persons who seem to be distinct—investigator of the crime and criminal—are in fact one and the same. (73)²⁶

The convergence of these extremes into the singular figure of Oedipus highlights the fact that we are not necessarily talking about a temporal relationship between his various roles: if Oedipus is simultaneously the murderer and the detective, can we really say that he was the murderer first, and then he became the detective, since he did not become a murderer (that is, a regicide) until he discovered that he was? It seems rather more acceptable to say that the moment he becomes a successful detective and discovers the murderer is also the moment when he becomes the murderer in question, that they are one and the same.²⁷ And, while he obviously married Jocasta a lot later than he was born, the prophecy makes those two events contemporaneous, by defining Jocasta's son *as* the man who will marry her.²⁸ The mutual predication serves to equate the two terms, which become simultaneous in terms of definition, of language.

In a typical example from linguistics, "bachelor" is defined as "unmarried adult male" (Eco, *Kant* 9)²⁹, without either of these terms adding anything to the other; they are equal and simultaneous, characterized by analytical emptiness rather than synthetic content. Such terms, Reichenbach tells us, "are called *analytic*, an expression which may be translated as *self-explanatory*" (17).³⁰ As Manetti says, "[a]n inference is valid . . . only if it is totally analytical or tautological" (130). Its meaninglessness is the price for its truth. A more ambiguous example would be the phrase "survival of the fittest," which at first glance seems to posit a temporal, causal, linear relationship: first, there is survival, then, there are the survivors, and only after that do we call them "the fittest." In his story "Night-Sea Journey," however, John Barth rejects such a sequence and speculates that the phrase is meaningless, "*fitness* meaning . . . nothing more than

survival-ability, a talent whose only demonstration is the fact of survival” (6). Of course we observe that the fittest survive, since those who survive we have chosen to call the fittest. In other words, the two terms exist in an analytical or tautological relationship similar to that of the bachelor and the unmarried man, or that of God as someone who does good things, or that of Oedipus as a son and Oedipus as a husband. Once the terms enter the space of mutual definition, they become redundant and simultaneous and short-circuit that temporal thing called causality. As the terms assume an analytical equality and simultaneity, they lose any synthetic content, which can only exist in a temporal sequence. As causality fails, the temporal aspect becomes altogether irrelevant.

That is why a straightforward temporal analysis would not explain the apparently temporal paradoxes in the chronology of the self-fulfilling prophecy; they are not really temporal. However, they can be more fruitfully rephrased in terms of semiotics. “[I]f you invent a plan and others carry it out, it’s as if the plan exists. At that point it does exist” (513), explains Eco’s protagonist in *Foucault’s Pendulum*. The “it’s as if” of this semiotic problem applies very closely to the Oedipus case. In Eco’s novel, the global conspiracy of the Plan is as much unveiled as it is constructed by the main characters, or, more precisely, what is unveiled is that they have constructed the Plan. By offering theories which have the appeal of consistent explanations of historical events, the characters manage to convince a number of other people and secret cults not only of the truth of the theories, but also of the existence of the events they explain. “We invented a nonexistent Plan,” says the protagonist, “and They not only believed it was real but convinced themselves that They had been part of it for ages, or rather, They identified the fragments of their muddled mythology as moments of our Plan, moments joined in

a logical, irrefutable web of analogy, semblance, suspicion. But if you invent a plan and others carry it out, it's as if the plan exists. At that point it does exist" (513). Reality and simulation are now equal in existence, in meaning, in reality.

The temporality and causality of the Plan are those of simulation: "Simple enough, if there was really a plan. But how could there have been? Since we invented 'the Plan' ourselves, and only much later was it possible for reality not only to catch up with fiction, but actually to precede it, or, rather, to rush ahead of it and repair the damage that it would cause" (145). Or, as another character puts it, "[the] argument is simply post hoc ergo ante hoc. What follows causes what came before" (282). This inverted chronology exemplifies "the discovery that it is not so much that storyability originates in events as that eventfulness originates in stories" (Young xii). Or, in the words of Baudrillard, "it is no longer the event that generates news, but the reverse" (*Illusion* 16).³¹ In Eco's novel, what initially appears to be a secret, coded message with information about key historical conspiracies on a global scale turns out to have been nothing more than a medieval laundry list: "The laundry list, for us, had been a crossword puzzle with the squares empty and no definitions. The squares had to be filled in such a way that everything would fit" (511). The linguistic strategy of simulation is so effective that, even after the trivial misunderstanding is exposed, the consistent historical theories of conspiracy still seem as convincing as the "real" explanation, if not more so. And the "made-up" explanation is accepted as truth by a greater number of people than those who accept the "real," literal explanation of the laundry list.

Just as the interpretation of the laundry list as a master Plan requires a large measure of imagination and linguistic play characterized by its ultimate denial that it is linguistic play,

Oedipus' understanding of the prophecy, although it can only be a linguistic interpretation, is never acknowledged as such; it is always seen as what the events would do "of themselves" (24).

In this sense, the critical acclaim of Oedipus' skill in and dedication to "reading" signs³² seems too idealistic, as it does not mention his denial that the truth is a matter of "reading," and his vision of a free-standing truth independent of the human subject:

Oedipus thinks of himself as a reader of signs par excellence. He casts himself in the roles of detective searching for clues . . . , navigator by the stars . . . , and psychologist analysing the behaviour of his wife. . . . His ability to read the riddle of the Sphinx . . . offers both to the community and to himself apparent confirmation of his semiotic skill. It is clear as the play progresses, however, that Oedipus is not so much a reader of signs as a misreader of them. (Griffith 70)

The greatest (and deliberate, public) misreading of signs that Oedipus performs is his denial that signs can be "read" in the first place, that we are dealing with signs and not with the truth itself. But other critics are more lenient; Bushnell, for example, interprets Oedipus' "misreading" quite literally, and sees it as positive and liberating: "The hero who defies prophecy, rejecting, misreading, or obliterating the divine sign, sees himself as reacting against a language of authority, which 'prescribes' his life" (6). However, there is another side to this process of misreading, and that is a denial of "reading" (in misreading, reading is "missed" altogether, which would suggest that the element of reading is still there but is invisible or at least not obvious, deflecting attention from itself; it also suggests that something is missing from the "things themselves" and that is reading). In this sense, misreading does liberate Oedipus but only by helping him conceal this liberty, even from himself, and by apparently freeing him from his own fallibility and agency. As Ahl suggests, "Oedipus is responsible . . . because his use of freedom is actually a resignation of freedom" (55). What is being liberated is not Oedipus from

the prophecy, but the prophecy from Oedipus; the creation is freed from its creator, in order to acquire the authority of the uncreated. Since Oedipus' freedom to construct meanings defines not only the meanings, but the margin of error in those meanings as well, the prophecy needs to be interpreted without appearing to be interpreted, since being interpreted would interfere with its claim of being true. The truth, as Donald F. Bouchard suggests in his introduction to Foucault's *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, is "[an] interpretation which does not give itself as such" (21). Oedipus consistently fails to draw attention not only to the fact that the oracular prophecy is a story, but also to the fact that it is a story already interpreted (misread) by him. And the misreading of an already misread text does not promise to reveal a straightforward truth. But as we saw, Oedipus is not after the truth (though in some sense he is behind it). The problem of freedom is to conceal the fact that it is there, and so is the problem of language, since Oedipus' use of language consists in a renunciation of language.

While interpreting the prophecy as "truth" (or fact, event) requires that Oedipus first work with the words of a story, the final interpretation, the reified (mis)reading of the story of his guilt takes the form of objective truth.³³ As Katharine Young points out in *Taleworlds and Storyrealms: The Phenomenology of Narrative*, "[d]escriptions reify realities" (x). The objectivity of the prophecy is the result of a subjective decision to accept the story as objective. That is why Jocasta, for example, contradicts herself when she advises Oedipus:

Do not concern yourself about this matter;
listen to me and learn that human beings
have no part in the craft of prophecy.
Of that I'll show you a short proof. (41)

It seems that Jocasta is trying to discourage Oedipus from accepting the prophecy, but this

passage can also be interpreted to mean that she is trying to discourage him from taking part in the creation (“craft”) of the prophecy, in the interpretive operation which proves to himself that he is guilty. At the same time, she takes the initiative to interpret the event of Laius’s apparently accidental death as a “proof” that the prophecy (according to which Oedipus is supposed to be Laius’s murderer) is not true; in other words, she is engaging in proof by interpretation in order to prove that interpretation should be distrusted as proof. She interprets the failure of the prophecies as proof that interpretation should not be trusted. As Baudrillard observes, “[i]t is always a question of proving the real by the imaginary” (*Selected* 176-77). In this way, Jocasta falls in the same trap as Oedipus: when she says, “Do not concern yourself with this,” she in effect is saying “. . . because I will concern myself with it”; she falls in the trap of using (mis)reading as a direct proof, of converting derivative language into a primary given.

Oedipus falls into the same trap when he blinds himself and says: “To this guilt I bore witness against myself— / with what eyes shall I look upon my people?” (70). In light of the problematic of seeing and witnessing, we can say that what he learns from a story (the story of the witness) he has now accepted as truth, since he concludes that the shepherd was not the only one who saw the crime, but that he himself must have also been there, that he must have seen his own crime and become a witness to himself (which is exactly what he was trying to avoid: “I fled / to somewhere where I should not *see* fulfilled / the infamies told in that dreadful oracle” [45] [*italics mine*])). And now that the story has convinced him that he was present at the murder of Laius, he can remember seeing it happen, even though he did not see it before, at the time of the event. But the simulation is total, since he also moves the event back to the past (“I bore witness against myself,” past tense), exactly to where it would have been had it ever happened, to deliver

that final blow of retrospective recreation which converts language into sight, stories into reality. Furthermore, Oedipus inverts the normal relationship of the event and the witnessing of the event: while we usually think of the witnessing as something made possible by the occurrence of the event, of seeing as made possible by the object of the seeing, in Oedipus' case the act of seeing makes possible the event which is seen; if Oedipus has indeed seen his own crime, then it must have happened (the "then" designates both a temporal and a causal relationship). And to cover up his special power of seeing a crime where there is none, Oedipus makes us believe that he cannot see anything, that he is blind altogether. It is as if he wants us (and himself) to think that he did not read too much into the story constructed in the course of his investigation, by making us (and himself) believe that he cannot, physically, read at all. In this way, he denies his own involvement in the simulated act of seeing whose truth was initially derived from a story whose narrative origin is now lost in a Nietzschean loop of forgetfulness.

Eco's characters are facing the same problem with the misreading of the laundry list, but they eventually recognize that the process of "transforming the game into reality" (6) is so complete and the game so authentic that there is no evidence which can allow for any conclusive decision one way or the other, fiction or truth, conspiracy or transparency. In the absence of evidence, the only criterion that remains is the testimony of the creator of the fiction: "The Plan real? Absurd. We had invented it ourselves" (20). But things have gone too far, and the denial of the creator (or bricoleur)³⁴ has minimum objective weight: everyone except the main characters is convinced of the truth of the Plan. And when the protagonists deny that truth, that denial is less convincing than the fiction they started with; the denial of the truth only confirms the truth: "the more Belbo refused to reveal it, the bigger They believed the secret to be; the more

he vowed he didn't possess it, the more convinced They were that he did possess it, and that it was a true secret, because if it were false, he would have revealed it" (515). By threatening to kill those who know the truth about the fiction, those who do not know anything but the fiction are in fact trying to convince the creators of the objectivity of their creation: just as "Teiresias is trying to persuade *the accused* of his guilt, not the jury" (Ahl 89).

Some critics, notably Frederick Ahl, insist that Oedipus was innocent of the crimes he is condemned for, innocent in a very legal and binding, not metaphorical, sense, and that the whole sequence of events exposed by the testimony of various characters in the play is nothing more than a fabrication which Oedipus assumes is the truth: he treats it as if it is the truth. Oedipus is like Eco's Belbo: "Inventing, he had created the principle of reality" (436). Much like the theories of Eco's characters,

Oedipus' conclusions are based on words and their interpretation. And words are notoriously elusive and prone to ambiguity. Yet Oedipus takes for granted that there can be a *verbal* (rather than a medical) solution to such problems as the plague afflicting Thebes. . . . He tells priest and people that, after much thought, he has sent Creon to Corinth to consult the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. This he considers the *only* cure. . . . Oedipus thinks that words may solve the problem. (Ahl 28)

(We can point out that words do in fact solve the problem, since words are the carriers of truth, and the solution of the problem (the city's misfortune) has to do (directly) with discovering the truth about Laius' murder, as well as (indirectly) with making the guilty party physically leave town, an action which is also the result of the words Oedipus hears and utters and only exemplifies their power to have a more than verbal impact.) Ahl's detailed and impressive study of the "facts" in the play leads him to conclude that "[t]he charges against Oedipus are based entirely on his own testimony against himself and unsupported hearsay" (21). In other words,

there is no crime to start with (or at least no regicide and incest).³⁵ It is all a mere story, a convincing one, and we can call this convincing story a simulation. When Ahl argues that “Oedipus will ultimately convict himself of murder and incest without evidence” (119), we can recall Eco’s version: “They constantly talk about irrefutable documents that no one ever produces” (173). By failing to demand solid evidence, Oedipus accepts an unfounded story as true. Oedipus, then, is not the perpetrator of the crimes, but he still is the perpetrator of the story, and therefore he is guilty: not guilty of murdering his father, but guilty of convicting himself, guilty, we can say, of not taking the story as a story but as the truth. Ahl concludes that “no other character in Greek tragedy is more wholly and personally responsible for the disaster that befalls him than is Oedipus” (55), which is in effect the same observation Tiresias makes in the play when he accuses Oedipus of seeing conspiracies that do not exist: “Creon is no hurt to you, / but you are to yourself” (27).

Even though Ahl means to propose this quite literally, his theory is also relevant to the semiotic game going on in *Oedipus Rex*. It would be irrelevant to point out that Oedipus harms himself by interpreting fiction as truth, rather than trying to come up with a more convincing fiction that works to his advantage. First, a fiction, as fiction, is not harmful to start with.³⁶ And Eco’s protagonist explains: “Now I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma, a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth” (81). In other words, the fiction is harmless until it gets confused with reality. The prophecy is harmless until it comes true. Then, however, it can be more dangerous than “reality”; the model has greater power than the “real.” As Baudrillard points out, “experts have calculated that a state of emergency declared on the basis of a prediction of seismic activity

would trigger off a panic whose consequences would be more disastrous than the catastrophe itself" (*Selected* 196). In the case of Oedipus, the same holds true, as the prediction brings more disaster than just Oedipus' killing his father: the whole state is affected, Jocasta dies (which was not supposed to happen), and Oedipus blinds himself and leaves in exile (even though he had earlier declared that the murderer will "leave this land unharmed" [20]). His effort to prevent one (double) crime leads him to commit more crimes. In this sense, Oedipus does not merely fulfill the prophecy: he raises the stakes³⁷ of the prophecy, he does better than the oracle.³⁸

And, second, the fact that the fiction is harmful to Oedipus does not necessarily mean that he has no part in creating it. As Ahl speculates, "Oedipus really wants his fears confirmed, not set to rest" (171). And, of course, a fiction of disaster would be all the more convincing to Oedipus, since he would not even suspect that he himself created it. In Eco's novel, the most convincing stories are those which seem to have been unintended: "he declares that the league exists, so that people will then create it. But he uses another tactic too: he cleverly mixes truth with falsehood, the truth apparently damaging to him, so that nobody will doubt the falsehood" (405). How can Oedipus possibly suspect that he himself is responsible for the events, if the events are so tragic for him? But more than that, being harmed by one's own acts is, in the words of Baudrillard, "a policy of self-exploitation one would never accept if it were imposed by someone else. It means cultivating servitude without the presence of the other, since each person substitutes himself for the other in the role of oppressor. The pinnacle of self-inflicted servitude" (*Illusion* 103). Oedipus would not accept the simulation (his guilt) so easily if it were imposed by someone else. As Baudrillard says, "if there is anything worse than being subject to the law of others, it is surely being subject to one's own law" (*Perfect* 11). And Oedipus repeatedly takes

on both the role of law-giver and the role of law-breaker; he is ultimately punished by his own curse.

The problem of self-inflicted simulation appears very early in the play in an oblique reference to those citizens who might be hiding the murderer of Laius, but actually in reference to Oedipus himself, since he is in fact the one who is hiding the murderer, hiding himself from himself. Note the words with which Oedipus threatens the people who might be harboring the criminal:

Those who do not obey me, may the Gods
grant no crops springing from the ground they plough
nor children to their women. (21)

It is significant that this describes exactly the affliction of the city, in the words of the Priest:

A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth,
A blight is on the cattle in the fields,
a blight is on our women that no children
are born to them (12)

The punishment with which Oedipus threatens anyone who is hiding the truth is exactly the same as the suffering of everyone in the city at the moment, a suffering which does not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty but “spares not” (12). The only difference is that the plague is general and impersonal, so there is still a chance of survival (*somebody* would suffer with certainty, but any given individual would suffer only with probability), while, if Oedipus’ curse comes true, the individual who has been singled out and personally cursed by Oedipus would suffer not with probability but with certainty. The fact that this person³⁹ eventually comes forward and that this person turns out to be Oedipus himself foreshadows his need for certainty (simulation, prophecy) rather than probability (human knowledge), even if the former is

significantly more destructive than the latter. This certainty, which has been generated by language (Oedipus' curse) needs to mask its narrative roots in Oedipus' speech in order to become certainty, to become something more than the normal probability of human existence, something that Oedipus would not be responsible for. To be absolved of any responsibility is part of Oedipus's rhetorical motivation from the start, and it very closely echoes Eco's strategy: "To invent a Plan. The Plan justifies you to such a degree that you can no longer be held accountable, not even for the Plan itself" (433). Things will happen anyway, Oedipus says, whether or not he knows or acts: "Since they will come / tell them to me" (24). The need of the human agent to hide his agency from himself is explained by Eco's protagonist: "But if there is no cosmic Plan? What a mockery, to live in exile when no one sent you there. Exile from a place, moreover, that does not exist" (434). In the same way, Oedipus needs to know that there is a reason for his exile, that he is running away from something terrible but, above all, real.

To renounce his ability to influence the events, Oedipus is quick to assume a seemingly passive role throughout the play: at the end of the play, for example, he leaves it to others to decide what to do with him: "I beg of you in God's name hide me / somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me" (71); even though death seems to him a just punishment, he does not step forward and take charge of that action, as Jocasta does, but apparently relinquishes his agency. "Apparently," because he does provide helpful suggestions about what has to be done, and Creon ends up punishing Oedipus exactly the way Oedipus has suggested to him: through banishment. While Oedipus seems to be saying to Creon, "Do whatever you think is right," he is in fact telling Creon exactly what to do. In this way, Oedipus semiotically masterminds the events, sets himself up, and then acts as if he had nothing to do with it, denying his own power to

manipulate language into becoming a reality; and how convincing that reality is will depend on Oedipus' denial of having created it. While Creon observes that "that which is sought is found" (15), the Oedipal quest for knowledge goes even further, ending in a denial that what is found has ever been sought. As Eco explains, "[b]etter reality than a dream: if something is real, then it's real and you're not to blame" (140). Paradoxically, then, Oedipus convicts himself so that he will be innocent: by declaring that he is guilty of the criminal actions, he proves that he is innocent of putting the story of the murder together. If he is guilty of reality, then he is innocent of the fiction (which suggests that reality is less of a crime than fiction).⁴⁰ He defends the "reality principle" while sacrificing the "narrative principle," in order to conceal the fact that there is no reality principle.

An example of the way simulation threatens the reality principle (or, rather, we can say, creates a reality principle) can be found in Baudrillard's interpretation of the Watergate scandal: "Watergate above all succeeded in imposing the idea that Watergate was a scandal. . . . [B]efore, the task was to dissimulate scandal; today, the task is to conceal the fact that there is none" (*Selected* 173). If there is a scandal, then moral laws have been violated; but if there is no scandal, then the very existence of morality is threatened. As Baudrillard explains later, "[t]ransgression and violence are less serious, for they only contest the *distribution* of the real. Simulation is infinitely more dangerous since it always suggests . . . that the *law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation*" (177). That is why Oedipus would rather be found guilty of committing a crime than of inventing it, to preserve his own sense of right and wrong, of order and chaos, of truth and fiction. Just like Eco's character, who, "inventing, . . . had created the principle of reality" (436), the tragedy of Oedipus upholds reality

and renounces narrativity. The prophecy which becomes truth and the story which exchanges language for reality are manifestations of simulation. As Ahl suggests, “this play is not about his final self-discovery but about his ultimate self-deception” (264).

In *What Really Goes on in Sophocles' Theban Plays*, Charles B. Daniels and Sam Scully suggest that Oedipus has no investigative talent whatsoever, and that he fails to see numerous clues obvious to the other characters. This is not the sense in which we use “self-deception” here. Rather than being oblivious to clues and unable to “read” them, Oedipus misreads them in the sense that reads too much into them. Heidegger quotes a line from a poem by Hölderlin: “King Oedipus has perhaps one eye too many” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 112). Heidegger interprets this extra eye as “the fundamental condition for all great questioning and knowing as well as their sole metaphysical ground” (112-13). But we can also see the excess of seeing as an excess of meaning which is not supported or guaranteed by any “reality,” meaning which is superfluous and made up, but also in denial of its made-up origin.

This process of reification of language into reality makes it difficult to see the real power of language, which lies behind the “real” available for perception: as Eco observes in *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*, “not only does being strike us as an effect of language but . . . it is radically the effect of language and nothing else but the effect of language” (47). This is even more true for the self-fulfilling prophecy, where language is fully referential and, referring, creates the event it refers to. In this twisted temporal structure, it is impossible to distinguish perception from the narrative construction which underlies it or conditions it. Eco, for example, questions whether we can justify “discriminating between perception and signification” (125). In other words, the distinction between linguistically reporting an event and

semiotically creating an event becomes blurred and tenuous. Observing the event becomes semiotically identical to causing the event. Again, the emphasis is on the double role of the observer (for example, Oedipus) as an interpreter (of the truth) and creator (of the story to be perceived as truth), as a listener and a storyteller (the latter being a role Oedipus resists throughout; or at least he denies his involvement in the storytelling in order to cover his tracks, to hide the extent to which he has invented, rather than committed, his crime). Trying to uphold the “reality principle,” Oedipus dismisses the language that goes into the making of the simulation which is called “the reality principle.”⁴¹

Baudrillard, for example, suggests that simulation is in conflict with the reality principle: “feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’, between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’. Since the simulator produces ‘true’ symptoms, is he or she ill or not? The simulator cannot be treated objectively either as ill, or as not ill” (*Selected* 168). Simulation, he argues, attacks the reality principle itself. However, if simulated symptoms are “true” to the point of being indistinguishable from “real” symptoms, it seems that the reality principle remains operational, since we cannot articulate or maintain any distinction between reality and simulation. As Mark Poster explains in his introduction to Baudrillard’s *Selected Writings*, “simulacra . . . have no referent or ground in any ‘reality’ except their own. A simulation is different from a fiction or lie in that it not only presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as the real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself” (6). What Baudrillard does not seem to pursue much further is the implication that if simulation is exactly like the real, then it is the real; we can never prove that simulation exists, and whatever we can

prove we call the real. In "Symbolic Exchange and Death," Baudrillard suggests that hyperreality has taken over reality: "Today, the entire system is fluctuating in indeterminacy, all of reality absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and of simulation" (*Selected* 120). But the opposite is also true: the reality principle has taken over hyperreality, in that hyperreality is indistinguishable from reality: "the fact is that the imaginary . . . model is in no way different from the real" (*Illusion* 87). Given all the signs of the real, we would immediately recognize it as real, and we would also recognize the hyperreal as real, because it uses the same signs: "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double . . . which provides all the signs of the real" (Baudrillard, *Selected* 167). The successful simulation is in fact indistinguishable from reality, and is intimately related to the reality principle: the reality principle appears to be in fact a side effect of simulation itself; simulation, in other words, defends the "reality principle" rather than threatening it. If we could in any way distinguish simulation from reality, it would cease to be a simulation; that is why simulation does not destroy the reality principle but takes advantage of it for its own existence.

Baudrillard does not propose any scenario in which we can identify the hyperreal and set it apart from the real. Just like Eco's master Plan, the hyperreal would be transparent in its fictitiousness only to its creator, whose only advantage over everyone else is his subjectivity and internal knowledge of the mechanism of the simulation. This scenario of privileged subjectivity, still philosophically unresolved, is worth citing in one of its modern versions. In a *Gedankenexperiment* known as The Chinese Room, the philosopher John Searle sets up a situation in which he can recreate a perfect simulation (Searle 32-33). A man who does not

know Chinese is put in a closed room. He is given a long, theoretically exhaustive list of Chinese symbols and their combinations, which represent various questions. Then he is given another, infinitely long, list of Chinese symbols which correspond to the first ones in the same way that answers correspond to questions. He is also given instructions on how to combine the various symbols. A group of native Chinese speakers approach the locked room; they write down on paper various questions in Chinese and drop them into the room through the window. They cannot see what is going on inside. The man inside, meanwhile, takes their questions, looks up the symbols in his instructions, and finds the corresponding symbols which he is supposed to give in return. He writes them down and gives them back to the Chinese speakers. They ask him more questions, he gives them more answers. The answers are always correct, written in perfect Chinese. The question is, does the man speak Chinese?⁴² To the best of the outside observers' knowledge, the man inside the room does speak Chinese. To the best of his knowledge, he does not. He is then in a position to regard his own knowledge of Chinese as fiction which cannot be exposed as fiction: it is a simulation. To anyone else, there is no simulation, only reality. In this specific example, simulation supplants language, just as it can supplant anything else.

The role of the creator of the simulation, who, for Searle, is "a person . . . in a special position to know what he is doing" (57-58), becomes rather more complex in the hands of both Eco and Sophocles. The creator, the man inside the Chinese room, would play a part similar to that of Dustin Hoffman in *Wag the Dog*, the only person to whom the events are not real, the only person who knows that it is not the dog wagging its tail, but the tail wagging the dog, the model preceding the reality it describes (or the creation of the "reality" of dog and tail).

Baudrillard remarks that “we are now engendered by models” (*Selected* 120), but it is only the person creating the model who is aware of the artificiality of the real, and the respective “reality” of the model. Both Sophocles and Eco set up such a person, only to compromise him later. While Searle could use Eco’s warning: “Beware of faking: people will believe you” (*Pendulum* 444), both Oedipus and Belbo must rephrase it to “Beware of faking: you will believe yourself.” Their words, which they thought were mere words, eventually assume the reality of deeds. Or, as i ek puts it, “it seems as though the real ‘answered’ the manipulation, the distance between manipulator and manipulated is destroyed and *the manipulator himself falls into credulity*, begins to believe in his own deception” (*They* 248).⁴³ When Oedipus accuses Tiresias, saying, “[I think you were] doer of the deed save in so far / as for the actual killing” (25), the same applies to Oedipus: he is also guilty of the deed, except that he did not do it. He is initially guilty of the illusion and not of the reality, and if we were talking about illusion things would stay that way, but since we are talking about simulation, the illusion eventually becomes reality and stops being an illusion, and the game Oedipus plays ends with real, in other words simulated, death and suffering. Without actually doing the deed, he ends up having done the deed. The guilt generates the crime because it has “rewritten the world” (Eco, *Pendulum* 39), and the words have become deeds.

In simulation, in other words, the models are no longer linguistic. They no longer describe but, as Baudrillard would say, generate. They are as simultaneous with reality as DNA is simultaneous with the person it has scripted. And that can perhaps take us beyond the paradoxes of causality: as Reichenbach says, “simultaneity means the exclusion of possible causal interaction” (154). The denial of causality is also the denial of language, since language is

the cause of the simulation in the first place (the reference to an oracle would be an excellent antidote to causality, since, as Reichenbach tells us, “teleology contradicts causality. If the past determines the future, then the future does not determine the past” [193]). But as long as language remains a part of simulation, this would not be a simulation it is a part of. Simulation is as antithetical to language as it is to its point of origin, and a given simulation is successful if and only if it has ceased to be language. Simulation is language that cannot help being reality. It is like a counterfeit that cannot help being true, a counterfeit that functions in the absence of any comparison to something “real.” Simulation does not give us any opportunity to compare it to reality, but places it directly in the spot where we expect to see reality. In fact, while the difference between simulation and illusion is relatively obvious, the difference between simulation and reality is hard to define. As Baudrillard points out, simulation “can never be unmasked, since it isn’t false either” (*Selected* 168). As much as simulation opposes the “reality principle” (180), it does not seem to threaten it the way Baudrillard wants it to. In a “fake hold up,” he remarks, the only way for anyone to approach the situation would be the way defined by the reality principle: “you will find yourself immediately in the real” (*Selected* 178). You may be only playing at bank robbery, but if all your equipment and actions seem real, the game is over: “There is no ‘objective’ difference: the same gestures and the same signs exist [in simulated theft] as for a real theft” (178). However, all actions will be treated as if they were real. They will no longer be playing at being real; they will become real, as real as anything else. (So, after all, the man in Searle’s experiment does know Chinese, without ever having studied it in the past; his past (of having studied Chinese) is simulated in his present.)

While illusion allows for comparison with reality, “it is practically impossible to isolate

the process of simulation” (Baudrillard, *Selected* 179). Simulation is invisible and can never be seen standing beside reality to allow itself to be compared with it. Simulation and reality never complement each other; they are completely identical in everything and can only occupy the same singular point in space-time, replacing each other completely. Since they do not sit side by side, in the absence of one the other is everything there is. We can never see simulation and reality together, and so we can never compare them; it is either one or the other. A good explanation of why we will never have evidence to prove simulation, if simulation is not in a position to be compared with reality, comes from Reichenbach’s brief thought experiment: “Suppose that during the night all physical objects, including our own bodies, become ten times as large. On awakening this morning we should be in no condition to test this assumption. In fact, we shall never be able to find it out. The consequences of such change are . . . unobservable, and hence we can collect no evidence either for or against it” (132). The totality of signs called “simulation” is invisible, *because* it is a totality. If everything changes from reality to simulation, or if simulation changes into reality, the change would be undetectable.

But the impossibility of detecting simulation is perhaps the clue to detecting simulation. In a similar way, Eco’s protagonist imagines a killer following him, and every failure of the killer to manifest himself, every lack of sign that there is indeed someone following the protagonist, can be easily interpreted as the special effort the killer makes not to be discovered: “Do I hear footsteps behind me? But I wouldn’t, of course; the killer has stopped, too” (500). As with conspiracy, the lack of proof is, of course, staged, and therefore proves that someone has staged it; and therefore that a “someone” must exist. The lack of any sign becomes a sign in itself.⁴⁴ The fact that the killer does not exist only serves to confirm his existence: “I made no noise.

Neither did he” (475). The same is true on a larger scale in Eco’s novel, not just for one imagined killer but for hundreds of initiates of a secret order: “The Rosicrucians were everywhere, aided by the fact that they didn’t exist” (168). The strategy is that of the Rosicrucian whose identity as a Rosicrucian seems most convincing when it cannot be proven: “He’d say he was, to make them think he wasn’t” (168). The absence is no longer a negative absence, but a positive characteristic of a present phenomenon: the absence of any sign of a killer is a characteristic of the killer himself which shows that he is very skillful and dangerous, rather than that he does not exist. Here, the only giveaway would be that simulation is too perfect to be “real”: “the more real than real (the hyperreal) and . . . the more true than true” (Baudrillard, *Selected* 188). (Note that this is precisely the way Oedipus himself describes his own fate: “If there is any ill worse than ill, / that is the lot of Oedipus” [69].)

In a sense, reality itself (or what science, for example, sees as reality) does not have the completeness of simulation; it is composed of uncertainty and the ongoing experimentation of trial and error; on the other hand, the *idea* of reality is a unified and consistent descriptive category which allows us to decide that a certain event falls within that category (that it is real), or that it fails to qualify and therefore cannot be real. Only as a category does reality open up the opportunity for predictions about whether or not a certain event is likely to happen. Without the category, anything can happen in reality: “a more comprehensive observation often reveals exceptions even to the strictest laws” (Reichenbach 28).⁴⁵ If anything can happen, then it is pointless to try to predict with certainty what will happen. For example, Reichenbach continues, “we cannot exclude the possibility that some day the molecules of the air in our room, by pure chance, arrive at an ordered state such that the molecules of oxygen are assembled on one side of

the room and those of nitrogen on the other” (161). There is no law to make sure that this particular event is impossible because laws do not constrain the future. And while we cannot exclude such unlikely events from our predictions about the future, we also have to admit that even our predictions about obvious events in the future (for example, the sun will rise tomorrow) cannot be absolutely reliable: “The concept of posit is the key to the understanding of predictive knowledge. A statement about the future cannot be uttered with the claim that it is true” (Reichenbach 241). Anything we say about the future is a hypothesis. And a hypothesis is a prediction in a very different sense from the oracular prophecy: while the hypothesis is imperfect and probabilistic, the oracular prediction is always unfailingly true. In this sense, the oracle does not so much predict as it simulates the future. In terms of temporality, simulation is a way to avoid the scientific restrictions on inductive statements by allowing 100% accurate predictions about the future which have the certainty of the past.

In terms of the self-fulfilling prophecy, we can say that the whole prophecy structure is based on immanence and simulation rather than language, because the self-fulfilling prophecy works only if it is assumed to be not language but truth. Prophecy is language, but a prophecy which is believed to be true is no longer language, since it strives to make language present and accountable to reality, thereby destroying it *as* language. We have stories and versions of reality because we cannot capture reality itself, but the self-fulfilling prophecy claims to give us nothing less than reality itself, not versions of it, probabilities, or speculations. In this sense, the self-fulfilling prophecy, which simulates a “real” future, is vulnerable to anything that would allow for uncertainty, multiplicity, alternative futures. Unlike simulation, which offers a complete package of signs to deliver a “realistic” but fully predictable future, reality is based on inductive

processes whereby what is established as certain can only be something that has already happened. Reichenbach, again, points out the fact “that we wish to know the truth of predictions before the predicted events occur, and that when knowledge has become observational knowledge it is no longer a knowledge of the future” (91). In a way, the kind of simulation that we call self-fulfilling prophecy seeks a way out of this problem by positing the knowledge of the future as immediately available. Oedipus cannot see the future right away, but he invents a story (the prophecy) according to which he can see the future, and then forgets that this is a story; simulation allows Oedipus to take a shortcut through the tedious process of guessing the future by what has occurred in the past, an imperfect scientific process which results in probabilities rather than certainties. In fact, this scientific reasoning about causality is apparently not Oedipus’ strength; Jocasta, for example, complains that he does not use the evidence of the past to formulate hypotheses about the future:

For Oedipus excites himself too much
at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing,
like a man of sense, what will be from what was. (49)

In a way, Oedipus wants “what will be” to be the same as “what was” (not in content but in certainty), so that the past and the future are equally accessible to him and equally true. But as Reichenbach points out, “knowledge of the future must be construed as essentially different from knowledge of the past” (91). By contrast, what is remarkable about the self-fulfilling prophecy is that it works by endowing the future with the absolute certainty reserved only for the past, that it presents as “truth” something which can be expressed only in probability. In a sense, the self-fulfilling prophecy treats the future as if it were the past; it simulates a future, and since simulation is not a version, a probability, or a story about the future but something that replaces

the future, we cannot speak of the predicted future as different from or in any way comparable to the “real” future; once we have the prophecy, there is no other future except the predicted one. There is no “real” other than the simulation.

The force with which the oracular future is present, before it has had a chance to exist, shows again that it has nothing to do with language, which is structured upon absence. Furthermore, unlike language, which attempts only an approximate, ambiguous, and shifting resemblance to reality, the simulated future is an exact reflection of the real future, to the point that they are identical, as if mirrored in each other. Eco emphasizes this point further: “The sign is something that stands for something else *in its absence*. The mirror image, on the other hand, stands *in the presence* of the object it reflects” (*Kant* 368); “The mirror image . . . is present in the presence of *a referent which cannot be absent*. . . . The image is causally produced by the *object* and cannot be produced in the absence of the object itself” (*Semiotics* 216). This presence has implications for the treatment of time, or rather the absence of time, in the mirror image. While normally time is defined in terms of causality and causality in terms of time, the phenomenon of the mirror is unique in the sense that it posits causality without time.⁴⁶ On the one hand, time is negated in the simultaneity of the mirror image and its source; on the other hand, even in the absence of a temporal asymmetry a basic causal asymmetry between the two is still implied, as the source causes the mirror image, without preceding it. The mirror trope then allows a possible separation of time from causality which the temporal simulation can take advantage of, by claiming that its own causality does not need the normal temporality we would expect. If two things (a mirror image and a source) can be simultaneous and still causally interconnected, then the future and the present can be simultaneous in the self-fulfilling prophecy

and still keep their causal structure; the future can be contemporaneous with the present while still being caused by the present. In normal prediction, the hypothesis stands for the future in its absence; in oracular prophecy, the predicted events are there, present with the authenticity of their actual occurrence, which is no longer hypothetical.⁴⁷ Since both the mirror image and the source must be present, the structure is temporally reversible: if we observe a mirror image, we must conclude that its real counterpart, its source, is also present, and that is how the self-fulfilling prophecy works. We don't think that the oracle is making up the future; we normally suppose that the oracle has seen a future which exists and the words of the oracle are a reflection of the truth; and if the oracle has seen the future then the future in some sense must already exist in order to be seen. Since we have the story about an event (the story normally being a chronologically secondary reflection of the event), we assume that there must have been an event, whereas it has not happened yet. In this sense, the chronology of Eco's mirror is reversed, and reality no longer has to precede the images or stories it generates. The self-fulfilling prophecy (or simulation in general) is like a mirror, but minus the normal causality of the mirror, the chronology of cause and effect which is implicit even in the simultaneous presence of the mirror image and its source.

Eco proposes that "we should establish whether the mirror image *stands for* the body emanating it as a reflection just as smoke *stands for* the fire which produces it" (*Semiotics* 213). Eco's answer is "no"; the mirror image is not based on signification. In this sense, the prophecy works on the principle of the mirror, not the sign, again declaring its opposition to language, its denial that language has made it possible in the first place. That is why the oracular prophecy is always true: it ensures its own truth by the assumption that, even though language is known to be

erroneous, the prophecy is not language: “The sign can be used to lie or state (erroneously, even though in good faith) that which is not the case. The mirror image, on the other hand, never lies” (*Kant* 368). The prophecy never lies. The overwhelming sense that the future is here, that there is no displacement of narrative from here to there which would fill in the gap between the “now” of the prophecy and the “then” of the future event, leaves us with the simultaneity of a perfect simulation.⁴⁸

The temporal blindness of Oedipus assumes an inverted mirror structure of cause and effect and prevents him from seeing the simulated nature of causality and the possibility of himself having caused the murder of his father without killing him, in a semiotic way: in a sense, he causes the murder by punishing the murderer. Unlike the man in the Chinese room, Oedipus does not know that he does not know Chinese; he is taken in by the simulation. His punishment is that he be his own witness, that he actually see as truth what he has assembled as a story. In the same way, *Foucault's Pendulum* shows us a Belbo taken in, literally killed by his own invention. In a similar situation, the “fictional” war in *Wag the Dog* catches up with Dustin Hoffman's character and becomes very “real” to him, to the point of physically destroying him (death in the model is no less “real” than death in reality; cf. *The Matrix*), despite the fact that he is the creator of the fiction, despite his privileged position to know that it is all fiction. It is not. It is simulation. And in creating the simulation, he has also created the illusion that there is no creator, that there never was one, making it possible to destroy the creator (or rather, to cause the creator to have never existed). He has become blind to his own privileged position within the simulation, blind to his own right to know that he does not know Chinese. The moment fiction becomes simulation, there is no privileged “inside” knowledge of its operations, no distinction

between the creator and the creation, between the cause and the effect.

NOTES

1. In addition to Oedipus' taking action to prevent the foretold from happening, Jocasta too is influenced by a prophecy and decides to kill her son because it has been foretold that he would kill his parents; by giving the child to the herdsman, she precipitates the disaster (63).
2. Freud (the Oedipal stage) and Deleuze (the anti-Oedipal flows) come to mind.
3. Some critics argue that language and voice are in fact central to the play without second-guessing them; see, for example, Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Prophesying Tragedy: Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays*. However, Bushnell takes language in its normal role of opposition to reality, or in a position of manipulating reality by influencing public discourse (3); here, on the contrary, the real power of language is seen as its ability to cease being language and to simulate reality to the point of becoming reality. There is no discourse or argument *about* what reality is; the process of language is the process of creating reality, of making it happen.
4. Due to the economy of narrative, event and description seem mutually exclusive in most narrative structures to avoid redundancy. In a story or a film, for example, if we hear about something (a plan) which is going to happen, we can be sure that it will not happen as planned, otherwise we would not have heard about it; we either hear or see, and events either happen or are told, but not both. Narrative encourages story and event not to overlap but to complement each other: as Michel Foucault says in his essay "Language to Infinity," "[t]he gods send disasters to mortals so that they can tell of them, but men speak of them so that misfortunes will never be fully realized, so that their fulfillment will be averted in the distance of words, at the place where they will be stilled in the negation of their nature" (*Language* 54). In contrast, Oedipus does not want the oracle to say things so as to prevent them from happening, or to add information which is otherwise unavailable, but to confirm the truth of the events which are going to happen anyway. In other words, the prophecy is a total co-occurrence of story and event. In simulation, including the self-fulfilling prophecy, words become redundant and useless, since they cannot be distinguished from the events themselves; language is compromised.

5. Oedipus says:

I was doomed
to be murderer of the father that begot me.
When I heard this I fled, and in the days
that followed I would measure from the stars
the whereabouts of Corinth—yes, I fled
to somewhere where I should not see fulfilled
the infamies told in that dreadful oracle. (45)

6. Most critics would advocate the opposite view, exemplified by Ricoeur's remark about Oedipus in "Consciousness and the Unconscious": "When he [Oedipus] loses his sight, he receives vision" (117).

7. We must note that there are kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing other than the one discussed here; Heidegger's definition of knowledge, for example, would dismiss the past and center on the future, *precisely* because it has not happened yet; knowledge, for him, is something that takes place beyond present existence and is opposed to observation: "Knowing here does not mean the result of mere observations about something present at hand that was formerly unfamiliar. Such items of information are always just accessory, even if they are indispensable to knowing. Knowing, in the genuine sense of *technē*, means initially and constantly looking out beyond what, in each case, is directly present at hand" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 169). Unlike Heidegger, we will be using the standard scientific definition of knowledge.

8. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, episode 64, "Pangs," original air date: Nov. 23, 1999.

9. On Oedipus' ability to exist simultaneously in a singular and in a plural mode, see note 39.

10. This is a conclusion also reached by Eco's protagonist in *Foucault's Pendulum*: "They [books] confirm one another; therefore, they're true. Never trust originality" (231). In a similar vein, Baudrillard cites an example from Brecht, where a non-beer serves to confirm the existence of a non-cigar, which would be incongruous without it, since the reality of either one would disrupt the smooth operation of the common illusion (*The Gulf War* 81). The same example appears in more detail in Baudrillard's *The Perfect Crime*:

In his *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, Brecht has two refugees in transit talking over a beer in a station buffet. Ziffer says: 'This beer isn't a beer. But the fact that this cigar isn't a cigar either makes up for that. If the beer weren't a beer, but the cigar were a cigar, then things would be all wrong.' So order is established out of the harmonious compensating effect of several disorders. This is the ironic version of the double negative. In the French expression '*bête et méchant*', the fact of being nasty is harmonious compensation for the fact of being stupid—there is no longer any scandal about it; logic remains intact. (67-68)

(Cf. also: "What he lacks in smarts he makes up in lack of smarts" [*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, episode 16, "Inca Mummy Girl," original air date Oct. 6, 1997].) In other words, while simple illusions are individual and multiple, simulation is a singular totality of synchronized appearances whose agreement with one another guarantees their truth. Which is also the definition of reality; as Baudrillard says, "[w]e can nowhere test out our existence or its authenticity" (*Perfect* 38), except, of course, test different elements of our existence against each other and find that they all fit in perfectly, as in a simulation.

11. It is true that the prophecies become available only through words, but we must reserve a special place for the oracular language, the language we don't want to be language: "Once again we come up against the opposition of 'human language' vs. 'divine language'" (Manetti 24). [See Manetti, pp. 24-29, "The Problem of Interpretation in Literary Uses of Oracles."] We

cannot call the divine language simply language, because it does not function as such. As Rebecca Bushnell points out, “[p]rophecy is a highly privileged form of speech” (3). And Oedipus trusts this form of speech *as if it were not* language. Unlike language, the prophecy is not subject to revision, doubt, or error. At the same time, it is not subject to meaning either: “Oracles show a glimpse of Fate, but at the same time they disguise it, for they leave it to be guessed at by showing an obscure and enigmatic sign which is no more comprehensible to the enquirers than were the events which led them to consult the oracle in the first place” (Manetti 18-19); the prophecies “fail to produce meaning” (Manetti 15). The ambiguity of the initial situation (the problem) and the ambiguity of the oracle’s advice (the solution) can be said to exist in an analytical relationship; the prophecy is true but meaningless. For more on the inverse relationship between truth and meaning in analytical statements, see pp. 43-44 below.

12. A similar argument is put forth in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*:

VLADIMIR: That passed the time.

ESTRAGON: It would have passed in any case. (31)

The possibility of any cause-and-effect exchange between the subject and time is denied and mocked here, as time would pass whether or not the subject is conscious of the passage of time.

13. This is also the classical structure of any time travel paradox: no matter what you do, it is always bound to be something you have already done, so that the timeline remains stable, and, as Terry Pratchett puts it, “[t]hings that happen stay happened” (*The Last Continent* 145). In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster makes a similar comment: “Something happens, . . . and then it goes on happening forever. It can never be changed, can never be otherwise” (193).

14. In that, simulation is similar to the Nietzschean progression in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where “we have ‘utility,’ ‘forgetting,’ ‘habit,’ and finally ‘error’” (25), with the source of the error being forgotten. Note, however, that the error is an error precisely because we have forgotten that it is an error; it is not an error in itself, but only in the way we view it as eternal truth. Nietzsche’s genealogy project is, optimistically, to recover the lost memory of contingency reified into necessity; hence his confidence that the eternal truths can eventually defrost into their arbitrary elements: “this source is supposed to have been *forgotten*—but how is this forgetting *possible*?” (27). In simulation, however, forgetting is possible and there is no going back to any memory of origin. That is why, if things like truth or the subject are simulations, they would be simulations which cannot be exposed as such; “incapable of being exposed” is, after all, part of the very definition of simulation. The real simulation doesn’t have history. It never *was* anything else.

15. Cf. Manetti: “Socrates . . . introduces the concept of the double. If all the characteristics of the original were reproduced in the mimesis, then the result would be not imitation but an identical occurrence of the same object. We would no longer have a situation of representation but would be faced instead with a complete duplicate, and there would be no way of telling which was the representer and which the represented. In other words, a name has a *signic* nature precisely because of its difference from the object to which it refers” (64-65). In the absence of that difference, what we have is simulation. At one point Baudrillard defines simulation as “the

same effect of absolute proximity to the real" (*Illusion* 6). He also calls it, elsewhere, "mistak[ing] the real for the real" (*The Perfect Crime* 51). In other words, the real is not merely identical to itself; simulation is our *awareness* that the real is identical to itself. It is not merely real: it is designated *as* "real"; it relates to itself not through *is* but through *as*. In this way, it becomes more than real: it is the real plus our awareness of it. Borges mentions something similar: "In the Buddhist monasteries one of the exercises is this: the neophyte must live every moment of his life experiencing it fully. He must think: 'Now it is noon; now I am crossing the patio; now I will meet the superior'" (71). However, instead of bringing reality closer, this exercise would add a virtual dimension to it, double it, allow us to experience reality *more than* "fully." Instead of "I am," we would be saying, "*This is* who I am," or even, with i ek, "So I do look alike"; the statement "I am" would replace being; we would observe instead of be (or, more precisely, the two would be superimposed on each other, so that we would observe that we are). The recognition of the fact of identity would be more than identity: it would be simulation, seen as the semiotic articulation of a physical act, a tautology of experience and description. Baudrillard gives the example of something called Biosphere 2, which apparently is designed to reproduce Earth's biosphere in a contained, artificial environment. It is located in the desert, and there is also a piece of desert reproduced inside it, as part of the biosphere. Baudrillard observes that "they have reconstituted a fragment of artificial desert right in the middle of the natural desert" (*Illusion* 85-86). It not only *is* desert, but it also has been designated *as* desert; it has been set off from the real desert in order to be designated as such, thereby announcing the absolute identity of the real and the artificial desert, of the thing and its sign.

(A counter-example would be the way in which movies (most recently *Minority Report*) make the protagonist confront the antagonist without knowing it. Unaware of the identity of the "bad guy," the protagonist goes to him for help, saying something to the effect of, "I don't know who the bad guy is. It must be somebody on the inside, somebody who has access to the information. It must be somebody just like you, but I can't think of anyone like that." In effect, he describes the person in front of him without seeing how the description and the person coincide.)

16. For discussion of the meaning of "itself" in relation to appearance, see Heidegger's Introduction in *Being and Time*, where he defines "appearance" in three different ways, as something which indicates ("announces") the presence of something else which is not present; as that which is announced by something, making its presence known without being present; and as something which is both visible and present, a true "phenomenon": "first, *appearing*, in the sense of announcing-itself, as not-showing-itself; and next, that which does the announcing . . . – that which in its showing-itself indicates something which does not show itself. And finally one can use 'appearing' as a term for the genuine sense of 'phenomenon' as showing-itself" (53). When Heidegger reminds us that "the concept of the phenomenon is understood from the beginning as that which shows itself in itself" (54), this definition can also suggest simulation in that simulation looks exactly like something it is.

17. "Yes, why do you lie to me saying that you're going to Cracow so I should believe you're going to Lemberg, when in reality you *are* going to Cracow?" (qtd. in Lacan, "Seminar on the Purloined Letter" 49). When simulation pretends to be exactly what it is, this is not the same as

saying that it is what it is. There is something superimposed on the truth, and that is the truth about the truth.

18. As Aristotle says, “all statements cannot be false, nor all true—for this reason among many others, that if all are false this statement itself is false, and if all are true it will be true that all are false” (*Metaphysics* 149). Consider, in this connection, a more contemporary version of the liar paradox from the musical “Once More, With Feeling,” where, in the middle of a very serious song, one of the characters steps in with, “I think this line’s mostly filler.” What makes this relevant to simulation is that this line is irrelevant to the song *because* it says it is. This is a perfect example of a nano-self-fulfilling prophecy: the sentence announces that it will be meaningless and, by the end of the sentence, the prediction fulfills itself. The line rhymes with the rest and in this sense fills in for a real line, but it is meaningless in terms of its content, which says that it is meaningless, and therefore it *means* that it is meaningless. Saying makes it so. It is the ultimate performative. (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, episode 107, “Once More, With Feeling,” original air date: Nov. 6, 2001) (For more on performatives, see Chapter Two.)

19. In *The Physical Basis of the Direction of Time*, H.-Dieter Zeh reminds us of “David Hume’s fundamental truth that the general validity of causal dynamical laws can never be *proved* to hold in the future (so we cannot be absolutely certain that the sun will rise tomorrow)” (71).

20. Some critics acknowledge the paradox, but without giving it any importance; R. Drew Griffith, for example, calls it “the red herring of whether one can foreknow the future” (51), which suggests that the paradox, if not entirely superfluous, is at the very least distracting from larger issues in the play. According to him, the temporal paradox is not what the play is about.

21. Even if we grant that there is a locus from where a divine power can observe the future, the notion that observation is merely passive and external is becoming more and more compromised as both the humanities (history) and sciences (quantum mechanics) have discovered that observation is always implicated in the phenomena observed. In other words, the logistics of omniscience aside, Apollo or any other deity would likely be unable to “observe” the future without having an impact on it, even if observation is indeed all it is, and so the association of observation with passivity becomes a problem in itself, a problem which Oedipus himself illustrates perfectly.

22. In other words, this means resorting to a self-referential strategy: if we cannot explain x and y, then we can at least posit a power which possesses the characteristics x and y, thereby “explaining” these phenomena.

23. Bushnell phrases the same time paradox more mildly: “Oracular language . . . characteristically twists the natural sequence of human events” (17).

24. Baudrillard hurries to add that neither the model, nor the real precedes the other: “But it is no longer a question of either maps or territory. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference between them” (*Selected* 166). In this way, he attributes to them a simultaneity, not

the simultaneity of a single, unified entity, but the simultaneity of a Möbius “one” with a double nature. In terms of temporality, again, we need to emphasize that it is impossible to say that the model precedes the reality: “To distribute this distinction [between the subjective and the objective] over a contrast between self and objects is to perpetuate a misunderstanding. Neither conceptualization nor objectification is prior. I enter as a material object a world rendered intelligible by virtue of my presence in it” (Young 3).

25. Griffith summarizes the history of the Möbius phenomenon: “The mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius discovered in 1865 that the surface, called the Möbius strip, has only one side. This is not apparent if you look at just a part of the strip, which appears to have two sides ... but only when you consider the whole thing. Mathematicians like to explain this oneness by saying that a fly who walks along the centre of the strip without ever deviating from his path will eventually pass the antipodes of his starting point (the point obtained by drilling a hole through the belt). This fly has acquired almost mythic status: a sculpted shield over one of the fireplaces at Princeton University shows him crawling along the Möbius strip proving its oneness to himself” (43).

26. Further instances of the same inversion in Griffith: “Oedipus’s homecoming departs from the norm because of a one-hundred-eighty-degree simple twist of fate. He comes back to whence he started, but in an inverted position: having left as legitimate (if unwanted), he returns as a usurper; having left as Jocasta’s son, he returns as her husband” (43); “Oedipus mistakes his parents for strangers, homecoming for exile, and hereditary kinship for unconstitutional rule” (58); “Oedipus is double. He is at once tyrant and king, foreigner and native, saviour from the Sphinx and apparent cause of the plague” (73). Frederick Ahl also notes the double nature of Oedipus in the way Oedipus “varies between treating his own person as ‘self’ and ‘other’” (147). And this “double” person, naturally, pursues “the twin quests for the murderer of Laius and the parents of Oedipus” (Griffith 71-72), which converge into one Möbius quest.

27. Consider Aristotle’s example of the doctor and the patient, who mutually define and “cause” each other: “a doctor considered as the act of curing and his patient considered as in the act of getting well; or a builder considered as building a house and the said house considered as under construction” (*Metaphysics* 6). The same can be said about Oedipus the murderer and Oedipus the investigator: they are simultaneous and causally interconnected.

28. As Donald Davidson demonstrates in *Essays on Actions and Events*, we can talk about the relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta, in all its complexity, without any significant reference to time: “At one time Oedipus was pleased that he was married to Jocasta. It follows that he was married to Jocasta; and since Jocasta was his mother, that he was married to his mother. But he was not pleased that he was married to his mother. ‘Oedipus was pleased that he was married to Jocasta’ thus expresses a relation between Oedipus and Jocasta, but the truth of the sentence depends on Jocasta’s being described in one way rather than another. It is natural, therefore, to think of the sentence as expressing a relation between Oedipus, Jocasta, and a certain description of Jocasta. In explaining why Oedipus was pleased, we might want to make explicit reference to the description of Jocasta under which he was pleased to be married to her” (195).

29. Eco also reminds us that “[t]he history of research into the philosophy of language is full of *men* (who are rational and mortal animals), *bachelors* (who are unmarried adult males), and *tigers*” (Kant 9).

30. He also gives the proverbial example “all bachelors are unmarried” (17).

31. In the citations of Baudrillard, “*Illusion*” refers to *The Illusion of the End; The Vital Illusion* is cited as “*Vital*.”

32. “We call sign in general everything that means something, and among these we may include words too” (Augustine, qtd. in Manetti 157) [from *De Magistro*, 4.9].

33. The merging of objective and subjective is also emphasized in the way in which Oedipus confuses his private with his public role: “Oedipus’ mingling of private questions about his past with public investigation of the plague allows personal and public inquiry to merge” (Ahl 43).

34. Eco’s characters see their position as bricoleurs rather than creators: “We didn’t invent anything; we only arranged the pieces” (512). They do not claim to have any more “facts” at their disposal than anyone else does: “*They* had all the pieces, but *They* didn’t know the design of the crossword” (512). Oedipus’ role is similar, in that he does not invent the whole story himself; he just puts the pieces he has together in a certain way and commands people to bring him the missing ones.

35. Without committing to an answer to Ahl as to the “truth” of the play’s facts, we can agree with his estimate that there is a powerful and convincing story going on in the play, and that this story is taken to be the truth. This chapter is not concerned with the “truth” behind the story, but with the way the story functions as truth, whether or not it is based on real-life facts. Our assumption is that in both cases (true or false), the story will function in the same way (as long as this story is not exposed as “false” by an opposing and more convincing story). It is certainly not exposed as being false in the play, and the final version of the events on which everyone in the play agrees is the only one we have. That is why the only commitment we are prepared to make is a commitment to our inability to make a final distinction between a made-up story and a description of the “real” events in the play. In that distinction, we cannot support Ahl.

In this connection, consider the semiotics of medicine in ancient Greece (medicine being one of the first areas of knowledge based on signs): “by stating things that the patient had not mentioned or thought worthy of notice, the doctor can gain credit and trust so that the patient will feel ready to undertake the treatment prescribed. It is interesting to see here how a procedure which is intended to *appear* scientific and objective is concerned principally not so much with reflecting reality . . . as with manipulating reality” (Manetti 37) [italics mine]. Notice that the diagnosis need not be false in order to “appear” true and to “manipulate reality.” Something can be true and still “appear” true, and this is the domain of simulation. In the same way, the story which Oedipus takes as “the truth” can be either true or false without this having any impact on the semiotic truth of the story.

36. Baudrillard's fake hold-up, which will come up as an example later, is perfectly harmless too, until it is confused with reality.

37. For more on this, see Chapter Four, pp. 274-77.

38. Baudrillard points to the possibility that the effort to avoid, escape, or prevent disaster is charged with the same fatal energy as the original threat: "isn't every system of prevention and deterrence a virtual locus of catastrophe? Designed to thwart catastrophe, it materializes all of its consequences in the immediate present. Since we cannot count on chance to bring about a catastrophe, we must find an equivalent programmed into the defense system" (*Selected* 196).

39. The confusion between the singular "person" that Oedipus is and the plural "people" whom Oedipus curses when cursing himself also emerges here, suggesting his ability to use language to deflect attention from, or draw attention to, himself regardless of the facts. Later, this turns out to be a crucial point in determining Oedipus' guilt: "You said that he spoke of highway robbers who killed Laius. Now if he uses the same number, it was not I who killed him. One man cannot be the same as many. But if he speaks of a man travelling alone, then clearly the burden of the guilt inclines towards me" (47). In the Möbius universe of semiotics, however, Oedipus can be both one and many, especially since he accepts the blame, which was originally clearly laid on the "many," as referring to him alone. The contradiction between the two versions fails to signal an inconsistency in the witness testimony, and the second version (that there was only one killer) functions to prove the facts rather disprove the method of getting to the facts which it itself is part of.

40. Cf. Colin N. Manlove's remark (in *The Gap in Shakespeare: The Motif of Division from Richard II to The Tempest*) about Macbeth's motive for killing the king: "we arrive at the strange meaning that Macbeth murdered Duncan to silence his imagination of doing so" (148).

41. In this, Oedipus would be a good target for Nietzsche's genealogy; quoting Nietzsche, Eco re-states the idea that "the truth is a poetically elaborated 'mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms' that subsequently gel into knowledge, 'illusions whose illusory nature has been forgotten'" (*Kant* 45). Baudrillard is also interested in how this mechanism works. In "The Mirror of Production," he explains how a subjective hypothesis can become an objective truth: "they [the critical concepts] also take on their scientific cast. . . . They set themselves up as expressing an 'objective reality.' They become signs: signifiers of a 'real' signified" (*Selected* 114). The problem is, again, not lack of meaning, but overabundance of meaning, so that concepts cannot help but mean. (The science of which Baudrillard speaks disparagingly is not the science we refer to here, which is characterized by an acknowledgment of its own incompleteness and uncertainty, and which does not allow for synthetic a priori statements, or "truths." In our view, science is aligned with language, narrative, semiotics, and unpredictability, while simulation is aligned with the predictability of the reality principle and in opposition to language. In this sense, Baudrillard perhaps has in mind a more Newtonian science, rather than a quantum one where light waves, for example, are not things but probabilities [Reichenbach 174].)

42. This question, in various forms, has been asked by other philosophers as well: Reichenbach proposes the analogy of a machine which simulates a human being: "It would be a perfect machine, but without a mind. How do you know it has no mind?" (271). The "perfect" simulation leaves no clues to the fact that it is simulation. Davidson investigates the same problem: "let us imagine *l'homme machine* has actually been built, in the shape of a man, and out of the very stuff of a man. . . . Art (as I shall call him or it) has acted in all observable ways like a man. . . . No one who did not know that Art was artificial would have discovered it by watching or listening, by prodding or talking" (245-46). Unlike Searle's theoretical experiment, which is very schematic and captures the essence of the problem, Davidson's example is more elaborate, as he points out that "Art is physically indistinguishable inside and out from a man, and he has reacted to changes in his environment by moving in ways indistinguishable from human behaviour" (247). When Davidson says that "the fact that Art is artificial plays no essential part in the argument" (251), we can take a step back and argue that it does play a part in the argument because it is impossible to *know* that Art is artificial; but Art needs to *be* artificial to illustrate the lack of difference between artificial and real. While Searle does not go to all the trouble of building an authentic physical "inside" for his artificial human simulation, he does a better job of asking the philosophical question, since his "inside" is radically different from a "real" one (it is not even a person but a highly artificial construct, a closed room with mechanical instructions inside), and yet it still *behaves* like an inside (i.e., simulates the behavior of a real Chinese person). Again, it is important to emphasize or even exaggerate the artificial nature of the inside in order to illustrate the point: that simulation and reality have an identical "outside," which leads us to suspect an identical "inside." Or, as Al Pacino's protagonist in the film *SimOne* says, what matters is having a "genuine performance," not a "real actor." By emphasizing the fact that his "actor" is not real, Searle makes his claim that the performance is "genuine" even more convincing.

43. In "Peirce, Holmes, Popper" Gian Paolo Caprettini, discussing the attempt of criminals in detective novels to simulate misleading clues which would lead the detective astray, says that "its [the simulation's] incongruities threaten to turn against the person who originally produced the false clue" (138). In the Oedipus scenario, however, the simulation turns against its creator not because it fails but because it succeeds. While usually the fictional criminal is afraid of being exposed by the forces of reality, in the case of Oedipus it is the forces of simulation that destroy their creator.

44. Applied to a god (like Apollo, for example), this principle would suggest that if the god does not become manifest, it is not because he does not exist but because he is powerful enough not to become manifest, which we observe to be *exactly* the case with him; his invisibility, just like that of Eco's killer, proves his special skills of stealth, and therefore his existence. Every fact of nothingness can become the special characteristic of a something: a something which it proves by the lack of proof.

45. All scientific laws are subject to revisions, and that is because they formulate concrete knowledge which has been acquired by inductive reasoning. Induction means, as Reichenbach points out, that we are working with knowledge based on experience. At the risk of simplifying

things, we can look at induction as 100% correct knowledge about what has occurred in the past. This knowledge, however, is not very useful for predicting the future, because we cannot observe the future happen before it has happened. If we nevertheless decide to use previous experience to make predictions about the future, we will no longer be working with the 100% certain knowledge, but with, let's say, 90% *probable* knowledge. That is, if we make any conclusion about the future, "the truth of the conclusion cannot be guaranteed" (82). In other words, "the laws of probability take over the place once occupied by the law of causality" (163).

46. Despite the popular view that "[c]ausation cannot exist without time" (Ouspensky 26).

47. From a divine or oracular perspective, there would be no difference between thinking or speaking about an event and the event itself: "For the gods . . . the only writing tablet large enough for their expression was the universe itself" (Manetti 5).

48. Baudrillard makes a cursory remark that uses the mirror image in another sense, as a metaphor for representation: "No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept" (*Selected* 167). The definition of "mirror" here differs; it emphasizes not the accuracy of some representation, but the immediacy and simultaneity of the "real" source and the reflected image. While in traditional philosophy of being and appearance the appearance is available to the perception in the absence of being, the mirror analogy allows for a model in which both elements are present; the mirror tries to contain two things within the same point of space and time, to make them coincide, just as the Oedipal prophecy postulates a point of convergence of past and present. But the two events coincide only in an inverted Möbius fashion, which creates the illusion of "two" things, rather than one. Neither the two, nor the one is real; they are both simulated.

A more serious objection would be Baudrillard's remark 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" (*Selected* 167). We are not saying that in simulation we actually have something "real" present. But we do want to define simulation as a structure of presence in that it creates the illusion that reality is present. To this end, we can revise Baudrillard's definition in this way: "To simulate is to feign to have what one has." Unlike a conventional theory of appearance, in which an appearance or a sign is allowed to be present to signify something absent, simulation is complete in itself; as Baudrillard says, it contains "*all* the signs of the real" (*Selected* 167). This completeness is yet another feature that separates simulation from language. And while language plays upon absences, simulation does not. It claims to be not a description of reality but reality itself, given to us with an immediacy that language cannot provide. In this sense, we see simulation as radically different from language and indistinguishable from "reality" (because there is no reality to compare it to). In other words, just as Oedipus takes the prophecy to be more than a story, simulation is more than signs; it claims to be the thing itself. It plays an impossible game of presence, in which presence is the simulated single side of the Möbius strip, blind to the duality and uncertainty it is composed of.

CHAPTER 2: MACBETH

“If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir” (I. iii. 143-44), Macbeth argues to himself in a brief moment of indifference before he goes ahead to give chance a nudge. Macbeth’s logic (and the logic of *Macbeth*) is what we are interested in here, as well as the epistemological problems which arise in the process of creating the temporal simulation that is the self-fulfilling prophecy. Encouraged by the three witches, Macbeth takes semiotic matters into his own hands, in order to create his own semiotic rules, his own simulated (predicted) future. Much like Oedipus, Macbeth also has to deny his power to cause events in exchange for the reality of what he has caused to happen.

Unlike the Oedipus play, which does not show us the oracle itself but only the “end product,” the words that reach Oedipus, the text of *Macbeth* includes a lengthy description of the witches and their behind-the-scenes preparations before they deliver their prophecies, as well as discussions afterwards. In this way, instead of an anonymous oracular utterance, we have two things: the words of the witches and the witches themselves.

In the eyes of the critics, the witches’ role varies from a dramatic trick whose supernatural qualities are merely incidental camouflage (“Shakespeare could have chosen to omit them [the witches] entirely and still have written essentially the same kind of play about the same characters” [McElroy 213]), to a diabolical and dark unknown (“witchcraft, it is important to recognize, was everywhere and always understood to involve a pact with the Devil” [Wayne

Shumaker qtd. in Calderwood 51]).¹ Harry Berger talks about “the puzzling status of the witches” (100), while Willard Farnham points out their unquestionable importance in the play: “Before we make up our minds about the guilt of the hero and, finally, the meaning of the tragedy, we must first decide what power these beings [the witches] wield over the actions and fortunes of the hero” (80); and Arthur Melville Clark dismisses them together with “the defective first act of *Macbeth*” (9). It is hard to find agreement of any kind among critics, and McElroy marvels how “[t]he quest for a solution has run the gamut from the venerable Kittredge, who saw the sisters as Norns who could not only see the future but determine it, to Stoll, for whom the problem scarcely existed, since the witches are primarily devices intended to sustain an illusion” (211).² McElroy seems to share the latter view: “They [the witches] do not cause Macbeth’s fall; they do not even contribute much to it” (214); and Cumberland Clark also sees the witches as incidental rather than essential: “It is very clear that Macbeth is entirely free as regards his actions, and that no incitement to crime and wickedness is contained in the prophecies of the sisters” (127).³ In much the same vein, Calderwood regards the witches as mere tools of storytelling: “The prophecies, which are merely the most obvious form of dramatic anticipation, are structural promises given his audience by the playwright, and they are all kept” (30).⁴ The words of the witches are merely the “formal promises” of the play (118), and prophecy in general “is merely the most explicit species of dramatic anticipation” (Calderwood 141, note). But it is not very clear how we should determine which characters are significant in their own right and which are merely a dramatic ploy, a way for the author to sneak into the play and speak to us, making dramatic promises. After all, once we’ve crossed that line, it is easy to conclude that all characters are merely transparent pawns of dramatic anticipation and fulfillment behind which

we can make out the quill of the dramatist himself.

A similar argument can be advanced against another view of the role of the witches: “The Witches, it is generally agreed, are the *instruments* of darkness, not the powers of darkness, the agents and not the principals; they make the offerings to the evil deity, pale Hecate” (Walker 136). If we grant that, it would be hard not to say the same thing about Macbeth, namely, that he is nothing but an instrument of darkness, that the dark powers need only say a few words, and Macbeth, an obedient minion of evil, turns them into deeds. However, Macbeth does not simply take the witches’ words for granted but goes through a process of deductive reasoning which somehow leads from “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir” (I. iii. 143-44) to a series of distinctly non-accidental murders which suggest quite the opposite: if he kills everyone else, Macbeth can easily become a king with or without any prophecies to that effect. But the fact is, he hears the prophecies and they urge him, in a sense, to disregard the prophecies by taking the matter into his own hands. But if he disregards the prophecies as a result of the prophecies, if he makes things happen only because he is convinced that they will happen anyway, then the prophecies are important, and their presence, however paradoxical and complex, is not insignificant. As McElroy points out, “[t]he problem that their [the witches’] presence poses is central to the tragedy, for it involves the degree of freedom Macbeth exercises in committing his succession of crimes. If the witches can accurately foresee the future in the instant, then the future must be fixed” (211). Again, as in the case of Oedipus, the temporal paradoxes will be more fruitfully addressed if we rephrase them in semiotic terms.

Nevertheless, those critics who do admit that the presence of the witches is significant tend to focus on the personality of the witches rather than on their semiotic role, to the point

where Cunningham exclaims, "Why should these pantomimic characters of 'witches' continue to disfigure this noble tragedy?" (qtd. in Walker 3). McElroy is equally dismissive: "they are filthy old hags who possess very little grandeur of any kind; when not trifling with the destiny of kings, they seem to derive equal pleasure from killing swine" (212).⁵ It seems that many critics look into the witches' appearance and personality for guarantees of the prophecies they utter (and do not find any), rather than looking for proof of their words in the words themselves. Frank Kermode rightly points out that "*Macbeth* is above all others a play of prophecy; it not only enacts prophecies, it is obsessed by them" (84). In comparison with the prophecies themselves, the personality of the witches and their presentation of the prophecies matter little; Macbeth himself pays attention exclusively to their words, not refusing the beautiful words offered to him by the ugly creatures, and so shall we. Their character as witnesses will not determine the truthfulness⁶ of their prophecies, even though we know a lot more about them than we did about the oracle in *Oedipus*. But only the facts, the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the prophecies will show whether the witches are to be believed or not; the witches, in the understated words of Calderwood, "merely reveal the future" (9). Frank Kermode also implies that the witches are significant precisely as carriers of information, saying that *Macbeth* is "uniquely concerned with prophecy."⁷ Accordingly, this analysis will not make a distinction between prophecies that come from witches and those that come from divine oracles, or directly from the future by tachyon means; as long as the prophecies are assumed to be true and turn out to be true *because of that*, they will be treated in the same way. Honigmann warns us that "their [the witches'] exact status remains undefined, except that they are closely associated with an 'unknown power' (IV. i. 69). They may be witches, but we cannot take even this for granted" (138). This may be true, but we

do know that 1) they say things; 2) Macbeth thinks these things are true; 3) these things are true;⁸ 4) these things are true *because* Macbeth thought they were true before they even happened. In this sense, we can treat the words of the witches very much like the words of Oedipus' oracle. In fact, we know that, in ancient Greece, "one favourite type of legend represented the oracle as foretelling the emergence of the tyrant or greeting him before he had shown himself" (Parke 57), which is exactly the case with the "prophetic greetings" (I. iii. 78) of the witches in *Macbeth*. Banquo also refers to their words as "oracles" (III. i. 9).⁹

However, a significant difference between the oracle and the witches is that we can *see* the witches; and we see them even before we see anything else in the play. Before Macbeth, there are the "three witches," and before they are witches, they are "three." Since we want to suggest that the personality and moral profile of the witches are insignificant, and at the same time argue that their presence (unlike the oracle's absence) is significant, we propose that the presence of the witches is significant because of their number. Even though their words are taken as if they come from a single source, the source is not a single witch, but three of them, three acting as one.

The number three is one of those constants that tend to crop up everywhere, across disciplines and genres. Any significance sought in its ubiquity usually results in numerology:

The great application of the numerological style of thinking has long—since at least Pythagoras—been for categorization and list-making. Pietro Bongo, in his *De numerorum mysteria* (1618), and, before him, Cornelius Agrippa, in his *De occulta philosophia* (written in 1510, published in 1531), pursued the magic of triads with manic determination, beginning with the highest meaning of *three*, namely, the trilateral name of God in His own language, Hebrew, through the Christian Trinity of Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, to triplicities rampant in every imaginable aspect of the world scheme of the times. (Sebeok, "One, Two, Three" 2)

Sebeok mentions a number of instances of what we can call three-thinking in philosophy and literature, among them Hegel (thesis/antithesis/synthesis) and Peirce:

These basic distinctions . . . are most generally called [in Peirce] . . . Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which, in turn, yield an enormously long list of further interplaying triads, the best known among them including Sign, Object, Interpretant; Icon, Index, and Symbol; Quality, Reaction, and Representation; and, of course, Abduction, Induction, and Deduction. . . . For example, consonant with current views of the emergence of Big Bang cosmology is Peirce's statement that 'Mind is First, Matter is Second, Evolution is Third' . . . roughly corresponding to as many modes of being: possibility, actuality, and law. (4)

And the list is practically infinite. Things just seem to come in threes, for which there are theological, scientific, mythical, and even anatomical explanations (in *Foucault's Pendulum*, one of Eco's characters speculates that "[t]hree is the most magical number of all, because our body doesn't know that number; we don't have three of anything, [and that is why] all cultures on earth have ternary structures, trinities" [302]).

The significance, or lack thereof, of the number three in *Macbeth* is an issue already raised by critics. Macbeth commits three crimes, which, Calderwood points out, are essentially manifestations of the same crime: "For as the word 'done' tolls three times within his famous line, so his deed tolls thrice in Scotland. I mean that the murder of Duncan, of Banquo, and of Macduff's family is in a sense one deed tripled" (39). Just as Macbeth's deeds repeat the words of the witches, his triple murder is a reflection of the triple nature of the witches themselves, "Hecate's three hideous heads, three bodies, a triple curse upon humanity; [she] sends her three phantoms to the world" (Walker 8). Walker also refers to the witches as the "three selves" of Hecate (8), and the first witch chants, "I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do" (I. iii. 80). The witches' song, too, trips into mystical triplicates: "Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, / And thrice again, to

make up nine” (I. iii. 37-38). Macbeth interrupts the second apparition after the triplet “Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!–” (and *makes* it a triplet by interrupting it) to tell it that he is ready to listen to it with *three* ears: “Had I three ears, I’d hear thee” (IV. i. 77-78). The doctor has watched Lady Macbeth for two nights before he finally observes her madness on the third night (V. i. 1-2). We can also mention some less definitive instances, such as the porter’s call: “Knock, knock, knock!” (II. iii. 3) and his theory that “drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things” (II. iii. 26).¹⁰ But all threes seem to be associated with some form of evil or horror¹¹ (Macduff’s first reaction upon seeing Duncan’s body is, “O horror, horror, horror!” [II. iii. 65]). In this sense, all tripled elements can be traced back to the witches and their role in the meaning of “three.”

For Calderwood, the triplicity in the play signifies non-differentiation, repetition, and inability to grow: “The tripling of the word ‘tomorrow’ calls to mind the curious stress of triplicity and repetition that everyone notes in *Macbeth* but no one accounts for. Perhaps the most obvious reason for the triplings is to echo the triplicity of the Witches in the opening scene and thus to suggest the pervasiveness of demonic influence in Macbeth’s world. But whatever reason we ascribe to them, in the present connection the effect of these triplings is to bring to the fore a difference between augmentation and ‘increase’” (62). Calderwood makes a distinction between cumulative development and fruitless repetition, the latter associated with evil as well as with the number three:

For that matter, the three witches themselves present us with an appearance of fullness or abundance that is in fact mere redundancy. The three witches accomplish no more than one, either functionally (they act and speak alike) or visually (they look alike). They are simply one witch multiplied by three—an apparent variety that keeps returning to unity, as in their speech, which always

verges on and frequently becomes chanting, all speaking as one while acting as one. (63)

The significance of the number three here lies in its embodiment of singularity rather than multiplicity: the things that are three are always three of the same (otherwise we wouldn't have counted them as three), so the apparent multiplicity is dissolved into redundancy.

Augmentation, then, can be associated with meaningless repetition, with making more of the same. Under this heading would fall Macbeth's three 'done's' in his soliloquy, his three deeds of murder, the three mewings of the brindled cat, the triplicity of the Witches, their 'I'll do, I'll do, I'll do' and 'Show! Show! Show!', the 'Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!' of the second apparition, and all similar verbal and actional forms of addition. (Calderwood 63)

The only function of the plural is to embody the singular: "Time is not more *than* what it was but only more *of* what it was" (Calderwood 62). In other words, the number three teases us with difference only to reaffirms sameness; as John Turner says, the witches "baffle the very categories that they invite" (qtd. in Coursen 92).

The erasure of all difference among the three witches serves to illustrate the repetition, meaninglessness, and evil they bring into the play. "Meaning is founded on difference" (85), Calderwood tells us; meaning, progress, order, these things require measurable, cumulative change over time, but in *Macbeth* "distinctions, and therefore meanings, cease to exist" (Calderwood 85). Still, the question arises, why three? Why not two? Calderwood, in fact, gives *binary* pairs as examples of confusion, chaos, and lack of difference: "We could say, then, that Macbeth begins with noise, with the undifferentiations of the three Witches, who look alike, speak alike, and act alike, whose ambiguous appearance blurs the distinctions between male and female . . . and whose oracular pronouncements confuse fair and foul and lost and won." (Calderwood 76). (Macbeth also echoes the binary "foul and fair" [I. iii. 40] theme later.) To

use Frank Kermode's words, what we have here is "triple questions and double answers" (85). If we know that the witches are neither male nor female, neither human nor supernatural, if those binary distinctions collapse and we have the ambiguity of two, why do we need the ambiguity of three? If three is an environment which allows for difference and meaning, so is the environment of two. Two would be enough to create both difference and, when this difference is compromised, ambiguity. But we will argue that "three" has a different function, that the difference of three is different; while both the binary and the tertiary collapse into the same undifferentiated chaos, what collapses in the binary case is different from what collapses in the tertiary case.

The structure of three is a structure of simulation; it is what happens to a paper strip when it becomes Möbius. While a normal sheet of paper will have two distinct sides, the Möbius strip does not. It has two sides *plus* something else, something which makes those two sides identical and yet rejects the whole notion of a "side."¹² To illustrate the difference between the structure of two and the dynamics of three in *Macbeth*, we can use this passage from Banquo's conversation with the witches:

I'th' name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? (I. iii. 52-54)

At first glance, this question seems clear: are you supernatural creatures, or are you real?¹³

However, we must note that the exact wording calls for an alleged opposition between "fantastical" and "what they *seem* to be"; but the witches' outward appearance *is* that of something fantastical, so the question translates into, "you appear to be fantastical; are you really so, or are you fantastical?"¹⁴ And this is no longer a simple binary question. It suggests that the

witches look exactly like something they *are*, and in that suggestion we can seek out the workings of a simulation, the presence of a simulated third which does not fit into the either/or scheme. If one interpretation of the witches is as what they are, and another as what they seem to be, the third is as that which is exactly what it seems to be, a simulation. In a paradoxical twist, Banquo poses this question “in the name of truth,” while the terms in which he phrases his question are “indeed” the terms of simulation. The clues pointing to the reality of what the witches are are misleading, because they suggest that the witches pretend to be that which they are. And if there is nothing hidden, then there are no “clues” either, and things do not mean other things; they just mean themselves.

While signification is founded on the loosely binary structure of something present and something absent, of cause and effect, simulation operates within an ambiguous Möbius dynamics which is simultaneously more and less than binary. That is why the number three becomes important. In a normal, non-simulated triplet structure, one element out of the three stands out, and the other two serve as a background to create meaning for the third as an exception. In some sense, meaning is always an exception, or it lies in something which is an exception, as in the figure/ground structure. More simply, a gust of wind¹⁵ or a bolt of lightning can be meaningful when it suggests that a storm is coming, but it loses that meaning when the storm is already here and it is impossible to single out any specific instance of lightning. The lightning does not *mean* the storm if it is already part of the storm, if it *is* the storm, but only if it precedes the storm, only if it is not part of it, but its foreground. Eco, for example, breaks down the signification structure this way: “There is no doubt that when we say that smoke is a sign of fire, the smoke we notice is not yet a sign; . . . smoke becomes a sign of fire not in the moment in

which it is perceived but when we decide that it *stands for* something else” (*Kant* 125). If that “something else” is present (and therefore not really an “else”), if the storm from our example is already here, there is no signifying going on, since nothing “stands for” the storm in its presence (nothing stands for it any more than it stands for itself, being already here). The sign is what remains when you subtract what is present from what is said.

In order for something to be not merely a phenomenon but a significant phenomenon (a statement), it needs to acquire an exceptional status in relation to its environment.¹⁶ Manetti calls “the phenomenon considered to be a sign” a “microcosm” set off against the macrocosm of “the general order of the universe” (19-20). The sign is something that contrasts with its environment in a way that gives it meaning. Despite the homology between the microcosm and the macrocosm (which Manetti uses this example to emphasize), there is a sense in which the two are incompatible, a sense in which the lightning as a sign is incompatible with the storm as a physical phenomenon; or even: the lightning as a sign is incompatible with the lightning as a thing. The phenomenon which stands out from its environment is no longer a phenomenon but becomes a statement; it is no longer a part of the physical world, but part of language. The self-fulfilling prophecy, on the contrary, is anything but a statement. It is characterized by its ability to include everything, so that deviation from the prophecy is impossible; a deviation would be an exception to the prophecy and therefore capable of making a statement about the prophecy, which would contradict the prophecy, since the essence of the unavoidable prophecy is that it has already made every statement it is possible to make, including statements about itself. The problem with such a totality is that it is against the very nature of language; a statement can only be an exception, not an environment; exclusive, not all-encompassing. The moment it is

incorporated into the background, the moment it becomes a rule rather than exception, it would cease to be a statement. That is why, while under the impression that it has said *everything* there is to say, the prophecy has *said* nothing (since it has turned all unpredicted exceptions into predictable permutations of the background). In a sense, the self-fulfilling prophecy has put into motion an ontological mechanism of occurrence of events which simply happen and negate any consciousness about themselves. Even though it seems that the prophecy is a verbal act, it is rather a blindly engendering act in the physical sense, literal and immanent; it cannot be a linguistic event, only an ontological one.¹⁷

But if one element needs to stand out from its environment, to be alienated from it, this would not be possible if we only have two elements present altogether¹⁸: even if they are different, they would be symmetrically different and interchangeable, and it will not be clear which one is the background and which one is to make the statement. A pure binary difference would be like a difference between figure and ground in an Escher drawing made possible (the drawing minus the observer's act of necessarily privileging one or the other), or a Möbius strip turned into a normal sheet of paper. The third, on the other hand, is asymmetrically "different."¹⁹ Calderwood's observation that "[m]eaning is founded on difference" (85) (and, conversely, the lack of differentiation in *Macbeth* is also a lack of meaning) is consistent with a tertiary structure where one element stands out, asymmetrically different from the other two. Only the third can turn difference into identity, since symmetry does not allow for uniqueness; in a symmetrical, binary relationship neither term can be privileged, while identity is by definition a privileging of the identified one versus everything else outside it. In order to be meaningful (and in order to be "the one"), the one must stand out against two (or more); if it stands out against one, that would

be chance, and chance is meaningless.²⁰ In the same way, the illusion of the Möbius strip²¹ tells us that we are looking at one out of two sides, at the illusion of privileging a figure against a background, and that figure/ground structure is a tertiary structure, not a binary one. A binary pair would be symmetrical, but the illusion that either term is privileged, that we are on one side rather than the other, that one of the two things is in the foreground and the other is in the background, that is the illusion of three, not two. Three is the smallest number of elements where one element can stand out against a background, the background of the other two. In order to make a meaningful decision (a decision not based on chance)²² about which element is the one that stands out, which element is the figure against the ground,²³ we are working with an illusion of three, not two, and the illusion is that one of the two is more important than the other.

In fairy tales, for example, this distinction is made more obvious by actually setting up a literal structure of three (three brothers, three sisters, three trials), and then one of these three stands out as somehow special²⁴: the evil queen makes three attempts to kill Snow White, of which the third succeeds, sons always come in three,²⁵ and who could have suspected the semiotic consequences of a father's second marriage when "[t]he new wife brought home with her two daughters who were fair and beautiful to look upon, but base and black at heart" (*Grimms' Fairy Tales* 155), two daughters, in other words, who are as different from Cinderella as we can imagine without leaving the human species.²⁶ The significance of a character like Cinderella lies in her uniqueness compared to her environment of multiple evil. The uniqueness of one (girl) out of two would not mean anything (it would not be a uniqueness), because we need to establish a pattern first, and we cannot establish a pattern with one; so two similar or identical elements go into the making of the pattern that we seek to break by the third.²⁷ The hero

must emerge and counter-position himself or herself against a hostile (that is, different in the extreme) background as the exception, the unlikely and unforeseen winner. If everyone in the fairy tale were as brave, pure, and resourceful as the hero, there would be no hero. Similarly, it would not do to say that one character failed and one succeeded, because this would diminish the achievement of the one who succeeds; the success of one out of two is simply chance: the odds are 50/50.²⁸ But if the person who succeeds is outnumbered by failures (at least two to one), then the success becomes meaningful²⁹; it is against the odds; it is the work of subjective power and will, not blind chance. The third element is the simulation of subjectivity; and thirdness is not so much about three (or multiple) things, but about one thing, the exception, the singularity of meaning. It is only when we speak of the three that we create the one.

Here we are reminded of the words of Beckett's Vladimir: "One of the thieves was saved. It's a reasonable percentage" (8). Stanley Cavell comments: "Reasonable indeed. Just the percentage you'd expect on the basis of chance alone, if there were no third" (150).³⁰ Besides the curious implication that in the *absence* of God the coin would be fair, not loaded, we can note that the odds are exactly those of flipping a coin: the even and fair odds that Macbeth, for one, would not be satisfied with. Beckett's reference to the crucifixion also presents God as an interference with chance, as an introduction of purpose into the events: out of the three people who were to be crucified, two were saved (Christ and one of the thieves), and two out of three is no longer chance. This loading of the dice is what thirdness is all about, and what simulation does to create meaning and difference.³¹

The situation of Macbeth presents us with what we may awkwardly call "temporal thirdness": from the initial three greetings by the witches, the third stands in special relationship

to the other two, even though Macbeth fails to see that and takes the first two as proof for the third.

FIRST WITCH.

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH.

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH.

All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter! (I. iii. 50-52)

As William Scott says, “[t]here is of course much that is worthy of question about the witches’ triple salutation of Macbeth” (163). Of the three greetings here, the first two are not really predictions. That Macbeth is thane of Glamis may be common knowledge, and in any case is not a secret. It serves to identify Macbeth as the recipient of the other titles rather than confer a title. The second prediction is not predictive either, since it *follows* Duncan’s decision to make Macbeth thane of Cawdor in I. ii. The only thing it proves is that the witches know something Macbeth does not but others do, since Duncan has already made and announced his decision. The witches’ second greeting is something whose cause has duly preceded it, and whose chronology does not in the least depart from its normal temporal parameters. The information in this case does not travel superluminally into its own past to cause itself, since it is conceivable that the witches could have simply overheard Duncan’s earlier conversation and then hurried to meet Macbeth.³² Some critics would disagree; Walker, for example, concedes the second prediction and points out “the plain fact that Macbeth met the Witches who told him before they could humanly have known it that he was to be Thane of Cawdor, a prediction that was immediately verified by the event” (44).³³ However, knowledge *is* “humanly” possible in this sequence of events between scenes ii and iii, simply because this knowledge is already out in the

open; it existed before the witches' words. It is not even clear that the witches would necessarily need some superhuman power to get to Macbeth before the messengers do, some highly advanced mode of witch transportation from one place to another; all they need is to be just a little bit faster than the messengers, or even to move at the same speed as the messengers but somehow cause them to be late (or maybe the messengers need to get some sleep, while the witches don't?). But in any case, even if superhuman powers are at work, no messing around with cause and effect is immediately apparent. The witches' words duly follow the event they describe just as normal words do.

This leaves only the third witch's utterance as a prediction. However, Macbeth will accept its truth by equating³⁴ it with the second greeting, which he thinks is a prediction:

and to be king
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. (I. iii. 73-75)

Once Macbeth receives proof of the second "prediction," the second will in turn verify the third:

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. (I. iii. 128-130)³⁵

Although the second prediction is not actually a prediction, Macbeth bases on it his conclusions about predictions in general: that they come true. Macbeth's error is that he treats the three greetings as the same thing, failing to distinguish between the second and the third, between past and future, cause and effect; in this sense, he has been influenced by the undifferentiation of the three witches, who "look alike, speak alike, and act alike" (Calderwood 76). Unlike fairy tales, where the third is different from the others, *Macbeth* asks us to believe that the third is the same; so if we had to choose one of the three, there would be no logical choice (as in fairy tales), only

chance. That is why Macbeth can conveniently believe that “chance will . . . crown [him]” (I. iii. 143). The undifferentiation of the three greetings presents itself as chance: chance which is artificially created, simulated to cover up Macbeth’s agency which will make all the difference. The lack of differentiation between the past and the future³⁶, the words and the deeds, the will of the witches and the will of Macbeth himself, is embodied in Macbeth’s merging of the first two greetings with the third, which is the moment when the prophecy causes itself to happen (or causes Macbeth to “happen” it).

Macbeth’s transition from the second to the third is a subset of the larger problem of semiotic (also scientific and philosophical) transition from knowing the past to knowing the future. To illustrate this problem, we turn to Reichenbach’s *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, where he presents us with the problem of “unobserved objects” (for those we can substitute “future objects,” which also cannot be observed): “What you said was that your house was there when you did not see it; what you verify is that your house is there when you see it. How can you tell whether it was there while you were absent?” (177). The impossibility of proving that things and events you cannot see (yet) will obey the same laws that hold for those you *can* see is clear to Reichenbach: “We have [no evidence] because unobserved objects have never been observed” (179). And, we can add, future events have never happened. All the events that have happened so far are past events. We can differentiate between the two, but Macbeth cannot; for him, the future events can be known just as past events can.

Even Banquo, “the one most free from guilt” (Cumberland Clark 133), does not remain immune to false temporal analogies from past to future, and is guilty of his own problematic transition from what is known to what is unknown, from cause to effect:

Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,
And set me up in hope? (III. i. 8-10)

In this case, Banquo's reasoning is faulty, again deriving the effect from a cause through a specious proof that goes something like this: "if you received your fortune by foul play, then maybe I will receive mine without doing anything."³⁷

The faulty transition from past to future, from cause to effect, from premise to conclusion is embodied in the transition from an analytical, tautological binary structure of two (where one element is exactly and only what the other is not, thereby inversely repeating the other), to a synthetic, meaningful, and faulty dynamics of three; or from a world conveniently split into the binaries of truth and illusion to the world of simulation, where a third element is created, a third, causeless event is "derived" from the preceding two and grounded in them. The play is founded on the transition from "two truths" to a third not-yet-truth, whose veracity is falsely guaranteed by the logic of the future crime. Macbeth's ability to see all three as equally true is his ruin, to see *three* instead of *two* is his tragedy, because his seeing the third makes it true, converts the structure of two to a structure of three, which also retrospectively gives meaning to the two as "happy prologues" (I. iii. 129) to the third. While in normal logic what precedes causes and guarantees the truth of what follows, here the opposite is true: the two as such, on their own, are not significant, except that they lead to the third. By creating the third, Macbeth creates meaning for the other two, creates a causal progression which culminates in his kingship. What he does is create meaning, which can turn out to be a serious crime.

The transition from the known to the unknown, from the present to the future is also the transition from cause to effect, which emerges as a theme in *Macbeth*. The problem with proving

anything in the future is, above all, a semiotic problem. As Caprettini points out in his semiotic study “Peirce, Holmes, Popper,” “[n]o theory can be verified once and for all. On the other hand, a theory can be declared unsatisfactory or false when one of the propositions deriving from its general premises is contradicted during an experiment” (143). The close connection between this semiotic problem and morality (such as the morality of regicide) becomes evident when we recognize that the notions of good and evil function in the same way: no one can be declared good once and for all, but a single act of evil can define someone as evil.³⁸ In a broad sense, true and false are like good and evil³⁹, in that there is no proof of the future in the case of the true/good, but the false/bad only needs proof of the past. The true/good cannot be proved in the past: one can still fail next time. The true and the good are never complete, *because* they seek to be complete, to include not only all the instances so far, but also the next one, all the next ones: they seek to include the future. In a way, the main criterion for the true and the good is the future, which is a criterion that is impossible to fulfill. So while in the case of the false and the evil we have a theory (that a proposition is wrong or a person is evil) and proof for it, the true and the good are defined by the absence of proof, by its constant postponement and displacement into the future; whatever we can prove now cannot be completely, truly good because it does not tell us anything about the future. We suffer from an epistemological deficiency which limits our perception to what can be treated inductively, that is, what has already happened, and this is why we can prove only what is evil or false.⁴⁰ Knowledge of what is true (or good) differs from knowledge of what is false (or evil) in the same way that “knowledge of the future must be construed as essentially different from knowledge of the past” (Reichenbach 91).

We can phrase the problem differently and say that true and false (or good and evil) do

not refer to the same thing;⁴¹ they are simply different theories, “false” being the theory about the past (everything that has been proven beyond doubt is false), true being the theory about the future (nothing has been proven true so far: every “truth” we have may change in the future as new evidence is discovered). On the other hand, it is sufficient to prove one instance of a theory (hypothesis) being false, and no amount of “true” in successful instances can reverse that falsity; if only one apple were to disobey the law of gravity, for example, all the fruit trees in the world which are properly behaved would not make the law of gravity true again. From an empirical perspective, true means “not false yet.”⁴² In other words, although we think of positive and negative as two equal but opposite predicates, they are not symmetrical: one is reversible, the other is not.

For example, before Macbeth becomes a killer, he can always become one, but once he is a killer, he can never become someone who is not a killer. Macbeth is already evil, irreversibly evil, but we cannot say that Banquo is “already good,” irreversibly good, until we have observed his whole life. Since, in a way, we do observe his whole life and he is not given a chance to become evil, we declare him good. But we must remember that both goodness and evil can be functions of time, and that Banquo could have turned evil later, had there been any “later” for him to use. Or, conversely, if Macbeth had not survived the battle in Act I, his crimes would not have had a chance to take place and he would have died a hero, his heroism being a temporal function of his short life rather than a moral function of his inherent goodness. In a very cynical way, whoever is killed first (for example, Banquo) becomes an innocent victim, innocent *because* first. His death is the only assurance that he would not kill anyone, that he has achieved absolute goodness, defined as the absolute lack of opportunity to do evil. Since it lacks positive

proof, goodness always has a negative definition. Just as the true is “that which is not false yet,” the good is that which is not evil yet, and no amount of goodness in the present and past can guarantee anything about the future. Epistemologically, there is no way to make predictions about the future based on the past. It is this time frame that upsets the symmetry between true and false, good and evil; in some sense, they are temporal categories. If there is any symmetry between true and false, past and future, if the future appears to have proof in the present, this symmetry is simulated.

“In a universe where a principle of simulation has to be always suspected, univocal facts or irrefutable evidence do not exist” (145), Caprettini tells us, suggesting that everything which seems real may turn out to be a simulation, but once something is proved to be simulation, it can never, theoretically, be real again. Of course, the problem would be that simulation, as we saw in Chapter One, cannot be exposed; it always presents itself as reality and is constructed in such a way that reality can never be more real than simulation.⁴³ In other words, in the face of simulation we have the false (and, some might argue, the evil) element but presented in such a way that its exposure is impossible; a false statement which, unlike all other false statements, is not susceptible to proof (and in that it resembles the true statements, which are not susceptible to proof either). In this respect, simulation is not false; in terms of the availability of proof, it functions like the truth, like reality, not illusion. It is structurally true, even though it may be false in terms of its “content.” While simulation does away with temporality and provides “proof” of the future before such proof can be logically available, it only provides proof of reality, but no proof of simulation. In this sense, proof itself is simulated. Seeing the self-fulfilling prophecy as a simulation gives us a new epistemology of illusion, of what is true and

false. While under normal circumstances the false is the thing that gets proved and irreversible, it cannot be proved under simulation, because simulation seeks to prove the true, not the false, the future, not the past. Unlike normal inductive reasoning, simulation gives positive proof of a future event, rather than a negative proof of a past event.

But there is one way to speak about the future and be sure that you are telling the truth, a truth without proof and without the whole problematic causality of proving something that has not happened yet, of proving the future. This issue is resolved in the semiotic universe of “performative statements.” In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin highlights two characteristics of the performatives: they “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report,’” and they are not ‘true’ or ‘false’” (5). But above all, they are special because “the uttering of the sentence is . . . the doing of an action” (5). The performative statement, Austin explains, is such that “to utter the sentence . . . is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (6). A simple example Austin cites is the ritual of marriage: “When I say . . . ‘I do’, I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it” (6).⁴⁴ In other words, performative statements are neither true nor false because they stand in a different relation to reality: they are not in any way accountable to the given reality, because they create their own.⁴⁵ Just like the self-fulfilling prophecy, the performative statements never lie, because there are no criteria outside of them to which they can refer. Just like simulation, a performative “is *not* false because it is devoid of reference” (50). The self-fulfilling prophecy does not have a reference, because the events it refers to have not happened yet. In this sense, we can apply to the self-fulfilling prophecy what Austin says about performatives: “There is something which is *at the moment of the uttering being done by the person uttering*” (60).⁴⁶ The self-fulfilling prophecy is

the perfect performative statement, and going even further toward a negation of statements altogether. The witches are “imperfect speakers” (I. iii. 70), because the only way to verify the information is to perform the acts it describes, so it is up to Macbeth to decide whether the prophecy is true or not: if he chooses to act, it will be true; if he does not, it will be false. A performative utterance erases the difference between true and false, cause and effect,⁴⁷ word and deed,⁴⁸ just as the structure of “three” takes place when the limits of the binary opposition appearance/essence are exhausted, resolved into a Möbius identity.

There is another way we can approach the performative function in *Macbeth* and that is through the number three. The privileging of the third element gives us subjectivity and a point of view which bend time and space into the unequal, asymmetrical elements of an Escheresque gestalt (the most remarkable thing about which is that it never fails to make sense). The space-time coordinates of thirdness come into play again in Macbeth’s tackling of triplicities. While contemplating the murder, Macbeth aligns his three best reasons against it, prefacing them, however, with a binary reference:

He’s here in *double* trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against the murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. (I. vii. 12-16) [italics mine]

Macbeth says “double trust,” but there are *three* roles that he goes on to list here (kinsman, subject, and host), not two.⁴⁹ Macbeth has no reason to count kinsman and subject as one, because neither of them implies the other: being the king’s kinsman is not what makes Macbeth his subject, nor vice versa. But one of the three, he implies, is different from the other two; one of these three roles betrays (or will betray) the king’s “trust,” leaving Macbeth with “double

trust,” as if the king is protected from two of Macbeth’s social roles but not from the third. But which one is the third? There are many ways to choose, using different criteria, and each of the three can be singled out. For example, both king and host are symbolic titles, whereas “kinsman” is not a matter of choice but blood. Macbeth can betray his symbolic titles by refusing to behave like a host or a subject, but no behavior would negate his status as a kinsman, because that role does not depend on his behavior. On the other hand, his status as a kinsman seems irrelevant to his acts of violence: he targets the king, not the kinsman (even though they happen to be the same person),⁵⁰ and he also targets other people who are not his kin (Banquo, Fleance, the guards). We would be inclined to single out “king” next, which defines Macbeth’s role as a “subject” and stands apart from the others as a unique title: there are many kinsmen and many hosts/guests, but only one king. But again, Macbeth targets people other than the king, people who can become future kings (Fleance) but also people who cannot (the guards, Macduff’s wife, etc.).

Macbeth himself singles out “host” as the different third (I. vii. 14), and we will follow him in this selection. “Host”⁵¹ seems to stand out not only because it is Macbeth’s choice, but because a thwarted host/guest relationship is implicit in every act of violence Macbeth commits: Duncan is his guest, and so are the two guards who stand watch (or else they are Macbeth’s gesture of hospitality towards the king); Macbeth’s crime of throwing suspicion on Duncan’s sons has to do with forcing them to feel unwelcome in his house (and country) and, fleeing, incur suspicions⁵²; the murder of Macduff’s whole family is an embodiment of a ruptured and inverted host ritual in which the murderers are distinctly uninvited and yet violently intrusive; and the violence against Banquo and Fleance is set against an overly (and hypocritically) friendly insistence of the host (Macbeth) that his guests be on time for the feast. Unlike the other two

roles, being a host is not an ongoing, full-time function; it is confined to a specific time interval and grounded in a specific place (and so it echoes the witches' persistent questions of "when?" and "where?"). The "host" is something which happens in space and time; like the figure/ground configuration, the host is a function of illusory perspectives, not so much a person as a convergence of factors which all have to be just right for the host relationship to take place. The host is the one who needs to be "prepared" (he cannot be a host if he doesn't behave like one), and the theme of preparedness recurs throughout the play. What we see, however, is *lack of preparedness in everything Macbeth does*. Calderwood makes a similar observation: "As a violent subversion of natural due process, the murder will be an attempt to extort from time a premature presence" (59); Macbeth claims his title before the time is right, before he is ready for it. But we see this theme even more clearly in the words of Lady Macbeth:

And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. (I. vii. 50-54)

Macbeth is somehow always at odds with his environment: he wants to act before the time is right, and when the time is finally right, he fails to act. But the "fitness" of the right time and place is something which eludes Macbeth even before he decides to commit the murder: Duncan thinks that Macbeth has hurried home to make preparations ("[Macbeth] is gone before to bid us welcome" [I. iv. 57]), but Macbeth's response suggests that he has assumed the role of a messenger, not a host:

I'll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach:
So, humbly take my leave. (I. iv. 45-47)

Unlike the host, the messenger is a figure not bound to a specific time or place but in constant movement. The main quality of the messenger, in fact, is that he is independent of place and time; predictably, then, Macbeth later admits that he is “unprepared” (II. i. 17) to welcome the king to his home.

Macbeth, in fact, fails to be a host,⁵³ while he does not fail to be a subject and a kinsman in the same way. He can be a bad subject and a bad kinsman, but that does not invalidate these roles; but one can either be a host or not be a host: he cannot be a “bad” host, because to be a bad host simply means that he is not a host at all. Note, in this connection, the difference between rules and laws: Baudrillard “remarks that one does not transgress the rules of a game like the prohibitions of the law; one either plays or not” (Bogard 326). “Because the Law establishes a line,” Baudrillard says, “it can and must be transgressed. By contrast, it makes no sense to ‘transgress’ a game’s rules; . . . there is no line one can jump (instead, one simply leaves the game)” (*Seduction* 131-32).⁵⁴ This means that one cannot play a game wrong; one is either playing it or not. As Stanley Cavell observes, “[y]ou CAN *push the little object called the Queen* in many ways, as you can *lift* it or *throw* it across the room; not all of these will be *moving the Queen*” (28).⁵⁵ But there is no reason why any possible move of the Queen should not be part of a game, even though the game would not be that of chess. An act different from the rule is not a different act; it’s a different rule. It is not a question of punishing the wrong move but of finding the right game, the game in which the move would not be wrong. Laws are unlike game rules in that one can transgress a law and still be subject to it: transgress it precisely *because* one is subject to it even when one is not obeying it.⁵⁶ In *Macbeth*, the relationship king/subject is governed by a law which can be transgressed and, therefore, cannot be avoided: one is always in

some kind of relationship with the law, whether obeying it or disobeying it. The situation of the kinsman relationship is similar, though for different reasons. Even though they are not governed by law, blood ties cannot be avoided either: the king can have good or bad (or even homicidal) relatives, but they are still relatives. In the case of the host, however, it is the rules that make the game, and if the host is not playing by the rules, then he is not playing the game; if he is not playing at being a host, he is not, properly speaking, a host (and Macbeth himself tells us that being a host is a role in a game, that he will “play the humble host” (III. iv. 4)). In contrast, a king who does not do kingly things (for example, a king who is a child) is still a king, regardless of what he does.⁵⁷ As i ek says, “the supreme crime consists in the very fact of *being* the king, not in what one *does* as a king” (*They* 84).

Cavell gives us another useful analogy: “An arrow pointing approximately north is exactly pointing somewhere” (76).⁵⁸ (Or, in Davidson’s version, “[t]rying [and failing] to do one thing may be simply doing another” [60]). The failure of pointing north is compensated for by the precision with which the arrow points in another direction: if we change the rules of a game (we decide not to face north, or not to move the queen as a chess piece), we would be simply playing a different game.⁵⁹ Note that the “content” of the action will remain the same (the arrow will still point not-exactly-north) but, in the new game, it will be seen no longer as a failure at pointing north but as a success at pointing not-exactly-north. In this sense, the rule will change the “form,” not the content of the action. The power (or vulnerability) of the law, on the contrary, lies in its singularity and dependency on the specific “content” (the physical direction of north): there is no meaningful space outside the law where an errant arrow might point. To use the same metaphor, north would be the only direction and the only criterion for success: the

arrow can either succeed or fail at pointing north, but both of these events are phrased in terms of “north,” of the law which defines the arrow’s behavior. By failing to be a good host (to put it mildly), Macbeth is not failing at the game of being a host but is playing a new, different game; he is no longer subject to the laws of the king but breaks away from the king’s laws and claims the right to create his own just as a king would⁶⁰: and he cannot break the laws he creates, because they receive their definition from him.⁶¹ Or, in iek’s words, we have “the paradox of the king’s relationship towards law: strictly speaking, the king cannot break the law since his word immediately *makes* law . . . we cannot say that his act violates the Rule, since it (re)defines it” (*They* 83-84). In other words, whoever creates the new rules can make them seem like laws to others while they remain rules to him. While obeying or disobeying gives a binary choice in regard to the law, the stance one assumes toward game rules is not binary; it is performative, creative, tertiary, if you will. Like performative statements, simulation is neither true nor false, neither past nor future. The past and the future have their own *laws*, but simulation is atemporal and creates its own *rules*; it is a whole new game, the object of which is to simulate the laws of reality. In other words, when the rules present themselves as laws, we have simulation.

Consider the theme of time, place, and readiness again in this light.⁶² Within the system of laws that maintain Duncan’s kingdom, the time will *never* be right for killing Duncan; but once Macbeth has broken free from those laws, he can choose any time he wants and call it the right time. And he does: he tells the servant to make preparations, to get things “ready”:

Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is *ready*,
She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed” (II. i. 31-32) [italics mine]

Later, at the end of his speech, Macbeth is startled by the bell: “I go, and it is done; the bell

invites me” (II. i. 56-62). He says the bell invites him, but that is the same bell that he *ordered* to invite him to action at the beginning of the speech. He has caused the invitation to action to happen, as well as to seem as if it was not caused by him (the bell seems to be the agent doing the inviting). That is why it makes sense to have an inverted causality again: first he “goes” and “does” the deed, and *then* he is “invited” by the bell; because the deed includes getting the bell ready to summon him, which will be a sign of the readiness of the moment, a readiness which should not appear to have been caused by Macbeth’s orders.

In this sense, we also see that Macbeth, who works in the simulated environment of a self-fulfilling prophecy where the appearance is the same as the essence, creates the *illusion* that appearances are not the same as reality, and therefore that appearances are deceiving. As Baudrillard says, “[t]he absence of things from themselves, the fact that they do not take place though they appear to do so, the fact that everything withdraws behind its own appearance and is, therefore, never identical with itself, is the material illusion of the world” (*Perfect 2*). Lady Macbeth describes this contrast best when she encourages Macbeth to pretend:

to beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under’t. (I. v. 65-68)

It is interesting that she is not merely urging him to look innocent, but also to be like a “serpent” underneath that appearance, as if this is not the way he is; her suggestion that Macbeth should be different inside from the way he is outside is the clause that follows the “but,” and so it receives the syntactic emphasis of the passage. In other words, it is as if she is equally concerned with the way he looks and with the way he *is*, as if she is saying, “It’s all very well, look innocent if you

want, but please try to be different inside, try to make this appearance of innocence false,” an advice which Macbeth later also gives himself:

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know. (I. vii. 81-82)⁶³

At first, Macbeth has to pretend that he still obeys the king’s laws, and in relation to these laws his behavior is false; but then he becomes king, and so, theoretically, he can do anything he wants. Why is he still secretive then, “[m]asking the business from the common eye / For sundry weighty reasons” (III. i. 124-25)? He still has to pretend there are laws, so even though the king can do anything he wants, he still sets up the simulation of laws that he must obey: but not because he wants to be a good king. In fact, he seeks to put himself in a position where he can be a *bad* king (he is not supposed to kill his guests and subjects, and we do not even question that unspoken “law”), in order to prove that his power and his laws are real to everyone else.⁶⁴ In this sense he transgresses his own laws to establish his semiotic power of having created them real, or at least of not having disturbed the reality of kingship by taking over it in a false way, by substituting a simulation for it. That is why he sets up (or maintains) the conditions necessary for having a false appearance.⁶⁵ It is only in relation to a reference point that a thing can be true or false, and the job of simulation is to create those reference points; being false or evil only confirms the success of Macbeth’s semiotic *coup d’état*, because it means that he has created a reference point in relation to which his behavior may seem wrong. It means that he has been successful in creating a reality in which he can be judged according to laws that seem authentic, making the position from which he wields his power also authentic. When Macbeth apologizes to Duncan for his unpreparedness, he says, “Our will became the servant to defect; / Which else

should free have wrought” (II. i. 18-19). Were he not perceived as a “servant” to defect, Macbeth suggests, he would have been its master: he would have freely “wrought” defect. The catch is, even when he is in a position to do this freely, to create “defect,” his success will be measured by the extent to which he can make it seem that he is “the servant” of the crime. His success in creating laws will be measured by his failure of obeying them: the more authentic the failure, the more authentic its reference point, the law. The only rule of the new game is to create the impression that it is not a game. But that does not mean that he believes in that seemingly objective reference, that he lives according to laws rather than game rules.

The problem of the law and authority in the play is closely entangled with the problem of the performative statement, since the authority of the king is characterized by performative power. The king utters words that come true because, by uttering them, he has commanded them to come true (not in the future, but simultaneously with the utterance).⁶⁶ In contrast, if anybody else were to say the same words, they would remain just words; only with the king as a speaker can the words become laws. But all this is a semiotic power that Macbeth challenges.⁶⁷ And the challenge begins in Act One, when Ross delivers the message that Macbeth is now Thane of Cawdor:

And, for an earnest of a greater honour,
He [Duncan] bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor:
In which addition, hail, most worthy thane!
For it is thine. (I. iii. 103-106)

Ross says that the message is from Duncan (“from him”), but it is undermined by the fact that Ross, and not the king, confers that honor to Macbeth. Furthermore, Ross’s speech echoes the witches when he says “hail,” which suggests to Macbeth that the message comes from the

witches rather than the king, that what the witches say decides his fate, not what the king says.

The words of the king are supposed to be performative statements (orders), which are neither true nor false, because they enact their meaning at the moment of their articulation; the words “I make you thane of Cawdor” are not “true” or “false” in the normal sense, they are only “true” in the sense that they make something happen. But, having already heard the same words from the witches, Macbeth is in a position to believe that the semiotic power of the king has been transferred to the witches, whose words are taken to be “true” in the same sense the king’s orders would have been “true,” in the sense of making things happen.⁶⁸ Even though the words delivered by Ross come from the king, as far as Macbeth is concerned they might as well come from the witches, since the witches were the first to say these words: they delivered the message of the king too, and, which is more significant, they delivered it *first*, before Ross did and without giving credit to Duncan for saying the words (or giving the order) in the first place.⁶⁹

Macbeth does question the witches about the origin of their words, the source of the information (“Say from whence / You owe this strange intelligence?” [I. iii. 75-76]), but he also calls their greetings “prophetic,” that is, locates the source of their words in the future, not the past, therefore assuming that the words did not originate in an event which has already happened, but will cause the event to happen in the future. By the time Ross delivers Duncan’s message, Macbeth has already accepted this piece of news as “prophetic” rather than real, therefore denying the power of the king to make it real; it happens because it was predicted it would happen, not because Duncan made it happen. Duncan’s words follow, rather than precede the event, even though the essence of the event itself *is* Duncan’s words; in this way, the king’s orders are made to follow the action they are supposed to engender, and causality is

compromised even before Macbeth acts on the “king” part of the prophecy. The “Thane of Cawdor” part of the prophecy is regarded now as “prophetic” and of paradoxical causality, even though it is nothing of the sort; and, by analogy, Macbeth believes the “king” part will also be “true” in the same way: it will be made true by being articulated, true as a royal performative, not true the way a story is true to an event. But he has ceased to attribute this power of making things true by making things happen to the king; it now belongs to the witches.⁷⁰

Unlike Macbeth himself, Lady Macbeth does not recognize the shift in power from the king to the witches; as far as she is concerned, the king still has absolute authority, and that is why the crime means to her the breaking of a law, not a change in the rules (and it is much harder to live with the implications of breaking a singular law than to deal with playing a new game). But Lady Macbeth has no reason to suspect a shift in power from the king to the witches in the first place; the way Macbeth relates to her his encounter with the witches fails to highlight the temporal paradox and the performative power of their words:

When I burnt in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who all-hail'd me 'Thane of Cawdor;' by which title, before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referr'd me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail, king that shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou might not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. (I. v. 3-14)⁷¹

In this version, the words “thane of Cawdor” come from the king’s messengers *first*, and only then does Macbeth refer back to what, by the way, the witches had also told him; he reverses the order of the events when reporting them to his wife, so the whole effect of compromising the royal source of the words is lost for her. For her, the king still has real power. As with Macbeth, the decision to kill, to disobey radically the laws and remain sane would be possible for Lady

Macbeth only if she no longer thinks of them as “laws” but as game rules; then she would have “the power to transmute values that comes with the rule” (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 139). But this is a transvaluation of laws into rules that she never achieves.

In this context, her famous invocation, “Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here” (I. v. 41-42), can be taken to mean that she wants her *thoughts* to be freed, not her body “unsexed.” First, she appeals to the spirits who tend specifically to the “thoughts” of humans, and then she points to where she wants to be “unsexed” (“unsex me *here*”), which suggests that it is not an obvious place: probably her head, the place where the difference between laws and rules exists. (Although we should point out that some critics would disagree: G. R. Elliott, for example, has a very specific vision of this speech: “‘Come, you Spirits,’ she explains with bent head and hands pressing her bosom” [54]. But as these stage directions do not come from Shakespeare, we reserve the right to alternative interpretations.) And if she asks for a kind of undoing that is mental but phrases it in terms of sexual undoing, we can suspect that the sexual is a euphemism for the mental: a significant reversal of normal speech, where one usually assumes that sexual language is to be guarded and hushed. Instead, we are faced with a more dangerous kind of language, one more in need of being hidden and avoided, the language of the mind. While sexuality is still defined by laws, the mind is the place where these laws are made and unmade; sexuality can be transgressive, but it does nothing to undermine the limit it is transgressing *as a limit*. The thought of regicide, on the other hand, challenges the very notion of law and transgression: it is the thought of re-making the law in the shape of what was previously a transgression. “Everything to do with the simulacrum is taboo or obscene,” says Baudrillard, “as is everything relating to sex or death” (*Perfect* 95). But Lady Macbeth’s speech makes a

different claim: for her, the simulacrum is even more taboo than sex. Terry Eagleton would disagree here, interpreting her speech as literally referring to sexual identity: “transgression, the ceaseless surpassing of limits, is for her the very mark of the human. . . . She herself crosses the strict divide of gender roles and cries out to be unsexed” (4). However, the second does not necessarily follow from the first: it is true that for her the murder is an act of transgression (of a law) rather than the changing of rules, but this does not necessarily happen at the level of gender. As Craig says, “Shakespeare’s emphasis [is] on *thought*—as if the *power* of thought is the key to understanding everything else important to and about man, not least of all his freedom for good and evil” (79). Aristotle would agree: “For truth and falsity are not in *things*, but in *thought*” (*Metaphysics* 160). To the extent that gender is a thing, thought is what makes it so; to the extent that it is thought, it is not gender. And the same can be said about law: thought is what renders it solid, makes it a “thing.”

However, when Lady Macbeth invokes the spirits, she is bound to fail: what she wants from them is freedom to change the rules, but she relies on the spirits to give her that freedom. To illustrate this point, we can go to a movie called *Willow*. There is a scene in which a sorcerer prepares to choose his next apprentice from among several candidates. To determine which one, if any, is worthy of being his apprentice, the sorcerer extends his hand, spreading out his five fingers, and asks the candidates to tell him which of his five fingers contains the power of magic (which we can think of as the power to change the natural order of things). Each candidate in turn takes a guess and fails, until the last one, Willow, the protagonist, hesitates in his choice. He almost gives the right answer, but at the last moment the answer seems to him impossibly daring and unthinkable, and he fails. The right answer, as we learn, is not among the five options (the

five fingers) offered: the power is in Willow's own finger (that is, in his own hands). The freedom of choice, in other words, means abandoning the available options that we are given to choose from; the right answer means rejecting the very terms of the question, creating a different semiotic system of right and wrong. The sorcerer shows that choosing what is "right" in the old system is not in itself "right"; the "right" answer is redefining the system of right and wrong altogether. As Leon Harold Craig says, "there is a world of difference between regarding the mind as the *medium* of good and evil, and regarding it as that which in and of itself dictates what any given person calls 'good' and 'evil'" (85). In this sense, when Lady Macbeth asks to be given freedom, she only proves that she doesn't have it, since freedom can only be in the hands of those seeking it and cannot be "given" to them.

We can also consider Willard Farnham's account of Lady Macbeth and the idea that "her conscience is of a higher order than his [Macbeth's] and that therefore violation of conscience finally puts a greater burden upon her than upon him" (110-11). If conscience is a measurement of law (or, more precisely, of how guilty one feels about breaking the law), Lady Macbeth's conscience is probably indeed superior: but this would simply mean that she finds it more difficult to conceive of a different law, which is what Macbeth does. Farnham in fact is tempted to call this quality of Macbeth "greatness," implicitly putting it above Lady Macbeth's "conscience": "that which makes him great as a doer of evil is the stuff of greatness wherever greatness is found, on the side of evil or that of good. One feels that the world needs such greatness even at the cost of having it go astray in a Macbeth" (10). (In contrast, nowhere does Farnham suggest that humanity needs more of Lady Macbeth's conscience.) In other words, the "content" (good or evil) is distinguished from the "form" (greatness), and the way a thing is done

from the thing itself.

For example, David Scott Kastan, in *Shakespeare After Theory*, makes a special effort to distinguish between Macbeth's actions and their structural function:

Duncan's benign sovereignty is no doubt set in opposition to Macbeth's willful brutality, but Duncan's rule depends upon—indeed demands—Macbeth's violence. The unexplained revolt that begins the play is put down by Macbeth's brutal defense of Duncan's authority. Violent disruption is violently repaired. Certainly we are to distinguish Macbeth's killing *for* the king from Macbeth's killing *of* the king: in the service of Duncan, killing marks Macbeth as 'valiant,' 'a worthy gentleman' (1. 2. 24). (167)

In other words, the content of Macbeth's actions is the same in both cases, but in the first case ("killing *for* the king"), the violence is structurally positioned to be "good," while in the second case ("killing *of* the king"), the violence is "bad." The structural shift is possible because the moral values are determined in relation to the king, so that whatever Macbeth does, if he does it *for* the king, would be good (even if it is killing), and vice versa. The royal function is a structural one, and as such it can only be challenged or reaffirmed structurally. The things that go into the making of what is "good" need not be "good" themselves. And conversely, Lady Macbeth's character may be morally "better" than Macbeth's, while her position in respect to the structure may not be one of advantage or "greatness," defined as the ability to re-structure, to simulate. This re-structuring does not carry moral value within it; as Maynard Mack says, "[k]illing the king is a central fact because it offers a rich image of conflict and change *without*, for example, labeling the old good or the new bad" (13). The same acts of violence are re-cast in new structures of meaning. In *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*, Harry Berger similarly proposes the argument that something is *structurally* wrong in Macbeth's Scotland, something which is not Macbeth himself but the culture as a whole, a

culture structurally based on violence (72). He suggests that the characters have “[the] freedom to reinforce or to oppose the structural tendencies” (72), and we see that Macbeth emerges as someone who opposes them successfully, by enforcing new structural configurations of power where the king lacks such power.

There is one instance where the king’s semiotic power is discernible, and that is an instance which pushes Macbeth toward the crime, not away from it: when Macbeth receives the title “Thane of Cawdor,” there is a hint of inverse causality as he seems to become a traitor partly as a result of assuming the title of a traitor, becoming a traitor by order of the king.⁷² In this sense, it is the king who makes him a traitor, and once he is a traitor, the side effect is that he no longer acknowledges the king’s power to make him anything else. It has the effect of saying “Do not listen to anything I say,” or “Do not obey me from now on,” which is the last order Macbeth will obey. The honors Macbeth will receive from now on will not have an origin in the king, or any origin at all.

The overlap between the king’s words as delivered by Ross and the witches’ words is significant because they have the *same content* but displace the authority from the king to the witches, from the past to the future; in this way Macbeth is ascribing prophetic qualities even to statements that are not, strictly speaking, bound to the future but to the past. The king has been deprived of the power to make self-fulfilling, prophetic statements, and that power has been transferred to the witches, in the eyes of Macbeth. The semiotic competition between the witches and the king is resolved as soon as it begins, the battle is “lost and won.” This flaw in the king’s words, their failure to make things happen (or happen in time), is confirmed later, in the words of Angus:

**We are sent
To give thee, from our royal master, thanks;
Only to herald thee into his sight, not pay thee. (I. iii. 100-102)**

The greeting is prefaced with a disclaimer which in effect says that the envoys of the king (and, by extension, the king himself) can do only what the witches did: greet Macbeth with words about his future, not make that future happen; the king's power is again compromised and forced to compete with that of the witches. As in the case of the Cawdor title, there are two possible sources of Macbeth's kingship: one is the king, whose job it is to confer titles, and the other is the witches, who are the ones who actually seem to cause titles to be conferred. This logic is strengthened by the fact that, even though the king can give titles, there is one title he cannot give: the title of the king. This one title (the one Macbeth wants) is beyond the king's power to give, since transference of the title depends on the king being dead, which reinforces the previous trend of compromising the royal power because it requires absolute negation of the king himself. However generous Duncan is, he will not be able to keep the promise of "growth" with which he greets Macbeth:

**Welcome hither:
I have begun to plant thee, and will labour
To make thee full of growing. (I. iv. 27-29)**

The ultimate growth Macbeth wants is beyond the power of the king to give, except in death. So, Macbeth rightly assumes, the title cannot come from Duncan at all. While the other title, thane of Cawdor, should assume authority and legitimacy only if it comes from the king (even though here its royal source is compromised), the title "king" cannot be authoritatively transferred to anyone else as long as the king is alive, so the king is the *least* authoritative source of that honor which Macbeth awaits. Macbeth then recognizes that this title should come from

somewhere else, and this is the point where he assumes the performative semiotic power to make things happen.

Just as the royal performatives cease to be performatives because they are late in arriving (if an event is caused once already, by the words of the witches, then, even if the king says the same words, and even if they have the same power, the event cannot be caused *twice*; it is caused only once, the first time)⁷³, there are other signs of lateness associated with the king, such as Duncan's words to Macbeth here:

O worthiest cousin!
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me: thou art so far before,
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
To overtake thee. (I. iv. 14-18)

The words of the king have been slow to get to Macbeth, who has already received his title from the witches, but this passage tells us even more: that the king is not only slower than the witches, but slower than Macbeth.⁷⁴ Through the power of the witches, Macbeth is ahead of the king himself, receiving the title of Cawdor before it has been given to him, and presuming to claim the king's title while the king is still alive. Since Macbeth has accepted the Cawdor title as a supernatural temporal paradox (which it is not), he has begun to think in terms of time reversal; he is ahead of his time, ahead of everyone, in that "attempt to extort from time a premature presence" (Calderwood 59). Even the king notices that Macbeth is so fast that even the "swiftest wing" is too slow to reach him. And if he is moving faster than the "swiftest" thing there is (the speed of light?), then he can be going backward in time, to claim the title of the king he already knows he has. (Despite Baudrillard's claim that "[n]o human language can withstand the speed of light" [*Illusion* 2], here it seems that language is faster than the speed of light, that language

defines the speed of light.) As Leon Harold Craig says, “*Macbeth* is not only the shortest of Shakespeare’s tragedies, it is generally acknowledged to be the most fast-paced. And haste suggests that time is of the essence” (52).

Macbeth is always one step ahead of the king, not because he is physically capable of superhuman speed (there is nothing superluminal going on), but because he disregards the king’s laws, the royal power of the performative, which is supposed to be the first thing to make things happen, the first cause. Instead, Macbeth treats the king’s laws as arbitrary “rules,” and proposes a new game.⁷⁵ While the law cannot be challenged, a rule can: as Marjorie Garber says, “the play is itself continually, even obsessively, concerned with taboo, with things that should not be heard and things that should not be seen, boundaries that should not be crossed—and are” (76); laws are converted into rules. Maynard Mack observes that Macbeth “no longer makes distinctions between reality and illusion, acting and being, true kings and false” (198). However, it would be difficult to defend the notion of a “false king”; as David Scott Kastan asks in *Shakespeare After Theory*, “What king is then not a usurper, or at least a usurper’s heir?” (171). Kastan also talks about “[t]he difficulty of maintaining the distinction between a ‘lawful’ king and a ‘usurping’ tyrant” (175), since, both historically and semiotically, whoever takes the throne first is the king.⁷⁶ And the precedence of the king is reified in a law.

When he hurries ahead of the king to get ready to meet him (“gone before to bid us welcome” [Duncan, I. iv. 57]), Macbeth is in fact metaphorically challenging the king’s power to be the first, the fastest, the carrier of agency.⁷⁷ In this sense, by leaving the king behind, Macbeth makes it impossible to “welcome” the king: to be welcome, the king must be the first agent, the causing power, not a secondary follower with a plodding-along-right-behind-you power. To

precede the king means to make him unwelcome. As Calvino will tell us later, in “A King Listens,” “[k]ings do not have watches: it is assumed that they are the ones who govern the flow of time” (*Jaguar* 36). Or, we can say, kings are never late: whenever they arrive is the right time. But Macbeth upsets the causality chain by taking the statement “The king is first because he is a king” and turning it into “The king is a king because he is the first”; after which it is easy to say that whoever is the first will be the king. And Macbeth hurries home . . .

The king even loses Macbeth from sight in this semiotic race with royal stakes:

Where's the thane of Cawdor?
We coursed him at the heels, and had a purpose
To be his purveyor: but he rides well;
And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp him
To his home before us (I. vi. 19-23)

The last two lines could be interpreted to mean either that Macbeth arrives home first, or that he is more welcome there than the king. And just as the king is always behind (and less welcome), the royal words are no longer royal because they are always late, and therefore constantly faced with a *fait accompli*, forced to remain words rather than become events, to tell the truth of what has happened rather than make it happen. The original purpose of these words is distorted: their being merely proof of what Macbeth already knows undermines their value of royal performatives, since the king's orders are not supposed to be true or false, but to make things happen, to make things, not words, true. The performative angle allows us to see that the power of the witches is not in predicting things but in causing things; it is not the witches' power that's dangerous here, but the witches' taking over the king's power. When Macbeth writes in his letter, “They [the witches] met me in the day of success; and I have learn'd by the perfect'st report, they have more in them than mortal knowledge” (I. v. 1-3), we can suspect that the

“perfect’st report” which confirms the truth of the witches’ words is the message from the king, the royal testimony that the title of Cawdor is already his. Even then, the king’s words are merely testimony, and a testimony against themselves, since proving the truthfulness of the witches’ words is proving their primacy too in relation to the king’s words.

But this is a game Macbeth is better at. His words and deeds, unlike Duncan’s, are always early and precede even Macbeth himself: we hear the story of how Macbeth fought before we see Macbeth himself (I. ii. 27-31). Macbeth seems to seek new and faster ways to get where he is going:

**I’ll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach:
So, humbly take my leave. (I. iv. 45-47)**

He leaves the king behind to announce his arrival, to be the messenger of the good news to his wife, but he has already sent his wife a letter (telling her about the witches), and the letter precedes the arrival of another messenger whose task it is to announce the arrival of Macbeth, who was to be the messenger in the first place. So, even though Macbeth cannot arrive right away, he finds various ways to send words and messages to his wife in advance, to delegate language, to release language from its current carrier and transfer it to another “messenger” in order to make it faster.⁷⁸ In this way, Macbeth again implicitly rejects the game of royal power, which is supposed to reside within the physical person of the king himself, regardless of what the king does and how fast his messages arrive. But for Macbeth, speed is everything; speed determines the source of the message (the first to arrive is the true authority), the fact of the message’s arrival points to its origin, the effect determines the cause. The person whose words are the first to get there is the person who is the legitimate source of the words; whoever is the

first to make things happen is the legitimate king. Accordingly, Macbeth is striving to achieve the ultimate simultaneity of thought and action, the ultimate performative:

from this moment
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand (IV. i. 144-148)

“‘Freedom’ is therefore,” to quote i ek again, “the impossible point of pure ‘performativity’ where intention coincides immediately with its fulfilment: to have it, I just have to desire it” (*They* 264). In this case, it is freedom from having to acknowledge the king’s law. The king’s very power, the performative power, is his weak point, since whoever has that power will be the king.⁷⁹ This is how Macbeth truly betrays the king: not by stabbing him, but, before that, by taking away from him his power to be the first cause. After recognizing that the performative is the only true royal power (for example, as opposed to the physical person of the king: whether he, as a person, is a legitimate king or not), Macbeth turns the self-fulfilling prophecy into a treacherous semiotic weapon which melts the laws down into game rules and changes the game by changing the rules. Macbeth can no longer distinguish the essential from the artificial, that which has happened (the first two titles he is greeted by) from that which has not (the title of the king), the past from the future. This is a blurring of differences (and therefore of meaning) which we also see in the semiotic behavior of the number three in *Macbeth*: the third, which, in the classical case, is supposed to be distinguished from the others in its essence, is here embodied in Macbeth’s role as a host, a role which is not capable of essence. The host is a performative function which obeys certain game rules, and by suggesting that these are simulated rules rather than essential laws, that the host is a function of form, not content, Macbeth betrays his loyalty as a host to the king and denies the king his welcome, refusing to welcome the king’s power to

cause events. Instead, Macbeth claims this performative power for himself, proving that it is semiotically transferrable and that all the reality created by it is simulation.

NOTES

1. Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1972. For more on the witches (dramatic role, critical theories, literary sources, historical context), see Arthur Melville Clark, *Murder Under Trust or The Topical Macbeth and Other Jacobean Matters*, pp. 25-29; Cumberland Clark, *A Study of Macbeth*, "The Supernatural in *Macbeth*," pp. 111-39; Henry Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth*, pp. 60-130 (and pp. 292-303 on sorcery in *Macbeth*); Walter Clyde Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, "The Demonic Metaphysics of *Macbeth*," pp. 53-93; Willard Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier: The World of His Final Tragedies*, pp. 80-114; Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, pp. 130-41; K. Tetzeli von Rosador, "'Supernatural Soliciting': Temptation and Imagination in *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth*"; Leon Harold Craig, *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear*, pp. 100-104 (and pp. 64-76 on the free will/determinism paradox); Peter Stallybrass, "*Macbeth* and Witchcraft"; H. R. Coursen, *Macbeth: A Guide to the Play*, "The Weird Sisters," pp. 91-100 (survey of various theories); Faith Nostbakken, *Understanding Macbeth: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*, "Witchcraft Beliefs," pp. 86-111; Arthur F. Kinney, *Lies Like Truth: Shakespeare, Macbeth, and the Cultural Moment*, "Lexias of Witchcraft," pp. 242-58 (historical context); William C. Carroll, ed., *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*, pp. 300-43 (historical sources on witchcraft and prophecy).
2. Cf. Peter Stallybrass: "For students of *Macbeth*, witchcraft has always presented a problem. At the one extreme, we have scholars like T. A. Spalding and W. C. Curry who have unearthed some of the historical *minutiae* of Medieval and Renaissance concepts of witchcraft; at the other extreme, we have critics who accept the play's witchcraft only as a form of psychological symbolism" (104).
3. And Willard Farnham: "Nothing is clearer than that Shakespeare writes of Macbeth as of a man who has free will so far, at least, as the choice of good or evil is concerned" (81). A less extreme view is voiced by J. Middleton Murry: "Have they [the witches] power over Macbeth or have they not? The question will not be answered by Shakespeare" (22).
4. "A few critics attempt to suggest what the Weird Sisters *are*, as if they were independent of their subordination to a dramatic purpose" (Coursen 92).
5. Cf also Curry: "They [the witches] are desiccated, hag-like creatures with choppy fingers, skinny lips, and beards, who dwell preferably in the murk of desert places and rejoice in upheavals of nature" (53).

6. Terry Eagleton, for example, argues that the “truth” of the witches is different in kind from the “truth” operative for the rest of the characters: “The witches signify a realm of non-meaning and poetic play . . . which has its own kind of truth” (2). However, implied in our argument is a notion of truth as something which is by definition shared, something which answers to structural criteria and is therefore communicable: in fact, something which exists only when it is communicated. Nobody “has” truth, because truth is a relationship generated in the structural encounters between people.

7. “What temporal image of the world do we derive from *Macbeth*? It is, to use the word the play forces on us, equivocal. The play, uniquely concerned with prophecy, begins with a question about the future: ‘When shall we three meet again?’ The speaker adds, without much apparent sense: ‘In thunder, lightning, or in rain?’ But these are three conditions which flourish, so to say, in the same hedgerow; they do not differ so completely as to be presentable as mutually exclusive alternatives” (Kermode 83).

8. This is obviously already an interpretation, since not all of the witches’ prophecies necessarily come true. What I mean to say (not to disparage the argument that follows but just to keep it on its toes) is that we do not objectively *know* whether the witches’ prophecies come true. How do we know that they refer exactly to those events which happen and not others? We can easily say that Macduff killed Macbeth and therefore the prophecy did *not* come true, because in some sense Macduff was indeed born of a woman. Whether he was born or not depends on what we mean by “born,” and this is no doubt a strategy we can apply to any one of the prophecies (although Macbeth’s becoming a king is a little less ambiguous, as names and titles are different from descriptions). Still, that the prophecies actually come true is a matter of assumption and this assumption will be (consciously) made here.

9. Frank Kermode also draws a parallel between the witches and the oracle, saying that the witches’ speech “is also a parody of prophetic equivocation, a device as ancient as the Delphic oracle. All plots have something in common with prophecy, for they must appear to educe from the prime matter of the situation the forms of a future” (83).

10. Or even the belief which apparently exists among actors that *Macbeth*, the play, is cursed; according to Marjorie Garber, the ritual the actors use to protect themselves from the curse also involves the number three: “Those who . . . break these unspoken rules [about not mentioning the name of the play], and quote from the ‘Scottish play’ behind the scenes, are obliged to perform a time-honored ritual to remove the ‘curse.’ The offender must go out of the dressing room, turn around three times, spit, knock on the door three times, and beg to be admitted” (74).

11. Cf. the account of the murder Jocasta gives us in *Oedipus Rex*:
the king . . . was killed by foreign highway robbers
at a place where *three* roads meet—so goes the story;
and for the son—before *three* days were out
after his birth King Laius pierced his ankles. (41) [italics mine]

12. In the *Physics*, Book I, Aristotle also recognizes the need to come up with a Möbius “third” which “underlies” the binaries of the universe: “[We must] posit some third thing which underlies, as do those who say that the universe is one single nature, such as water or fire or something between the two. . . . [T]he underlying thing [is] different from any of [the oppositions]” (14); “It is clear that there must be something to underlie the opposites, and that the opposites must be two in number” (18). We can consider this in terms of the Möbius structure, where the two sides are connected by a third thing which is itself not a “side”; the third thing is the two sides being one: “Hence from one angle we must say that the principles are two, and from another that they are three; and from one angle they are the opposites . . . but from another angle not, for opposites cannot be acted upon by one another. This difficulty too is resolved by the fact that the underlying thing is something else, and that other thing is not an opposite” (17). The “third” thing has an ambiguous status: “The underlying thing, however, though one in number, is two in form” (17), a description which fits exactly the Möbius strip. Aristotle admits that it is not easy to choose between two and three: “That the elements, then, are neither one in number, nor more than two or three, is plain; but whether they are two or three is, as I have said, a very difficult question” (15). Ultimately, he decides in favor of “three” as the number of basic principles in the structure of the universe: “The theory originally was that the only principles were the opposites; then that there had to be something else to underlie them, making the principles three. . . . Whether the form of the underlying thing has the better claim to be called the reality, is still obscure; but that the principles are three, and how, and what the manner of them is, is clear” (18).

13. If this were indeed the question asked here, we would agree with Frederick Turner’s interpretation: “Their [the witches’] real meaning, like the real meaning of Macbeth’s life, is quite different from their outward seeming” (141).

14. The word “fantastical” is echoed later by Macbeth:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man, that function
Is smother’d in surmise; and nothing is
But what is not. (I. iii. 139-142)

Just as in Banquo’s question the terms of the question are redundant (are you fantastical, or are you fantastical?), here Macbeth describes the murder in the same way, speaking of a collapsible opposition between “what is” and “what is not.” Neither appearance nor truth survives as a distinct category, shaking the “single state of man” as a distinct category too.

15. In “Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes,” Carlo Ginzburg talks about signification in relation to “[t]he ability to tell an unhealthy horse from the state of its hooves, a storm coming up from a shift in the wind” (100).

16. Taken to the domain of literature, the same principle holds: if taken out of context, a work can make a statement more forcefully and fully than if taken just as another example of the normative whole. The difference between imitation and original can be expressed in terms of figure and ground. Every successive imitation is part of the environment (ground), against which

an original work would stand out as a figure. Cf. also Baudrillard: “How fine indifference was in a world that was not indifferent—in a different, convulsive, contradictory world, a world with issues and passions” (*Perfect* 102).

17. Here we obviously disagree with Calderwood’s assessment that “[t]he Witches’ prophecies constitute a signifier, Macbeth’s response the signified” (116).

18. The graphical paradoxes of the figure/ground type seem to work with only two, not three, elements. However, they are far from being simple binary structures; a breakdown into a series of three can help us understand their ambiguity, which is exactly the function of the number three in this analysis: to help us visualize a paradox whose existence is clearly impossible.

19. In a very simplified sense, “same” needs at least two items, while “different” needs at least three, two of which form the background against which the third is “different”; a definition of the “same” (the two) would give us the opportunity to establish a “different” (the third).

20. This analysis would suggest that all structures of meaning are tertiary and that, if the third element, the three-dimensionality of this structure is simulated, then meaning itself is simulated.

21. The Möbius strip is one of those unique images that can illustrate for us the workings of simulation (which we wouldn’t normally notice); others include Escher’s drawings and the optical illusion drawings used in psychology classes, which require what Brown, in *Observation and Objectivity*, calls a “gestalt shift” (86). The Möbius strip breaks down the structure of simulation into a visual, simplified analogy (albeit one requiring an impossible act of the imagination, since the imagination always fails to grasp simultaneously the two possible interpretations of what it sees; it can grasp them only with a time lapse from one to the other, always privileging one of the two, always giving into the simulation, into the necessity of seeing something definite and meaningful to the exclusion of the rest).

22. Recall Macbeth’s dilemma between chance and deliberate action: “If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir” (I. iii. 143–44). The witches, with their witch theme of threefold repetitions, enchant Macbeth with the suggestion of freedom, of the ability to make decisions rather than await chance happenings, with the tertiary simulations of a cosmic plan, of meaning rather than the binary dice of chance.

23. Or which twin would be the one aging faster if they’re both in motion relative to each other in Einstein’s classic time paradox.

24. It is usually the last/youngest one which is different from the other two, which are always the *previous* two; as the popular joke goes, of course you find what you’re looking for in the last place you look; otherwise you would have continued looking.

25. The recurrence of “three sons” in various Grimm fairy tales (pages 7, 23, 181, 201) and occasionally “three golden hairs” (313), “three kingdoms” (185), or three other items is rivaled only by the number of fairy tale titles which contain the number three: “The Three Spinning

Fairies" (18), "The Three Children of Fortune" (23), "The Giant with the Three Golden Hairs" (313), etc. In some cases we have four, as in "The Four Accomplished Brothers," but it is still *one* of the four we are interested in: the one who stands out as "[t]he youngest brother" (308). The third is simply the first that can be the last.

26. We should note that they are different from Cinderella only in their essence, while in appearance they are said to be beautiful, just like her. Again, the difference creates an identity, and the different, the third, the simulated one is also the simulation of essence.

27. Again, three is simply the smallest number that allows us to do that; it could be more than three, as in "Sleeping Beauty," where many have tried to awaken her before the prince succeeds. Or, as Eco says, "[the] shift to Thirdness is already a shift to the universal" (*Kant* 153).

28. The confusion and lack of differentiation in the event of equal odds is hinted at again in the words of Lady Macbeth: "[the night is] [a]lmost at odds with morning, which is which" (III. iv. 127).

29. Cf. also the St. Crispin's Day speech in *Henry V*: "The fewer men, the greater share of honour" (IV. iii. 22); "O, do not wish one [man] more!" (IV. iii. 33); "We few, we happy few" (IV. iii. 60).

30. Cavell traces this example further back in time: "Somewhere Augustine cautions: 'Do not despair, for one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume, for one of the thieves was damned'" (150).

31. Of course, in a Tom Stoppard universe, a coin can be flipped and come up "heads" eighty-five times in a row (or even a hundred), purely by chance, so that "[a] weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least in the law of probability" (12).

32. Walker points out that "Ross is given no message from Duncan that would justify the promise of a greater honour" (15); the witches are not either, which only strengthens our case that there does not have to be anything supernatural in the knowledge of the message, since both the witches and Ross possess that knowledge without explicitly receiving it from Duncan. However, Walker interprets this to mean that "Ross has become an oracle, repeating the greatest promise of the Witches" (15), without problematizing the fact that oracles generally do not repeat but engender, and therefore Ross (and, by extension, the king) lacks any oracular power. Instead, we interpret the parallel between the witches and Ross as evidence that this particular act of the witches does not call on supernatural powers.

33. Colin N. Manlove also counts the second greeting as supernatural: "*Two* truths: only the second required any supernatural knowledge, since Macbeth was already Thane of Glamis" (133).

34. "The equivocating witches," as Frank Kermode says, "conflate past, present, and future; Glamis, Cawdor, Scotland" (85). Manlove also suggests that the second greeting gives

legitimacy to the third: "He [Macbeth] cannot understand how he can be Thane of Cawdor since he believes that the present incumbent is both alive and still loyal to the king; we of course know that Cawdor is a condemned traitor. When Macbeth finds out that he is indeed that thane, he believes that the witches speak true, and more fully credits their prophecy regarding his eventual kingship" (133). Susanne L. Wofford makes a similar point: "The witches present to Macbeth a synecdoche of time: he sees the fragment and guesses wrongly about the whole to which it should point" (6).

35. Even though Manlove regards the second prophecy as prophecy, he notes that the connection between the second and the third exists only in Macbeth's mind: "The imperial theme is swelling only to Macbeth: in cold fact it is simply another item, disconnected from the others; to put it in terms of a pattern is to mask personal choice as necessity" (133).

36. In *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, Frederick Turner says that "[t]he Witches deal with the future; the future is the business of the imagination" (133). However, since not all of their "prophecies" have to do with the future, and since Macbeth can be said to "re-imagine" the present rather than wait around for the future, it is fair to say that the present is also "the business of the imagination," and that both the witches and Macbeth can manipulate the present by redefining their own roles in it, rather than wait for the future to do the job.

37. There is some evidence that Banquo might take this analogy even further and follow the logic of Macbeth to the point of repeating Macbeth's crime; in these lines, for example, Banquo apparently addresses Macbeth but obliquely refers to the witches too:

Let your highness
Command upon me; to the *which* my duties
Are with a most indissoluble tie
For ever knit" (III. i. 15-18) [italics mine]

We can interpret this to mean that Banquo is already in bondage "to the witch," and there is certainly no evidence that Banquo is immune to the blind ambition Macbeth falls victim to, "immune" being a statement about the future meaning that he *will not* be affected (and, as we shall see later, negative statements about the future cannot be proven). So, there is some indication that Banquo will claim what the witches promised him, while there is no indication that he will not.

Critics are somewhat divided on this issue. Colin Manlove maintains that Banquo is innocent in principle: "Nor can the source of Macbeth's impulse readily be traced to the supernatural solicitation of the witches. They promise as much glory to Banquo's descendants as to Macbeth, and Banquo is able to put all wicked thoughts behind him" (132). Harry Berger, however, points out that Banquo 1) thinks about the witches too (95); 2) "directs attention away from himself and toward [Macbeth]" (96), so that people won't notice (1); and 3) remains only passively good, failing to demonstrate his innocence and good character in action, even though he has the opportunity to do so: "Could Banquo have kept Duncan from being killed? It was in his power to do so. Instead his words work to soften Duncan's defenses . . . [and] try to domesticate the images of danger" (96-97).

38. Cf. Herodotus, who tells us that no man can be called happy until we can see the end of his life, his life in its entirety: "Now if a man thus favoured dies as he has lived, he will be just the one you're looking for: the only sort of person who deserves to be called happy. But mark this: until he is dead, keep the word 'happy' in reserve" (53). Prophecy, however, is a mechanism of circumventing this temporal imperative of waiting until one's death: "oracles . . . were understood to reveal to a human individual, while still alive, the secret meaning of his or her Fate, which otherwise would be available to human perception only after death" (Manetti 18).

39. This may be recognized as a reiteration of something very old: "Plato and Socrates established the *ethico-cognitive parallelism*, the theory that ethical insight is a form of cognition" (Reichenbach 52). In this case, however, what ethics and cognition share is fallibility, rather than perfection of any kind. In this sense, we can call it "negative parallelism." So while "[i]n Kant's system, the ethico-cognitive parallelism has reached its climax through its foundation on a synthetic a priori" (Reichenbach 59), our argument still does not invite a synthetic a priori, which would be a positive outcome of the parallelism; the most we can expect is a negative outcome, and that would be a parallel negativity of a lack of proof of the future.

40. That is why it's "innocent until proven guilty": the innocent part cannot be proven, or, more precisely, it can be proven only temporarily, for a specific case but not in general.

41. And Baudrillard: "[Good and Evil] are not on the same plane, and it is an illusion to oppose them. The real problem . . . is precisely the strangeness, the imperviousness of Good and Evil . . . to each other, which means there is no reconciling, no superceding them, and thus no ethical solution to the problem of their opposition" (*Perfect* 122).

42. Notes from a lecture at the Society for Empirical Philosophy (SEP) conference, University of Montreal, May 11-14 2001.

43. Consider Cavell's example in this context: "It is not that Goneril and Regan have taken the words out of her mouth, but that here she cannot say them, because for her they are true ('Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty . . .'). She is not disgusted by her sisters' flattery . . . but heart-broken at hearing the words she wishes she were in a position to say" (293). This passage unwittingly illustrates Baudrillard's problem: that the real has no way of dealing with simulation except as something real; and, what is more important to us, the opposite: that we cannot find an expression for the real except the same expression that is used to simulate the real. "In other words," says Butler, commenting on Baudrillard, "everything can only be conceived of as though it were simulated, even if it is not" (43). Or, as Malcolm says in *Macbeth*, "Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace, / Yet grace must still look so" (IV. iii. 23-24). The simulated looks exactly like the real, but the real sometimes also looks like the real, therefore being susceptible to a suspicion of simulation. Baudrillard's conclusion is that simulation threatens reality in a radical way: "On the horizon of simulation, not only has the world disappeared but the very question of its existence can no longer be posed" (*Perfect* 5). However, the power of simulation is that the real, *as real*, without irony or second-guessing, has to use the same signs simulation does to second-guess the real; and vice versa: the signs as ironic cannot

exist unless they also exist as real. Simulation would not exist if the real did not exist equally to lend it its signs.

44. John Searle also gives us examples of the performative: "In general they [people] have to think that's what it is. So, for example, in order to get married or buy property you and other people have to think that that is what you are doing. Now this feature is crucial to social phenomena. But there is nothing like it in the biological and physical sciences. . . . The defining principle of such social phenomena set [sic] no physical limits whatever on what can count as the physical realisation of them. . . . [T]hinking that something is money is essential to its being money" (Searle 78-79). Consciousness is another thing which exists only if we are aware of it: "The distinction between reality and appearance cannot apply to the very existence of consciousness. For if it seems to me that I'm conscious, I *am* conscious" (Searle 99). In the same way, "a king is a king because his subjects treat him like one, and not the reverse" (i ek, *They* 254). To paraphrase Searle, in order to be a king one must think that that is what one is, so that being a king is to a large degree defined by the awareness of being a king. What Macbeth understands is that being a king can be realized through anybody's physical person, but when he himself becomes a king he begins to resent this knowledge and would prefer the royal power to reside in his own person rather than in his position.

45. In "The Discourse of History," Roland Barthes suggests that the performative is a form of denial of signification as such: "the (illusory) merging of referent and signified defines, as we know, *sui-referential* discourses (such as performative discourse)" (*Rustle* 139).

46. It seems possible to speak of "performative actions" as well as performative words. These would be actions whose purpose does not lie beyond themselves; they are self-sufficient and do not lead to any results beyond the possibility of their own completion. Consider this example from the film *The Dish*: to the question "What is there that we don't know about the moon, so that we have to go there?" the answer we get is, "There is one thing we don't know: whether we can go there or not." The self-contained action does not aim at anything beyond itself; it is its own intention and result, process and goal, cause and effect, beginning and end. Here we can cite McElroy's interpretation of Macbeth's actions: "He dares to kill his king not so much to become king himself as to become the man who dared to do it" (220). By arguing about who is the king, Macbeth becomes the king, and his best argument for being a king is becoming one; the tautology of this is the tautology of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Cf. also this statement by Charles Levin in *Jean Baudrillard: A Study in Cultural Metaphysics*: "There is no signifier or signified [in the giving of a gift] in the proper sense of those terms, since the meaning of the gift *is* the social action, its context in the relationship it creates. The gift is not a sign because it cannot be separated from its context, and transferred to any other: it simply embodies its own meaning" (85). Macbeth also seems to use this philosophy, except that he takes the gift (of kingship) rather than giving it.

47. "It is tempting to think that whenever A causes B there must be two discrete events, one identified as the cause, the other identified as the effect" (Searle 20). This, however, is not true in the case of performative utterances, where the cause and the effect coincide.

48. Even, possibly, good and bad:

Macbeth [*aside*]: "This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good" (I. iii. 130-131).

Unlike past actions, future actions are neither good nor bad (they simply *are* not); they are actions which create their own criteria of truth (as well as their own "fit" time and place), and there is nothing to prevent them from creating their own moral criteria too.

49. Leon Harold Craig would disagree: "Macbeth himself speaks of Duncan's being 'here in double trust,' but then goes on to cite, not two, but *four* troubling considerations 'against the deed' he is contemplating" (104). Craig does not say what the four are, but it is reasonable to assume that he has in mind Macbeth's reference to Duncan's personality as an argument against his murder: "this Duncan / Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been / So clear in his great office, that his virtues / Will plead like angels" (I. vii. 16-19). However, this "fourth" item does not refer to the relationship between Duncan and Macbeth (and "trust" implies a relationship), but only to Duncan; the bonds between the two are still only three. Without relationship/trust as a consideration, we can in fact count *five* arguments against the murder in Macbeth's speech, the fifth being Macbeth's lament that he lacks a motive or that his motive is not legitimate: "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition" (I. vii. 25-27). Even if we grant all five reasons Macbeth gives, we note that only the first three have to do with the *structural* position of Macbeth versus Duncan and their respective roles in the political game, whereas the last two refer to specific *content*: the "content" of Duncan's character and the "content" of Macbeth's ambition. In order to be challenged at all, kingship must be based on the structural notion that a different physical person can occupy the same symbolic throne. In this sense, only the structural fault lines between Duncan and Macbeth are relevant to the argument.

50. Cf. Davidson's example: "suppose, contrary to the legend, that Oedipus, for some dark oedipal reason, was hurrying along the road intent on killing his father, and, finding a surly old man blocking his way, killed him so he could (as he thought) get on with the main job. Then not only did Oedipus want to kill his father, and actually kill him, but his desire caused him to kill his father. Yet we could not say that in killing the old man he intentionally killed his father, nor that his reason in killing the old man was to kill his father" (232).

51. The witches also act as hosts to Macbeth, or at least they are chided by Hecate that they have not been prepared to "show the glory of [their] art" (III. v. 9) in welcoming Macbeth. And, in another sense, Macbeth is also a host to the witches (rather than the king), as we can infer from the fact that he takes their words to heart instead of his, as well as from the ambiguous words of the first witch: "That this great king may kindly say / Our duties did his welcome pay" (IV. i. 131-132). "We repaid him for his welcome" (he was our host) as well as "We exchanged duties; we welcomed his" (we were his hosts). In connection with the theme of the host, see also Arthur Melville Clark on Macbeth's "murder under trust," pp. 46-49.

52. Macduff:

Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's two sons,
Are stoln away and fled; which puts upon them

Suspicion of the deed (II. iv. 25-27)

53. It is not sufficient that the host be there: Macbeth is physically present at his house and at his feast, but that does not make him a host any more than his ownership of his castle does (his ownership holds whether or not he has any guests and is insufficient for his role of a host).

54. Also: “the game, not being a system of interdictions, does not have lines one can cross. One does not ‘transgress’ a rule, one fails to observe it” (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 140).

55. Cavell also asks: “When is not doing a thing well not really doing the thing?” (29). In the context of this chapter, we can cite the complicated role of Macbeth as a host in response to this question. (Cf. also Aristotle: “We sometimes say of a man who can walk or speak, but who cannot do so as well as he intended, that he *cannot* walk or speak” [*Metaphysics* 23].)

Aristotle defines as “good” something which fulfills its function: “the goodness or excellence lies in [the] function” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 9); “What a thing is, and what it is for, are one and the same” (*Physics*, Book II 38); “Things are said to be ‘perfect’ which have attained their end, this being good; for things are perfect when they have attained their end” (*Metaphysics* 31). In this way, he establishes an implicit parallel between whether something works or not (exists or not), and whether it is good or bad (assigning value to structural rather than moral categories). Nietzsche also raises this question in *The Gay Science* (and answers it very much as Aristotle does): “Is it virtuous when a cell transforms itself into a function of a stronger cell? It has no alternative. And is it evil when the stronger cell assimilates the weaker? It also has no alternative; it follows necessity” (175-76). Morality is a product of evolution, just as the notion of choice is a product of necessity. The fact that something is efficient makes it good, the fact that something survives makes it worthy of survival. Macbeth’s role as a host is based on the same tautology: he is a host if and only if he is a good host, and being a good host is the exact equivalent of being a host; being good equals being (or, in the Nietzschean version, being equals being good).

56. Since ethics and other properly philosophical disciplines fall outside the scope of this paper, we must stress that we are merely scratching the surface here (but since we are standing on this surface, it bears mention); consider the following complication which Cavell proposes: “In the sense in which ‘playing chess’ has rules, ‘obeying rules’ has none” (50).

57. As Terry Pratchett tells us, “a king is reigning even when he’s doing something else or asleep, even” (*Mort* 41). The king is not a king because he says kingly (true) things, but the things he says are kingly because it is he who says them. Consider Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” where whatever the king says, goes, however obviously wrong it may be. The royal power resides in the specific position the king occupies, whether or not he is making the right decisions, or making decisions at all (and anybody in this position would have the same power). But, like the king in *Macbeth*, Anderson’s emperor is also fooled: the simulation is not his, but was initiated by “two swindlers” who come to town, claiming to be able to weave a cloth with “the strange quality of being invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office or unforgivably stupid” (77). The emperor plays by their rules, which are clearly arbitrary

and yet he never challenges them with his own, equally arbitrary, rules: "his heart beat strangely when he remembered that those who were stupid or unfit for their office would not be able to see the material" (78). He thinks that he should abide by the *content* of the swindler's words, that words are true because they are true, in themselves, and not because they are uttered from a position which structurally guarantees their truth; this makes it possible for the emperor to think that the swindlers can be right and he can be wrong. But the words of the swindlers have no content whatsoever: "[the people] saw nothing, for there was nothing to be seen" (80).

While, in the tale, all the people are afraid of losing their jobs (by failing to see the invisible cloth), their fear is misdirected, because only the emperor has the power to punish them; in other words, the power to execute the threat (take away their jobs) belongs to the emperor, while the power to articulate the threat ("if you don't see the cloth, you will lose your job") belongs to the swindlers. The emperor is unsure which side of the standoff he is on: in effect, the swindlers are saying to the people, "If you don't play by our rules, rather than the emperor's rules, the emperor will punish you" (it would be like a robber taking a hostage and saying "If you don't do as I tell you, the police will kill my hostage," a proposition obviously short on logic). In a sense, the emperor is on the side of the enemy and against himself, saying (or at least acquiescing to) something like, "if you don't obey the swindlers, rather than me, I will have to punish you; i.e., if you play by my rules, I will punish you." He becomes alienated from his own power and is eventually led to question his position: "What! . . . I can't see a thing! . . . Am I unfit to be emperor?" (79). And the answer is yes, he is, but not because he can't see the cloth: the emperor is unfit for his office because he cannot change the rules which say that whoever fails to see the cloth is unfit for his office. Like the witches, the swindlers take over the emperor's power to simulate: "The emperor did as he was told" (80).

58. Similarly, any statement at all can be true under the right circumstances: like the arrow, it would simply mean something *else* (e.g. if I say "the cat is black" to describe a white cat, this statement can be true if such a context comes about in which saying "black" always refers to the color white). The self-fulfilling prophecy carries this possibility of performative truth much further; it is an utterance that carries its own conditions of truth, its own context within itself (just as a portable oxygen bottle is an environment that someone can carry with him; or just as self-extracting files carry in themselves the information about how to un-compress themselves, and that is possible because compression is an encoding and decompression is a decoding which uses the same code). In other words, under no conditions can the self-fulfilling prophecy fail to be true (if it says "black" but refers to white, it will also carry within itself the context (the code) in which it would be possible to say "black" and mean "white"). The criteria according to which the message is true are also part of the message. Just as a self-extracting file can be sent from one place to another without needing a specific program to decode it at its destination (or, more precisely, the file carries this program with it), the self-fulfilling prophecy is a message sent from the past to the future which will arrive successfully (be meaningful) in the future without relying on the future to supply the right events for the prophecy to be true; it is already true before it leaves its starting point, because it carries within itself the conditions under which it will be true. In a similar way, the DNA code both tells something to somebody and creates the somebody to tell it to. (Similarly, in Fred Hoyle's science-fiction novel "*A*" for *Andromeda*, there is a message which includes information about how to build a machine which can decode the

message [43-44].)

This can be used for different ends; for example, manipulation would be another instance of the same mechanism, since it means communicating our view to others in such a way that they cannot possibly disagree with it. Manipulation is the ultimate communication; we communicate not only a message but also the criteria according to which this message is true; we appeal to the structural necessity of logic, which the others cannot reject since it's their logic (or, the logic of their rejection would have to be the same logic they reject). It is easy to associate simulation with manipulation (e.g., advertizing), but we might as well relate it back to the ancient art of rhetoric; the connection between all these is that they are based on structure rather than content: "Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever. This is the function of no other of the arts, each of which is able to instruct and persuade in its own special subject" (Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* 15). Rhetoric does not depend on content, only on the structure of the argument: as John Henry Freese says in his introduction to Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric*, "the practised rhetorician will be more successful than the expert in persuading his hearers on any subject whatever" (xviii). Same with advertizing: when we advertize something, we want people to accept a certain structure rather than trying to force specific content on them, because we want them to be free to choose what we want them to choose; we sell them this freedom as much as the product they use their freedom to buy. In fact, the only function of buying the product is to exercise the freedom which the advertizing is all about. In this sense, the TV commercials about cars do not advertize cars: what they advertize is the freedom to go anywhere we want, because, while we cannot all agree that we want a car, we can all agree that we want to be free (even if, to achieve that, we might have to buy something we don't want in itself; but if we are given this freedom, we can also grudgingly accept the car that comes with it). The content of that freedom (which is the car) is supplied later, and it could be virtually any content, just as any reality can be used to create simulation. Like simulation, freedom is defined by the absence of specific content (e.g., if it is specified that we are free to do A, but not not-A (the opposite of A), this means we are not free to do A either: we are forced to do it (for more on this, see Chapter Four, pp. 258-59).

59. For a 21st century example, consider the email address: you can never get the address of the recipient wrong, in the sense that the message cannot arrive if there is even the slightest error in the address. You can never actually send the message to the wrong address: it always arrives at the right address (or *a* right address), or doesn't arrive at all. This seems fairly trivial, but not if we think of it in broader terms. It's like being physically unable to address a person by the wrong name because the person doesn't hear anything you say unless it's the right thing. The same mechanism is in place for the king's power, since the king is physically unable to say anything untrue (whatever he says instantly becomes true). This means that if he is not playing by the rules, he is actually still playing by the rules, it's just that these are now the rules of a different game.

60. Consider the rule (whether historically true or not) that you can never turn your back on the king; you can, obviously, turn your back on the person who is the king, but you would not be turning your back on the king, because he would not be your king anymore, since, by turning your back you have made the suggestion that the king is your enemy (you have offended the

king). Turning your back on the king is dangerous, because, after you have turned your back, he has become your enemy, and it is dangerous to turn your back on your enemies. (If this sounds like an impossible temporal puzzle, that is correct.) In other words, the law does not *forbid* you to turn your back, but informs you that if you do, you'd be turning your back on an enemy, not on your king, since by your actions you have made your king your enemy. Macbeth, obviously, has turned his back on his king in a radical way, with the result that Duncan is no longer his king (which has the side effect that Duncan is no longer alive).

Cf. also an example cited by Žižek about “a joke Lacan often refers to: ‘My fiancée never misses an appointment with me, since the moment she misses it, she is no longer my fiancée.’—‘I never make a mistake in applying a rule, since what I do defines the very rule’” (*They* 173, note). In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster also returns to this paradox: to the statement that he never talks to strangers, one of the characters receives the following objection: “But once a man gives you his name, he’s no longer a stranger,” to which he in turn responds with, “Exactly. That’s why I never talk to strangers” (89), staking his claim to the absolute, self-generated truth of this statement, a truth independent of anything other than itself. The statement is not an intention to avoid strangers (in the *future*), but an observation of what has already happened (in the *past*), i.e., the other person is no longer a stranger. This is how the self-fulfilling prophecy functions too, and it shows us again why, while it is absolutely accurate in predicting the future, the self-fulfilling prophecy manages to avoid making any claims about the future at all.

61. Terry Eagleton doubts Macbeth’s desire to break down the definitions of society, saying that “Macbeth himself fears this troubling of exact definitions: to be authentically human is, in his view, to be creatively constrained, fixed and framed by certain precise bonds of hierarchical allegiance. Beyond these lies the dissolute darkness of the witches into which, by murdering Duncan, he will catapult himself at a stroke. To transgress these determining bonds, for Macbeth, is to become less human in trying to become more” (3). However, this does not explain why Macbeth would voluntarily plunge into the “darkness” beyond all definition and value (which all the other characters manage to avoid), unless that *is* what he wanted to do.

62. At the end of the play, Malcolm restores order by re-establishing as laws the rules of space and time:

this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
We will perform *in measure, time, and place*:
So, thanks to all at once and to each one. (V. viii. 71-74) [italics mine]

63. Also:

And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are. (III. ii. 33-34)

64. Recall Oedipus, who is convinced that he is no longer in control, that he is dealing with objective laws rather than subjective rules, which is how he puts the final touches on simulation at the moment when simulation becomes reality. Rosador says that “[i]llusion or appearance begins to occupy Macbeth’s mind. He is no longer capable of distinguishing it clearly from

reality" (47), and here we could substitute "simulation" for "illusion," since illusion will always be different from reality, whereas simulation will keep all the apparent constraints and limitations of reality. While illusion can be described by what Elliott calls "one's ability to distract one's attention from the evil in oneself" (22), giving one the freedom of absolute impunity, simulation is rather a process of creating evil (or good) by "one's ability to distract one's attention from the free will in oneself" and relinquishing impunity, a premise of artificial determinism which is constitutive of simulation.

In this connection, it is interesting that, while *Macbeth* is probably the play which challenges human values the most (as many critics point out, Macbeth has a dubious motive and his acts of "gratuitous brutality" [Kastan 164] are often arbitrary), or, we can say, it is the play with the least respect for metaphysics, it is, as Craig points out, "the only work in the canon in which the word 'metaphysical' occurs" (57), as if to canonize its lack of values into a value of its own.

65. Leon Harold Craig says that Macbeth "has neither taste nor talent for dissembling" (55). While it is true that Macbeth does not "pretend" in the classical sense of the word (he simulates, and this is different from pretending), it is not because, as Craig says, "his face is an open book" (55), but because his falsity fails to register in an environment in which true and false have been obliterated altogether; the things it would normally be false in reference to are missing.

66. Terry Eagleton also sheds light on this matter, saying that "the king is at once impersonal symbol of the social order, expressive of its corporate meanings, yet able in his arbitrary decrees to stand free of that order and dominate it from the outside. His word is 'creative': discourse, not least royal discourse, is material power, an active intervention into the world at least as real as a blow on the head. Yet this creativity is uneasily close to a kind of discursive imperialism, in which words determine reality rather than the other way round" (8-9). While this is a vivid description of the reality of the royal semiotic power, it seems unlikely that the king can dominate the order from the "outside." Not being able to step "outside" is precisely the price of his ability to make anything he says true: the moment he says it, he also creates an order in which his words are valid, a context in which they make sense. He cannot make a wrong move which would throw him out of the game: every move he makes is the right one and he will always find himself *inside* the game, albeit a new one, the new game he created by trying to leave the old one.

67. Terry Eagleton says that "a stability of signs . . . is an integral part of any social order: settled meanings, shared definitions and regularities of grammar both reflect, and help to constitute, a well-ordered political state" (1), and we can say the same for the destruction of this order: it is also based on signs.

68. It is interesting that, as Peter Stallybrass points out in "*Macbeth* and Witchcraft," historically there was a fear that sorcerers might "kill the king" (105). Stallybrass relates this to the play, saying that "both the witches and Macbeth threaten to bring the world back to its first chaos or, as Bolton puts it, to create 'a very hell upon earth,' the hell of a world without sovereignty" (110). However, when the witches and Macbeth challenge the king, they don't necessarily want chaos: they threaten the physical person of the king, but not the semiotic function of kingship,

which Macbeth wants not to destroy but to possess.

In fact, critics (who have been “constantly aflame with debate over the powers and status of kings [ever since 751]” [Mack 3]), largely seem to agree that the power of sovereignty *cannot* be destroyed. As Maynard Mack points out in *Killing the King*, “killing the king is *almost* inevitably to be attempted and yet is *almost* inevitably unperformable. The king can be killed, but the whole world, human, natural, and supernatural, reacts to offer a new king. Regicide is finally in some strange way impossible” (184). Mack explains this with the historical (and theological) notion of “king”: “there emerged in England a specific formulation of the idea of the king as a twinned entity called ‘the King’s Two Bodies’” (3). Faith Nostbakken explains how this theory “evolved from the Middle Ages [and] described the king as having two bodies: a body politic and a body natural. . . . This theory echoes still today in the expression ‘The king is dead; long live the king.’ . . . The chain is not broken; *the king never dies*; the social system is not destroyed” (34) [italics mine]. (For more on this, see Nostbakken, “King James’s View of Kingship,” pp. 45-51.) This is what makes it possible for Mack to say that “Duncan may be dead in his body natural but in his body politic he yet lives on in Malcolm” (141). Why Duncan doesn’t “live on in Macbeth,” however, is not clear, since Macbeth is obviously the next king, and if the political function of the king is supposed to be uninterrupted, it should not be able to skip a king, however evil he may be: “‘Named’ and legally enthroned, Macbeth is king and arguably truly owed the obedience of his countrymen” (Kastan 175).

69. It could be argued that, even if the content of the message is the same, it is true in one case (when Duncan or Ross says it) but not true in the other (when it comes from the witches). In *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time*, Frederick Turner makes a similar distinction between the knowledge of the future the witches have and the knowledge of the future God has: “The knowledge of the Witches is not a spiritual knowledge, but a temporal knowledge” (130). In other words, they know the same thing (the same future) that the divine power can see, but their knowledge is different, not moral or spiritual but mechanical, because they use different means to get to it (if we apply this to the Chinese room theory, the correct answer to a question in Chinese would be different depending on *how* the person got to it: whether by studying Chinese for five years or by mechanically following the instructions given to him). According to this view, the witches access the future in a way that is *morally* wrong, and that would probably hold true in any context other than that of simulation, where all that matters is whether one has the knowledge or not (or even, whether one behaves *as if* one had the knowledge).

70. It seems that there are limitations even to the witches’ power, such as when the first witch tells the others how she punished a sailor:

Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost. (I. iii. 25-26)

The word “cannot” suggests that the witches are still obeying some *laws* which lie beyond their power to convert into *rules*. As Arthur F. Kinney says, “the power of the three sisters [has] severe limits. . . . Throughout, the power of these strange creatures is strangely restricted” (258). Janet Adelman even suggests that the witches’ power diminishes over time: “There is a distinct weakening of their power after their first appearances: only in 4.1 do we hear that they themselves have masters (1. 63). The more Macbeth claims for them, the less their actual power

seems: even their power over the storm . . . is eventually taken from them. . . . The witches' display of thunder and lightning . . . [is] merely childish theatrics compared to what we have already heard: the serious disruptions of natural order—the storm that toppled the chimneys and made the earth shake (2. 3. 53-60), the unnatural darkness in day (2. 4. 5-10), the cannibalism of Duncan's horses (2. 4. 14-18)—are the horrifying but reassuringly familiar signs of God's displeasure, firmly under His—not their—control" (140-41). We can agree that there is indeed a sense in which Macbeth "learns" from the witches how to play the game, before he goes on to surpass them. But if the witches are weak, what is stronger than them is not God (after all, the witches can prompt Macbeth to do evil, while God cannot prompt him to do good), but Macbeth himself: while the anger of Nature at Duncan's murder manifests itself in the cannibalistic acts of the horses, the violence of the horses (if we can take violence as a measure of power at all) pales when compared to the violence of Macbeth.

71. In *Murder Under Trust*, Arthur Melville Clark offers a different theory, according to which Macbeth has already discussed with his wife the matter of killing Duncan before he meets the witches: "The whole passage ["Nor time nor place / Did then adhere . . ."] is taut between *then* and *now*, past tenses and present tenses. Lady Macbeth seems almost to cast in Macbeth's teeth the very words of his resolution when he 'broke the enterprise' to her, ere 'time and place' had 'adhered' for its consummation. But there is no such corresponding passage in the extant play. I cannot believe that Lady Macbeth's retrospection is an instance of a character referring back to something merely assumed to have been said or done off-stage. As to the appropriate place in the play for the dialogue in which Macbeth 'broke his enterprise' to his wife, it must have been before the present opening scene of the witches lying in wait for a man whose entertainment of a murderous ambition had already made him their potential victim" (9). This theory would suggest that Macbeth's letter is not in fact the first message regarding the kingship to reach Lady Macbeth.

72. See also Walker, who makes a reference to "the traitor's title that Macbeth bears" (40); "'What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.' A traitor's title!" (35). Duncan's words are always appropriately ambiguous on that subject:

No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom interest:—go pronounce his present death,
And with his former title ["traitor"?] greet Macbeth" (I. ii. 65-67)

"No more *that* thane of Cawdor shall deceive" implies that there are more than one thanes of Cawdor, and if *that* one cannot deceive anymore, then the other one still might. Duncan: "What he [Cawdor] hath lost noble Macbeth hath won" (I. ii. 69). And also: "Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not / Those in commission yet return'd?" (I. iv. 1-2). Here, again, Duncan could easily be speaking either of the old Cawdor or the new one, either of the traitor or of Macbeth: "Have you executed my orders to give the title of Cawdor to Macbeth? Have the messengers returned yet?" Furthermore, he is saying this with emphasis on the fact that the order will be executed when the message is delivered to Macbeth, that the words of the king "execute" things, accomplish, create, perform.

Critics have pointed out that, just as Macbeth takes over the traitor's title, Macduff takes over the role of Macbeth at the end: "In killing Macbeth, Macduff steps into his role. . . . [I]n

killing Macbeth he has killed not merely a tyrant but a properly appointed king” (Berger 73). David Scott Kastan also says that Macduff “is obviously a loyal version of the ambitious Macbeth. Macbeth kills both a rebel then a king, exactly as does Macduff, but, as Alan Sinfield has shrewdly noted, Macduff’s rebel and king are the same man. Macbeth’s acts, of course, are clearly differentiated: one is heroic defense of the nation and its king, the other a murderous attack upon them; but Macduff’s single act at once defends and attacks sovereignty. It is a liberation and a regicide” (175).

73. In this sense, we can resolve Craig’s dilemma: “one wonders whether these Three Weird and wayward Sisters are in fact the *cause* of anything” (53). If the first cause is the only cause, the words of the king lose their power by being superimposed on (and secondary to) the words of the witches, making the witches the real cause of the events that follow.

74. Cf. again the emperor from Andersen’s tale, who, instead of being the first, is the very last one to see the truth, after *everyone* else:

‘He has nothing on!’ shouted all the people at last.

The emperor shivered, for he was certain that they were right. (81)

Like Duncan, he is slow to get there.

75. “The game’s sole principle,” says Baudrillard, “is that *by choosing the rule one is delivered from the law*. . . . With the rule we are free of the Law” *Seduction* 133, 137). Susanne L. Wofford says that *Macbeth* is “questioning, sometimes, the authority of the monarch or of any transcendent truth. Shakespeare lived at a time when values and beliefs once considered absolute had suddenly come under intense political and religious questioning” (1); in a similar environment, the play offers “a liberation that will free Macbeth from these moral limits and perhaps also from his humanity itself. . . . [The play] articulates a tragic desire for freedom from social, moral, and political constraint” (7). However, Macbeth’s game goes even further in seeking to establish itself as a law. The ultimate purpose of the game is to be taken seriously; the simulation is complete only when it is law-like, indistinguishable from reality.

76. G. R. Elliott, in *Dramatic Providence in Macbeth*, suggests that there are criteria of kingship other than the throne, and therefore such a notion as a “false king” is possible; he posits that Macbeth “is temperamentally unfitted for sovereignty at its best. He is designed by God and nature to be a very excellent second in command . . . [but] he yearns for a status higher than he is fitted to have” (28-29). In other words, the “real” king is the person who can make the *right* decisions, not the person who has the power to make any decisions he wants (which would be a rival definition of kingship and the one we use here).

77. Harry Berger says that Duncan “feels himself to be in a contest, a race, with Macbeth. Macbeth has ‘gone before,’ Duncan is lagging behind, and his only means of overtaking is to ‘purvey’—that is, to impress on his subjects his superior power of royal generosity . . . to precede him as his servant, to provision the household with new honors” (90-91). Michael Long also comments that the introduction of Macbeth by the soldier defines him as a man of action: “This will be a play about a man who does, and about the momentous deed that he does. It will be a

play about doing, and about that spectacular, frightening spirit of ‘bloody execution’” (31). In contrast, the appearance or presence of Duncan does not seem to suggest action or urgency.

78. In “Lying Like Truth: Riddle, Representation, and Treason in Renaissance England,” Steven Mullaney says that, instead of Macbeth being in charge of his language, his language “masters him” and he is “not so much speaking as he is spoken by his own words” (69). We could object and say that the fact that Macbeth’s words precede him does not mean that he cannot control them but that his control of them is so perfect that he can send them ahead and still manipulate them from a distance, both literally and metaphorically: Macbeth’s words and thoughts are “fast” because they exist in the future, as Lady Macbeth says:

Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant. (I. v. 57-59)

However, there is also a sense in which Macbeth *wants* to be “spoken” by his words, because this way his semiotic function, embodied in his words, would not be limited to the speed of his own body; the semiotic role is just that, a role, a simulation, and it does not need the hardware of his physical self: “Macbeth goes beyond realizing that the king is also a man, or only a role. He concludes, in his hell-like vision, that ‘man’ is himself only a role” (Mack 198). If we define “role” as the structural position of man, his function regardless of his essence, then his essence (his agency manifested in the ability to “speak” himself) matters little. He would prefer to send messages rather than wait until he can deliver them personally; he doesn’t need his voice to be attached to his body. Just as the speed of his words is not slowed down by his body, his royal right to decide right and wrong is not “slowed down” by morality. Since he is structurally free to maneuver between moral systems, unencumbered by a moral “essence” (“In killing Duncan he actualized the lack in himself of all sense, all value” [Manlove 151]), he would have an advantage in any endeavor which is structural. That is why “it is the good characters who are shadowy, Macbeth substantial. . . . And where Macbeth becomes increasingly steady in his evil, his opponents becomes more unstable in their good” (Manlove 155). Since they compete in a structural, simulated environment, Macbeth’s opponents, who still think in terms of right and wrong, are naturally at a disadvantage; they don’t understand that their “good” actions may not necessarily translate into positive transformations of the system, or may no longer be “good” in a different system of meaning. That is why it is difficult for these characters to stop Macbeth, who operates on the structural level. When Macduff finally stops him, he does so by an act of violence which is morally ambiguous (see note 72); in a sense, Macduff has to step out of his own system of right and wrong in order to fight Macbeth on his own turf, because Macbeth no longer exists in the moral universe of Macduff, and to make any contact with him possible Macduff has to compromise his own moral position. Cf. Calvino’s story “Montezuma”: “To fight an enemy you must move in the same space as he does, exist in the same time. Whereas we watched each other from different dimensions, without quite touching” (*Numbers* 189).

79. Calvino also addresses the problem of the king (in his story “A King Listens”), envisioning a king who is tempted to step away from his throne but who realizes that his physical absence would open the throne to a possible usurper: “Go ahead then and try to prove you are the king, not he! A king is denoted by the fact that he is sitting on the throne, wearing the crown, holding

the scepter" (35). The position of Calvino's king is so symbolically fragile that he cannot be sure that he has not been already overthrown, even as he is securely seated on his throne: "Perhaps everything continues as before, but the palace is already in the hands of the usurpers" (44). In other words, the king cannot be sure that he himself is not a *simulated* king, even though (or precisely because) the simulation cannot be exposed. And, as we saw earlier with Oedipus, this is the ultimate simulation: the one which infiltrates even the person most immune to it, the only person who would be able to tell the difference between simulation and reality, if this difference were possible. In this case, the king is in the best position to know whether he is a king or not, and yet even that knowledge is taken away from him, since it is the knowledge of everybody else that defines him as the king. (Unlike Searle's man in the Chinese room, the king would be a man who will have to accept the "outside" view, which tells him that he does know Chinese: or, in this case, that he is not the king.)

CHAPTER 3: CALVINO

“Nor am I to be included among those who believe in the existence of a first and absolute lion, of which all the various individual and approximate lions that jump on us are only shadows or simulacra” (*T Zero* 104), says Calvino’s protagonist in the story “t zero.” The first lion is the point of origin, and looking at the point of origin (t_0) in more detail will tell us more about the ability of simulation to negate its origin, its cause, and its past. And the ability of simulation to constitute an all-inclusive totality to the negation of concepts such as origin, causality, and evolution will show us why it is impossible to trace a genealogy of simulation, which is one of the manifestations of the impossibility of an outside.

The emergence of simulation is not merely chronologically problematic. In addition to the temporal challenges of tracing simulation back to its origin, there are the epistemological and axiological questions of the *raison d’être* of simulation. In other words, there are two problems related to the emergence of simulation: not only *how* but also *why* it came into being, and both questions refer to causality. Just like the self-fulfilling prophecy, simulation in general is an environment of absent causality: cause and effect appear to be simultaneous, or, inversely, two simultaneous events, or perhaps even one single event, the prophecy itself, appears to behave both as cause and as an effect, as a verbal act and as a physical phenomenon resulting from it. In this sense, we are faced with the possibility that the point of origin of the prophecy is also the moment of its completion and fulfillment.¹ The simulation does not have an origin, a “before”

where there was no simulation, followed by an “after” with simulation. In *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real*, Rex Butler emphasizes the fact that simulation “is a total process, [and] there is nothing outside of it” (26). And Žižek agrees: “Because a symbolic system has by definition the character of *totality*, there is meaning only if *everything* has meaning” (*They* 215). With this, an inverse connection is established between causality and systems of meaning: we call the system a system because of its completeness, but that completeness cannot have an origin and a cause, since they would have to be outside the system itself; therefore the system is incomplete, or, more precisely, if we insist on the origin, we need to surrender the notion of a complete system.² In other words, there is a tension between causality and any complete system, such as that of simulation, since any reference to a cause outside or before the system would impair the completeness of the system. Butler asks the question, “if there is nothing outside of simulation and nothing before it, how are we to think it at all?” (26), but the real problem we should address is exactly the opposite: we can think of simulation *only if* we are not thinking of its origin or cause, since simulation is possible only when there is nothing else, when there is nothing outside, before, or after it. Otherwise the opportunity for comparison would arise, and simulation would cease to exist, exposed as false by its comparison to reality. “By extinguishing its own foundational myth,” Baudrillard points out, “the system also eliminates its internal contradictions” (*Selected* 141).

That is why every attempted reference back to the origin ultimately becomes a reference back (or, rather, forward) to the simulation which originated it; it gets warped back upon itself, so that the virtual point of the origin “is always-already ‘past’, although it never appeared ‘in the past itself’; it is constituted by means of a double reflection, as the result of the way the past’s

mirroring in the future is mirrored back in the present” (i ek, *They* 15). The “zero” point, although it embodies an ongoing present without memory of the past, can only be thought of in past tense; it is never “there.” Taken to its logical extreme, this paradox can only result in science fiction or fantasy, as we see in the work of Terry Pratchett, who entertains the idea of a sudden emergence of phenomena in their entirety, complete with their own history, so that the history emerges together with the phenomena, rather than preceding them. Pratchett talks, for example, of objects which “probably weren’t here last month but now they’ve been here for thousands of years” (*The Last Continent* 382), or which “hadn’t been there a few weeks ago and then suddenly had always been there” (98).³ In other words, the time it would take things to emerge, to evolve, is absent, canceled, since they are created complete, but that same evolutionary time is also created, implied, caused to exist (or, rather, caused to have existed), as the synchronous present gives rise to a previously non-existent diachronic dimension “to create the illusion of elapsed time” (Baudrillard, *Perfect* 20); the present causes the past: “They [the hills] were made thirty thousand years old” (Pratchett, *Last* 94). The act of creating something also causes it to have a past, to have been around for a long time, even before the actual point of its creation. Creation is always in past tense (or present perfect tense): in this simulated environment, one never starts; one has always already started. Or, we can use Deleuze’s metaphor: “A scar is the sign not of a past wound but of ‘the present fact of having been wounded’: we can say that it is the contemplation of the wound” (77). The scar is old *now*, in the present; it was not old before. In the past, it was never a scar; it was a wound. In this case, we have convenient terms to distinguish between the wound and the scar (defined as “a wound after some time has passed”). But in most cases, we lack such terms to differentiate between the

“was” and the “having been” which coexist in the “always already” loop.

Calvino does not begin with such a time loop. Contrary to narratives of the Oedipus type, or to a world in which supernatural creatures can tell the future, Calvino’s fiction is trying to take something (humans, language, etc.) and trace its development from beginning to end, in the normal sequence and in the normal direction of time: from the before to the after. But even without beginning from the premise of a complicated temporal structure like that of the self-fulfilling prophecy, Calvino still ends up in the realm of temporal simulation, where the normal time flow gradually becomes less obvious and even problematic.⁴ Starting from the simplest of premises, a movement from “before” to “after,” and from the “first” to the next, Calvino still ends up with the same untidy timeline which characterizes the self-fulfilling prophecy, since he is unable to explain how things ever begin without already having begun. In terms of the self-fulfilling prophecy, which is the most obvious temporal simulation model, the moment “t zero” is what, if it existed, would have separated the “before” from the “after,” as well as defined the transition from the cause to the effect, “for,” as Aristotle says, “there is a great difference in whether these events happen because of those or merely after them” (*Poetics* 35). The problem is that the shift from one term to the other, from the cause to the effect (or, in our case, from the prophecy to the fulfillment of the prophecy) can never be comprehended as a process, with a beginning and an end, duration, or direction: the simulated points of before and after co-exist with each other, and the fulfillment of the prophecy is nothing but its utterance.

If the keyword for Macbeth was the “third,” the main problem for Calvino is the “first,” the one which comes into existence before anything else. He is interested in the moment when things begin: language, signs, people, time, space. Matter appears for the very first time in “At

Daybreak,” signs in “A Sign in Space,” form in “The Spiral.” And in the story “Neanderthal Man,” the firstness of the first human being is what makes him newsworthy:

INTERVIEWER: Agreed, you were there. Well, do you feel that is sufficient?

NEANDER: I was already there.

INTERVIEWER: That’s a useful point I think. Mr Neander’s great merit isn’t so much the simple fact of being there, but of having *already* been there, having been there then, before so many others. (*Numbers* 177)

Calvino’s study of the “first” things explores the value of things which comes from their origin, or from the power to originate the rest of their kind. Just as the performative power of the king in *Macbeth* was directly related to its apparently chronological (but actually semiotic) precedence over everything else, so the power of the “first” things lies in their ability to exist without being created, to cause without being caused. While we can visualize the performative function as words turning into (causing) events, the physical creation of first things is not preceded by words (unless we take a theological shortcut); in fact, it is not preceded by anything. What is remarkable about any origin is that it appears impossible;⁵ it is self-generated, very much like the self-fulfilling prophecy. The emergence of something for the first time is a transformation which is difficult to understand in terms of cause and effect; that is why a standard way of visualizing it is to imagine that things do not change but, instead, come from or go somewhere else. Death, for example, is a transformation from one state to another which is often represented as a transition, a physical movement from one place to another; change in terms of space is easier to conceive of than change in terms of time. Or, in the case of birth, the stork story is as much a euphemism standing in for sexual contact as it is a spatial representation of a temporal phenomenon⁶, a change in location standing in for change over time, to avoid having to account causally for the changes which result from time.⁷ This is a topic to which Calvino comes back again and again in

his explorations of the phenomenon of evolution.⁸

Levi-Strauss makes the same point, only about language: “it is a priori impossible to explain it ‘genetically’—language functions as a closed, involute circle which always-already presupposes itself. In other words, language emerges by definition *ex nihilo*: suddenly, it is ‘all here’, suddenly, ‘everything has meaning’” (*They* 200). The same principle holds for simulation, which cannot be explained “genetically” either. There is no transition from reality to simulation; it is “suddenly” there, in its totality, and it is impossible to know whether we are dealing with language or with simulation, with words or with reality.⁹ Simulation does not *begin*; it already is. Which leads us to speculate that nothing changes over time and things do not become other things (for example, the causes do not *become*, but already *are* the effects), just as the self-fulfilling prophecy already contains the future. Or, as Levi-Strauss puts it, “things *become* what they *always-already were*” (66).

The point of closure, the completeness which Calvino questions in “Neanderthal Man,” is the point where a thing becomes what is it supposed to be; it becomes itself. The problem then arises of how we know that this stage has been reached, that the thing is finally “itself,” that it is complete, a question which Merleau-Ponty addresses in terms of language: “Now the very idea of a *complete* statement is inconsistent. We do not understand a statement because it is complete in itself; we say that it is complete or sufficient because we have understood” (17). There isn’t a given amount or kind of information which, when added, will make the statement complete; in the same way, there isn’t a given number of changes which will result in a “complete” species.¹⁰ Calvino’s concern with the completeness of species finds its logical (and rather absurd) conclusion in Pratchett’s suggestion that completeness (a complete organism, for example) can

only emerge in parts, gradually, as a process:

'If it [evolution] happens, and frankly I've always considered it a bit of a fairy story, it *has* to happen fast. Look at lemmings, for one thing.'

'Lemmings, sir?'

'Right. The little blighters keep chargin' over cliffs, right? And how many have ever changed into birds on the way down, eh? Eh?'

'Well, none, of cou--'

'There's my point,' said Ridcully triumphantly. 'And it's no good one of them on the way down thinking, "Hey, maybe I should waggle my claws a bit," is it? No, what it ought to do is decide really positively about growing some real wings.'

'What, in a couple of seconds? While they're plunging towards the rocks?'

'Best time.' (*Last* 119-120)

The question, again, is deceptively put in temporal terms, when it should be put in semiotic terms instead. The problem with evolution is not that it happens too fast or too slow for us to see it¹¹, but that we can never say that any evolutionary process is "complete." We do not say that species eventually subsumed under the class *Aves* started out by specifically aiming to become birds; the opposite is rather true: the species evolve into something else, which we then choose to call "birds." In other words, this is a process without a final, known destination.¹² When Pratchett's character questions the efficiency of evolution ("There's no point in turning into a bird a bit at a time, is there?" [134]), he assumes that a bird is what the lemming is turning into; he is taking a teleological view of evolution which faultily starts from the premise of the bird as a known final destination ("final destination" being a simulated point, just like the point of origin¹³). However, even if the process of the lemmings' turning into birds is completed, there is no reason to assume that the birds are something complete in themselves. Perhaps they are simply a transition toward something else in a process which is infinite without being complete. Every species is an early form of the next species; every creature is another creature in disguise, which both exemplifies and undermines the idea of evolution, since it suggests a fuzzy

continuum rather than the logical sequence of discrete units (species) necessary to formulate a law about how one emerges from another. No species is complete at any point in time, and, conversely, no species is incomplete, unless we take one species as an imperfect attempt at being another. But as with the arrow which does not point north but still points precisely somewhere¹⁴, there is no species which would be “wrong” on its own terms; it would appear imperfect and transitional only retrospectively, in terms of what follows it.

The same can be said about simulation: it can never be exposed as wrong (or right) on its own terms, but only in terms of a reality outside of it. The impossibility of simulation to see itself in any terms other than its own ensures that simulation would not be compared with anything and therefore would not be found lacking in comparison to anything (and therefore would not be found at all).¹⁵ While simulation is never seen in terms of something else, everything else is seen in terms of simulation. What we perceive as a complete species or a system always has a retrospective identity as we assume that other, independent species or phenomena are merely early phases of its own past (and we fall into the completeness fallacy again when we say “independent species” as if they were all individually complete). The same ambiguity haunts the self-fulfilling prophecy, which, at the moment of its utterance, is both complete and partial; it both contains and anticipates (therefore, presumably, excluding) the event it predicts.

The completeness fallacy emerges again in Calvino’s “Neanderthal Man,” where the primitive man is of interest to the interviewer only in so far as he is the beginning of humanity, in other words, an early and imperfect version of modern man himself. While Kathryn Hume, in *Calvino’s Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos*, argues that the story “Neanderthal Man” “destabilizes

the interviewer's ontology by its assertion of the caveman's total reality and presence and concreteness, while emphasizing the dubiousness of the interviewer's existence" (54), rather the reverse is true: the neanderthal man is not the epistemological subject of the interviewer, but his ontological cause, and in this sense the neanderthal man reassures, rather than destabilizes, the interviewer's ontology; he *is* nothing more than the interviewer's ontology. In this sense, the story undermines not only the interviewer (who seeks to rebuild his own history), but also the neanderthal man, who was there, in the past, only in so far as he exists through the interviewer in the present. Recognizing this, the interviewer is looking for his own identity in the past as a projection backward of his identity in the present. In uncovering the causality of himself, the interviewer needs a proof that the reason for the existence of the neanderthal man was none other than the interviewer who would evolve from him in the distant future, the man who will have been something else before he became what he was meant to be from the beginning. The interviewer's question, "do you feel that [the mere presence of the neanderthal man in the past] is sufficient?" (177) attempts to cast the past in the role of a retrospectively partial and imperfect form on its way to subsequent perfection, to the final form of humanity which the interviewer embodies. If the presence of the first man is not sufficient, then this insufficiency is defined by an absence, the absence of the future perfection of man. In this sense, the interviewer proposes a relationship of signification between himself and the neanderthal man, whereby the neanderthal man signifies, or stands in for, the interviewer, who will not be available for several million years but nevertheless, through his absence, defines and gives meaning to the neanderthal man. The interviewer suggests that this structure of absence would best describe the evolution which has taken place between the first man and the last man.

Even though the neanderthal man attempts to reject this homo-sapiens-centric view, claiming that his life was complete on its own terms, he ends up within the structures of signification again, where everything is seen in terms of something else: "I had everything I wanted, everything that was done afterwards, I'd already done, everything that was said and thought and meant was already there in what I said and thought and meant, all the complication of complication was already there" (183). Instead of a world of presence and sufficiency, we see a world in anticipation of what it would become, a past signifying its future but also eventually identical to its future, just as the self-fulfilling prophecy hangs suspended between identity and signification, as it simultaneously signifies and causes its referent, the future event. It is the word "already" in this passage that suggests a retrospective (originating in the present) act of reference from the past to the present, a temporally structured relationship between the world of the past and the world of the present, where the past was always meant to evolve into the present. Like the self-fulfilling prophecy, this is a world in which the future is treated *as if* it has already happened, or at least as if it will inevitably happen.

Another word for "inevitability" would be "simultaneity," where things would not have had time to evolve into something other than what they are. In this sense, inevitability comes not from a strict, inevitable, linear derivation of effects from causes, but from their coincidence, the simultaneity of cause and effect. "Let us begin with Escher's graphic paradoxes," suggests i ek. "Their basic procedure is that of the dialectical interplay of figure and ground, of gradual transformation of ground into figure, of retroactive remarking of ground as figure, and vice versa. . . . And is not Escher's best-known visual paradox, that of two hands holding a pencil and drawing each other, a perfect case of two marks simultaneously re-marking each other?" (*They*

76). Escher's "Drawing Hands" is the quintessential time loop without a zero point, and it is only through the omission of the starting point that what follows is possible. This omission is what Baudrillard calls "the simultaneous effacement of origins and causes" (*Selected* 189). The zero point, the cause, always exists in past tense, so the hands never begin, but always have begun, to draw each other. Each hand is the other's origin, and each hand precedes the other "by retroactively reorganizing its past, by reconstituting its origins backwards" (i ek, *They* 203).¹⁶ It is not accidental that at least one edition of Calvino's *Cosmicomics* has Escher's drawing "Other World" on the cover.¹⁷ It depicts an impossible combination of interior and exterior, and up and down, in which everything doubles as its opposite in terms of space and time. The before can also be an after, and the up can be a down. This structure has the effect of a self-referential simulation, since none of the lines can leave the drawing: the arches which point outward are ultimately contained in the interior of the picture by its folded geometry, and anything which appears to be an effect (pointing to the future) becomes a recursive reiteration of its own cause in the past. All lines are implicated in a closed and warped space without time, trapped in a simultaneity where no consistent temporal or causal sequence resolves into view.¹⁸

This image perfectly fits into Calvino's world where we find, for example, two cities entwined in an Escheresque ambivalence: at first we are simply told that a city has created an underground copy of itself, but then the copy begins to influence the original and effectively undergoes a transformation from effect to cause:

They say that every time they go below they find something changed in the lower Eusapia; the dead make innovations in their city. . . . And the living, to keep up with them, also want to do everything [like them]. . . . So the Eusapia of the living has taken to copying its underground copy. . . . They say that this has not just now begun to happen: actually it was the dead who built the upper Eusapia, in

the image of their city. They say that in the twin cities there is no longer any way of knowing who is alive and who is dead. (*Invisible Cities* 110)

No way of knowing who came first. The absence of a definite zero point in a narrative obsessed with the idea of origins is somewhat conspicuous. There is nothing wrong with the idea that something can be transformed over time into something else, just so long as it does not precede itself, just so long as nothing is transformed into its own past, into the “first.” The first, by definition, cannot be the end point of transformations or the effect of something else. ..The “first” thing is something which is finite and in the past; its function is to be a prelude to something else. In fact, it is something else in disguise, a signifier for a signified which will follow. But in a universe from which the zero point of origin has absented itself, the first is no longer a signifier but an ongoing simulation which never gets replaced by anything else and for which the term “first” is no longer appropriate, since there is nothing else to follow. The “first” is usually about something else, that which follows, and in this sense it resembles the sign: “anything may be taken as a sign of anything else provided that it is an *antecedent* revealing a *consequent*” (Eco, *Semiotics* 214). What temporality and signification share is a linear causal structure without a recursive Escher effect. But in the Calvino universe linearity has not been invented yet, and the causality of signification is always compromised by the simultaneity of simulation.

Another instance of this problem is the reversal whereby the copy becomes the original. This is the subject of Calvino’s story “A Sign in Space,” where he is trying to tell us the story of the very first sign in the universe, and is eventually obliged to come to a halt at a point of causal and temporal impossibility where the concept of the “first” (or t_0) does not exist. At the beginning of the story, the world begins to make signs of itself, but by the end it is the signs that have created the world as a mirror image, a side effect of their own game:

world and space seemed the mirror of each other, both minutely adorned with hieroglyphics and ideograms, each of which might be a sign and might not be. . . . In the universe now there was no longer a container and a thing contained, but only a general thickness of signs superimposed and coagulated, occupying the whole volume of space. . . . [T]he universe was scrawled over on all sides, along all its dimensions. There was no longer any way to establish a point of reference: the Galaxy went on turning but I could no longer count the revolutions, any point could be the point of departure, any sign heaped up with the others could be mine, but discovering it would have served no purpose, because it was clear that, independent of signs, space didn't exist and perhaps had never existed. (*Cosmicomics* 38-39)¹⁹

The transition from space with signs in it to the signs of space without any space in them is not a transition to signification but to simulation.²⁰ The absence of direction and chronology is the result of the Escher time loop of circular causality which never departs from itself and never generates anything other than itself.

The same causal ambiguity is described by Eco, in the metaphor of an architectural structure in *Foucault's Pendulum*, where the narrator is marveling at "that supreme static hypocrisy which rests on an absence, making the columns believe that they are thrusting the great ribs upward and the ribs believe that they are holding the columns down, the vault being both all and nothing, at once cause and effect" (6). The impossibility of describing the structure chronologically, as a process leading from the cause to the effect, marks it as a simulation, a structure which does not have a chronology. T_0 is the beginning of simulation, and simulation doesn't *have* a beginning. As William Bogard explains in "Baudrillard, Time, and the End," "[i]n simulation . . . you are always already *at* your destination" (329).²¹ (Compare Pratchett's rendering of the traditional temporal crime of going back and changing the present by changing the past: when a concerned time traveler tries to clarify the issue by asking, "Excuse me, can we tread on ants or not?," the answer is very simple: "If you like. . . . Any ants you tread on, you've

already trodden on, so if you do it again it'll be for the first time, because you're doing it now because you did it then. Which is also now" [*Last* 146]). The self-referential nature of this temporal loop suggests that time is in some sense complete and closed to further changes. The beginning coincides with the end to the negation of time altogether. Even though we are apparently dealing with time, we are in fact dealing with a temporal simulation, a semiotic structure which simulates time and causality while erasing them both. The lack of an open-ended causal sequence also means the lack of any logic or necessity in getting from one point to another, since all points converge into one Borg-like entity without alternatives or an outside. And the absence of alternatives implies the absence of exclusions, as well the absence of logical choice and necessity.

In contrast to simulation, language has indeed a temporal form, which we usually call narrative and which creates the necessity of plot where there were previously only random events. As Ricoeur tells us in "Narrative Time," the quest is that "by which the hero . . . becomes *who he is*. . . . The end of the story is what equates the present with the past, the actual with the potential. The hero *is* who he *was*" (182).²² Since this implies a certain necessity (another salient feature of the self-fulfilling prophecy), it is simply another way of saying what Aristotle says about narrative:

'Whole' is that which has beginning, middle, and end. 'Beginning' is that which does not necessarily follow on something else, but after it something else naturally is or happens; 'end,' the other way round, is that which naturally follows on something else, either necessarily or for the most part, but nothing else after it; and 'middle' that which naturally follows on something else and something else on it. So, then, well-constructed plots should neither begin nor end at any chance point but follow the guidelines just laid down. (*Poetics* 29-30)

In other words, the beginning is only that which leads to the end, so that it is called "beginning"

only in terms of, and as a result of, the end: “Only when we perceive it from the third is the former one the first, the former other the second,” Heidegger observes in his essay “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics” (*Basic* 277). Or, in the words of the Interviewer in Calvino’s “Neanderthal Man”: “What I mean is that you were the first to be believed to be the first *by those who came after*” (177) [italics mine]. Without the hindsight of the end, no beginning is possible, and no “first” without a “last.”²³ Every time we speak of a sequence beginning with a first, it makes sense to ask, “the first of what?” But by supplying this “what” we move away from the “first,” populating the succeeding space with others of the same and invoking a whole (beginning, middle, end); the first can be only retrospectively “first,” but never first in the “natural,” linear order of time; it can only be a scar but never a wound. Even though it looks like a temporal category (for example, the achievement of the first human being is not that he was there but that he was there *then*), the “first” can only be a semiotic, not a temporal, concept. It exists only where there is a whole, and every whole is a narrative, a plot in the Aristotelian sense. We can say that “the first” is a way of describing the moment of origin (t_0) not in its own terms but in terms of what follows.²⁴ The narrative sequence (beginning, middle, and end) creates a retrospective temporal dimension which did not exist before, at the time the events were actually happening. In other words, this is a temporal dimension which comes into existence only after the *temporality* of the events is over, when they are no longer happening and so can be narrated as parts of a whole, with its causal and temporal necessity.

In contrast to narrative, simulation is not based on a diachronic change, but on a simultaneity of cause and effect, of before and after. In this sense, Aristotle’s description refers to what simulation *is not*. Paradoxically, the *whole* which Aristotle describes is the opposite of

the *totality* of simulation.²⁵ As i ek reminds us, “the very gesture of completion entails exclusion” (*They* 111), so that the completeness of the whole is in fact antithetical to an all-inclusive totality. When the whole is formed, it is formed at the expense of the things it excludes; it is order made at the expense of the chaos around it (a lower local entropy and a higher overall entropy). The whole would necessarily exclude everything irrelevant to its internal logic, “for,” as Aristotle says, “an element whose addition or subtraction makes no perceptible extra difference is not really a part of the whole” (*Poetics* 32). The necessity, the completion, and the causality of beginning, middle, and end happen at the cost of exclusion, not only the exclusion of what does not fit in, but also the exclusion of what came before, so that the story can begin somewhere. Simulation, on the contrary, never begins and also never changes over time: it always exists in its totality, so there are no exceptions, no alternatives, and no genealogy. “If there were a first event,” Reichenbach reminds us, “it would not have a cause, and it would not be meaningful to ask for an explanation. . . . The word ‘cause’ denotes a relation between two things and is inapplicable if only one thing is concerned. The universe as a whole has no cause, since, by definition, there is no thing outside it that could be its cause” (207, 208). The same can be said about simulation, which has no cause or beginning. The “whole,” on the other hand, depends on the causality and interdependency of its elements, since each element is causally implicated in the others to create a complete story.²⁶

The difference between the requirements for a narrative whole and the all-inclusive totality becomes apparent in Calvino’s story “The Chase,” for example, where the narrator, who is being chased by another car, drives into the middle of a traffic jam, with the result that the chase is no longer visible: “an outside observer is unable to distinguish in the river of identical

cars the two which are involved in a lethal pursuit, in a mad race that is hidden within this unbearable stasis" (*T Zero* 130). And, vice versa, the relative positions of any two cars can be interpreted as the result of a chase:

Nor can I exclude the further possibility that each car is pursuing another car with homicidal intentions. . . . Whether this is true or not, the behavior of the cars around me would be no different from what it is now, therefore I am entitled to insist on my hypothesis and to follow the relative positions of any two cars in their various moments, attributing to one the role of the pursued and to the other that of the pursuer. . . . I have only to interpret every change of position in the lines as an episode in a hypothetical pursuit. (131-32)

The chase itself is characterized by an invisible causality, an internal motivation which lacks external manifestation. The ability to isolate the two cars which are in pursuit is the ability to isolate a narrative hidden within the totality of all cars, to tell the story (as Calvino does) of the chase: every time car **A** chases car **B**, **A** is behind **B**; but, every time car **A** simply wants to pass car **B** but can't, **A** is also behind **B**, exactly as if it were chasing it. Just as a figure/ground image (for example, an Escher drawing) would justify two equally legitimate interpretations, here the event (car **A** following car **B**) can be interchangeably a cause and an effect: "our pursuit is only a pursuit after a manner of speaking, just as it would be difficult to establish that two travelers seated in two coaches of the same train are pursuing each other" (128). The causality of the chase (**A** moves forward because **A** wants to overtake **B**) becomes invisible, hidden in a false causality of the visible movement we observe (**A** overtakes **B** because **A** wants to move forward), and it becomes impossible to see the "real" cause of the observed effect (the movement of the car). In this way, the two cars (which the story was initially about) blend into the totality of cars completely, into a "general system of moving cars, where neither pursuers nor pursued can be distinguished" (135). And where no more stories can be told: the story of the two cars is lost; it

becomes the story of any other car. We find ourselves in a position of narrative aporia, without any grounds for deciding whether one car is chasing another or simply being forced to follow it.²⁷ And the difference between the two, the question of “why” things happen, is essential to narrative. In other words, we have no narrative because no logical choice for beginning, middle, and an end is possible: in the Calvino universe, there is no longer the Aristotelian “difference in whether these events happen because of those or merely after them” (e.g. in whether car A is after car B or merely behind it). The chase has no beginning: its beginning is infinitely displaced further back to the previous car in the line. No cars can be excluded from the totality of the chase, but this totality also means that we can no longer speak of a “chase” with a pursuer and a pursued, with clearly outlined cause and effect; the causality (the “wholeness”) of the chase as a phenomenon dissolves into the totality of cars; we can begin anywhere, and any single car can be the beginning (that is, any event can be the cause), which makes it impossible to tell a coherent story.

The narrative necessity of the whole is motivated by the need to *choose* the right events²⁸, those which are relevant to the story, among the multitude of other events. This is what the narrator in Calvino’s “World Memory” is trying to do. His job, however, is supposed to be quite the opposite: to collect and store the history of everything, without exception, in “an archive that will bring together and catalogue everything that is known about every person, animal and thing, by way of a general inventory not only of the present but of the past too, of everything that has ever been since time began, in short a general and simultaneous history of everything, or rather a catalogue of everything moment by moment” (*Numbers* 135).²⁹ He is engaged in what Baudrillard would call “the perfect crime”: “The perfect crime is that of an unconditional

realization of the world by the actualization of all data, the transformation of all our acts and all events into pure information" (*Perfect 25*).³⁰ This transformation, however, never actually happens in Calvino's story. Gradually, the protagonist feels the need to edit the "world memory" in order to focus on what is essential ("all this material is being put through a reduction process that brings it down to the *essential*, condensed, miniaturized minimum" [135-36] [italics mine]), and exclude what is accidental: "The moment comes when a yawn, a buzzing fly, an itch seem the only treasure there is, precisely because completely unusable, occurring once and for all and then promptly forgotten, spared the monotonous destiny of being stored in the world memory" (138). What the narrator wants to create is a narrative, a story, which is a distortion of the initial simulation. Simulation is not selective and is not interested in what is essential; it must include everything. In that sense, it is completely gratuitous, just as reality is: in reality, there is no narrative control over the logic of events to encourage the meaningful events to happen and prevent the meaningless events from happening. There is no narrator who, seeing that a given event would not lead anywhere or be "in character," can make this event not happen.³¹ While a narrative would exercise control over the logic and probability of all events (for example, there is a certain logic or necessity in the death of Romeo and Juliet), reality allows events to happen in a non-narrative way, without being required to make sense. For example, if Romeo were to fall from Juliet's balcony and break his neck, this death would not be narratively justified (it simply *cannot* happen in the middle of the play), but it does not need justification to happen in reality, to be "realistic" in the literal sense of being possible and in accordance with the laws of physics. More precisely, Romeo could still die a narrative (justified) death from the balcony, but only if there were a narrative reason behind it, such as that Romeo was pushed off the balcony by a

feisty Capulet like Tybalt, “because,” as Aristotle says, “even among chance occurrences the ones people consider most marvelous are those that seem to have come about as if on purpose: for example the way the statue of Mitys at Argos killed the man who had been the cause of Mitys’ death, by falling on him while he was attending the festival; it stands to reason, people think, that such things don’t happen by chance” (*Poetics* 35). But the moment Romeo trips off the balcony for no reason at all (as most people tend to trip, in reality), we trade the restrictions of narrative for the *carte blanche* of reality: “Of reality as pure reality it can neither be said that it is because it could be, nor that it is because it could not be: but solely that it is because it is. Reality is wholly gratuitous and unfounded” (Pareyson qtd. in Eco, *Kant* 394).

The same holds for simulation. The creator of Calvino’s “world memory” is supposed to make history by collecting information, not by telling a story: “What will the human race be at the moment of its extinction? A certain quantity of information about itself and the world, a finite quantity, given that it will no longer be able to propagate itself and grow” (137). But for various personal reasons the narrator feels compelled to put a spin on the information, making it selective and meaningful:

In short, by not giving certain kinds of information, one is giving more than one would if one did. The final result of our work will be a model in which everything counts as information, even what isn’t there. Only then will it be possible to say what really mattered out of all that has been, or rather *what really was*, since the final state of our archive will constitute at once that which is, has been and will be, and all else is nothing. . . . A mass of coldly objective and incontrovertible information would run the risk of presenting a far from truthful picture, of falsifying what is most specific in any situation. (138-39) [italics mine]

The sense of “truth” and authenticity is merely a distortion of the initial indiscriminate gestalt of information, an attempt to spin it into a story to the exclusion of anything which would be irrelevant, redundant, or meaningless. But the narrator goes even further in the pursuit of his

poetic license: he includes in his “history” events which have never happened but should have happened (for example, he rewrites for the archives his relationship with his wife). In this sense, he follows Aristotle’s advice that, for a good story, “[o]ne should . . . choose events that are impossible but plausible in preference to ones that are possible but implausible” (*Poetics* 66). The narrator is in fact becoming a storyteller, a poet, whose actions directly oppose the simulation imperative of the job he is supposed to be doing instead.

Without a plot line which would privilege some events and leave out others (the *Odyssey*, Aristotle tells us, omitted many inessential events, “[none] of which events, by happening, made it at all necessary or probable that the other should happen” [*Poetics* 32]), in simulation everything becomes equally relevant. Simulation does not suggest; it articulates. While a Troy created by Homer would highlight only a few details, just enough to imply all the others, a Troy created by simulation would contain all details, even the ones which are forever hidden from the eye. Being incapable of narrative, simulation is also incapable of generalizations; it gives us an exhaustive collection of details but no patterns or rules. It can give us 22,000 falling apples without ever deriving the law of gravity from them, since the law would make the rest of the apples (the future apples) useless, forcing us to *infer* their fall without seeing it, or to accept that something could happen without actually making it happen. While for Aristotle “the poet’s job is not to report what has happened but what is likely to happen: that is, what is capable of happening according to the rule of probability or necessity” (*Poetics* 32), neither art nor language exists in simulation, since “the rule of probability or necessity” is sidestepped.³² Simulation is not satisfied with the possibility of an event, but seeks the realization of the event itself. In terms of Baudrillard’s example³³ of the simulated symptoms of illness, what’s happening is not a man

creating the illusion of illness (by throwing the *essential* clues at his doctors and expecting them to infer the illness from the clues), but a man making himself ill; the illness is not suggested, implied, or signified, but physically realized and present, in all its manifestations (even the ones which cannot be seen by the doctors and therefore, if we were dealing with an illusion, would not have been essential to its construction).

In addition to narrative, knowledge is also incompatible with simulation.³⁴ As Reichenbach explains, “[t]he meaning of the term ‘relevant’ can thus be defined: that is relevant which must be mentioned for the generalization to be valid. The separation of relevant from irrelevant factors is the beginning of knowledge” (5). Manetti also mentions “a distinction between properties which we could term *essential* properties and properties which we could term *incidental*. [There are] certain properties which bodies have precisely ‘insofar as they are bodies’” (133). To define or identify something we need to list its essential features: to say that something is a mouse (to foreshadow very subtly the example which follows), we can refer to its four legs and a tail, but not to its having a broken leg, which is not an exclusively mouse-like feature. Eco gives us the example of a generic mouse constructed through “the process known as solarization, which is simply a form of deprivation or diminution of the individual features in order to arrive at a rule for the construction of the image of any mouse” (*Kant* 156). Only essential features are involved in causality, and in this sense causality is selective: “The gestalt of the mouse, once it is perceived, allows us to *deduce* the paws and the tail (*if mouse, then tail*)” (*Eco, Kant* 238). We cannot say, on the other hand, “if mouse, then broken leg,” since the accidental features which attend each individual mouse at any given moment are not causally dependent on its identity and therefore are not predictable. A broken mouse is still a mouse and

its identity does not change. But if the mouse gradually develops cat-like features and evolves into a cat, it will no longer be a mouse (the mouse, “insofar as it is a mouse,” is not a cat). A mouse can have many accidents and still remain a mouse, but if we have a mouse which is in every respect “kitteny,”³⁵ then it is less likely to be a mouse which looks like a cat than a cat which looks like a cat. Or, rather, we have a word to deal semiotically with the kind of mouse which looks like a cat, and the word is “cat.”

The question of which features are expendable and which are essential is crucial for identity and meaning to be constructed, but immaterial for simulation. In simulation, there are no more or less important features which cause a thing to be what it is. Normally, identity is aligned with causality: “To define a substance means to establish, among various accidental attributes, the essential ones, particularly that one which *causes* the substance to be as it is” (Eco, *Semiotics* 57) [italics mine]. In simulation, on the other hand, there are no internal reasons for a thing to be what it is, no logic behind its existence other than the fact of its existence. Since simulated identity is not bound up with causality, we cannot seek the genealogy of things in order to identify them; we cannot trace their development from what they were before to what they are now, from earlier evolutionary forms to the present entities. Things exist in a relationship of simultaneity rather than causality. This is also Calvino’s vision for t_0 :

Through the combination of all contemporaneous data I could achieve an objective knowledge of the universe-instant t_0 in all its spatial extension, me included, since inside t_0 I, Q_0 am not in the least determined by my past Q_{-1} , Q_{-2} , Q_{-3} , et cetera but by the system composed of all the toucans T_0 , bullets B_0 , viruses V_0 , without which the fact that I am Q_0 could not be established. For that matter, since I no longer have to worry about what will happen to Q_1 , Q_2 , Q_3 , et cetera, there’s no use in my assuming the subjective point of view that has guided me so far, now I can identify myself with myself as well as with the lion or with the grain of sand. (*T Zero* 116)

Just like Calvino's t_0 , simulation is characterized by simultaneity and has no evolution. It does not come from anywhere (t_1), and it is not going anywhere (t_1); it is never on its way to becoming something else. Its essential features never change, because it does not have any essential features ("now I can identify myself with myself as well as with the lion or with the grain of sand"). Rather than as a definite form, we can visualize simulation as an amorphous substance whose every part is equally expendable and equally essential. It has no vital organs or features which, when removed, would render it something else.³⁶

The amorphous, that which is before or instead of form, is of special interest to Calvino and his protagonist in "The Spiral": "But since I had no form I could feel all possible forms in myself, and all actions and expressions and possibilities" (*Cosmicomics* 142). The same character also claims that before the emergence of form "inside or outside was the same" (141). Even though Calvino begins with a simple project of tracing the development of one thing from another, he ends up in all-inclusive semiotic spaces which contain everything and where everything has already happened, the "totality" from which future "wholes" will split off: "I see all this and I feel no amazement because making the shell implied also making the honey in the wax comb and the coal and the telescopes and the reign of Cleopatra and the films about Cleopatra and the pyramids . . . so I feel as if, in making the shell, I had also made the rest" (148).³⁷ On the one hand, this description suggests to us a process of signification, since the "rest" of the things in the world are only implied but not created; the shell *means* the coming of everything else. On the other hand, signification is shown to be a simulation, since *whatever* happens afterwards will be the result of the shell. In other words, the shell does not have a specific meaning; nothing can be logically derived from it, and the tracing of the genealogy of the

pyramids back to the shell can only be retrospective. In this sense, the existence of the pyramids cannot be implied before they have been created: it's only when we see where the making of the shell has led that it has led there. The shell would be significant only in the *presence* of the pyramids, but not in their absence (just as in Eco's anti-signification mirror effect the mirror image is not a sign because it can exist only in the presence of the object it reflects). Calvino is giving us a situation where prediction is impossible, except retrospectively.³⁸

He is envisioning potential futures which are implied in the present/past and can be logically derived and predicted, occasionally with absurd accuracy, as in the story "How Much Shall We Bet?" where concrete predictions about the future are based on patterns of cosmic phenomena in the distant past, before the planets or the stars have come into existence³⁹: "'On February 8, 1926, at Santhià, in the Province of Vercelli-got that? At number 18 in Via Garibaldi-you follow me? Signorina Giuseppina Pensotti, aged twenty-two, leaves her home at quarter to six in the afternoon: does she turn right or left?'" (*Cosmicomics* 89-90).⁴⁰ In a way, this impossible, zoomed-in prediction means a derivation of inessential events (whether Signorina Giuseppina Pensotti turns left or right, or, for that matter, whether her name would be exactly "Signorina Giuseppina Pensotti") from essential ones (the logical development of the universe based on laws of physics, for example, in all likelihood, she will be walking rather than flying). And while gravity can constrain her movement and make it predictable, there is no scientific law according to which she should turn right rather than left. This action does not depend on who she is and is not causally derivable from her identity. Kathryn Hume asks, "At what point should one stop in one's predictions? When dividing up reality, what separates the significant from the trivial?" (50). The causality implied in such "predictions" is flawed and they

are nothing more than random guesses: "I had let myself go," says Calvino's narrator, "making predictions about fleeting, impalpable events, countless predictions, and now I couldn't draw back, I couldn't correct myself. Besides, correct myself how? On the basis of what?" (91). Instead of "if mouse, then tail," the protagonist has been betting on "if mouse, then broken leg" (or perhaps even, "if broken leg, then mouse"), trying to shape the amorphous totality of accidents into meaningful clusters (wholes) with logic and form (just as the narrator in "World Memory" was tempted to make sense of the formless simulation by distorting it into a logical narrative). Instead of the necessity of a predictable evolutionary development, we get a temporal simulation composed of accidents, where the narratives (predictions) proposed by the protagonist fail to happen. Unlike self-fulfilling prophecies, these predictions do not cause what they predict, but simply, well, predict what they predict, which is what any statement about the future does. They are also occasionally wrong, which shows that they are composed of language with no bearing on the behavior of its referent. In contrast to performative statements, for example, where the observer and the agent are one, these predictions are at a perfect observational distance from the phenomena they describe, a distance from which the act of observation cannot influence the object observed. In short, everything points to a normal linguistic act and not simulation of any kind.

However, even this simple picture of someone who is in straightforward, linear, one-way relationship with the future events he observes becomes more complicated as we find that, even though the object of observation is not influenced by the act of observation, the *observer* is: "We were always betting, the Dean and I, because there was really nothing else to do, and also because the only proof I existed was that I bet with him, and the only proof he existed was that he

bet with me” (86). In other words, without the continuous betting the person doing the betting would not exist (or would not know that he exists). This is the ultimate interactive game, a game which gives identity to the player.⁴¹ It is here that we find the element of simulation. As we saw in the last chapter,⁴² a person turning his back on the king is never really turning his back on the king because, by turning his back, he has already denied his role as a subject as well as the king’s role as a king, so even though a man can turn his back, the person he turns his back on is no longer his king but his enemy. Similarly, here we have a player who cannot stop playing the game and still remain a player. If someone stops playing the game, he would no longer be a player. It is this tautology that structures simulations in general, and the endless betting in this story in particular. Calvino empties out the universe of everything but the game of betting. Planets, stars, and matter have not emerged yet; the game is all there is, so the game is all-inclusive and total. It does not have rules, in the sense that each of the characters can say anything at all about the future, and whatever he says is a valid game move.⁴³ Since playing is all these characters do, and everything they do is part of the game they play, we can substitute “exist” for “play”; in the game of existence, nothing we do is against the rules of existence, unless we cease to exist (but then we wouldn’t be in a position to do anything, so even that does not contradict the statement that anything we *do* is a valid move). Calvino’s game is the same: as long as the two players exist, everything they do embodies and defines the game. The present is a game without rules; at the same time, the characters are trying to impose rules on the future; their failure lies in the impossibility of detecting a pattern, a form in future events. Just as, in the game they play, any move is a valid move, what happens next, whatever it is, will qualify as the future; nothing is excluded and there are no conditions or criteria as to what future events must

be (and therefore no possibility for flawless predictions about them). Each event emerges on its own, rather than in accordance with some method of derivation of one event from another (or what we would call causality). In this sense, simulation has no generic existence governed by laws, but consists of a host of concrete experiences which cannot be analyzed in terms of a logical pattern external to them or preceding them, but must be encountered one at a time, pointing to the impossibility of generalizations (and therefore meaning) in simulation.

In terms of time, to use our grossly simplified fruit example, knowing that all apples hereafter will be falling down rather than up is knowledge about the future, while observing the fall of each individual apple in the present is not knowledge. The solarized apple is a generic apple, and therefore a predictable apple. Knowledge, in other words, has to do with making predictions based on essential qualities, a pattern.⁴⁴ And Reichenbach again: “The essence of knowledge is *generalization*. . . . The art of discovery is therefore the art of correct generalization” (5). The impossibility of generalizations in simulation leads to the impossibility of knowledge. And both generalization and knowledge are based on causality, which in turn is made possible by repetition. As Baudrillard reminds us, “a causal process can always be repeated” (*Selected* 191). Causality is reproducible and in this sense it is characterized by generalization (the formulation of a rule) and predictability (statements about specific future events under the general, known rule). At the other extreme we find something like magic, which Borges describes as a phenomenon beyond normal causality: “What is magic? Magic is a unique causality. It is the belief that besides the causal relations we know, there is another causal relation. That relationship may be due to accidents, to a ring, to a lamp” (51).⁴⁵ “Unique causality” here is an oxymoron, since all causality is reproducible, and suggests that even magic

is vulnerable to causality: if every time we rub the lamp the genie appears, the behavior of the genie will no longer qualify as an “accident” but as a generalization, the possibility of coming up with a rule which will predict the behavior of the genie in the future; in other words, it would tell us less about magic and more about science.

The possibility of repetition is key to predictability, knowledge, and causality. As Reichenbach explains, “[s]ince repetition is all that distinguishes the causal law from a mere coincidence, the meaning of causal relation consists in the statement of an exceptionless repetition” (158). Signification seems to function in a way similar to that of causality. When Calvino’s character in “A Sign in Space” creates the first sign, it is the possibility of future repetition that makes it a sign: “once, as I went past, I drew a sign at a point in space, just so I could find it again two hundred million years later, when we went by *next* time around” (31) [italics mine]. “Next” implies repetition, and it is through the passage of time that the sign is “[r]ecognizable” (32).⁴⁶ A single, unique appearance cannot be “recognizable”; the sign must appear at two different points in time in order to be “recognized” at the second point as the sign from the first.⁴⁷ Of course, then we can predict what would happen at the second point; so instead of signs, we can “call the repetitions prophecies” (Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum* 311). In this sense, all signs are prophecies, prophecies of the anticipated repetition of something which becomes a sign by being repeated. Like scientific knowledge and causality, language functions on the basis of repetition. Nothing “means” the first time around; things acquire meaning only afterwards.⁴⁸ In contrast, in the self-fulfilling prophecy, things happen only once (even though in some sense they have always happened before). It is not only that signification is implicated in time, but time is also implicated in signification: “I had made it [the sign] precisely in order to

know the time it would take me to see it again, and until I had found it once more, I wouldn't know" (33). The sign, in other words, functions as a clock, to tell the passage of time. Like the predictable oscillations of quartz, the sign allows us to tell the time, or at least to tell that there is time, since we can identify things by their repetition, by the fact of the same thing at two different points in time. But unlike a normal clock, semiotic phenomena tend to create the temporal dimension they are measuring.

Another and no less problematic version of repetition is evolution. The questions of identity and time are perhaps best captured in the concept of evolution, the change of identity over time. The problem of evolution is the problem of when exactly **a** becomes **b**, and how do we know it's **b** and not **a** anymore. The simple answer is we don't; and it isn't. In evolution, we are no longer faced with repetition of **a** over time, where we can identify **a** because we have seen it before; **a** is never repeated as **a**, but has evolved into **b** and repeated in **b** the way a cause is repeated in the effect. Even though there is no repetition on which to base **a**'s identity, we can still identify **a** in terms of **b**, as the cause of **b**. And the temporal distance between the two is the process of evolution. The question is, how much of evolution is a straightforward, linear process, and how much is a retrospective semiotic creation, a simulation. In simulation, the whole point is that something is exactly like something else, fiction is exactly the same as reality, **a** is **b**, nothing has *changed* from **a** to **b**, and **b** doesn't have any history or starting point. Which, if applied to a normal time flow, would lead to the absurd statement that human beings either don't exist or have suddenly always existed. And while Pratchett is probably right to say that "[p]eople don't like to hear that they may have evolved from somebody's lunch" (108), they are even less likely to embrace the idea that they still are, in some sense, what they're supposed to

have evolved (away) from. The difference between a causing **b** and a being **b** is the difference between a normal time flow and the temporal distortion of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The premise of evolution seems to be exactly the opposite to that of simulation: things change over time, one thing causing another in a tidy linear fashion. But things get a little more complicated when we find that evolution is predictable only retrospectively, as *Leick* explains: “we do *not* ‘derive man from monkey’: all we effectively do is reconstruct the process backwards, from the standpoint of the finished result” (*They* 209). The Zeno-like paradox of how you get from the ape to the human when there are an infinite number of intermediate steps and ultimately no possibility for movement and change to replace identity seems to arise only retrospectively, just as in the original Zeno paradox the problem of movement would never arise if we were not starting from the end, the final destination, and *then* dividing the preceding distance in infinite, ever-nestled halves. It is only because the process is already complete and the event has already happened that its happening becomes impossible. Pratchett also hints at the retrospectively impossible, concluding that “many things are not impossible *until* they have been tried [and] the universe [relies] a great deal on things *not* being tried at all. . . . When something *is* tried . . . it often does turn out to be impossible very quickly, but it takes a little while for this really to be the case—in effect, for the overworked laws of causality to hurry to the scene and pretend it has been impossible all along” (*Last* 23-24).

The same principle holds for the events which in fact do happen, since what is possible is nothing but a retrospective description of what has already happened: as we see from a remark by one von Weizsäcker (“What has been observed, exists with certainty” [qtd. in Zeh 7]),⁴⁹ as well as from Aristotle’s observation that “what is possible is persuasive; so what has not happened we

are not yet ready to believe is possible, while what has happened is, we feel, obviously possible: for it would not have happened if it were impossible" (*Poetics* 33).⁵⁰ And Eco: "It is possible largely because it happens (and by a time-honored definition all that happens is possible)" (*Kant* 191).⁵¹ For any given set of circumstances what happens next is only retrospectively constrained by what came before. Anything that happens falls under the condition that it must be one of those things that can happen, but what *can* happen is retrospectively defined as what *has* happened. Which in turn changes the tense of "can happen" to "could have happened" and supplies the event with a retrospective possibility it didn't have before. At the same time, we find that, again, we are in no position to say anything about the future. What we said, intending it to be a statement about the future, about the things that can happen in the future, has turned out to be a statement about the past, about the things that have already happened. In this sense, there are restrictions on what can happen imposed by what has happened, but not because what can happen in the future is logically derived from what has happened in the past; rather, what can happen *is* what has happened, and it is only in this sense that the latter defines the former.⁵²

Here we can consider Aristotle's curious remark that "there is nothing to prevent some of the things that have happened from being the kind of things that can happen" (*Poetics* 34). When he refers to only "some" of the things, he is talking about things chosen or excluded by a rule, a generalized law or pattern defining the "kind of things that can happen," not as a physical constraint upon the actual possibility of things (because all events, without exception, can occur in actuality in the future), but a narrative constraint, a requirement of meaning. Not everything that actually happens falls under this rule, because future events do not follow any rules until they have already happened. But there is a sense in which a rule is applied through narrative in order

to structure the events, to construct a logical whole which would make sense precisely because it would exclude all the irrelevant events (that is why the *Odyssey* omitted many inessential events, “[none] of which events, by happening, made it at all necessary or probable that the other should happen” [*Poetics* 32]).⁵³ That is why only “some” of the events are such that they happen to satisfy some pre-formulated rule about future events (just as only some events fulfill the predictions of Calvino’s protagonist in “How Much Shall We Bet?” even though all events are possible). The reason Aristotle is interested in those specific events is that he has in mind the poet, the ultimate creator of generalizations and plots based on essential qualities to the exclusion of accidents. Without the selective control of the poet, all events that happen would be of the kind that can happen. But once the poet is in charge, only those events which have a reason for happening would count; the rest, the narratively unnecessary or redundant events, will be of interest only to simulation, but not to narrative.⁵⁴ Eventually, after everything has happened, all the things that have happened turn out to have been possible all along, but this possibility is only retrospectively established.

Once again, the semiotic construction of meaning has created a temporal dimension, a causality, in order to explain itself. Since all explanations are causal, they are also temporal, so that we don’t feel we have really explained something until we have constructed a genealogy for it, a precedent and an identity based on repetition through time. The temporal paradox of evolution, just like that of the self-fulfilling prophecy, has to do with the simultaneity of events which are supposed to cause each other⁵⁵: “He [Lichtenberg] marveled that cats should have two slits in their skin, just where their eyes are” (qtd. in Eco, *Semiotics* 129). (Or, in the words of Pratchett, “[e]verything wants to make itself damn *useful!*” [*Last* 180].)⁵⁶ The coincidence of the

content taking the form of the form available to it, of an object filling up its place exactly is Escheresque in that it seems to invite and yet denounce any notion of causality: invite, because of the implied necessity and interdependence of the events (the eyes and the slits), and denounce, because of the absence of any time lag which can allow this to happen. In other words, evolution is a process where the rules and the game begin simultaneously and change synchronously over time.⁵⁷ And if the rules change all the time, how is it possible to actually play a game? At one point a physical characteristic may be a bad choice (for example, breathing would not be very successful underwater), but at another point in time the rules have changed and all of a sudden breathing is a good strategy, because now there is oxygen.⁵⁸ But the breathing has to emerge simultaneously with the oxygen, and that is where evolution intersects with simulations of the self-fulfilling prophecy type, where the predicted event fits into the prophecy like the cat's eyes into the slits. This is like the causality of the mirror image we saw in the first chapter, where the object causes its mirror image without preceding it, so that the two are simultaneous and yet causally interdependent.

But, unlike the mirror image, simultaneity does not privilege either one of the two elements. In Calvino's story "The Spiral," causality seems reversed at first, as we witness the creation of eyesight as a result of the presence of things to be seen: "Now it's ridiculous to think that, having an encephalon, one would simply drop a nerve like a fishing line cast into the darkness; until the eyes crop up, one can't know whether there is something to be seen outside or not. . . . I had conceived an idea of my own, namely that the important thing was to form some visual images, and the eyes would come later in consequence" (150). But the images do not precede the eyes either: "I conceived of the eye-encephalon link as a kind of tunnel dug from the

outside by the force of what was ready to become image, rather than from within by the intention of picking up any old image" (151). It is not the finished "image" that triggers the appearance of the eyes, but "what was ready to become an image" encourages, we imagine, "what was ready to become eyes" (to use the technical term), so that the image and the eyesight can appear simultaneously, motivated by some preternatural knowledge of their mutual emergence which precedes the emergence itself.⁵⁹ In this sense, the emergence has been anticipated, predicted. Or, in the words of Heidegger, this is "[the] paradoxical logic of a moment when, before the formal act of decision, things are already decided" (*They* 92, note). The problem Calvino is facing is that whenever he tries to describe creation (in the sense of self-creation, evolution), he ends up within the realm of what we've come to see as simulation. Starting from the diachronic, he arrives at the synchronic; aiming at the temporal, he finds himself in the semiotic.

Whenever Calvino tries to capture the beginning, he suddenly find himself at the end, where everything is already complete and created. In Calvino's world, it is never entirely obvious whether everything has already happened, or whether nothing has happened yet (which is also true of Baudrillard's universe, where "[we] no longer know whether anything has taken place or not" [*Vital* 44]). The narrator in "At Daybreak" senses a finality at the very beginning of life and matter, at the "daybreak" of the universe: "By now we were sure that everything that could possibly happen had happened" (*Cosmicomics* 28). And in "The Spiral" the protagonist is intensely aware of his own power to cause things to happen: "[everything] came from what I had done. . . . In other words, I had foreseen absolutely everything" (153). When causing the future is the same as knowing the future, we are in self-fulfilling prophecy territory. And if we attribute both not to a supernatural oracle, but to a creature of biological evolution (whose prophecy about

the future can also be called DNA, which would come close to the ontological power of the prophecy to come true over time), we are talking about a creature which is complete, which does not need more time or space, since all future possibility is already embodied in it. And this completeness would be a “totality” rather than a narrative “whole” (that is, all-inclusive amorphousness rather than any specific, exclusive creature), since the creature does not impose any conditions on the creatures (events) which would follow it. As we saw earlier, every species we perceive as complete is merely a retrospective, narrative whole used to select essential and relevant features and give them a name; the species is an exclusive semiotic category, a plot or a story about biological life which, like the *Odyssey*, is selective in what it includes under its title. A creature which contains all life in it would not exclude anything, but then it wouldn’t need the necessity of selection either. In other words, although anything could evolve from it, nothing specific would evolve; or, rather, it would be impossible to predict what would evolve, since the presence of the all-inclusive creature leaves the future as open-ended as if the creature did not exist at all. If a species cannot impose conditions on what would evolve from it, if there is no logic in the process leading from one stage of evolution to the next, then the whole idea of selection and purpose in evolution would be compromised (as well as the idea that one species signifies another, that it doesn’t just happen to precede it, but precedes it meaningfully, creating an opportunity for prediction of the future).

As Reichenbach asks, “How can causality ever assume the appearance of purposeful behavior?” (196). Or, to put the problem of purpose in extreme terms, “believing in Darwin’s theoretical mechanisms of evolution [is] like believing that a hurricane could blow through a junkyard and build a Boeing 747” (Vonnegut, *Timequake* 163). We can answer this question by

going back to our initial premise: when causality, which is a semiotic concept, assumes the appearance of a temporal phenomenon, it seems to have “purpose,” which is a temporal concept, because things assume purpose only in retrospect. At the time of the happening of the event in the past, which is where Calvino wants to begin, the notion of “purpose” is inapplicable: “Form? I didn’t have any; that is, I didn’t know I had one, or rather I didn’t know you *could* have one. I grew more or less on all sides, at random; if this is what you call radial symmetry, I suppose I had radial symmetry, but to tell you the truth I never paid any attention to it. Why should I have grown more on one side than on the other?” (“The Spiral”141). In this instance, it is the *lack* of purpose that explains the elaborate symmetry of the shell: “So I can say that my shell made itself, without my taking any special pains to have it come out one way rather than another” (147). The necessity and logic of evolution are compressed in simultaneity, in the coincidence of the form with the description of the form. If we wonder how it is possible that the description matches the form so perfectly, we only have to assume that the description does not precede the form but follows it: Calvino’s character speaks of “a shell, with its particular form, which couldn’t be any different because it was the very form [he] had given it” (149). In this case, the necessity would not be in the transition from one thing to another, but in the self-identity of a thing, where necessity compels it to be what it is; but necessity would *not* be involved in the genealogy of the thing, in the process of its selectively becoming what it is by exclusion of everything else (which is how a narrative would work). While in narrative the necessity is in the transition from one thing to another, in simulation the necessity would be in the thing itself, in the way it is because it cannot be (and never was) any other way. Or, in Vonnegut’s terms, we wait until the hurricane is done with the junkyard and *then* call the result, whatever it is, a “Boeing 747,” implying that this

phrase has had this particular meaning all along. (The result need not be any less complex than an airplane, but the process of arriving at it is greatly simplified by not specifying the final result in advance: that is why, for example, it is very difficult for us to win the lottery, to come up with the specific winning number, but it is not at all difficult for the lottery itself to come up with the winning number (in fact, it manages to do it every time), because that would be any number at all that the lottery mechanism happens to pick. The distinction here is not in the pronouns (self and other, us vs. the lottery), but in the temporal/semiotic characteristics of the outcome: we are forced to choose first, while the lottery can wait until the final result to “make its choice,” so to speak. In the same way, given the infinite varieties in nature, it would be as impossible for evolution to come up with a specific species as it would be for the hurricane to assemble an airplane: both are in fact capable of creating very complex configurations of parts, but not ones that have been specified *in advance*.) The random process of the hurricane blowing through the junkyard would retrospectively seem entirely purposeful, provided we don’t define what “Boeing 747” means until we have seen what the hurricane has produced. While it is impossible to predict anything specific, once a specific event has happened, we can retrospectively marvel at the coincidence of just this event happening and not any other. This is what Deleuze would call “the retroactive inversion of contingency into necessity” (*They* 108) or “retroactive causality” (*They* 201).⁶⁰ (And Baudrillard calls it “[t]he projecting back of a phantom causality and intelligibility” [*Perfect* 9].)

This problem leads a precarious existence on a very fine line between extremely trivial common sense and a seriously paradoxical philosophical dilemma which has to do with the unavailability of points of reference. For example, if someone singles out various objects and

declares that what he has is a collection, a whole, a species, we usually assume that there is something these items have in common *before* they have been put together.⁶¹ But it is also possible to say that what they have in common is precisely the fact that they have all been selected to form a group which is defined by nothing outside their presence in it. In other words, we can question the existence of external reference points, that is, reference points which precede the objects we are trying to define, just as in evolution we can question the assumption that what follows is restricted by what has come before. It is the Nietzschean prerogative of the doer to have no existence outside (or before) the deed.⁶² Just as the doer is an effect of the deed, an illusion of depth, a past (the illusion that the doer existed before the deed), the criterion of selection is an effect of the selection itself (the cause of the event is an effect of the event).⁶³

But the question of reference points has a flip side to it: it concerns not only the idea of how we decide that a collection of items really belongs together, but also how we decide the opposite, that things *do not* belong together, that things are not identical: in evolutionary terms, the reference points would be the criteria telling us that *a* is no longer *a* but is now rather something called *b*. In other words, how do we know that the lemmings are now birds and not merely lemmings with wings? Considering this semiotic problem, Eco cites a similar historical example: seeing rhinoceros for the first time, Marco Polo reported that he had seen unicorns, and then “he hastened to tell us that these unicorns were rather strange—not very good examples of the species, we might say” (*Kant* 57). In the absence of another species as a semiotic category, the species of the unicorn becomes a totality rather than a whole, with the necessary consequence that the essential features which go into the making of the unicorn cannot be isolated; anything could be a unicorn. Totality would mean that everything can be subsumed under this heading,

even qualities which are diametrically opposed to the original concept of the unicorn, such as that unicorns are white: “after having brought into play the idea of the unicorn, Marco Polo had to admit that that unicorn was not white but black” (60). “White” is no longer an essential characteristic; it is accidental and has no causal bearing on whether we identify something as a unicorn or not. Instead of calling the rhinoceros rhinoceros Marco Polo calls it a “black unicorn” the way we could call the birds in Pratchett’s universe “lemmings with wings”; instead of a “normal rhinoceros” he opts for an “abnormal unicorn.” He looks at the unusual color of the unicorn as he would at the broken leg of a mouse: it does not disqualify the unicorn from being what it is. Both the white and the black “unicorns” go into his definition, just as both healthy and injured mice would count as mice. The difference between black and white does not threaten the totality of the category “unicorn” (which we can no longer call “species” and get away with it, because it is no longer an exclusive whole). Even if we boldly assume that the rhinoceros actually evolved from the unicorn (and that the unicorn actually existed), the rhinoceros would still *not* be a unicorn; it would be a unicorn over time, and that requires another word, just as a “wound over time” is called a “scar.” And if, unlike Deleuze’s example of the scar, here this difference does not register in language⁶⁴, we can say that the temporal changes do not result in semiotic changes; or, rather, the semiotics of our understanding remains unaffected by the temporality of evolution, and the category “unicorn” inhabits simultaneity rather than time; it becomes simulation rather than description, and simulation does not detect change, because that would mean detecting an alternative state of affairs, something other than itself.

Consider again Aristotle’s definition of the “whole”: “That which lacks none of those parts in virtue of which it is called a natural whole” (*Metaphysics* 41). This definition now

introduces some ambiguity: if things are whole “because no part proper to them can be found outside them” (*Metaphysics* 31), then the definition becomes tautological and reversible, and begins to resemble that of totality. Aristotle says that “that of which no part is outside, is complete and whole: that is how we define ‘whole’, as meaning that of which no part is absent” (*Physics*, Book III 16), but if all the parts the whole needs are always *present* in it, what is to prevent us from saying that the essential parts are defined retrospectively *as* those which are present, regardless of what they are? For example, imagine a book, which constitutes a whole with a beginning, middle, and an end. If the ending is missing (physically) from the book, we will *know* that it is missing, because the story will not be complete. We cannot merely add pages at random to complete the book, because we cannot substitute any odd ending for the missing one: to cite Aristotle again, “the end should not be just any last thing, but the best” (*Physics*, Book II 27). The parts of the story must be logically connected to each other, just as the temporal “parts” of the whole are interdependent: “Since quantities have a beginning, a middle, and an end, those to which the position of their parts makes no difference are ‘totals’; those to which it does are ‘wholes’” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 41). For example, the “position” of the beginning, middle, and end of the book matters, because the order of the pages must correspond to the order in which the story is told. In a totality, on the other hand, the order would not matter, because there is nothing it can correspond to: there is no story, only pages (or, to cite Calvino’s “World Memory” again, no history, only information).

As a “whole,” the book was “meant” to be a certain way, and if a part is missing, we know that there is a part somewhere out there which *belongs* to the book. Aristotle, however, sees the whole as “that outside which it is impossible to find a single part proper to it”

(*Metaphysics* 31). Here our definitions differ, since we assume that there can be things which are parts of the whole in a sense that doesn't require them to be physically in it even though they are "meant" to be in it.⁶⁵ A part of the whole is still a part of the whole even if it is not *in* the whole. The criteria of what belongs to the book and what doesn't are not based on what is in the book and what is not. The book may not necessarily be what it was supposed to be, and it *can* be incomplete.⁶⁶ In contrast, a totality (simulation) is never supposed to be something it is not; it is always complete. It is never missing anything, because its parts are, by definition, any parts that happen to be in it. If any of them disappear (or new, irrelevant ones are added), the totality would not suffer; it would be merely redefined as that which remains. For example, a unicorn without a horn would not be "a unicorn missing a horn," but rather "a horse missing nothing" (and the same can be said about the cat and the mouse), not something failing at what it is not, but something successful at being what it is.

It is relatively easy to decide that evolutionary change has taken place if things multiply or die out discretely, so that we can count them and measure the change (quantitative, not qualitative change, we can say; or change in content, not form). In Calvino's story "Mitosis," for example, one cell splits into two, and the narrator (who is the cell) tells us about this division from a unicellular to a multicellular organism; in the beginning, there is nothing but this one cell: "I'm talking about the times before I had established any relationships between myself and anything else, [when] there was a cell and the cell was me, and that was that" (*T Zero* 65). At the end, however, he is having trouble keeping his pronouns straight, since the number of cells is now greater than the number of speakers: "by now they were both transmitting on their own, on my own now, on my own in a repeated fashion, each independent" (78).

But while change in content is easy to trace and count, evolutionary change is not so obvious over a continuum where the number of things remains the same: that is, when we begin with one thing and then it changes into another thing (assumes a new form), which is still singular but different, and the first thing is no longer available for comparison.⁶⁷ To measure the difference between the second and the first, we would have to resort to the first; but the first is now the second, so we are in fact measuring the second very much against itself. In other words, if the rhinoceros ever evolved from the unicorn, then the unicorn would now be rhinoceros, and probably always was. How do we calculate a reference point for that change, that departure, when what is departing is the same as what it is departing from? How can we locate the origin of a thing which, moving, carries its origin with it? It's like a tortoise which is walking away from its starting place but has never moved from its home, its carapace. The reference point will therefore change with the change in the object we want to anchor in it. In a sense, the movement of evolution is the same as the movement of the boat in Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*, the boat whose motion cancels any motion the characters may attempt while on the boat: "You don't have to worry about which way to go, or whether to go at all—the question doesn't arise, because you're on a *boat*, aren't you?" (100); "Where we went wrong was getting on a boat. We can move, of course, change direction, rattle about, but our movement is contained within a larger one that carries us along as inexorably as the wind and the current" (122). Just as the two cars in Calvino's story can never distinguish their chase semiotically against the background of the traffic jam, Stoppard's characters can never leave the confines of the boat; while they may move away from the shore, they never move away from the boat. In the same way, when one species undergoes an evolutionary change into another, it does not change

away from it, but with it. It never moves away from its point of origin, but always moves with it. The reference point, in other words, moves with the thing being referenced. Or, we can say, the whole process of referencing something which no longer fits the old reference points consists in changing our reference points to fit what this something has become.

Calvino's equivalent of Stoppard's boat is evolution itself. In his effort to describe how things first begin, Calvino has to fall on the problematic semantics of something which causes itself, or something which causes something else by causing a difference to emerge from itself, or something which makes departure possible by departing. Self-generation is somewhat like jumping off a board and then discovering that what has jumped off the board is the board itself. In other words, we cannot distinguish between the *what* that jumps and the *where* it jumps from, or, more generally, between what originates and its point of origin. (In some sense, lemmings have always been birds; they just needed to get there.) The point of origin changes with the species: at first, the primordial ocean was the point of origin of the amoeba; then, the same primordial ocean became the point of origin of the fish; now, it is obviously the point of origin of *homo sapiens*. In this sense, we cannot say that "the beginning is an absolute point" (Eco, *Kant* 101), since it is relative to the thing that has begun. The destination of its arrival changes the origin of its departure. We can no longer tell them apart. Are the eye slits the starting point for the eyes, or are they a side-effect? As Kant defines it, "an organized product of nature is one in which all is end and, reciprocally, means too" (qtd. in Eco, *Kant* 93). So the eye slits are both end and means. But they never get the time needed to "reciprocate" the development of the eyes, so this symmetry of ends and means happens outside the temporal space, outside of causality. As Baudrillard points out, "[s]omething like a short-circuit has occurred, a switch shift of the

temporal dimension—effects preceding causes, ends preceding origins . . . and everything is drifting indifferently between cause and effect, between origin and finality” (*Vital* 48, 62). But, even though we can certainly phrase the problem in terms of the “first” and the “last” (the origin changes together with the thing it originates, and there never really is finality in evolution), the problem seems to exist between those extremes as well: without the grand terms of origin and end, we can finally notice that it is not destabilized teleology or genealogy we have to worry about, but the destabilized causality in between. In other words, instead of talking about the first and the last, we can focus on the categories of the “previous” and the “next,” or before and after.⁶⁸ Not only t_0 , but t_n becomes impossible, since the transition from $t_{(n-1)}$ to t_n is as semiotically ambiguous as the origin t_0 itself.

In the story “At Daybreak,” Calvino identifies the awareness of an object with the emergence of this object: “‘We’re hitting something!’ a meaningless expression (since before then nothing had ever hit anything, you can be sure), but one that took on meaning at the very moment it was uttered” (*Cosmicomics* 21). There is no time interval between the meaning of the words and the possibility of the actions; the jet lag of meaning, the temporal margin necessary to construct meaning through repetition, does not exist. In this sense, the linguistic expression the narrator quotes is not linguistic at all, since it hasn’t had time to become language; rather, we should treat it as just another manifestation of spontaneous evolutionary development, a “language” which has the same material qualities as the objects it describes (self-fulfilling prophecy, anyone?), because the simultaneity between them would not allow it to be otherwise. Here, even signification has become a possible target of simulation, deprived of the temporality and causality which would usually distinguish it.

In another instance in the same story, Calvino resorts to a paradoxical description of that which is the same but marginally different: "As soon as we could make a more careful analysis of the situation, it turned out that: first, the sky was dark as before but was beginning to be *not so dark*" (26) [italics mine]. Or, "there was something there that wasn't exactly the same as the other" ("The Spiral" 144). The operative words are of the kind "not exactly," "not yet," "not so much." As Rex Butler reminds us, "if the copy comes too close to the original, it no longer resembles it but is another original. There is thus an absolute limit to how close a copy can come to the original while still resembling it, or the copy only resembles the original insofar as it is different from it" (25). We encounter the same problem in Calvino's evolution, an attempt to find a basis for comparison where what is being compared is something which is trying to differentiate itself from what it was before, namely, its own point of origin. In this sense, the problem with the origin (t_0) is not that it is inaccessible in the distant past, but rather that it refuses to remain in the past and moves with time itself, into the present. When something "leaves" its point of origin, there is no "point of origin" that stays behind, fixed in the space-time continuum like a zero in a coordinate system; there is no X that marks the spot (for that matter, there is no spot). If we cannot see t_0 , it is not because it is too far, but because it is too close to be different from us. In "Nothing and Not Much" Calvino envisions the "other" as the imminent *possibility* of difference, in the absence of any actual difference: "I realized now that, even if I didn't know I was there, still I had a place I could have been, I mean the universe; whereas before, even had I wanted to, I wouldn't have known where to put myself, and that's a pretty big difference" (*Numbers* 265). The notion that there is a "place" separate from the "I," that there can be an "I" without a place for it in the universe, would be the opposite of the slit/eye problem:

it would be like having eyes but no slits for them. It would be difficult then to say in what sense they are “eyes” exactly, since they wouldn’t be capable of sight. And while the uncanny coincidence of slits and eyes seems on some level impossible, the lack of coincidence thereof seems much more impossible, since the thing and its place, the thing and its origin, are in some sense the same thing.

This problem comes up again in “A Sign in Space,” where Calvino questions our assumptions about the nature of the sign as a thing separate from its creator: “if I say sign to you, you immediately think of a something that can be distinguished from a something else, but nothing could be distinguished from anything there; you immediately think of a sign made with some implement or with your hands, and when you take the implement or your hands away, the sign remains” (31). It later turns out, however, that you can’t really “take away” the creator from the creation, or the origin from the thing it originated:

So the situation was this: the sign served to mark a place but at the same time it meant that in that place there was a sign (something far more important because there were plenty of places but there was only one sign) and also at the same time that sign was mine, the sign of me, because it was the only sign I had ever made and I was the only one who had ever made signs. It was like a name, the name of that point, and also my name that I had signed on that spot; in short, it was the only name available for everything that required a name. (32-33)

The making of the sign has influenced equally the sign itself and its creator, who is now defined as the Person who Made the Sign, a person who came into existence at the same time as the sign, causally related to his sign as Nietzsche’s doer to his deed. But, more importantly, there is no distinction between the sign and the place where the sign is located: the sign is no longer merely a predicate of the place or the thing it signifies; the sign is not *where* a thing is: the sign *is* the thing. If the sign marks a spot, it merely marks the spot where the sign is, “in the sense that the

sign [is] the thing you could think about and also the sign of the thing thought, namely, itself” (“A Sign in Space” 32). A thing cannot move away from its place, just as it cannot depart from its origin, or, more precisely, it cannot escape from the fact of having originated.

Even the very moment when the universe came into existence (the ultimate t_0) is never clearly differentiated from what came before (mostly because nothing came before): “One can’t even say for sure that what there was then, really was: the particles, or rather the ingredients with which the particles would later be made, existed in the virtual sense: that kind of existence where if you’re there you’re there, and if you’re not there you can begin to count on being there and then see what happens” (266). The focus on the odds of existence, which have taken the place of existence itself (just as probability has replaced causality in contemporary science⁶⁹), is reminiscent of the game from “How Much Shall We Bet?": “from the start I was willing to bet that there was going to be a universe” (85). The ultimate bet, about whether betting is possible or not, whether the person who is betting exists or not, and whether there is anything to bet on, any chance to “hypothesize on the possibility of framing hypotheses” (87), again hints at the simultaneity of events. The betting is not a matter of predicting what will happen, but it is rather a self-fulfilling kind of utterance whereby it creates its own object; in other words, the act of betting about whether something is going to happen actually makes something happen (the betting itself). The self-generation of the universe against all odds now makes sense, since if there are any odds for it to be against, then something already exists (the odds), and therefore the universe exists, independent of anything that came before and causally related only to itself.

In every simulation (including the self-fulfilling prophecy), the simulated totality is self-contained and does not depend on anything before or after it. When the prophecy is uttered, its

truthfulness does not depend on any independent, external future events, but on the act of utterance of the prophecy, which is the only thing that ensures the happening of the prophecy. In problematizing the concept of evolution, Calvino and others pose the same problem with regard to the past: where the self-fulfilling prophecy carries around its own future to ensure its truthfulness, the self-fulfilling evolution carries around its own past, making past developments seem necessary and purposeful, qualities which are retro-spectively attributed to evolution just as they are pre-spectively attributed to the self-fulfilling prophecy. But what Calvino wants us to see is that purpose, necessity, and truthfulness have no properly temporal existence in the actual past or in the actual future; they are attributions of the present, projections from the present to the past. They exist outside of time, in the moment t_0 , where they are given the diachronic dimension we imagine was there all along.

But the problem is really this: whatever the situation, there always is the question, “Why this and not something else?” Or, in more radical terms, we can cite “Leibniz’s dramatic question ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’” (Eco, *Kant* 12).⁷⁰ From observing what *is*, we deduce what isn’t, constructing the illusion of an alternative which has *not* been chosen; we assume a choice, a selective process, a purposeful singling out of something which is essential and leaving out something else which is inessential. Or, from the existence of *one* we deduce the existence of *two*, one of which didn’t make it (“what doesn’t exist and, not existing, causes what does exist to exist” [Calvino, “Meiosis” *T Zero* 93]). But the illusion of an alternative is only retrospectively created by the belief that a choice has been made, and we are convinced that we have *chosen* something only because there *is* something. In other words, we suspect something is absent or excluded just because something else is present; what *is* seems to

“prove” that something else is *not*. But this conclusion is challenged by Searle, for example: “Is it ever true to say of a human being that he could have done otherwise?” (89). And Eco also speaks of restrictions on being: “Being says no to us in the same way that a tortoise would say no if we asked it to fly. It is not that the tortoise realizes that it *cannot* fly. . . . The tortoise proceeds on its earthbound path, positively, and does not know the condition of not being a tortoise” (*Kant* 55). Flying is to the tortoise as the color black is to the unicorn (although not in Marco Polo’s version). Being is restricted not by any rules which precede and legislate it, but by the fact of its own existence, which automatically excludes a number of things, such as its non-existence. For example, defining the unicorn as white automatically disqualifies any creature that’s black from being a unicorn; however, this imposes restrictions not only on the black unicorn (which is prevented from being a unicorn), but also on the white unicorn (which, being a unicorn, is prevented from being black). The unicorn can be seen as either free to be white (Eco’s positive definition) or forced to be white, that is, deprived of the opportunity to be black (negative definition).

Here we can consider Stoppard’s version of the negative:

ROS: So we’ve got a letter which explains everything. . . .

GUIL: I thought he gave it to me.

ROS *looks at him hopefully*.

ROS: Perhaps he did.

GUIL: But you seemed so sure it was *you* who hadn’t got it.

ROS (*high*): It *was* me who hadn’t got it!

GUIL: But if he gave it to me there’s no reason why you should have had it in the first place, in which case I don’t see what all the fuss is about you *not* having it.

(106)

The state of not having the letter can be a negative thing only if the person was supposed to have the letter in the first place; but in the absence of this condition, not having the letter is not a

failure (like the arrow which fails to point north), but just one of thousands of neutral, self-evident facts related to that person, such as the fact that Rosencrantz cannot fly. Pointing out what he cannot do is irrelevant to who he is, and so he is causally independent of anything he cannot do (for example, the fact that he doesn't have the letter does not tell us anything about him, such as that he has *lost* the letter and is therefore irresponsible by nature). To attribute any causality to negativity means to assume that something was there before but later was excluded (for example, that Rosencrantz first had the letter and then didn't), and therefore that there was a reason for its exclusion, and therefore that there is a purpose behind things as they are (the fact that Rosencrantz does not have the letter *means* something). But, as Eco explains, such a purpose does not exist: "A closed door is not in itself a no; on the contrary, it could be a yes for those who, inside, seek privacy and protection. It becomes a no only for the dog planning to cross the threshold. . . . It is we, given that the Mind can provide imaginary representations of impossible worlds, who ask things to be what they are not. And, when they carry on being what they are, we think they are telling us no, and setting limits for us" (*Kant* 55-56). Here we can remember Pratchett's remark that nothing is impossible until you try it; it is only retrospectively that something becomes impossible, a "no." The "no" is never general; it is always a failure in relation to something specific. The same problem is implied in Baudrillard's question, "useless for what?" (*Perfect* 48). It is not that something is useless in general, but, in order to be useless, it needs the reference point of what it failed to be useful *for*. It is the retrospective possibility of failure, that is, the possibility of conceiving a state of things alternative to the one which exists, which gives us the positive definition of life and evolution. Here we can finally see that the flaw in the idea of the arrow which fails to point north is that there is no north; or, there is, now, but

there never was before. The north is a simulated alternative which was never the actual purpose of the arrow but only a retrospective condition of its failure to be something other than it is.⁷¹

The north is a simulated past, a false genealogy of the arrow, in the sense that we assume it was the original aim of the arrow, that it preceded the arrow (just as we assume Rosencrantz's having the letter preceded his not having it, giving meaning to the absence of the letter through a genealogy of its disappearance, through identifying a moment of origin where the disappearance originated, where the loss happened, a moment which implies a previous presence in the past, a meaning). But if, instead, the arrow did not try to point north, did not try to be something else, we would see how uncannily successful it would be at being exactly what it is.

Baudrillard observes that “[t]he probability, in this world, of a total identification, of a total adequation of the same to the same, is equal to zero” (*Vital* 71). And yet, while the arrow fails to point exactly north, it nevertheless can be identified with that failure: that is, the arrow is exactly the arrow which failed to be the arrow it set out to be in the first place, and none other. Where we have a rift in the totality of identification is the notion that there is something *else* to be achieved: in other words, something *outside* the current state of the arrow. Allowing that notion of an outside means also acknowledging that the simulation has failed to *be* its own outside; it has failed to be what it is not. And conversely, without the notion of an outside, the simulation inevitably succeeds at being what it is, since there are no demands imposed on it to be anything else, no reasons to explain why it failed to be the “other,” and no purpose behind the way it is “itself.” The outside, in this case, is almost like the notion of divine justification, where man is found deficient because he is compared to a perfect entity of some sort. In this (grossly simplified) analogy, God is to man as the outside is to simulation (God being defined as that

which is devoid of irony, that which has no “other” because it claims to *be* the other, as well as the self). The first term dismantles and compromises the second by suggesting an “other” which resides at the other end of the proposed teleology (the teleology being the pressure on the identical to be different, or on the immanent to be transcendent; or, the pressure on the arrow to be forever the failure at being the arrow which was supposed to point north). This teleology is not a map toward an actual future-oriented goal; it is always retrospective and merely marks the spot where the failure to achieve a certain future goal would be, triangulated relative to the spot where this goal would have been had it had the foresight to exist in the first place.

The goal of trying to be something specific is an illusion similar to that of the evolutionary impulse of something to come into existence before it has evolved, detecting a direction of evolution before its happening, as if we had a map of evolution. But evolution is a process where nothing evolves into anything in particular, where the categorizing principle is created simultaneously with the thing being categorized, and the map simultaneously with the exploration. In a sense, we have directions only for the evolutionary places and distances already covered, teleologically useless directions for the places we’re not going to because we’ve already been there. If we then marvel at why the directions are so accurate, we should remember that we can predict exactly where a certain landmark would be because the map describes not where it will be but where it *was*, so the impossibility of this accuracy, as well as the accuracy itself are only retrospective.

Calvino’s character in “The Spiral” faces a similar problem, since he creates and inhabits a retrospective shell, or something which turns out to have been a shell⁷²: “while I was making it I had no idea of making it because I needed it; on the contrary, it was like when somebody lets

out an exclamation he could perfectly well not make, and yet he makes it, like 'ha' or 'hmp!', that's how I made the shell: simply to express myself" (146). In other words, without any intention to create a shell, without creating a shell, specifically, he ends up having created a shell. The thing that he "could perfectly well not make"⁷³ is something which both defies and embodies necessity, just as Oedipus could "perfectly well not kill his father" but nevertheless always does, retrospectively. The necessity is that, after the fact, he cannot avoid having made the shell the way it is. And it is not only the shell: everything is something which could perfectly well not exist but nevertheless does exist, inviting us to marvel at the incredible coincidence of its existence with nothing other than its existence. In a sense, evolution is the process of constant renouncing of what i ek calls "the moment when development could have taken an entirely different course[,] the point of . . . *undecidability*, . . . the point when a number of possibilities coexist which today, in retrospect, from an already established line of evolution, seem absurd, unthinkable" (*They* 130).

The teleological illusion of necessity is based on a paradoxical chronology: it is not that we have an alternative, and *then* decide that it is impossible or faulty; on the contrary, our very decision that an alternative would be impossible creates that alternative; in explaining why it was not chosen, we *create* what we assume was not chosen. In this way we retrospectively simulate reasons and meaning. This simulation, even though it has no outside, is the simulation *of* an outside, of a belief that things could have been otherwise, which makes the things as they are purposeful. The "otherwise" is a simulation which retrospectively inhabits the past. It is only through something absent that we can prove the truth (purposefulness) of what is present. The interplay of what is and what isn't creates the misleading impression that what isn't was once a

possibility for what is: “If you compare yourself with the limitations that come afterwards,” says Calvino’s character in “The Spiral,” “if you think of how having one form excludes other forms, of the monotonous routine where you finally feel trapped, well, I don’t mind saying life was beautiful in those days” (142). The linear progress from unlimited potential to limited form is not part of simulation, where necessity does not bind the (fully formed) present but retrospectively haunts the (formless) past. The “exclusion” or selective process Calvino is talking about is created retrospectively; only after we have the included does the excluded insinuate itself into the realm of possibility; and while the included retrospectively becomes possible, the excluded retrospectively becomes impossible.

The illusion that there is a cumulative value in evolution is the illusion of narrative, the idea that evolution is somehow telling a logical story which imparts teleological value to earlier species in light of later ones. Evolution, as a concept, aspires to more than a simple syntax⁷⁴ of development where species emerge according to their environmental conditions; it aspires to semantics, to cumulative meaning, to signification. In language, for example, any meaningful string of words is redundant (that is, cumulative), which means that the preceding words restrict the meaning of the words which follow: “a stream of data in ordinary language is less than random; each new bit is partly constrained by the bits before; thus each new bit carries somewhat less than a bit’s worth of real information. . . . The more random a data stream, the more information would be conveyed by each new bit” (Gleick 257).⁷⁵ And, conversely, the more meaningful the string as a whole is, the less meaningful each individual bit of information needs to be. This leads Gleick to conclude that information is “a fancy word for unpredictability” (261); in other words, the ability to predict future bits of information is proportional to their lack

of information. And, conversely, the more information each future bit carries on its own, and the less dependent it is on the bits coming before it, the less predictable the future is.

If evolution is seen as a data stream, each preceding unit (species) would carry information to restrict, direct, and imply the next one, so that all species together would form an exclusive whole (where not all variations are possible for the emergent species⁷⁶), rather than an inclusive totality. Calvino's return to the "first" and to the concept of evolution suggests that he wants to discover this meaningful whole, this cumulative genealogy, this narrative within the totality of the universe. But the concept of evolution gives way to the concept of simulation, or rather, we can recognize the concept of evolution as the result of simulation. What Calvino says about the human race at the end of its existence, that it is "[a] certain quantity of information"⁷⁷ (*Numbers* 137), can also apply to any other moment of its existence. Any moment is the last moment before the next moment, and in this sense the past is always only information which can be manipulated, and narrative is one of the forms which this information can take.⁷⁸ In this sense, evolution seems to occupy some place in between simulation and narrative, between generation and prediction, actualization and potential, simultaneity and causality.

If causality means a set of rules for deriving one event from another, there is no reason why these rules cannot change, leaving causality out of the picture. Just as simulation creates its own rules, the rules of evolution change over time and there are no strict criteria for which qualities are essential and which accidental in a species. At first glance, evolution is a game with certain rules; however, the whole point about evolution is that new rules are made up, that the very object of the game is to make up new rules, to play new and different games, as we can see from this bit of Pratchett dialogue:

'I thought it would be a much better idea to create creatures that could change their own instructions when they needed to . . .'
'Oh, you mean evolution,' said Ponder Stibbons.
'Do I?' (*Last* 179)

If evolution can be conceived of as a set of rules, these rules would be about how to change the rules; their purpose would be to change and negate themselves. In evolution, the rules do not precede the events they define, but are simultaneous with them. As Gleick explains,

"[n]onlinearity means that the act of playing the game has a way of changing the rules" (24).

And the moment evolution enters nonlinearity it becomes a form of temporal simulation where the rules are created retrospectively, just as the attribution of purpose is retrospective and asymmetrical. The premise of a linear evolution is that the future in some sense *exists*, that it is a place we are headed toward, and that we have directions for how to get there from the past. But the clues about how to "get there" (the ones given to Oedipus by the oracle, for example) are less than linear and reliable and show that the future is not any specific, existent place we aim for, but any place at all where we happen to arrive will be the future.⁷⁹ Pratchett also stresses this point: "To hell with messing up the future! That's what the future is *for*" (*Last* 258). It is impossible to mess up the future, because there is nothing *to* mess up; to return briefly to the arrow example, there is no future just as there is no north. It is impossible to get it wrong.

The self-referential nature of evolution, which tells us, among other things, that species are not structured in a linear, predictable, causal syntax because they do not refer to or imply other, future species, finds another expression in the idea that evolution is not so much a movement toward the other but a recursive movement toward the same. In the words of Sebeok, "a sign is only a sign's way of making more signs" (*Culture Signs* 142)⁸⁰, and this can be applied to the idea of evolution as well: "It is a possible idea, though far from being proved, that

organisms here on earth have been formed by the same principle, and 'only' serve to optimize the production of entropy facilitated by the heat flow from the sun towards the cold empty space. This would mean that even the scientists who try to understand these processes have arisen in order to serve this 'purpose' of an efficient entropy increase" (Zeh 68). In other words, it is not the case that evolution is undermined by entropy, but evolution is the result of entropy, order the result of chaos, semantics the result of syntax, and meaning the result of simulation.⁸¹

Calvino's fiction shows us that strictly temporal categories such as causality, repetition, and evolution have a hidden semiotic foundation and possess qualities of temporal simulations similar to those of the classical self-fulfilling prophecy. His interest in the moment of origin, t zero, never leads to a resolution of the problem of origin, or to the actual discovery of a point we can legitimately call t zero.⁸² The genealogy of species, signs, and form is a recursive one and there is no linear or causal progression over time, regardless of how far back in time or how deep into the basic biological structure of life one goes. The temporal simulation we call "origin" does not hide anything from us; it is nothing more than what we see, and all we can do is try to discover (or invent, to use Eco's term) some of its properties.

NOTES

1. Cf. Baudrillard: "Finality is no longer located at the conclusion; indeed, there is no end, and no determination. The finalities are established in advance, inscribed in the code" (*Selected* 140)
2. This is Derrida's classical argument about the center in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."
3. This is an idea that Baudrillard is also fascinated with, as he cites "Bertrand Russell's paradox in *The Analysis of Mind*, in which the world is supposed to have been created only a few minutes ago but peopled with a humanity which remembers an illusory past" (*Perfect* 20). And: "We might, in this connection, revive the hypothesis of P. H. Gosse, the nineteenth-century English

naturalist, in his book *Omphalos* (which Stephen J. Gould discusses in *The Flamingo's Smile*), that all the geological and fossil traces of the origin and evolution of species, including the human species, are a simulation contemporaneous with the creation of the world by God five thousand years ago, as in the biblical account. Everything which appears to reach back beyond that point, right down into the depths of time, has, he alleges, merely been got up by God in his infinite kindness to bestow an origin and a history upon our world, and is intended to create the illusion of elapsed time. God, argues Gosse, gave men a past in order to soften the unbearable confrontation with the world as it is, the product of an act of force on the part of a higher will. . . . For Gosse argues: 'as thoughts in God's mind, solidified in stone by creation *ab nihilo*, strata and fossils are just as true as if they recorded the products of conventional time'. If the unreal past is no less true than our objective reality, then this latter is no more true than that unreal past" (*Perfect* 20-21).

4. In its extreme, the criticism of the linear time flow looks like this: "It's like saying that Cassandra must have been born after Homer because she predicted the destruction of Troy. The belief that time is a linear, directed sequence running from A to B is a modern illusion. In fact, it can also go from B to A, the effect producing the cause. . . . What does 'coming before' mean, or 'coming after'?" (Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum* 173).

5. As Aristotle says, "whatever comes to be must do so either out of something which is, or out of something which is not, and neither is possible. What is cannot come to be, since it is already, and nothing can come to be out of what is not" (*Physics*, Book I 19).

6. There is a certain inverse correspondence between time and space, which now comes mostly from physics but can be found in more human terms in Pratchett as well: "Time happens to space and space happens to time. . . . There's places where there's several times happening at once and places where there's hardly any time at all, and times when there's hardly any place" (*Last* 95, 105). Whatever is missing from time can be found in space, and vice versa. Pure time, one suspects, would negate space, and pure space would negate time, and, in some sense, to make time simultaneous is to make it space. Baudrillard observes a similar interaction between past and future: "Prediction, the memory of the future, diminishes in exact proportion to the memory of the past. When there is overall transparency, when everything can be seen, nothing can be *foreseen* anymore" (*Vital* 37).

7. The unsuccessful simulation of the holodeck variety can also illustrate the paradox of spatial coincidence. Some critics have taken the holodeck as an instance of simulation: in "Baudrillard, Time, and the End," William Bogard, for example, suggests that "[i]n 'Star Trek,' the holodeck eliminates the 'illusion of being there' by not only making the technology 'appear to disappear,' but in some sense to *really* disappear" (318). However, it is precisely this disappearance that prevents the holodeck illusion from establishing the simultaneity characteristic of simulation. When a place is not where it is supposed to be, in its own place, but appears *in the place of* another place (e.g., a city appears on the holodeck), the simulation is compromised and becomes mere illusion, because the shift we observe, from spaceship interior to city exterior, involves a temporal lag and invites the notion of causality: the spaceship *caused* the city to appear. In a true

simulation, the two would rather occupy different places at *the same time*, coexisting in a simultaneity which would make causality between them impossible (we can recall Reichenbach: "simultaneity means the exclusion of possible causal interaction" [154]). Conversely, causality means that one thing can cause another thing to appear in its place, instead of it, but at a later time. That is how one thing can metamorphose (evolve) into another. In other words, causality requires events to be happening at different times and at the same place, while simultaneity (simulation) requires them to be at different places at the same time. Causality also means that the two events are incompatible with each other, so that one can exist only to the exclusion of the other. Paradoxically, this exclusion is necessary because the first in some sense *is* the second, so it is a question not so much of two different things but of two different forms of the same thing, which cannot coexist; when a thing evolves over time, it has to abandon its earlier form to attain its later form.

The holodeck scenario also follows this evolutionary sequence; unlike simulation, it does not violate the principle of causality: the ship's interior causes the city's exterior to appear *in its place*, so the normal requirements of causality are maintained. In a "real" simulation, however, this genealogy could not be traced, and we would call the simulation "reality" because we would not suspect that it was ever anywhere else but here. It would be occupying its own place (a place which was always "here"), as well as its own time (a time which was not occupied by anything else before the simulation, such as, let's say, the cause of the simulation). A "real" simulation would be one where the ship's interior and the city's exterior can coexist without violating each other's reality; if they are compatible with each other, they would contribute to the internal consistency of a "reality" common to both. In a simulation, we would have to assume that, if the ship is real, then the city is as real as the ship: anything simultaneous with reality would have to be reality.

Baudrillard argues that "the world and its double cannot occupy the same space, for the double is a perfect artificial and virtual substitute for the world. Conflict between them is inevitable" (*Vital* 70), and, "There is, in fact, no room for both natural and artificial intelligence. There is no room for both the world and its double" (*Perfect* 34). However, we will have to disagree and say that conflict between them is not inevitable but rather impossible. If we take as an example of simulation the well known graphic paradox of the drawing which can be alternatively perceived as two faces or a vase, we cannot say that the two are in conflict, since they consist of the same things, the same substance; the stuff that goes into one also makes the other. In this sense, they do occupy the same space, but not at the same time. They cannot be in conflict, because the simulated world is identical to the "real" one; simulation and reality not only occupy the same space, but they constitute each other in an atemporal (rather than causal) relationship. With the disruption of causality things are no longer required to follow one another; they can, instead, co-exist. Cf. Auster: "Night and day were no more than relative terms; they did not refer to an absolute condition. At any given moment, it was always both. The only reason we did not know it was because we could not be in two places at the same time" (152). The relativity of night and day is never resolved into determinacy, just as the drawing is always a Möbius "both" of faces and a vase.

8. There are various scientific definitions of evolution we will not be referring to. Zeh, for example, tells us that "[t]he dynamical self-organization of matter as observed mainly in

biological and social evolution appears to contradict the Second Law but is probably in agreement with it if the entropy of the environment is taken into account" (4); according to him, "evolution can be defined as the emergence of order by itself" (67). Gleick, on the other hand, suggests that "[e]volution is chaos with feedback" (314).

9. If Baudrillard is concerned that "[the human is turning] into something that is neither human nor inhuman: namely, the genetic simulation of life" (*Vital* 23), we should point out that this substitution of the simulated for the human is not detectable, and, strictly speaking, there is no transition from one to the other: the change never happens, but it has "always already" happened. Same with i ek's "doubling, by means of which . . . the real image is substituted by a virtual one" (*They* 10).

10. Even Darwin (working with the literal, not metaphorical, definition of "species") feels the need to include a heading in the *Origin of Species* which says, "Doubtful Species" (Vol. I 56). Under this heading he explains: "I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, for convenience's sake" (Vol. I 66). Species, he reminds us again later, "are merely artificial combinations made for convenience. This may not be a cheering prospect; but we shall at least be freed from the vain search for the undiscovered and *undiscoverable* essence of the term species" (Vol. II 301) [italics mine].

11. "You're the one who says things naturally change into other things, Mister Stibbons."
"But not *that* fast!" . . .
"Have you ever *seen* any of this evolution happening?"
"Well, of course not, no one has ever—"
". . . That might be the normal speed. As I said, it makes perfect sense. There's no point in turning into a bird a bit at a time, is there?" (*Last* 133, 134)

12. As Eco puts it, "[the platypus] was not made from the pieces of other animals, but . . . the other animals were made from pieces of the platypus" (*Kant* 6); for example, even though it looks like the beak of the platypus obviously *belongs* (or will inevitably belong) to a bird, we should not assume that the bird is the final destination, the essence, the intention, so to speak, behind the beak.

13. In terms of temporal simulation, it would be difficult to defend Foucault's linear view of the origin, according to which "[t]he origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things corresponded to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost" (143). For our purposes, the origin would be simultaneously the place of loss and the place of gain, or addition, since that which originates is added to the world. In terms of evolution, we can borrow Baudrillard's description: "There is a shift from pure and simple reproduction to procreation: the first two will die for the first time, and the third for the

first time will be born" (*Vital* 7). In evolution, the transition from nothing to something (point of origin or t_0) and the transition from something to nothing (death) do not exist in a temporal conflict but in simultaneity. The problem begins with temporality, when we view the two events as linear and irreversible; in other words, the two may die without a third being born, and if the third is born, the other two will not die as an effect of this. The two cause the third, but the third cannot cause them back. This one-way causality has always puzzled humanity, as it is not easy "to understand why we have to have parents but not necessarily children" (Zeh 2). That is why seemingly trivial questions of the sort, "Could there be a father who never had a child?" (Reichenbach 208) become important, as they attempt to translate the temporal into the semiotic (i.e., what does the word "father" mean?), which in the final analysis appears to be the only place where temporality can at least be discussed.

14. "An arrow pointing approximately north is exactly pointing somewhere" (Cavell 76).

15. Inspired by Pratchett: "He was not going to be found wanting when duty called. He did not intend to be found at all" (*Last* 109).

16. In this remark, i ek is referring to language, not to the Escher paradox, but since he is discussing the same theoretical problem in both cases, the quotation is still applicable.

17. Calvino, Italo. *Cosmicomics*. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1968.

18. Pratchett's version: "hold on, if he's carrying the entire universe in a sack, right, that means, he's carrying himself and the sack *inside* the sack, because the universe contains everything. Including him. And the sack, of course. Which contains him and the sack already. As it were" (*Last* 10).

19. This passage resonates with Sebeok's observation that Peirce did "speculate 'if it [the universe] is not composed exclusively of signs'" ("One, Two, Three" 9).

20. The literal transition from things to signs has been investigated in science fiction by Philip K. Dick, for example, in *Time Out of Joint*, where the protagonist becomes aware of the simulated world around him:

The soft-drink stand fell into bits. Molecules. He saw the molecules, colorless, without qualities, that made it up. Then he saw through, into the space beyond it, he saw the hill behind, the trees and sky. He saw the soft-drink stand go out of existence, along with the counter man, the cash register, the big dispenser of orange drink, the taps for Coke and root beer, the ice-chests of bottles, the hot dog broiler, the jars of mustard, the shelves of cones, the row of heavy round metal lids under which were the different ice creams.

In its place was a slip of paper. He reached out his hand and took hold of the slip of paper. On it was printing, block letters.

SOFT DRINK STAND

(54-55)

21. Cf. Ouspensky's contemplation of the transition from one dimension to another: "A *really two-dimensional* being will never become three-dimensional. In order to *become* three-dimensional, he must *be* three-dimensional" (55).

22. Or, as Heidegger says in his "Introduction" to *Being and Time*, "[e]very seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought" (*Basic* 45).

23. We can say the same thing about the mechanism by which a prophecy is fulfilled: "The succession of events acquires meaning *only when its end is reached*, that is, when Fate is accomplished. It is only at this point that Fate becomes intelligible, and only then is it possible to understand, in the light of ulterior developments, the significance of previous, initially inexplicable, events" (Manetti 18) [italics mine].

24. The same can be said about the "end": as Aristotle says, "the end should not be just any last thing, but the best" (*Physics*, Book II 27). "The best" here is not a moral or aesthetic but a structural category (though both morality and aesthetics are based in some sense on structure): the best is that ending which logically follows from the preceding events; an arbitrary ending would be "worse." In the same way, the beginning is not just any first thing, but only that which makes sense in terms of what follows.

25. In a way, the "whole" includes everything but within limits (everything which satisfies specific requirements), just like Pratchett's god: "He was an omnipresent god, although only in a small area" (*Last* 146).

26. We can recall the witches in *Macbeth*: "Since they [the witches] could be said to sew, or *seam*, together present, past, and future, they present a figure of historical and temporal totality" (Wofford 5). Instead of a "narrative" of past, present, and future, they weld the three into a synchronic totality, a simulation.

27. The question can be phrased in different terms: we cannot tell whether any given car is forced (dare we say "destined"?) to follow the car in front of it because of the traffic jam, or is following it out of its own free will. This can give us a new perspective on Oedipus too: in a sense, what he thinks was a traffic jam turns out to have been a chase. (This seems to be exactly the opposite of the usual free will dilemma, where a person is trying to take action only to discover that his input doesn't really matter in the larger traffic jam of events; Oedipus, however, starts out with a belief in destiny, only to discover that he is the one who has been chasing his father, on an empty road, so to speak, driven by nothing but his own unforced agency.)

28. The whole is motivated; it has logic and purpose: "'Whole' and 'complete' are either exactly the same or very close in their nature. Nothing is complete unless it has an end, and an end is a limit" (Aristotle, *Physics*, Book III 16). Here we notice that "end" defines the "whole" both as a limit and as a purpose (the need to choose only and all the essential elements which complete the whole).

29. This project is again reminiscent of the self-fulfilling prophecy, which operates on the similar assumption that an exhaustive description of something can *constitute* that something, rather than merely representing it. The utterance of the prophecy *about* the event *is* the event, since it is equivalent to the happening of that event.

30. Baudrillard cites, in this connection, Arthur C. Clarke's story "The Nine Billion Names of God" as an example of this effort at exhaustive enumeration of events (in this case, all the possible names of God), which leaves nothing unlisted and ultimately leads to the end of the world (*Perfect* 25). Coincidentally, Calvino's story is also set against the possibility of the end of the world, although it is not the cataloguing of data that leads to the end of the world ("triggering the code for the world's automatic disappearance by exhausting all its possibilities" [*Perfect* 26]), but vice versa. However, as Baudrillard says, "[t]he worldwide listing of all data [such as that in Calvino's story] is the same phantasy as that of the spelling of the names of God" (*Perfect* 33). Baudrillard and Calvino have a similar vision of the end of the world as the moment when things would have to be finalized, wrapped up, typed up and saved. For both, the end is that which is "definitive, perfect" ("World Memory" 140), or, as Baudrillard would call it, the perfect crime: "In the perfect crime it is the perfection itself which is the crime" (*Perfect* xi).

31. Notice that this is again a temporal problem: in reality, we have no way of knowing whether an event would turn out to be meaningful or not until after all the repercussions of the event have subsided. We are not in a position to judge which events may turn out to be relevant until we get to "the end." That is why Herodotus advises us to wait until the end of a person's life before we judge his life in its entirety ("Now if a man thus favoured dies as he has lived, he will be just the one you're looking for: the only sort of person who deserves to be called happy. But mark this: until he is dead, keep the word 'happy' in reserve" [53]). In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster echoes this idea: "the circumstances under which lives shift course are so various that it would seem impossible to say anything about a man until he is dead. Not only is death the one true arbiter of happiness (Solon's remark), it is the only requirement by which we can judge life itself" (298-99). (And Pratchett: "It was later that the story of Windle Poons really came to an end, if 'story' means all he did and caused and set in motion. In the Ramtop village where they dance the real Morris dance, for example, they believe that no-one is finally dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away—until the clock he wound up winds down, until the wine she made has finished its ferment, until the crop they planted is harvested. The span of someone's life, they say, is only the core of their actual existence" [*Reaper Man* 260].)

While the "wholeness" of narrative is not temporal but semiotic, because it depends on excluding the irrelevant and including the essential in order to create meaning, the "wholeness" of reality (e.g., the completeness of a human life) seems to be a temporal, arbitrary thing, since, instead of achieving wholeness by excluding all the meaningless events, we achieve wholeness by excluding all events that happen after a certain point *in time*. In other words, in a narrative we draw the line at what is meaningless, while in reality we draw the line at the "end" (which is an arbitrary point). Or, in narrative we can evaluate and screen the events *before* we include them (e.g., Should we make Romeo and Juliet die now or later? Which would make more sense?), whereas in reality we cannot prevent anything from happening, and we can only exclude events *after* the fact: to use Herodotus' example, we can only wait for the human life to be over, in

temporal terms, before we can treat it as a whole, and that “whole” will still be a dubious concept, since it would be constructed in the following way: all events, however meaningless, which happen during the person’s lifetime would be included, and all events, however meaningful, which happen afterwards would be excluded.

32. In contrast to the last chapter, here the terms “law” and “rule” will be used in a broad sense and interchangeably.

33. Baudrillard: “Since the simulator produces ‘true’ symptoms, is he or she ill or not? The simulator cannot be treated objectively either as ill, or as not ill” (*Selected* 168).

34. As Searle says, “explanation and prediction are perfectly symmetrical. You predict by deducing what will happen; you explain by deducing what has happened” (71). In simulation, the impossibility of prediction (knowledge about the future) corresponds to the impossibility of explanation (knowledge about the past).

35. The term “kitteny” suggested by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, episode 83, “No Place Like Home,” original air date Oct. 24, 2000.

36. Cf.: “If a cup is mutilated it remains a cup, but a number from which one or more units has [sic] been removed is no longer that number” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 42). Or, “although a drop of water is still water, the letters of the syllable are not themselves syllables” (*Metaphysics* 7). However, the number of things that remain “themselves” seems to decrease if you go on far enough into their physical makeup; eventually, even water will break down into something that is not water: “I can’t for example reach into this glass of water, pull out a molecule and say: ‘This one’s wet’ . . . [or] ‘This neuron is in pain’” (Searle 22). Simulation, in contrast, cannot regress to lower levels, because it doesn’t *have* levels: it is all surface structure, and it is always itself.

37. Similarly, in “Neanderthal Man” the first human being already contains all the rest: “I had everything I wanted, everything that was done afterwards, I’d already done, everything that was said and thought and meant was already there in what I said and thought and meant, all the complication of complication was already there” (183).

38. Saint-Exupéry studies the same phenomenon in the guise of absurdity in *Le Petit Prince*, in the figure of the king who restricts his orders only to things that would happen anyway, regardless of his wishes: “J’ai le droit d’exiger l’obéissance parce que mes ordres sont raisonnables” (40). One of the things the king can order is, for example, a sunset, and the predictive power of his order would be equal to zero, because it would follow, rather than precede, the phenomenon it predicts; the king will wait until the event happens, to be able to predict it correctly: “Ton coucher de soleil, tu l’auras. Je l’exigerai. Mais j’attendrai, dans ma science du gouvernement, que les conditions soient favorables” (40). And, to take this further, or to reverse the chronology of cause and effect, the king gradually begins to read into everything that happens his own desires, as if all events are the result of his orders; so, when the little prince decides to leave, the king still makes this event appear as if he himself had ordered it to happen: “Je te fais mon ambassadeur,” he cries after the little prince (41). While these predictions are

always right, they are not, strictly speaking, predictions.

Cf. also *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*:

ROS: Next!

But no one comes. . . .

ROS: Keep out, then! I forbid anyone to enter! (*No one comes. Breathing heavily.*) That's better . . . (69, 72)

39. As if having read Calvino's story, Aristotle describes an identical situation of absolute determinism over thousands of years: "No need would there be for mankind to deliberate and to take pains, could we make the assumption that if we adopt a particular line, then a certain result will ensue and that, if we do not, it will not. There is nothing to prevent any man from predicting some future event (say) some ten thousand years beforehand, while another predicts the reverse: the event that was truly predicted must needs come to pass at long last" (*The Organon* 137). In this universe, betting would replace deliberation. People would not try to alter the events by making *other* decisions or taking *other* actions, because "events are not caused or prevented by someone's affirming or denying that at some future time they would happen" (Aristotle 137). Instead of being participants, people would be merely observers of their own actions; instead of living, they would be merely gambling.

40. Pratchett's version: "Future books exist *in potentia*, as it were, in the same way that a sufficiently detailed study of a handful of primal ooze will eventually hint at the future existence of prawn crackers" (*Last* 23). And Aristotle's version (which describes a theory he disagrees with): "Will *A* occur, or not? Yes, if *B* happens; otherwise not. And *B* will happen if *C* does. Thus it is clear that if time is constantly subtracted from a limited period we shall come to the present, so that *X* will die by violence if he goes out. He will go out if he is thirsty; and he will get thirsty if something else happens; and thus we shall come to conditions which are in existence now. For instance, 'he will go out *if* he is thirsty, and he will get thirsty *if* he is eating something pungent.' This last condition is either fulfilled or it is not, so that he will of necessity either die or not die. . . . Therefore, according to this line of thought, all future events will take place of necessity" (*Metaphysics* 159-60).

41. In *The Perfect Crime*, Baudrillard complains: "Much has been made of the alteration of the object by the subject in observation. But no one has raised the question of the opposite alteration. . . . The main focus of interest has always been on the conditions in which the subject discovers the object, but those in which the object discovers the subject have not been explored at all" (55). This, however, is not entirely true; in "How Much Shall We Bet?" Calvino, for example, envisions a game which defines the players; the same can be said about Calvino's story "Montezuma," where Montezuma, who is in some sense the object of the Spanish conquest, is trying to discover the subject acting out the quest: "they were so different from us, incongruous, inconceivable. . . . I wanted to . . . conceive them" (*Numbers* 186, 192).

42. See Chapter Two, note 60.

43. Stanley Cavell, in his brilliant analysis of Beckett's *Endgame*, makes a similar observation: "victory or salvation consists . . . in coming up with the right answer—or rather, with the *next* answer, one which continues the dialogue" (127). It is not that the characters have to come up with the right move next, but whatever move they make will be the right one *because* it happens next.

44. But, as Aristotle reminds us, no predictions of accidental details are possible:

There can evidently be no knowledge of the accidental; for knowledge is of that which is always or usually so, otherwise learning and teaching would be impossible. A fact must be determined by its being so always or usually. . . . The accidental, then, is what occurs, but not always and of necessity, nor for the most part, and for that reason there can be no knowledge of it. There are obviously no causes and principles of the accidental such as there are of the essential; for if there were, everything would be of necessity . . . [and] chance and the possibility of a thing's either occurring or not occurring are ruled out. (*Metaphysics* 159, 161)

That is why, for example, Macbeth is unable to figure out how exactly the Birnam forest could come to him; he somehow expects this to be an essential (and therefore predictable) quality of the forest, as in some sort of enchanted forest with the property of movement, whereas it turns out to be an accidental choice of camouflage on the part of the soldiers.

45. In this sense, we can view the self-fulfilling prophecy as an instance of "magic," not because it often involves oracles, witches, and the like (which it does), but because its causality falls under no other category.

46. In Beckett (*Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, for example), there is a unique kind of repetition without recognition; the characters suffer repetition without knowing *what* is repeated, and therefore looking for any meaning in it is quite vexing to them. They are also incapable of constructing a narrative about this repetition, and the only reason we know that there is repetition at all is through a narrative based on dramatic irony and inaccessible to its characters. Similarly, in the movie *Memento*, what the protagonist lacks is not the experience but the recognition of events, the repetition of people which creates meaning; for him, time is irrelevant (the "backward" direction of the story is available only to us, since we are capable of the temporal dramatic irony of recognizing the repetition in what for him is a perpetual present).

47. Eco also hints at the importance of repetition for signification: "Only if I already know the general rule which makes for 'if smoke, then fire' am I able to render the sensory datum *meaningful*, by seeing it as that smoke which can reveal fire" (*Semiotics* 33).

48. The repeated event does not have to be "cognizable" to be "recognizable," since cognition is the *result* of repetition. Repetition allows us to identify events and explain them only by identifying them as what we have encountered before.

49. Also: "physics is a vast collection of reports on what has happened" (Notes from a lecture at the Society for Empirical Philosophy (SEP) conference, University of Montreal, May 11-14 2001.)

50. Cf Stoppard, when Guildenstern says to Rosencrantz, “But you don’t believe anything until it happens. And it *has* all happened. Hasn’t it?” (108).

51. Also Eco’s mention of the empiricists and “the process that they basically accepted as a reasonable way of moving in the world, a process whose legitimacy was confirmed by the fact that, all things considered, it worked” (*Kant* 68).

52. In the opposite extreme, nothing specific can be predicted as happening in the future because nothing has happened yet: “We bet on what events would or would not take place; the choice was virtually unlimited, because up till then absolutely nothing had happened” (“How Much Shall We Bet?” 86). This is also the situation in any other point in time as well, not just the beginning, since, from the point of view of *any* present, the future hasn’t happened yet.

53. And, conversely, *all* events included in a story are significant, as is implied in Barthes’ comment: “[the] question is the following: Is everything in narrative significant, and if not, if insignificant stretches subsist in the narrative syntagm, what is ultimately, so to speak, the significance of this insignificance?” (143). In *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster also makes the same point regarding the detective novel: “In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word is not significant” (9).

54. In terms of evolution, this would lead us to the question of whether the concept of evolution is of the narrative kind (does evolution have a plot?), or whether it is an effect of simulation.

55. Causality, as Aristotle says, is not supposed to be compatible with simultaneity: “‘Simultaneous’ we use in its primary and most correct meaning of things that have come into being together. For neither in that case is prior, nor is either posterior to the other. We mean ‘simultaneous in time.’ ‘Simultaneous’ in nature we apply to those things where the being of either necessitates that of the other but neither is cause of the other. For instance, take ‘double’ and ‘half,’ for these two have reciprocal dependence. If a double exists, then a half; if a half exists, also a double. And neither of these is the cause of the other’s existence or being” (*The Organon* 101). The properly semiotic necessity through definition (as in any categories which define each other in a binary pair) is different from the necessity of causality because it does not involve the element of time. Just as the half does not “cause” the double but still necessitates it, in another binary pair we can say that the “true” necessitates the “false” without “causing” it (or the oracle determines Oedipus’ actions without interfering in them).

56. Or, in the words of Darwin, “beautiful co-adaptations” (Vol I 76).

57. Not *really*. In “reality,” Darwin specifically takes the time to explain that simultaneity of evolutionary change should not be assumed: “It has been objected that in order to modify the eye and still preserve it as a perfect instrument, many changes would have to be effected simultaneously, which, it is assumed, could not be done through natural selection; but as I have attempted to show . . . it is not necessary to suppose that the modifications were all simultaneous, if they were extremely slight and gradual. . . . [T]here is no necessity for supposing that all the parts of any being have been simultaneously modified. The most striking modifications,

excellently adapted for some purpose, might . . . be acquired by successive variations, if slight, first in one part and then in another; and as they would be transmitted all together, they would appear to us as if they had been simultaneously developed" (Vol I 226, 265). In this way, "a structure even as perfect as an eagle's eye might thus be formed" (226), and "there is no logical impossibility in the acquirement of any conceivable degree of perfection through natural selection" (258). In relation to the idea of "perfection" itself, Darwin also points out that it is not an abstract notion, and if species are not perfect, we should rather say that "they are not as perfect as they might have been *in relation to their conditions*" (262) [italics mine]. In other words, Darwin implies that the idea of perfection would be the result of what evolution has produced, not the other way round.

58. If we define breathing as the problem and oxygen as the solution, we can also refer to Deleuze's explanation: "This is what is meant by such famous formulae as: 'The really great problems are posed only once they are solved' or 'Mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve' . . . because the solution necessarily follows from the complete conditions under which the problem is determined as a problem, from the means and the terms which are employed in order to pose it. The problem . . . is at once both the site of an originary truth and the genesis of a derived truth" (159). (Or even: "Stories happen only to those who are able to tell them, someone once said. In the same way, perhaps, experiences present themselves only to those who are able to have them" [Auster 260].) In a sense, the solution is an analytical, not a synthetic, statement, derived from the initial problem through a process of deduction; it does not add anything but simply rephrases the given conditions in different terms: "The value of deduction is grounded in its emptiness. For the very reason that the deduction does not add anything to the premises, it may always be applied without a risk of leading to a failure. More precisely speaking, the conclusion is no less reliable than the premises. It is the logical function of deduction to transfer truth from given statements to other statements-but that is all it can do. It cannot establish synthetic truth unless another synthetic truth is already known" (Reichenbach 37-38). Deduction, we observe, works by "reducing problems to the form of propositions capable of serving as cases of solution" (Deleuze 161). This is not unlike events of the performative kind, where "the mind brings about the very state of affairs that it has been thinking about" (Searle 61); thought and action (mind and body?) exist in an analytical relationship with each other. They repeat each other in a tautological, rather than cumulative, way, short-circuiting causality into identity.

59. The problem of causality without contact is something we won't be discussing here; however, Reichenbach tells us that causality without contact is indeed a problem: "The [causal] anomalies concern the principle of action by contact, formulating a well-established property of causal transmission: the cause has to spread continuously through space until it reaches the point where it produces a certain effect. . . . The cause does not affect distant objects instantaneously, but spreads from point to point until it affects the objects by contact" (185). And Zeh reminds us that "causality" means in physics "the relativistic limit for the speed of propagation of causal relations" (2). At the same time, we have Michael Crichton's glib remark that "[y]ou also can't put a piece of paper through a telephone line. But you can send a fax" (*Timeline* 120). Physics experiments such as the classic double-slit experiment suggest the possibility of two

simultaneous events which somehow react to each other, have “knowledge” of each other, even though there is no time for this knowledge to occur and no way for this information to travel without any physical contact between the two: “the path beyond the slit selected by the particle will be influenced by the existence of the other slit; the particle knows, so to speak, whether or not the other slit is open. This is the point where the particle interpretation [vs. the wave/probability interpretation] arrives at a causal anomaly, that is, a violation of the usual laws of causality” (Reichenbach 184). The problem with the particle interpretation is that it postulates two independent events which cannot influence each other causally, and yet they seem to. The wave interpretation, on the other hand, postulates one event, without breaking down the wave into particles. However, both interpretations seem to involve simultaneity rather than causality.

60. Also: “the necessity realizes itself through a set of contingencies” (i ek, *They* 128), and it is therefore a “retroactive necessity” (*They* 130).

61. This would be applicable to a range of questions, including that of the works of fiction selected for an English thesis, for example, where the only thing they have in common is perhaps the fact that they are all part of the thesis.

62. “[T]here is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything. The popular mind in fact doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a doer: it posits the same event first as a cause and then a second time as its effect” (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 45). This is a paradox as old as Aristotle: in the *Metaphysics*, he says: “What *causes* a thing in one sense may be its *effect* in another. Thus exercise is the cause of physical fitness, and the latter again of exercise” (4).

63. This is an ongoing argument especially in fields such as ethics and epistemology; as Brown observes, some people would argue that “we cannot determine the norms for accepting or rejecting knowledge claims solely by examining the grounds on which people do in fact decide to accept or reject such claims. Rather, the norms for an activity must be prior to that activity” (31-32), a view which Brown himself rejects.

64. Consider also Auster’s observation occasioned by a broken umbrella: “Because it can no longer perform its function, the umbrella has ceased to be an umbrella. It might resemble an umbrella, it might once have been an umbrella, but now it has changed into something else. The word, however, has remained the same” (93).

65. Aristotle talks about “[t]he absurdity of separating a thing and its essence” (*Metaphysics* 179), but we have to wonder whether this is not possible only in simulation, where the thing does not *have* an essence from which it can possibly be separated. In any other theoretical environment, the separation would only serve to prove that the “essence” exists; by failing to be what it is “supposed” to be, the thing simply confirms the “essence” it has not achieved.

66. Another example can be found in ethics, where “no information about how people do in fact behave entails any conclusions about how they ought to behave” (Brown 31).

67. Aristotle again: “what is moved must at first be *in* that from which it is moved, and then *not* be in it—i.e. move into the other and come to be in it” (*Metaphysics* 147). In order for that to happen, the thing which moves must not *constitute* the thing from which it moves, and that doesn’t happen with species which change into other species, since there is nothing they move *from* that is not themselves.

68. Evolution can never go back far enough to become origin. Or, we could say that evolution is the theory of ongoing origin, in the sense that it continuously accounts for the “origin” of each successive species in the preceding species. But that would mean redefining the word “origin” to mean “the previous” rather than “the first.”

69. Reichenbach: “the laws of probability take over the place once occupied by the law of causality” (163).

70. Searle also raises this question: “each thing we do carries the conviction, valid or invalid, that we could be doing something else right here and now” (95). The opposite view is summarized in Eco’s comment: “the logic of knowledge needs no discovery, because it knows already. Why must it demonstrate that which could not be otherwise?” (*Foucault’s Pendulum* 242). (And we would be remiss if we didn’t mention Baudrillard’s reversal of the terms: “The great philosophical question used to be ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ Today, the real question is: ‘Why is there nothing rather than something?’” [*Perfect* 2].) However, one of the unspoken (or, now, spoken) assumptions of this thesis is that there is something.

71. Aristotle defines the necessary as “[t]hat which cannot be otherwise than it is” (*Metaphysics* 10).

72. Cf. “A Sign in Space”: “I conceived the idea of making a sign, that’s true enough, or rather, I conceived the idea of considering a sign something that I felt like making, so when, at that point in space and not in another, I made something, meaning to make a sign, it turned out that I really had made a sign, after all” (31). Whatever he ends up making would be a sign.

73. See also Chapter Four, pp. 258-59.

74. When Searle explains that his hypothetical man in the Chinese room actually does not know Chinese, even though this truth cannot be proven since all the evidence points to his perfect knowledge of Chinese, his argument is that “the mind has more than syntax, it has a semantics” (31). In other words, while the external, visible behavior (the syntax) shows knowledge of Chinese, the man in the room has inside knowledge of himself (the semantics), and so he knows that he doesn’t know Chinese. In this sense, an essentialist view would distinguish between two things, inside and outside, semantics behind the syntax, while a simulation would not.

75. In Gleick’s terms, the self-fulfilling prophecies would be ambiguous because each word in them must carry more information than normal speech. While normal speech relies on context, there is no context for the prophecy yet, so it carries a lot more information than it is supposed to. In normal language, each term carries less than 100% meaning because it relies on the context

outside itself to complete its meaning; the prophecies, on the other hand, cannot rely on any context outside themselves so they carry their own meaning around. That is why it is impossible to guess what the prophecy would mean (e.g., the prophecy about the forest in *Macbeth*), since there is no link from the context (outside) to the words (inside) whereby the context can supply part of the meaning and allow us to guess what the words would say to complete that meaning. Instead of the context and the words meeting halfway to make sense, meaning begins and ends with the words of the prophecy, regardless of their context.

76. In a sense, meaning has to be selective: not everything can be meaningful if anything is to be meaningful. Or, the choice between equally meaningful possibilities would be arbitrary and meaningless.

77. Even though Calvino cautions in *Invisible Cities* that “the city must never be confused with the words that describe it” (61), his warning suggests that the possibility of such confusion is real, a point that Frank Kermode also makes in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*: “It is true that in some situations we cannot distinguish between a fact and our knowledge of the fact, which is what the physicists say about their subatomic observations” (61). While we usually take this to mean that the “fact” is less an objective thing and more our own interpretation or description of it, the opposite is also true, that our knowledge/description is a physical event in itself: “every change of information has to be represented by a physical process with thermodynamical aspects. . . . [A]ny gain of information . . . has to be accompanied by some process of dissipation leading to the production of . . . entropy. . . . [I]nformation is not “an extra-physical concept” (Zeh 62-65).

78. If we were really bold here, we could suggest that the movement from simulation to narrative is a movement from an improbable state toward a probable state, which is how irreversible physical processes work (Zeh 33). Since narrative is by definition made up of probable events, can we say that narrative is more “probable” than simulation? That there is a movement from simulation to the simulation of narrative? A movement from information to history, similar to the process Calvino describes in “World Memory”? (This would be the opposite of the movement *toward* simulation, envisioned by Baudrillard almost as a historical process, and similar to Nietzsche’s view of history as the solidification of accident into necessity, of error into truth.)

79. Auster is also interested in self-identity of this kind and talks about “[f]ate in the sense of what was, of what happened to be” (133).

80. B. F. Skinner finds possible application of this in other fields as well: “a poet is only a literary tradition’s way of making more of a literary tradition, and . . . a scientist is only science’s way of making more science” (qtd in Sebeok, *Culture Signs* 142).

81. Baudrillard: “There is nothing to counter the implacable rule which states that the virtual produces the real as its waste product” (*Illusion* 79). And elsewhere he says that “the real is merely a particular case of . . . simulation” (*Perfect* 16).

82. In this sense, what Pratchett says about the brand-new thirty-thousand-year old hills holds for any statement about evolution: just as the Pratchett hills were created very old, we can say about any given thing **a** that it was created the way it is, since before, when it was different, it was not **a** but something else, **a** (t_1). But we can also call this previous thing (**a** (t_1)) simply **b**, just as we would call a mouse with cat-like features a cat. In this sense, **a** as such has no genealogy.

CHAPTER 4: AUSTER

“Quinn had been prepared for this and knew how to answer. He was not going to let himself be caught. Since he was technically Paul Auster, that was the name he had to protect. Anything else, even the truth, would be an invention, a mask to hide behind and keep him safe. ‘In that case,’ he said, ‘I’m happy to oblige you. My name is Quinn’” (*City of Glass* 89). Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* ostensibly consists of three detective novels and deals with the standard detective problems of investigation, truth, and identity. However, a closer look reveals that it seems to operate in a different genre: not that of the detective novel but that of simulation. More specifically, Auster addresses the problems of detecting, overcoming, and ultimately siding with simulation. In the interaction between the self and simulation, which this chapter is all about, one thing becomes clear: as long as Auster’s characters resist the quicksand of simulation, they are its victims, but the moment they embrace it, they can be its creators, they can be free.

Simulation is generally considered to be something “bad.”¹ In what seems to be Baudrillard’s latently humanist vision of defeating the system, the words “fight” (“Against the extermination of evil, of death, of illusion, against this Perfect Crime, we must fight for the criminal imperfection of the world” [*Vital* 74]) and “weapon” (“The system’s own logic turns out to be the best weapon against it” [*Selected* 123]) come up quite often, and things tend to “fall into the clutches of total simulation” (*Perfect* 4). It seems somehow natural to assume that simulation is something negative. Other words heavy with connotation are “escape” (good), “rebel” (good),

“obey” (bad): “while it is true that one can always escape the reality principle of the content, one can never escape the reality principle of the code. Even while rebelling against the content, one more and more closely obeys the logic of the code” (Baudrillard, qtd. in Tseëlon 119).² The “content” varies within a closed and apparently repressive “form,” always contained within the bounds of simulation.³ This idea is illustrated very simply in Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*:

GUIL: We are not restricted. No boundaries have been defined, no inhibitions imposed. . . . We can do what we like and say what we like to whomever we like, without restriction.

ROS: Within limits, of course.

GUIL: Certainly within limits. (116)⁴

In the context of the play, the characters are referring to, among other things, their freedom from the author. While the author can make them do anything at all, without restrictions, the characters will still be limited to what he has written for them. Even though it can be anything, it can’t be anything other than what it is.⁵ The limitations imposed by simulation are exactly of the same kind: regardless of what we do, we will be confined to what we ourselves have chosen to do.⁶ Our choice is restricted to what we choose, and so it is less than absolutely free: “At least we are presented with alternatives. . . . But not choice” (Stoppard 39). Any action the characters take will have to remain within the limits of all the actions available to them: just as, in a game of chess, all moves, however unpredictable, remain within the confines of the board; otherwise they wouldn’t be chess moves.

In *The New York Trilogy*, Auster makes the same point: “This is what the ancients called fate, and every hero must submit to it. There is no choice, and if there is anything to be done, it is only the one thing that leaves no choice. But Blue is loathe [sic] to acknowledge it. He

struggles against it, he rejects it, he grows sick at heart. But that is only because he already knows, and to fight it is already to have accepted it, to want to say no is already to have said yes” (222).⁷ The “no” is not merely a subset or a kind of “yes”; it is the essence of the “yes,” and there is no “yes” outside of that “no.” The very meaning of the “yes,” in other words, is to force the person to say “no”: “The point was to prove to him that I no longer cared—that was the crux of it: to treat him as a dead man, even though he was alive. But before I proved this to Fanshawe, I had to prove it to myself, and the fact that I needed to prove it was proof that I still cared too much” (Auster 317-18). The two opponents are engaged in what Cavell calls “the consuming game of manipulation, the object of which is to convince the other that you yourself do not need to play” (118). But the act of leaving the game is always also a move *in* the game (just as *telling* the opponent that you don’t want to talk to him would be defeating the meaning of the words).

The same futile “no” which means yes is the only possible no we can say to simulation; it is a denial which does not exist outside of what it denies, a way out which turns back in, taking an alternative route to the same destination. It is not that we can’t get to the outside; it is that there is no outside to get to, because the moment we get there it will no longer be an outside: precisely because we will have gotten there. As Rex Butler says in *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real*, “any outside is only an effect of the system itself” (46). Just as simulation creates the “outside,” it can also create its enemies, so we have no way of knowing whether our dissent is genuine rather than cultivated by the system, or whether we want what we want despite the system rather than because of the system.⁸ And for Baudrillard this is a problem: “the central problem of Baudrillard’s work is how to contest simulation when there is no outside standard by which to judge it . . . [and] how to speak against simulation, when there is no real but only

simulation” (Butler 121, 152).⁹ The simulation does not prevent us from saying “no”: the problem is that it provides us with the “no” we are free to say.¹⁰ The dissent comes from the simulation itself, not from somewhere else: not even from us, because there is no “us” separate from the system. There is *nothing* separate from the system.¹¹ But the same can be said about reality, and there are two equal and opposite situations which would make it impossible to speak about simulation: if simulation is everything and reality does not exist, or, alternatively, if reality is everything and simulation does not exist. Neither of those descriptions is accurate on its own, but together they hint at the fact that simulation is not something different from reality. When Baudrillard says that “[t]here is no longer a fiction that life can confront” (*Selected* 146), he is telling us above all that simulation is not “fiction,” that it is no longer something different from reality, that it *is* reality.

The question is, is it reality because the “real” reality is gone (because there is no reality), or is it reality because there is no simulation? Or, to use the king analogy from *Macbeth*, is Macbeth now a king only because the other (the real) king is gone and whatever has replaced him has to be treated as real in the absence of the “real,” or is Macbeth a “real” king, because there is no “false” king to begin with: whoever happens to occupy the throne is “really” the king (not a usurper), and there is no other test or requirement?¹² Or, simply, is the usurper really a king? The usurper does not co-exist with the king but *replaces* him, which means that we cannot call someone a usurper until he actually takes the throne: he is never a usurper unless he is *also* a king. In some sense, being a usurper *means* being a king, and vice versa. Or, more generally, being simulated means being real. By definition, simulation never finds itself in a position to be compared with a “reality” different from itself. In this sense, we cannot talk about two things,

reality *and* simulation, but only one, a Möbius compound of both.¹³ In this case, it is difficult to say that simulation is really doing anything “bad” to reality, since it *is* reality. Saying that simulation manipulates reality would be like saying that one side of the Möbius strip wants to negate the other, that there *are* two sides. In his introduction to Baudrillard, Mark Poster convincingly articulates the problem: “Critical theory faces the formidable task of unveiling structures of domination when no one is dominating, nothing is being dominated and no ground exists for a principle of liberation from domination” (*Selected* 6). Fighting becomes a little complicated when there is nothing to fight against (or, equally as important, nothing to fight *for*).

According to Auster, “[t]he real problem boils down to identifying the nature of the problem itself. To start with, who poses the greater threat to him, White or Black?” (201). It makes little sense for a victim to be unsure of who threatens him, what the threat is, and why it is that he feels threatened. If there is suffering, it is there because it can be identified.¹⁴ If it cannot be identified, then it is difficult to say that it exists.¹⁵ We cannot be in pain and not know it, because pain is recursively defined as the knowledge/awareness of pain. If we don’t know that we are in pain, that means our brain doesn’t register the pain, but it also means there is nothing *to* register, since the pain originates in the brain: it is the brain’s reaction to the injury of the body, not the injury itself. Same with freedom (or lack of freedom): it is not a thing but the awareness of / reaction to a thing: we only lack freedom if that is what we think; we only lack freedom if we are aware that we lack freedom. “Freedom” is the name for the awareness of freedom, just as “pain” is name for our awareness that we are being hurt. In the Auster universe, for example, such pain or lack of freedom cannot be identified; the system the protagonist is trapped in does no obvious evil to him: “If so [if there is a conspiracy against him], what are they doing to him?”

Nothing very terrible, finally—at least not in any absolute sense. They have trapped Blue into doing nothing, into being so inactive as to reduce his life to almost no life at all. Yes, says Blue to himself, that’s what it feels like: like nothing at all” (201). This is what we can say about simulation too, that it feels “like nothing at all.” It is not “bad”; it is not even something “bad” that feels good (assuming that we have been manipulated into feeling good about it). Part of the fascination with simulation is that we cannot find out what it is that we are fascinated with. Same with Auster’s characters: they are never forced into taking the case (usually, they are not even professional detectives and they don’t get paid), but they seem to have a fatal fascination with discovering what the “case” is all about, usually because the case doesn’t seem to be about anything at all; they are drawn in, provoked into looking for meaning by the obvious lack of it:

My job is to watch someone, no one in particular as far as I can tell, and send in a report about him every week. Just that. Watch this guy and write about it. Not one damned thing more.

What’s so terrible about that?

He doesn’t do anything, that’s what. He just sits in his room all day and writes. It’s enough to drive you crazy. (214)

There is no detectable trap which keeps the protagonist where he is; that is, as far as we or he can tell, he is working “on the case” by his own volition. However, the boundaries of this volition and its very existence are put into question as we get deeper into the “case.” The detective (called Blue) is hired by a person named White to watch a person named Black. Instead of, or in addition to, watching Black, Blue endeavors to discover the identity of White, which he knows would mean going against White’s instructions: in other words, it would mean playing against the rules, disrupting the system. However, it turns out that White is in fact Black, so that the case Blue *thought* he was working on (investigating White, who is Black) turns out to be exactly the

case he was hired to work on (investigating Black). To complicate things further, the complaining in the above passage is done by Black, whom the protagonist (Blue) is supposed to watch, and who in turn watches him, so that they are both engaged in the same activities, doing the same “job,” suffering the same pain. Black, who is the “bad guy” (to use that inapplicable classical detective genre term), suffers as much as the “good guy”; the “enemy” is as trapped inside the system as the protagonist.¹⁶ From either point of view, the exile or suffering is self-imposed, which makes it all the more difficult to escape, since to fight the system one has to fight oneself.

But there is more to it than that: the rebellion against simulation is not merely futile, shrugged off by the system, unnoticed. On the contrary, the attempt to escape the system becomes an integral part of the system itself, just as Oedipus’ escape from the oracle is indispensable to the oracle. Oedipus’ failure does not merely make Oedipus wrong: it makes the oracle right. Baudrillard also makes this point: “The terrifying aspect of such an event is that, beyond a certain point, every effort to exorcise it only serves to precipitate it: no premonition has ever been of any use; each event confirms and legitimates the one that preceded it” (*Selected* 191). And so we enter self-fulfilling prophecy territory.¹⁷ The point is that even something so obviously and inalienably personal as the awareness of the possibility of manipulation contributes to the manipulation itself (for example, if Oedipus had not consciously tried to run away from the prophecy, he would not have encountered it). As Baudrillard says, “[c]ritical consciousness . . . always comes after the fact, a day too late. . . . It is nothing but retrospective prophecy. . . . This may be the risk thought has to take: it must risk falling victim to its own prophecies” (*Vital* 57). More simply, the thought of resisting the system has to come to terms

with the fact that this resistance will strengthen, if not radically create, the system: as Baudrillard¹⁸ observes, “Hölderlin’s phrase [“But where danger is, grows the saving power also”] must be reversed: the more the saving power grows, the greater the danger” (*Vital* 81).¹⁹ The defense measures are more dangerous than what they are trying to prevent: in other words, we can’t fight simulation because we are *causing* it by trying to escape. In this connection, Butler cites the following, very Oedipal, example:

another tale Baudrillard relates [in *Seduction*] [is] the famous anecdote ‘Death in Samarkand,’ from Somerset Maugham’s play *Sheppey*.²⁰ It is a story about a man who one day accidentally comes upon Death at a crossroads. The man, fearful for his life, runs in the opposite direction and travels all that day and into the next night to arrive finally, exhausted and out of breath, at the last place he thinks Death would look for him, the obscure town of Samarkand. Meanwhile, the King has summoned Death to his court, where he reprimands him for scaring one of his subjects. Death replies that he had not meant to do so but was surprised to see him there as he already had an appointment with him the next night in Samarkand (S, 72-74)! Here too the point is not so much that Death as a figure is anywhere in particular as that he is that for which everything stands in, underlies all of our actions, is present even in his absence. Indeed, . . . we cannot even say that Death is that which precedes us and that toward which we run, but rather must say that Death does not exist before us, is only an effect of our attempting to run away from him. It is our very attempt to escape fate that is our fate. The truth of Death’s prediction is not fulfilled until we try to refute it. We spend the whole of our lives trying to avoid the fate which becomes in retrospect the very fate we always had. (103)

What in this passage is defined as “death” might as easily be referred to as “simulation.” In light of this example, we see that simulation is the name for that which we cause by trying to escape from simulation.

In *The New York Trilogy*, Auster’s characters are initially motivated to escape because they feel trapped in the “case” they are respectively investigating in each of the three novels, with a conclusion common to all: “One way or another, the key to the case is action. He must go on

disrupting things wherever he can, a little here, a little there, chipping away at each conundrum until the whole structure begins to weaken, until one day the whole rotten business comes toppling to the ground” (199). However, the problem is how to determine which action would really be disruptive to the system. In each case, Auster’s protagonist attempts such a disruption and fails: in *Ghosts*, for example, Blue confronts Black, his “enemy” (for lack of a better word), only to discover that his enemy was expecting this confrontation all along and in fact was counting on it, which makes the protagonist’s actions not so much part of his own plan as part of his enemy’s plan, since they do not disrupt so much as fulfill his enemy’s intentions. Or, in another case, Blue is “wondering if there is not some way that he might help Black, if it would not be possible for him to offer his hand in friendship. That would certainly turn the tables, Blue thinks, that would certainly stand the whole business on its head. But why not? Why not do the unexpected?” (227). The problem with doing the “unexpected” is that it’s impossible to know which move would be unexpected and which would be part of the plan, which move is truly his and which is his opponent’s. Stoppard’s characters face the same problem:

ROS: I wish I was dead. (*Considers the drop.*) I could jump over the side. That would put a spoke in their wheel.

GUIL: Unless they’re counting on it.

ROS: I shall remain on board. That’ll put a spoke in their wheel. (*The futility of it, fury.*) All right! We don’t question, we don’t doubt. We perform. But a line must be drawn somewhere. (108)

But putting spokes in the wheel is how the wheel gets created in the first place; the spokes are part of the wheel, and there is no wheel without the spokes, no system without the individual will to escape it. Just as, in *Macbeth*, the king was robbed of his power of causing things to happen because someone else was causing them *first*, the system robs Rosencrantz of his power to make

decisions by anticipating his next move, even if it is the opposite of what he thinks the system would assume he would do. Whatever he does will end up being beneficial to the system; whatever junk he throws at it will turn out to be useful construction material for the system to expand and cover everything “new” he can think of *before* he has even had a chance to think of it. Trying to act on his own, he finds that he is acting for the system; there is no part of him that is outside the system, but, more importantly, there is no system outside of him. The need to “draw a line somewhere” is the need to break away from this vicious circle and find a point where simulation ends, where the spokes would not conspire to form a wheel. In other words, it is an attempt to find an “outside” where simulation does not hold sway, an outside off the edge of the chessboard and beyond the rules of the game, where acting would not be playing and an action would not be a move. In that “outside”²¹ there will be no more second-guessing and everything would be taken at its face value: when someone disrupts the system, he’ll know that he is disrupting the system, not aiding it in some way that is not apparent to him. (This is also a space where everything would happen in real time, not as a result of predictions such as the system’s knowledge of Rosencrantz’s next move.)

But Auster’s characters consistently fail to recover that free space: “The strange thing was not that I might have wanted to kill Fanshawe, but that I sometimes imagined he *wanted* me to kill him. . . . I became convinced that this was the true meaning of the letter he had written. Fanshawe was waiting for me. He had chosen me as his executioner, and he knew that he could trust me to carry out the job. But that was precisely why I wasn’t going to do it. Fanshawe’s power had to be broken, not submitted to. . . . Killing Fanshawe would mean nothing. The point was to find him alive—and then to walk away from him alive” (*The Locked Room* 317-18). The

protagonist/narrator goes through the same fruitless Rosencrantzian monologue, which never becomes a dialogue because the system never commits to an act of its own: it makes the protagonist act *for* it, and, although it is quite possible to guess that, out of two opposite actions, one is insidiously suggested to the protagonist by the system and the other is genuinely his own, it is quite impossible to guess which is which. They are both Rosencrantzian in their opacity to the person performing the actions. All he can do is pick one at random: “As he turned the question over in his mind, it occurred to him that he no longer had an opinion. He saw the argument for making the call, and at the same time he saw the argument for not making it” (Auster 125). Since the system does not explicitly want anything from the protagonist, he has to imagine what the system might want from him and then do the opposite, which usually turns out to be what the system wanted him to do in the first place. If he thinks A, and then discovers that the system (or somebody else) *wanted* him to think A, does that mean that the truth is B? Since every action the system wants is an action by necessity performed by the protagonist (the “system” doesn’t act as an independent agent), there are no criteria to decide which action was caused by something *outside* of him. Since the system just wants him to do whatever it is he happens to be doing anyway, he always suspects that his actions have an external source.

But the real danger (assuming simulation is dangerous at all), is not so much that there isn’t an *outside*, as there isn’t an *inside*. Since the protagonist is not able to determine which of his own actions have an external cause (are caused by the system), he is equally unable to say which are internally motivated, truly his own. It is no longer a question of being able to find an action which would disrupt the system, of choosing an action different from the one the system would anticipate; it is rather a question of attributing a different reason or cause to the *same*

action (what Baudrillard calls “an excess of causality” [*Selected* 189]), contesting not the content of the action but the “form” this action is cast in, the role this action has to play. Blue has been working on the same case all along, but his reasons for his actions are in fact Black’s reasons for Blue’s actions, so that Blue’s actions have a completely different cause than the one he imagines them to have. Just like Blue’s “case,” “[the systems of simulation] are possible only for a completely different reason than the one they give themselves . . . [and] they must be explained altogether otherwise” (Butler 120). In literary theory, this is a phenomenon referred to as “doubling”: simulation “*doubles* [the world], gives it an entirely different explanation than its own” (Butler 151). In the same way, the person sitting on the throne is doubled into both a king and a usurper.²² As Butler suggests, in simulation the same action can have two “identities,” two opposite reasons for happening: “The very totality of simulation now means something else, is able to be seen as suggesting some other fate than its own, heading in a direction it does not foresee, having to be explained for a completely other reason than the one it provides” (106-107).²³ And there is no basis on which to choose one reason over another, due to what Baudrillard calls “the equiprobability of every cause and of every consequence” (*Selected* 193). In Auster’s terms, we could say that Blue is working on a different “case” than the one he thinks he is working on, but the two cases are nevertheless identical. Or, more confusingly, Blue thinks that the case he thinks he is working on must be different from the “real” case he wasn’t told about, and when he discovers that the two are identical, he can see that the case he thought he was working on (the case which was supposed to be a “cover” for something else) never existed as such: it was never a cover; it was always itself. It was exactly what it pretended to be, without knowing that it was pretending.

To see how not knowing that one is pretending is a philosophical problem, a problem of subjectivity, we can turn to John Searle: "If I am going for a walk to Hyde Park, there are any number of other things that are happening in the course of my walk, but their descriptions do not describe my intentional actions, because in acting, what I am doing depends in large part on what I think I am doing. So, for example, I am also moving in the general direction of Patagonia, shaking the hair on my head up and down, wearing out my shoes, and moving a lot of air molecules" (38).²⁴ While an external observer would not be able to tell which is the true "reason" behind the walk, the person who is doing the walking, Searle argues, should know "the truth": "a person is in a special position to know what he is doing. He doesn't have to observe himself . . . to see which action he is performing" (57-58). And, conversely, a person observing him would not know what the action "really" is. Here we can recall the Chinese room *gedanken* experiment, where only the person inside the room is in a position to know that he doesn't know Chinese, while to an outside observer he would appear to have perfect knowledge of the language. Searle's conviction that there exists such a thing as the "inside" of the room²⁵, a subjective space of hidden causality where the "real" reasons reside, also means that he rejects "doubling" as a possibility.²⁶ A person according to Searle is a person who knows *why* he is doing the things he is doing: "In the case of human beings, whenever we follow a rule, we are being guided by the actual content or the meaning of the rule . . . [so that] meanings cause behavior" (Searle 46). Any attempt to keep the action but retrospectively discard the meaning would fail. Searle would probably argue that this would not be the same action at all: that is, he would say that Blue is working on two different cases, without the first case retrospectively changing into the second. They would not be identical, just as one cannot imitate an action,

however perfectly, and claim that he is actually doing the action. Searle in fact considers the theoretical possibility of a flawless imitation of a human action by artificial means, for example a machine, and concludes that “the computer is unable to *duplicate* however powerful may be its ability to simulate no simulation by itself ever constitutes duplication” (37). The term “simulation,” as used by Searle, remains exactly the same as the term we have been using so far: simulation can reproduce the form but not necessarily the content, the “syntax” (Searle) but not the semantics, the “code” (Baudrillard) but not the message. Where Searle’s theory differs is in suggesting that there is something outside simulation, or, more precisely, something *inside* simulation, a hidden content, a subjective space, an intuitive knowledge. We know, Searle argues, the “real” reason behind what we do; a computer may be able to do the same but without the knowledge of *why* it is doing it: “The formal properties of the behaviour are not sufficient to show that a rule is being followed. In order that the rule be followed, the meaning of the rule has to play some causal role in the behaviour” (47). In other words, there is always a reason, an intention which defines the action in a unique way, so that, for example, if a person follows an order for his own personal reasons rather than for the reasons he was ordered to, then the action he was ordered to do is not really the action he does, even though they may seem entirely identical (he would seem to obey the order, whereas he is actually doing something else that we, as outside observers, wrongly interpret as obedience just because it reflects exactly the content of the order).

To this we can oppose Wittgenstein’s view: “we do not ‘follow’ some rule external to the act—the ‘rule’ is inherent to the act itself. . . . [S]trictly speaking we never know what—if any—rule we are following” (*They* 153). In other words, we cannot establish conclusively whether we are

doing something because we want it, because the system wants it, or because the system wants us to want it. Which means that we can do no better than Searle's computer, going through the motions without knowing exactly "why." There is no justification outside the act itself, a moral or other category defining the act before the act takes place and creates that category. Not to follow a rule external to the act, but to create the rule by performing the act can mean both freedom and limitation. The act does not happen in accordance with the rules of a pre-determined game; what we discover is that there is no game outside of the moves, and the only reason we think we are playing a game is that we find ourselves making a move. Or, we think we have a destination just because we see that we are walking, which, since we don't know the destination, in turn makes us suspect that someone else does. Hence the bad reputation of simulation.

But more than that, just as the rule is not external to the act, the cause is not internal to it. The reason "behind" the act gets created, retrospectively, by the act itself. Butler gives the following Baudrillardian example: "It serves no purpose to discover by shadowing someone that he has a double life. . . . [T]he important point is that it is *the shadowing itself which is the other's double life*. To shadow the other is *de facto* to give him a double life, a parallel existence" (Baudrillard qtd. in Butler 112).²⁷ The example of this character, who does not "discover" so much as "create" the truth about the double life of her subject, points to the lack of an interior motive on his part: "by her shadowing [she] wants to discover a secret about the man, but . . . by this means she in fact imbues his life with a secret" (Butler 112). The secret does not exist before her attempt to discover it; the secret is in fact the name for her attempt to discover a secret. The important thing is that the man does not even need to know about his own "secret" in

order for the secret to exist; he can have a double life without his knowledge, a “hidden” identity which is exposed to her eyes but hidden from his, an inside completely external to him. As Butler points out, “she as it were destines him, denies him his free will, makes everything he does seem as though it was done for an entirely different reason than the one he gives himself” (112). In other words, he might as well have been doing everything for her benefit, allowing himself (by walking outside) to be followed so that he would have the double life of being followed, which is exactly what she wanted to find all along. In a way, he has been doing what *she* wanted him to do all along. Even though he doesn’t know it, he has never been free.²⁸

The same problem concerns Auster. In *Ghosts*, the protagonist faces a very clear danger of doubling: “It seems perfectly plausible to him that he is also being watched, observed by another in the same way that he has been observing Black. If that is the case, then he has never been free” (200). Even though he was feeling free at the time, subsequent evidence can show that he was not; he retrospectively loses his freedom. His free will is retrospectively doubled into predetermination. That is why simulation is perceived as dangerous, because it suggests that people were doing things for a completely different reason than they thought they were. Or, as Auster says, “[w]e are not where we are . . . but in a false position” (200). This would mean that, even though the physical position does not change,²⁹ its triangulation relative to other points in space can change, and the reference points one uses to calculate one’s position become unstable. At the same time, there is the attendant perception that there still is a “real” position beyond the grasp of our knowledge, that if our knowledge stops short somewhere, it must have stopped short of *something*. In other words, if it turns out that we don’t know something, then there must be *something* we don’t know.³⁰ If we have taken the wrong turn, then there must be a right turn; if

something is false, then it must be false relative to something else which is true (or, in the very least, the statement “this is false” must be true). In other words, if we don’t have the position of freedom, at least we have that of the absence of freedom. This is essentially a Cartesian position: the absence of truth is not a falsity but a truth in the same way the absence of certainty is not a doubt but a certainty. Butler says the same about simulation: “If he says simulation can no longer be seen as such but is proven in its absence, he can at least name this absence as *simulation*” (147).

Part of the simulation mechanism, we are tempted to assume, contrary to Poster, is that if there is manipulation, there must be someone doing the manipulating (the Nietzschean “doer” behind the deed). If simulation simulates anything, it is the notion of the “other,” the one who remains outside of the simulation, the one who knows what it’s all about.³¹ Even if the protagonist (the subject) doesn’t know the reasons behind his actions, someone else (“the system”) does. In the confrontation of Blue and Black, for example, Black assumes a position of superiority, claiming that the true reasons are available to him: “Are you going to sit there and tell me that you’re smarter than I am? At least I know what I’ve been doing. I’ve had my job to do, and I’ve done it. But you’re nowhere, Blue. You’ve been lost from the first day” (230). Black not only claims to know what he is doing, but also suggests that he knows what *Blue* was doing, even though Blue doesn’t have that knowledge about himself. To use Searle’s analogy, while Blue assumes that he is out for a walk in the park, Black has known all along that, for example, Blue has been actually going north.³² In other words, Black tells us that Blue’s action was never a random walk which just happened to lead him north, but an action motivated by the intention to go north, which just happened to take the form of a walk; that the walk was not

content but form, not an end but a means; that it was never about the walk, but the walk was about something else altogether. Or, more radically, that there never *was* a walk, there never was a case.

In other words, Blue encounters the problem of being unable to say what it is that he encounters, to reduce anything to an unequivocal event: “But then why does he feel so dissatisfied, so troubled by what he has written? He says to himself: what happened is not really what happened” (176). If the actions we do turn out to be different from the actions we want to do, does that mean that we now have two sets of actions? That we lead double lives? As Davidson explains, “events are identical if and only if they have exactly the same causes and effects” (179). With the “doubling” of simulation, we have one action and two causes, two opposite and mutually exclusive intentions causing the same result.³³ In the case of Oedipus, for example, both his intention not to kill his father and the oracle’s “intention” for Oedipus to kill his father result in Oedipus’ fleeing Corinth. Without knowing what he is “supposed” to do, what the oracle would want him to do, Oedipus fulfills the oracle’s wishes exactly, and his ignorance is the condition of this fulfillment. (This paradox is very much like the double-slit experiment in physics: the ability of the light wave going through the first slit to “know” whether the other slit is open or not, and therefore to do what is expected of it without knowing what is expected of it, is like Oedipus’ uncanny ability to act as if he *knew* exactly what he needed to do in order to fulfill the prophecy.) Butler gives us a similar example from socio-political philosophy: “We get the feeling that in the masses’ very fulfilling of our expectations about them there is something we are not quite getting at, that behind their apparent acquiescence something else remains hidden” (133). Baudrillard talks about “the doubt automatically attaching to

anything which turns up so wonderfully on cue" (*Illusion* 76), and that is what we feel, the need for an explanation of how this coincidence between theory and practice, between prediction and event is possible. If the masses were indeed free to act any way at all, how come they did exactly what was expected of them? If Oedipus could do anything at all, how come he did the one thing out of a hundred that led to the fulfillment of the oracle?

The problem is in the chronology of the events. As Butler explains, "[i]t is impossible to say which comes first: the masses which conform to their theories or these theories which conform to the masses" (135). Keeping in mind the case of Macbeth, there is a sense in which what "comes first" is more "true" than the rest,³⁴ and here is where the problematic temporality of simulation comes up again. The semiotic problem, presented in temporal terms, is that we cannot be certain that we wanted to do A *before* the system wanted us to do A, which precedence would make A genuinely ours. If we had a guarantee that we were the first to want A, we wouldn't care as much whether A coincided with what the system wanted from us.³⁵ Simulation is not dangerous because it makes us do things we don't want to, but because it wants us to do exactly the things we want to do. It just that it wants them *first*. To use Calvino's words, the system "obliges you to repeat rather than say" (*Invisible* 68). Which makes us feel as if the system is the cause and we are the effect. Consider again the case of Oedipus: if the prophecy was a story that took place *after* the events it predicts, there would have been nothing really problematic about it, since Oedipus would have killed his father not *because* of the prophecy but because of himself. If the story (no longer a prophecy) came after Oedipus, he would have been causally independent of it and free in his actions. But when simulation substitutes a different reason for our actions, this means that it claims to have caused the actions, that the actions are

not our own and probably would have happened without us. In that case, we are free to join in and make the action happen, knowing that it would have happened anyway. In *Essays on Actions and Events*, Davidson for example tells us that “if we choose to do something and do it because we chose it, then the action is free no matter what would have happened if we *hadn't* chosen” (75). In other words, our choice is free even if the *same* action would have resulted from a deterministic force anyway (for example, someone who has to fight and nevertheless chooses to fight *instead*).³⁶ The redundant choice (or doubling) in this case is a paradoxical solution to the problem of freedom, in which determinism is disguised as freedom, and the “wrong” is disguised as “right,” so that the self can claim a victory, however fictional, over fate.

In *The New York Trilogy*, we see a similar but reversed situation: the characters are overpowered by the system (however fictional), because even if they were acting for their own “true” reasons, they still would have done exactly the same things they did for all the wrong reasons. In other words, the “true” actions would look exactly like the false ones: they would *be* false ones. When Auster’s narrator remarks that “even a child knows that the truth can be used for devious ends” (313), this is reminiscent of our opening quotation, where the protagonist’s real name (“Quinn”) becomes a fiction: “Since he was technically Paul Auster, that was the name he had to protect. Anything else, even the truth, would be an invention, a mask” (89).³⁷ The mask which is made out of truths is a particularly dangerous one, since it doesn’t hide the truth but exposes it³⁸, and yet, even though the “content” of the truth is there, the “form” in which it is presented denies it any truth at all. In this sense, simulation is no different from reality in terms of content, but only in our perception of that content. Simulation is that property of reality which tells us that this is not reality. It hides the truth by not hiding it, and therefore inviting us to look

for something hidden, something *else*.

Just as Blue's "fake" case was exactly the same as his "real" case, Auster's protagonist in *The Locked Room* attempts to cover up his real activity only to find that the cover-up is identical to the reality it is trying to cover:

I no longer had any intention of writing it [the biography of Fanshawe]. The book existed for me only in so far as it could lead me to Fanshawe, and beyond that there was no book at all. It had become a private matter for me, something no longer connected to writing. All the research for the biography, all the facts I would uncover as I dug into his past, all the work that seemed to belong to the book—these were the very things I would use to find out where he was. Poor Sophie. She never had the slightest notion of what I was up to—for what I claimed to be doing was in fact no different from what I actually did. (316-17)

It turns out that the actions of the protagonist done for the benefit of an observer are the same as the actions he would have performed independently of an observer ("The point was that no one was watching me anymore. I no longer had to put up a front as I had at home" [340].) The narrator's "fake" behavior is no different from his "real" behavior. Or, more precisely, if there is no "fake" behavior, then there isn't a "real" one either: there is only *one* behavior, doubled in a Möbius fashion. To describe it, we can borrow a definition from Deleuze, who, on a different occasion, speaks of "that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself. . . . The same thing is both disguising and disguised" (17).³⁹ For Auster's other main character, from the *City of Glass*, what begins as a "case" ends up as "reality"; for example, in the beginning Quinn is writing down his observations in a notebook as part of his work on the "case," but in the end the writing becomes an end in itself: "He regretted having wasted so many pages at the beginning of the red notebook, and in fact felt sorry that he had bothered to write about the Stillman case at all" (156). Or, more generally, it seems that at

first the writing is secondary to the outside world, but later the world fades into the background and the writing gains primacy; the world is only a means, something which makes it possible for Quinn to continue to write (by providing him with food, light, or even the “case” he is working on). While at first the case is the single focus of his existence, the “doubling” of the case leaves him pretending to be working on the case while actually working on the case.

Each of Auster’s three novels reaches this point of doubling, where the protagonist “knows that no more disguises will be needed” (221). It is not that the disguise is finally gone, but he finds that he has been *living* the disguise all along, not that he has been living a lie, but that he has been living the truth. The appearance, the surface is not gone but internalized. Every “case” reaches this point where the disguise is “dropped” (dropped *as* disguise but preserved as truth: the content remains; it’s just the form that’s different), revealing the “real” case the protagonist has been unwittingly involved in. But this is also a point where nothing changes. Just like Rosencrantz’s discovery that he does not have the letter that he is not supposed to have in the first place (see Chapter Three, pp. 191-93), the discovery of the true nature of the case is a negative event.⁴⁰ As Baudrillard asks, “What are we to make of events that do not take place?” (*Vital* 38). In simulation, this is the discovery of the sudden identity of what came before with what came after, and it is characterized only by the awareness that nothing has changed.⁴¹ When Auster’s characters become aware that they have been manipulated, they simultaneously become aware that they have been manipulated into doing what they would have done anyway. In the case of Blue, for example, the moment he makes his own choice is the moment when he is most manipulated: “he discovers the inherent paradox of his situation. For the closer he feels to Black, the less he finds it necessary to think about him. In other words, the more deeply entangled he

becomes, the freer he is" (188). The two opponents have become mutually entangled, and the simulation has become the "natural" environment for Blue. The end of the case is the moment when the protagonist *is* doing things for the reasons he *pretends* to be doing them. (Strictly speaking, Auster's cases are never "resolved" in the traditional sense: they take over the characters' lives, while at the same time becoming inessential and beside the point, so that the case is merely a way for the protagonist to get to that new life, which is working on the case.)

The "transition" from the single case to the double case, although ultimately not temporal, *can* be represented in terms of time, as a process, and usually is, for greater clarity. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, for example, Eco explains it this way: "the point where there is no longer any difference between developing the habit of pretending to believe and developing the habit of believing" (386); "we were slowly assuming the natural reserve of those who possess a secret" (418). And Auster also attempts to break it down for us, chart it on a neat chronological continuum: "I had been pretending to write a book for too long now, and little by little I had forgotten my purpose" (340). However, the process of the single event becoming double is not a process of multiplication, of difference, but of the total identification of the two Möbius "sides" of the event. If we go back to the analogy of the Möbius strip, we always see one "side" before we see the other, but that doesn't mean that there is a temporal process whereby the first side *becomes* the second; what we cannot see is the simultaneity of the two "sides," which have coincided all along. The first does not go anywhere to leave us with the second. Instead, there is only one, doubled "side," which includes both. The whole point is that the moment of transition (t_0 , if you will) from one Möbius side to the other, or from pretending to believe to believing, does not exist; it is a negative event, since there is no measurable change. The observable

behavior of the characters does not reflect any change; the change in their reasons for doing an action does not change the action itself. Let's take the person from Searle's example again (who must be very tired of *gedanken* walking by now): he is, again, taking a walk in the park, when suddenly he changes his mind and decides to go to the museum instead; however, the museum conveniently happens to be in the same direction he was going anyway, so he continues to walk without any observable change. (In the same way, in Calvino's story "The Chase" there is no observable change when the car chase "becomes" a traffic jam.) For simulation to begin (or to end), nothing need change physically; what has changed is not the act the person is performing, but his own interpretation of this act, his intention, the purpose behind it. The event is now doubled. But, to complicate things, he was walking in the direction of the museum all along: he just didn't know it. Does this mean, then, that he has finally "discovered" the true purpose behind his walk? Was there something *to* know (the walk to the museum) *before* he knew it (before he decided to go to the museum)?⁴² In Auster's universe, the "discovery" of the "true" nature of the case is of this kind. White always *was* Black, even though at the moment of this discovery he also "became" Black, adding temporality to the mix.

Consider this example as applied to Oedipus: he is going (that is, taking a walk) in one direction, thinking that "away from Corinth" means "away from his father," when he discovers that "away from Corinth" in fact means "toward his father." In other words, the same "walk" means first one thing, then another. The meaning of the action has changed without any change in the action itself.⁴³ Oedipus knows that he is walking, but he doesn't know whether he is walking away or toward.⁴⁴ The question of whether he could have known the meaning of his actions (i.e., that he is not simply taking a walk but going to the museum) is the question of

agency. And agency (dare we say “free will”?) seems to be a temporal problem: whether there is any way for a person in this Oedipus-via-Searle predicament to detect the “true purpose” behind his walk *earlier*. In other words, it seems that he cannot *predict* the change in his purpose before he decides to change his purpose (though his behavior remains the same). And since prediction is nothing but temporal detection, we are back to the question of detecting simulation, of guessing at the existence of one Möbius side from the other.

Auster’s characters find themselves in exactly the same position: deprived of interiority, they can only observe their own actions from the outside: “Nevertheless, as time wore on he [Quinn] found himself doing a good imitation of a man preparing to go out. . . . It was not until he had his hand on the doorknob that he began to suspect what he was doing. . . . ‘I seem to have arrived,’ he said to himself. . . . ‘If all this is really happening,’ he said, ‘then I must keep my eyes open’” (14-15). If Quinn had his own Chinese room, he would have been positioned outside, watching himself converse in a language he does not know; he is his own observer, a “neutral bystander” (177), rather than a subject transparent to himself. In this, Auster follows in Hawthorne’s footsteps, explicitly (209) and implicitly invoking the story “Wakefield,” in which Hawthorne’s protagonist also follows his own actions with the curiosity of an outside observer: “Habit—for he is a man of habits—takes him by the hand, and guides him, wholly unaware, to his own door, where, just at the critical moment, he is aroused by the scraping of his foot upon the step. Wakefield! whither are you going?” (77). Like Auster’s Quinn, Wakefield tends to *notice* what he is doing, rather than *intend* to do it. Everything he does is, as the narrator says, “unpremeditated”: “He ascends the steps . . . but he knows it not” (80). He needs to *see* what he is doing first, and then, like Quinn, interpret his own actions, “Oh, so *this* is what I am doing,

then!” To describe this kind of alienation from oneself, one of Auster’s characters comes to the following dreary conclusion: “We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. No one can cross the boundary into another—for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself” (292).⁴⁵ More specifically, Auster is interested in the action which is as opaque to its doer as it is to an outside observer, or, more precisely, the action whose doer can relate to only as an outside observer.

One of Auster’s main characters, Fanshawe, is a virtual double of Wakefield; like him, Fanshawe leaves without explanation: “The man wanted to leave, and he left” (282). “In some old magazine or newspaper,” Hawthorne’s narrator begins, “I recollect a story, told as truth, of a man—let us call him Wakefield—who absented himself for a long time from his wife” (75). Right away, we are alerted to the fact that the expression “as truth” has replaced “truth,” introducing us to a semiotic environment receptive to simulation. Also, “Wakefield” is not the true name of the man: or it might be, but we don’t know for sure. It is implied that the name is arbitrarily chosen (“let us call him Wakefield”), while at the same time there is nothing to prevent it from still being his true name, since we would normally call somebody named Wakefield by the name “Wakefield” (we just wouldn’t make a conscious decision to do so: we would do it without pointing out that that is what we are doing). In other words, we are introduced to an ambiguity where “let us call him Wakefield, because we don’t want to reveal his true name” and “let us call him Wakefield, because that is his name” become two equally valid propositions superimposed on each other, since the possible reasons for *why* we would call him Wakefield are left out,

leaving us with “let us call him Wakefield”: the act itself, without an explanation. The name, the identity of Wakefield, is doubled from the beginning.

This ambiguity continues throughout the story. The narrator tells us that Wakefield left “under pretence of going a journey” (75). But what he actually did, under the cover of this false pretense, was in fact go on a journey (albeit a shorter one than expected; or, rather, shorter in terms of distance but significantly longer in terms of time, making it impossible to say whether the “real” trip is shorter or longer than the “cover-up” trip). In other words, while pretending to be going away, he is actually going away. Again, the two acts are superimposed on each other; they are in fact the *same* act. Nevertheless, one can still assume that this single act has two different reasons, so that the reason for Wakefield’s “official” trip is used to cover up the reason for his “real” trip. However, this is not the case either, since neither trip *has* a reason. Wakefield never tells his wife the reason for his “official” trip: “He has informed Mrs. Wakefield that he is to take the night coach into the country. She would fain inquire the length of his journey, its object, and the probable time of his return; but, indulgent to his harmless love of mystery, interrogates him only by a look” (76). Not his act, but his “pretense” becomes suspect, since in both cases (true and false trip) his wife is not given a reason. But, more than that, he doesn’t give his wife a reason because he doesn’t *have* one himself: he leaves “without the shadow of a reason for such self-banishment” (75). So when the narrator advises Wakefield to tell the truth, “if thou wilt be wise, get thee home to good Mrs. Wakefield, and tell her the truth” (77), we know this would be impossible for Wakefield, since he doesn’t *know* the truth. He doesn’t know what it is that he wants to cover up, and his sole purpose is to pretend to have a secret in order to have a secret. But there is no secret: the only secret is the pretense itself, or rather pretending that there

is a pretense. The trip is not a secret from his wife but “a secret from himself” (77-78). If anything prevents him from going back, “he does not know it” (78).

It is not that he doesn't want to know the reasons for his own actions; on the contrary, he tries very hard to understand what he is doing: “In the morning he rises earlier than usual, and sets himself to consider what he really means to do. Such are his loose and rambling modes of thought that he has taken this very singular step [his disappearance] with the consciousness of a purpose, indeed, but without being able to define it sufficiently for his own contemplation” (77). In his search for a reason, he looks inside himself (“his eyes . . . sometimes wander apprehensively about him, but oftener seem to look inward” [79]), but doesn't seem to find anything inside that would be an answer, an explanation of the outside, of what he observes himself doing. The only thing he can see when he looks inside is that there is nothing to see: “[the] strangeness of his life is revealed to him at a glance” (79). This is again an ambiguous statement: if “strangeness” is defined as that which cannot be explained/revealed, then what is “revealed” to him is that nothing is revealed; he takes that extra Cartesian step of defining his life as undefinable.

For both Fanshawe and Wakefield, there is no explanation of the act other than the act itself: “In the end, their statements [of the people who knew Fanshawe] only confirmed that what happened could not possibly have happened . . . a purely irrational act, a thing totally out of character, a contradiction of everything Fanshawe had been up to the moment he vanished” (333). (This is, among other things, another example of the idea that what has happened so far is not an indication of what will happen next.) And we find an almost identical passage in Hawthorne: “With a cold but not depraved nor wandering heart, and a mind never feverish with

riotous thoughts, nor perplexed with originality, who could have anticipated that our friend would entitle himself to a foremost place among the doers of eccentric deeds? Had his acquaintances been asked, who was the man in London the surest to perform nothing to-day which should be remembered on the morrow, they would have thought of Wakefield" (76). He has unexpectedly done something eccentric, but what is "eccentric" if not doing the unexpected? Even though everyone is "deceived," both Fanshawe and Wakefield are absolved of the suspicion that their actions are deceptive, since deception would be defined as the difference between their knowledge of their actions and everybody else's knowledge, and such difference does not exist.

In this sense, *The New York Trilogy* is much closer to Hawthorne's story than to any detective story; having a detective investigate the disappearance of Fanshawe would be like sending a detective after Wakefield. Even finding the man will not "solve" the case, because the reasons behind his disappearance will remain unclear, even to himself. The suspicion that he knows the true intention behind his actions but he refuses to tell anyone is the thing which artificially endows his actions with meaning from the "outside." As Hawthorne's narrator implies, inside knowledge is not reliable: "We know, each for himself, that none of us would perpetrate such a folly, yet feel as if some other might" (75). In this case, knowledge from the "outside," knowledge not of ourselves but of the "other" seems more truthful, since, while Wakefield could not have suspected what he was about to do, an external observer might have. Wakefield's actions do not seem to be internally motivated; no meaning comes from the "inside." We cannot say that he disappears on purpose, since his action is clearly unplanned. At the same time, to say that Wakefield (or Fanshawe) disappears by chance or against his will would be a shaky argument, since his action is quite deliberate. In the end, it is impossible to say how much

Fanshawe and Wakefield know about their own actions, and this ambiguity is reflected in Hawthorne's narration: "He [Wakefield] had contrived, or rather he had happened, to dis sever himself from the world" (79). Is the action contrived or accidental? At no point does the narrator commit to an answer.⁴⁶

If Wakefield's action surprises everyone else, it also surprises himself. He doesn't know what his next action will be, or what the meaning of the things he did before was. This is the affliction of Auster's characters as well: "The visa stamps in my passport, for example; my airplane ticket, my hotel bill, and so on. These things prove to me that I remained in Paris for more than a month. But that is very different from remembering" (345).⁴⁷ As Baudrillard says, "freedom has been obliterated, liquidated by liberation; truth has been supplanted by verification" (*Vital* 47), and "no truth can withstand being verified" (*Illusion* 2). When memory has been replaced by a hotel bill, it is the job of the detective to translate the hotel bill into the events it signifies, to study the external clues to reveal the internal reality ("the Gods have immediate knowledge of invisible and mortal things, but men must 'proceed by clues'" [Alcmeon, qtd. in Eco, *Semiotics* 26]).⁴⁸ Auster's novels closely approximate the detective genre but at the same time undermine the possibility of detection by showing that the "case" is not a process of revealing the "truth" but rather a process of discovering that there is none, or, even, the process of establishing the absence of truth as a truth, and in this sense creating a truth. As we shall see, all of these things make Auster's novels as far removed from the detective genre as simulation is from reality.

There are detective stories which at first glance approximate simulation as it appears in Auster. For example, in Arthur Conan Doyle's story "The Red-Headed League," a character by

the name of Mr. Wilson is hired to perform an obviously meaningless task, copying the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (and not leaving the building), for a lot of money. At first, Holmes is not even sure there is a “case”: “there is room for doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I have heard, it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not” (54). In Auster’s universe, things would remain that way; when this happens in a traditional detective story, however, we know there is a “solution,” a hidden reason, an evil plan, for which the meaningless task serves as a cover: “I want to find out about them,” says Mr. Wilson, “and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank” (63).⁴⁹ And Holmes doesn’t fail to uncover the plot and provide an explanation: “it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the *Encyclopedia*, must be to get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day” (72). The criminals are indeed criminals and their “object” is nothing more complicated than robbing a bank.

In Auster’s novels, however, the “case” the protagonist is hired to work on is not a cover for something else; the case is all there is (and, of course, the case is never resolved to reveal a “true” purpose behind it). In this sense, Auster’s detective is in a position which resembles that of Dr. Watson rather than that of Holmes: “Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened, but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque” (67). Watson is like Wakefield, or Blue, in that neither the past nor the future makes sense to him; he stays in the present and on the surface. In a sense, the present *is* the surface, because the hidden purpose can appear only before or after the cover-up, not simultaneously with

it: while pretending to be doing something, the criminals must actually do it, though for a short period of time, and when their plan is exposed, it is only because of what happened *before* (their reputation as criminals) or what will happen after (the robbing of the bank). In between these temporal zones, they indeed are doing what they pretend to be doing, which is paying Mr. Wilson to copy the encyclopedia. In fact, while this apparently meaningless action is going on, it does not seem to stand in for anything else; it is only when the action is interrupted (when Mr. Wilson's services are no longer needed) that the investigation begins, to find out what it is that is hidden behind the scheme, the "why" of the scheme (and the "why" is always a temporal concept, because purpose is something which refers to the future, not the present).⁵⁰ In simulation, on the other hand, a "why" is temporally impossible, simply because the "cover-up" continues to infinity without leading to anything else, to "the truth." That is why, unlike Holmes, Watson would be the proper hero of simulation, and a story in which Watson is right (and Holmes is wrong to suspect a cover-up) would be a story of simulation. "What did Wakefield *mean* by disappearing?" would be a meaningless question, since there would be no meaning separate from the act of disappearance (or no intention behind the fact of copying *Encyclopedia Britannica*).

In a world based on what Baudrillard would call the "reality principle," the truth is hidden but detectable through clues, things that inadvertently point to something which is not there (rather than something which is, the way the mirror image works). In detective fiction, for example, where the most simplified and clear-cut structure of clues and reality, appearance and essence is found, signs work to expose the hidden, the true.⁵¹ As Ginzburg puts it, the detective endeavor is "the leap from apparently insignificant facts, which could be observed, to a complex

reality which . . . could not” (89).⁵² In *Observation and Objectivity*, Harold Brown gives this example: “a case in which the letter opener is completely covered by paper, but I recognize its location because of a slight bulge in the paper. . . . [This is how] scientists observe one item by seeing another” (92).⁵³ This is, Manetti tells us, “the principle of Anaxagoras (according to which the visible allows us to see the invisible)” (44). Another example Brown cites is the nature of stars: our knowledge of the stars is derived from what we see, which is *not* the stars but little dots of light. On the other hand, “the ancient concept of a star fit what was seen” (Brown 94), which means that it didn’t interpret the surface appearance but only gave it a name.⁵⁴ This is what Brown calls “non-epistemic seeing” (80), as well as what Holmes has in mind when he tells Watson, “You have not observed. And yet you have seen” (qtd. in Caprettini 137).⁵⁵ To see the underlying object despite (or, rather, because of) the visible object is the basic strategy of the detective novel, which is based on “the assumption that the fact that is obscure by nature is linked to the evident fact in such a way that what is evident could not exist if the non-perceived fact were not what it is revealed to be” (Manetti 110). In this world of appearances, the detective has “the capacity to leap from the known to the unknown by inference (on the basis of clues)” (Ginzburg 110). The semiotic function of clues is best described by Gian Paolo Caprettini in his essay “Peirce, Holmes, Popper,” where he talks about “[t]he traditional distinction between *sign* and *symptom*, based on artificiality, arbitrariness, and conventionality in the case of the former, and on naturality, non-arbitrariness, and motivation in the case of the latter” (137-38). The symptom, we observe, would be the clue; it is something which does not belong in the world order as we see it but is “a possible symptom of another reality” (139). Caprettini shows us, however, that this distinction collapses in structures of simulation:

The inherent difficulties of such an approach [a rigid distinction between sign and symptom] appear especially when dealing with cases of simulation, that is, voluntary production of symptoms. Think, for instance, of a footprint on a beach. Even if it appears as an evident case of a 'natural sign,' there is a chance that, under particular circumstances, it could be intentionally produced in order to lead any investigation astray. It depends upon the interpretative hypothesis, upon the detective's (motivated) choice to consider it as either a sign or as a symptom. (138)

In Auster's novel *The Locked Room*, the protagonist/detective is faced with a similar situation when he receives a letter from a person he believes to be dead. The letter is not signed, and that, instead of throwing doubt on its authenticity, serves to convince the "detective" that the letter is real: "There could be any number of reasons for the name to be left out, and the more I thought about it, the more clearly I saw that this was precisely why the letter should be considered genuine. A prankster would make a special point of including the name, but the real person would not think twice about it: only someone not out to deceive would have the self-assurance to make such an apparent mistake" (282). This is similar to the familiar trope whereby we have clues too obvious to be true, and they invite a suspicion of a set-up; in other words, the clues point not to what they point to, but to the fact that somebody wanted them to do that.⁵⁶ The clues are no longer symptoms of something hidden, but signs of something apparent. Even in the case where the clues were faked, they still cannot be misleading, only leading. In simulation, we don't have clues anymore, in the sense of surface appearances suggesting a hidden reality; we have only not-clues (things that we've established are not clues, not symptoms but signs). In this sense, simulation is the negative event whereby we discover that the clues we have are not clues. Have we then discovered a meaningful entity? Can we say that we have the clue of "not-clues" the same way Descartes discovered the certainty of "not-certainties"? The answer is very much a

yes. Or, in other words, having discovered that something is not reality, we call this negativity “simulation.”

Detective fiction can get as far as the non-reality stage, but not as far as simulation (as far as the negative but without reaching the positive definition of that negation), since it keeps treating simulation as an illusion, as something susceptible to detection. A phrase we find in a passage from Peirce, “An expression . . . of hypocrisy” (qtd. in Sebeok, “You Know My Method” 38), nicely summarizes the problem of detective fiction and how its resources are insufficient to uncover simulation, precisely because it looks for something to “uncover.” The detective method can see how the “expression of hypocrisy” is false, but it cannot see how it is true. What it sees is the deception of a man wearing a mask, not the truth of a man who needs deception. But, as Manetti says, “[i]mages are always true” (115). If the expression is one of hypocrisy, then it is true to the essence of the man, and in that sense it is not an expression of hypocrisy. (This is simply another way of expressing the ancient paradox of the Cretans who are all liars.⁵⁷) Auster’s version is “a man named White, who is obviously not the man he appears to be” (162). But he obviously *is* the man he appears to be, since from his appearance we can see that he is not the man he pretends to be; his appearance tells us the truth. Calvino makes the same point in the story “World Memory”: “Only in a superficial sense can lies be said to exclude the truth; you will be aware that in many cases lies—the patient’s lies to the psychoanalyst, for example, are just as revealing as the truth, if not more so” (*Numbers* 139). Only “in a superficial sense” can we say that the little dots of light are *hiding* the stars from us by *pretending* to be stars. On the contrary, in a universe governed by the “reality principle,” they are the only way to get to the truth (and in the universe of simulation, they *are* the truth).

Simulation does not allow symptoms, since nothing remains to be revealed underneath that which is already visible. However, it is essential for simulation that we don't know that. If reality is hidden because it is obvious, as obvious as that which is false, then reality is as obvious as the illusion, and therefore it is still hidden *as* reality. Bogard, following Baudrillard, talks about "simulation, which in its highest form is pure exposure (ob-scenity), nothing secret, nothing hidden, nothing left to interpretation or the imagination" (331), and Levin, also following Baudrillard, agrees: "There are no longer any secrets, or illusions of interiority" (274).⁵⁸ However, we would object to the implication that simulation has any less interiority than reality does (or they both equally lack it). Simulation is completely realistic, right down to the illusions of interiority; it is not "excessive" reality, but just the right amount of reality to make it realistic, not "overdone." The question arises of how simulation "knows" which signs would be realistic (and this question was also raised in the film *The Matrix* in roughly these terms: how do they know what chicken tastes like to simulate the taste of chicken?). The answer seems to be in the internal consistency of simulation: after all, it is only the internal consistency of reality that makes it "real"; the "truth" of reality is structural.⁵⁹ As Eco says, "the problem of knowledge . . . [can] be resolved only in linguistic terms, that is to say, in terms of coherency among propositions" (*Kant* 69). This is a formal requirement that can easily be reproduced without any reference to the content of reality; any simulation as internally consistent as reality will be reality. It is not difficult to guess which signs must be simulated in order to make the simulation convincing: any signs will do, as long as they are consistent among themselves. In other words, if the illusion takes the form of interiority, we don't need interiority to have a content (just as we can perfectly well say "no" (in content) to simulation and yet mean "yes" (in form); as in the self-

fulfilling prophecy, the “form” is the importance of the circumstances of the utterance itself, the position of the words relative to other words, not to a referent).⁶⁰ It is the unavoidable assumption of a referent (depth, metaphoricity) that creates a problem when we encounter what Cavell calls the “literality” whereby words “seem willfully to thwart comprehension; and time after time we discover that their meaning has been missed only because it was so utterly bare—totally, therefore unnoticeably, in view” (119).⁶¹ (Notice the temptation to use the word “willfully” here: this is the same problem as the suspicion that someone is manipulating our actions, that someone knows what we don’t know about ourselves.) In this way, the detective story is a foil to simulation, illustrating what simulation is *not*, or, rather, what simulation would have been without our participation, what the “system” would have been without us in it. If we could position ourselves as outside observers independent of the system, we would be in the position of the detective who investigates the crime without participating in it: significantly, Auster’s detective is always an integral part of the case, though not the case he *thinks* he is investigating.

Before we approach the question of why Auster’s novels are about simulation, let’s see what’s wrong with calling them detective stories; or, before we can see why the clues don’t work⁶², let’s see how they are supposed to work. Since the detective story takes place in a “reality principle” universe, even if we grant the difficulty of recognizing the “symptom” right away, we still understand that the “reality principle” structure remains intact⁶³ and there is a stable difference between sign and symptom.⁶⁴ In other words, the detective story does not operate within the realm of simulation, but within the realm of illusion: “[T]he detective story can be defined as a tale which consists of the *production of symptoms* [clues]” (Caprettini 136).

And the significance of the clues is proportional to their incongruity; or, rather, whatever seems incongruous is a clue.⁶⁵ As Truzzi notes, “Holmes recommends special inspection of the unique and unusual details present in the situation” (65). Anything out of the ordinary, anything that doesn’t fit in, falls within the category of a “symptom” and reveals a hidden reality. In the words of Holmes himself, “[s]ingularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult is it to bring home” (qtd in Truzzi 65); the ultimate featureless and commonplace crime, one supposes, would no longer *be* a crime. Any incongruity in the initial “story” of the crime stands out and leads to a resolution, the resolution being a new version of reality in which the same detail would not stand out, would not be a clue anymore but would fit perfectly into its now “commonplace” environment. As Caprettini says, “in the realm of the detective story, to *qualify a given datum as a ‘fact’* means to say that a symptom has been *already and once and for all transformed into a sign*” (145). The symptom (of another reality) has become a fact (of this reality). The lack of coherence between the initial symptom and its surrounding reality has been resolved into a reality with a higher level of coherence, a reality which now incorporates the object or event which was its symptom before.

The higher degree of coherence incorporates previously incoherent elements; as Aristotle says “it stands to reason that things should also happen against reason” (*Poetics* 72). Consider this example from Calvino’s story “Crystals”: “I wanted to persuade myself that these were only apparent flaws, that they were all part of a much vaster regular structure, in which every asymmetry we thought we observed really corresponded to a network of symmetries so complicated that we couldn’t comprehend it, and I tried to calculate how many billions of sides and dihedral corners this labyrinthine crystal must have, this hypercrystal that included within

itself crystals and non-crystals" (*T Zero* 43). This super-crystal would be a structure incorporating both order and disorder; for every "flaw" (symptom) there must be a larger structure which can incorporate it as a sign, so that it will no longer be an exception but part of the rule, the pattern. In the hypercrystal, incongruity becomes a pattern (just as the uneventfulness becomes an event for Holmes); rather than disrupt the reality around it, it becomes one. In other words, the "case" of incongruity is solved.

Incongruity is indispensable to the detective genre: there always is the small giveaway detail, the flaw in the cover-up story, the "singularity." In Auster's novels, however, it is impossible to determine whether something is a "singularity" or not: "In other words," Blue asks himself after following Black into a restaurant and observing Black's conversation with a woman, "is the meeting with the woman a smoke-screen or the real thing? Is it a part of the case or not, is it an essential or contingent fact? Blue ponders these questions for a while and concludes that it's too early to tell. Yes, it could be one thing, he tells himself. But it could also be another" (183).⁶⁶ Blue is unable to determine whether this event in Black's life is "part of the case" because he is not sure whether this event was part of Black's life at all: Blue cannot decide if the event was staged for his own benefit or not. If not, then it would be a legitimate clue. If yes, then it would still tell the truth: not the truth about Black's activities, but the truth about Black's awareness of Blue's activities. Blue is never certain how much the "experiment" has been influenced by the "observer," or, in other words, to what extent the case is *about* the detective. For that matter, he suspects that Black himself is not an individual person but a person simulated especially for him: "Blue believes the only logical explanation is that Black is not one man but several. Two, three, four look-alikes who play the role of Black for Blue's benefit, each

one putting in his allotted time and then going back to the comforts of hearth and home” (203).

While the traditional detective is faced with the question of whether something is a clue, Auster’s detective is faced with the question of whether something is a case. It is never clear whether a “case” exists or not, since there is no crime, no victim, and no evidence.⁶⁷ The difference between the detective story and simulation is, to use Baudrillard’s words, “the transition from the *determined* sphere of the sign to the *indeterminacy* of the code” (*Selected* 127).⁶⁸ Since the “code” is never “cracked” to reveal reality, it is impossible to find “evidence” of reality. (Baudrillard says that “*it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real*” [*Selected* 179].)

However, saying this would still leave us at the negative stage of establishing the “not-reality” without taking the further Cartesian step of giving it a name, of saying that what we have is still evidence: it is evidence of itself. In this sense, what is impossible is not finding evidence, but escaping evidence. In *Must We Mean What We Say?* Stanley Cavell analyzes Beckett’s *Endgame* and comes to the conclusion that the words of each character in the play “are not so much what the character wishes to say as they are what he cannot help saying, the result not of expression but of failed suppression” (159). In other words, the characters cannot escape the suspicion of an underlying, suppressed reality; they can’t help saying meaningful things: “The discovery of *Endgame*, both in topic and technique, is not the failure of meaning (if that means the lack of meaning) but its total, even totalitarian success—our inability *not* to mean what we are given to mean. . . . Solitude, emptiness, nothingness, meaninglessness, silence—these are not the *givens* of Beckett’s characters but their goal” (117, 156). They live in a world of surface signs which keep being turned into symptoms against their will. In the words of Baudrillard, even a

“pure signifier, without a signified, signifying itself” can inadvertently assume meaning, become “[a] signified despite itself” (*Selected* 10). In simulation, everything would mean something, namely, itself. A sign can always be suspected of being a symptom, even though it is not, because *all we can see* of the symptom is the surface sign.⁶⁹ The sign, like the tip of an iceberg, is the evidence of the symptom, or, more precisely, both the sign and the symptom would be the tip of the iceberg, but the symptom would be the assumption that there is more iceberg underneath. Appearance is all the evidence we have of essence; meaninglessness is all the available evidence of meaning: “This is the logic of signifiers which produces the ‘evidence’ of the ‘reality’ of the signified and the referent” (Baudrillard, *Selected* 103). It is not that the hidden reality has produced the symptom we see and interpret as part of it, but it is the symptom that retrospectively has produced the reality we infer from it, since this reality does not exist outside of its symptoms. In his discussion of simulation, Baudrillard in effect acknowledges Beckett’s problem: “Ambivalence lies in wait for the most accomplished systems. . . . These systems, even when they are based on a radical indeterminism (the loss of meaning), become once more the prey of meaning” (*Selected* 123). If at any point reality doesn’t seem to have meaning, we just suspect that the meaning is deeper than we thought. We never give up on meaning; we always interpret the footprint as a symptom rather than as a sign, and with that same gesture we create reality from simulation. If nobody comes, then we know it’s Godot. Or, as Auster says, “if he’s no one, then he must be Fanshawe” (348).⁷⁰ This situation comes up in all three novels, including *City of Glass*, where Quinn is following a man named Stillman: “it was possible that Stillman had known all along that he would be watched—had even known it in advance—and therefore had not taken the trouble to discover who the particular watcher was. If being followed

was a certainty, what did it matter? A watcher, once discovered, could always be replaced by another” (74). In other words, if Stillman appears not to know he is being followed, it is because he already knows; Stillman’s apparent lack of awareness cannot deceive Quinn about his awareness, and in fact proves it.

The reading of presence into absence is also the reading of the system’s intentions into our actions, the pronoun substitution through which we lose our freedom of action. As Butler explains, “the other’s absence is only a deliberate strategy on her part in order to win the game” (116). And Sebeok gives the following example: “when the shrewd Austrian maneuverer of the Holy Alliance, Prince Metternich, died in 1859, diplomats everywhere kept asking, ‘What do you suppose he meant by it?’” (*Culture Signs* 89). As Baudrillard says, “[t]he game . . . is based on the hypothesis that everything can be put into play” (*Seduction* 135). This is how we interpret the “system” as well: if the system doesn’t exist, this is obviously one of its ploys to get us to think that it doesn’t exist.⁷¹ And it’s obviously successful. The system may not exist, but it is nevertheless winning the game. What simulation needs is our involvement; it needs to be mediated through our agency. It is not enough for simulation to do something: it needs us to believe that it is doing something. If we are manipulated, this is not simulation; but if we think we might be manipulated so subtly that we can find no evidence of it, that is simulation’s way of getting us into the game, of forcing us to make a move, to take an action, and that action is the creation of simulation itself. Or, more simply, simulation is that “whose very absence is its proof” (Butler 129). As Baudrillard says, “simulation . . . can never be unmasked, since it isn’t false either” (*Selected* 168).

Claiming to “unmask” reality, the detective method alerts us to its own inefficiency in

detecting simulation, precisely because of its efficiency in detecting illusion. The method is useful if we are dealing with a false appearance and an underlying truth, but useless when we are dealing with simulation, because simulation, not being “false,” has no clues to tell us that it is not false. As we saw earlier, clues can exist only in a false environment, whose falsity we infer from the fact that the “clues” are incongruous with it. But a “true” environment cannot be proven.⁷² In other words, it is much easier to prove that there *is* an underlying reality than to prove that there *isn't* one. It is much more difficult to prove a negative event than a positive one. Consider again the Chinese room experiment. It is very easy (theoretically at least) to prove that the person inside the room knows Chinese. He just needs to produce the evidence which would convince us: he just needs to do what a native Chinese person can easily do, pretend to speak Chinese. It would be impossible, however, to convince us beyond doubt that the person in the room *doesn't* know Chinese. If he doesn't speak it, that doesn't mean that he doesn't know how. The evidence he gives (silence) is something a native Chinese person is also capable of. For a Chinese person, the fact that he knows Chinese doesn't contradict the fact of his silence, and we can infer the same about anyone else. Silence is inconclusive.⁷³ It is much easier to fake knowledge than to fake the absence of knowledge, because the absence of knowledge is in fact only the absence of the *manifestation* of knowledge, and that can have multiple causes, the absence of knowledge being only one of them. An alternative (doubled) cause of the same effect (silence) can be the unwillingness of the person to reveal this knowledge. Or, as Eco says about one of his characters, “he was the only one who knew he didn't know it [the secret]” (*Foucault's Pendulum* 460). And while his silence means one thing to him (the truth), it means exactly the opposite to everyone else (a deception): “His reticence about the final truth guaranteed the truth

of its premises" (455).⁷⁴ The denial simulates the existence of the secret reality it denies; the negative event acquires a positive content. The difference between necessary silence (he doesn't know) and motivated silence (he doesn't want to tell) is exactly zero.⁷⁵ It is the same as the difference between the absence of a move and the move of being deliberately absent. The presence of intention is not detectable, simply because the absence of intention would produce identical evidence. (We can recall Rosencrantz, and how the fact that he doesn't have the letter doesn't prove that he has lost it.)

The problem of freedom now seems more complicated: the man in the Chinese room is free to know Chinese, but he is not free *not* to, and Eco's character is free to know the secret, but he doesn't have an option not to know it, because his denial would only prove that there is something to deny; his "can't" directly generates his "doesn't want to." This would be a freedom very different from the one Davidson describes: "It is natural to suppose that an action that one is free to perform is an action that one is also free *not* to perform" (74).⁷⁶ In simulation, however, one is not free not to perform. As Baudrillard says, "We are no longer free not to will" (*Perfect* 12). The freedom of embracing the inevitable allows one not to embrace it (in one's mind), but it doesn't allow one not to perform the action which *looks* like one is embracing it. The "no" is again, structurally, a "yes." The negativity takes on the appearance of positivity. In simulation, we constantly find ourselves in the role of Exupéry's king in *Le Petit Prince*, who is free to command anything to happen but is never free to command things *not* to happen (see Chapter Three, note 38). In a perfect Exupéry scenario, "most of the time we can will only what has already come to fruition" (Baudrillard, *Perfect* 12). To borrow Eco's tortoise again, while the tortoise cannot fly but is obviously free to walk, whether it is free *not* to walk is another

question.⁷⁷ It is doubtful whether we can use any words associated with freedom or agency (such as “it wants to walk” or “it is trying to walk”) to describe the walking, because “the word “trying” . . . suggests some sort of conscious effort, some sort of possibility that there might also be a state of ‘not trying’” (Pratchett, *Reaper Man* 200). In the game of simulation we are free to make any move but we are not free not to make a move, because not making a move will also be seen as a move, a move, as we see from Cavell’s analysis of *Endgame*, which can never be proven: “Here is at least one possible endgame other than the act of ending the story: I call; there is no answer. But this ending is unclear. The problem seems to be that there is no way of *knowing* there is no answer, no way of knowing the call was heard, and therefore *unanswered*” (146). The unanswered call does not necessarily mean that there is no one, but that there is someone who doesn’t want to play; in this case, leaving the game is the highest degree of upping the ante, and absence is the most tangible, manipulative presence. Another example would be Eco’s accusation: “how can you be so wicked as to make me believe you don’t exist?” (*Foucault’s Pendulum* 506). The “other” does not need to play in order to play; if the other does not exist, what we see is simply that he doesn’t play, so we assume that he doesn’t *want* to play, and therefore he exists (while making the clever move of not making a move to cover this up).⁷⁸

This is where the detective method fails. It would be successful if there was intention motivating the events, if the events were *actions*, but in the absence of intention the failure to detect one doesn’t mean anything. In this sense, Dupin’s criticism of the police in “The Purloined Letter” can be applied to Dupin as well: “Had the letter been deposited within the range of their [the police’s] search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it” (230). But as the method they apply is not suited to the method the criminal is using (“to conceal this

letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all" [234]), and the strategy of finding the letter does not match the strategy of hiding the letter, the police naturally fail to uncover it, precisely because they are looking to "uncover" something and therefore miss that which lies exposed in front of them. While the police are looking for a hidden essence behind a true appearance (they assume the letter they find will look exactly like the letter that was lost), we can say that Dupin's method would have the same shortcomings when it comes to simulation, because it seeks to expose an essence hidden underneath a false appearance (however deceptively obvious). If anything, Dupin confirms the basic premise of the traditional detective method, which is that the essence is different from its appearance; in simulation, however, hidden essence and false appearance are not things you want to bet on, because essence and appearance tend to coincide.

As Dupin's solution of the mystery of the letter follows the traditional detective method, it is naturally based on an inconsistency of the "clue" with the rest of the "reality": "But, then, the *radicalness* of these differences [between the letter he finds and the description of the lost letter], which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D—, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document" (235) [italics not mine]. The small detail that gives away the shortcomings of the detective method itself is the word "true," which is emphasized here; if we are dealing with a simulation, rather than illusion, there would be no difference but only consistency between the appearance and the "truth." In other words, to create a perfect, inviolable simulation, the minister will have to simulate more than one thing (the letter), and change his "habits" as well.⁷⁹ Simulation is above all a totality of facts, rather than individual,

conflicting illusions; it simulates not only the effects but the causes as well. If the letter looks dirty (effect) and that doesn't match the methodical habits of the minister (cause), the illusion is easily compromised. Illusion can be defined as an effect without a cause; simulation, on the other hand, includes both. As we saw in the last chapter, simulation is all-inclusive; it does not distinguish between more and less important events, and everything is relevant to it. If one thing is to be simulated, then *everything* must be simulated. This means that it doesn't leave any clues, a clue being an exception, a discordant effect without a cause.

The totality of cause and effect, or the lack thereof, can be seen in the movie called *The 13th Floor* (which, even though it is neither a good movie nor a good example of simulation, can be a good example of why its simulation fails), where the characters inhabit the simulation of a city. They eventually discover that this is a simulation when they get to the end of the city, where the illusion disintegrates and instead of buildings they see only computer-generated grid lines, like empty drawing paper which proves that the rest of the city is just a drawing.⁸⁰ The creators of this imperfect simulation have put much effort into designing the downtown area of the city, where the characters are expected to spend all of their oblivious lives, and none into finishing the outside fringes of the city, which are not essential. In other words, the simulation in the movie is selective, focused on a specific illusion created for the benefit of the characters alone. In this way, it clearly betrays its intention to deceive, and, by allowing itself to *have* an intention, makes it possible for that intention to be detected.⁸¹ However, as we saw in the last chapter, a real (that is, theoretical) simulation would not distinguish between the essential and the accidental. It would not stop at what is essential to its purpose, because it would not have a purpose to begin with. In terms of the simulated city, that would mean that a "real" simulation would not "end"

with the city but would continue to create further causes for its effects, to back up its illusions as far back as possible in order to obliterate the possibility of anyone finding an origin of its illusions different from the one it provides, a cause or intention behind its action that is not its own. For example, imagine the simulation of a sea breeze. One possible cause of the sea breeze would be a sea, and an alternative cause would be a very big fan; if the simulation of the sea breeze is to be absolutely convincing, rather than an easily detectable mechanical device (or CGI, more likely), the simulation must include the sea *as well as* the sea breeze (or, the non-beer as well as the non-cigar [Baudrillard, *The Gulf War* 81]), so that they would ensure each other's reality (a sea without a sea breeze would be as suspicious as a sea breeze without a sea). In other words, it must eliminate all alternative causality which may expose its mechanisms.⁸²

In a sense, the simulation in this movie is atypical because it strives to be a logical "whole" (rather than a totality), so that there is a *reason* for the simulation to be inside the city and no reason for it to continue outside the city, where it would be gratuitous since no one is present to observe it. This evidence of intention, however, shows that this is not simulation but a local illusion: "local" because it has an "outside," a place where there is no more simulation and from where the simulation itself becomes visible. In other words, it cannot be a simulation because it leaves clues, and the "outside" is the biggest clue of all. As Kathryn Hume says in *Calvino's Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos*, "[o]nce you admit that something is left out of your system of order, that omission can form the framework for a different order" (55). For simulation to leave a clue means to leave something outside itself (isn't a clue always external to what it signifies?), to compromise its totality, to allow for alternative explanations.⁸³

Without an "outside," no place exists from which simulation can be observed, and

therefore no one *can* observe the simulation; the only thing that can be observed is the reality of it, its *inside*. To be in a simulation means not to be able to see it; to see simulation means not to be in it. Butler suggests that “we might even go on to say that the very proof of simulation is that we cannot think it, cannot say it has taken place” (144). When the characters in *The 13th Floor* see the computer-generated grid lines in the outskirts of the city, they are observing the scaffolding which allows them to infer the artificial nature of the city which is *elsewhere*, where no computer scaffolding is visible; in other words, they learn things about the city only when they are outside of it. However, a real simulation would not allow the vantage point of “elsewhere” to exist, defined as a place where there *is* no more simulation and therefore a place where simulation can be suspected; only when simulation *is* not does it become visible. We can prove that something is a simulation (which will then dissolve into a simple illusion) only by discovering its outside, the thing it is not, and exposing it in contrast to that outside. In this case, the thing which is not (for example, the absence of simulation outside of the city) proves the thing which is (the presence of simulation within the city).⁸⁴

The traditional detective novel relies on the existence of an outside (the notion that something was left *out* because there is an agenda to what is *in* the illusion), and therefore on the existence of intention and purpose. If such intention exists, if what we have is a selective illusion rather than a total simulation, there usually are visible symptoms of it, clues for the detective to follow. Because simulation lacks the purpose which would constrain the inside and create an outside, it also creates the *impression* of purposefulness;⁸⁵ if we look deeper into it, trying to unmask it, and all we find is more of the same simulation, it would naturally appear as if the simulation had expected us to look deeper, as if it wants to stay one step ahead of us.⁸⁶ In this

sense, even purposelessness seems to acquire purpose *when observed*, because nobody is expected to observe it; it would seem to have been designed not to be observed, and therefore not to exist for the benefit of anyone, but simply to exist for its own sake, to be itself (true) rather than a cover (false). If Caprettini's footprint on the beach could convince the observer that it would have been there whether or not it is observed, it would not be a clue because it would not be inconsistent with the reality around it (someone was really walking on the beach). This will be true for both reality and simulation. In detective fiction, however, if the observer believes the footprint is there for his benefit, that it was left there with the intention of being observed (or, if the footprint is hidden, with the intention of preventing the detective from observing it, but still for his benefit), it would be a clue (someone was really walking on the beach, but for the sole purpose of leaving or hiding his footprints). In simulation, on the other hand, the footprint will never be a clue; it will always be there, with or without an observer. Seen from the point of view of the observer, the simulated footprint would be gratuitous: unless it is actually observed. Observation itself would function like the self-fulfilling prophecy, making the observed object automatically worthy of observation and therefore significant. Just as there are no essential elements in simulation, there is no such thing as an "insignificant detail": the significance of the insignificant detail is that, if observed, it will work to corroborate the rest of the simulation (or reality), precisely because of its apparent insignificance. In other words, whatever is observed is significant, not the other way round.

Had the creators of the artificial city in *The 13th Floor* bothered to extend the illusion beyond the city itself and to infinity (where it would have been wholly gratuitous), their simulation would never have been discovered, precisely because nobody would think that anyone

would go to such lengths to create a useless world, down to the last detail. The more difficult it is to discover the simulation, the more we suspect that there are deliberate obstacles which prevent us from discovering it (or, to use Eco's terms, the more the tortoise fails to fly, the more it would suspect that nature is saying "no" to its flying, rather than "yes" to its walking). The more we fail at exposing the "system," the more the system would seem to be hostile and sentient rather than neutral and given. Our inability to uncover the artifice (the fan behind the breeze) simply means that the artifice is ahead of us in its deception (not that there is no fan, but that the fan is too big to see). In this sense, *The 13th Floor* is again atypical, because the characters ultimately get proof of their "simulation" different from the "proof" they would get in a "real" simulation (which would be none, or, rather, only the proof of not being able to find proof). Note that we can say exactly the same of reality itself, which also doesn't have any proof coming from the outside.⁸⁷

Here "itself" does not refer to an essence but on the contrary, to the only way in which we can identify something: appearance. While the detective method uses appearance to its own advantage, it fails to recognize that appearance can also work against it. Dupin's question, "You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?" (229) suggests that the police are getting it wrong by looking for a letter with the exact appearance of the letter they're looking for. Dupin, in turn, is looking for a letter that may *look* different but *is* the same: a distinction which would not exist in the realm of simulation. There, the only way to identify an object is by its description, which is also the only way to simulate an object (or, in this case, to hide it by altering its appearance). (Note that even Dupin implicitly concedes the importance of appearance, since, when he assumes that there is a false appearance, he also assumes the existence of a *true*

appearance.) The place where the identity of an object is located is also the place most vulnerable to simulation. The clues which reveal the deception are also the best source of simulation, as we see in this passage from Auster: "He [the detective] thought he was following me, but in fact I was following him. . . . [I]t was like playing a game. I led him along, leaving clues for him everywhere, making it impossible for him not to find me" (362).⁸⁸ The method of following clues and paying attention to incongruous details would allow absolute deception if a simulator sets up the right clues; any method that can be used to solve a crime can also be used to perpetrate a crime.⁸⁹ What Dupin does not realize is that there is no objective *thing* called a clue: any single thing can function either as a "clue" of deception or as its opposite, a realistic detail in its own right; any single thing can be either part of the crime itself or part of the investigation, and there is no way to tell objectively which. Both the criminal and the detective work with appearances, even though in the classical case the detective claims to be working with the "truth itself" and against appearance.

In a sense, the truth lies with whoever manages to take the coherence of "clues" to a higher level, to see the larger pattern, to build a bigger hypercrystal of evidence. But in this game, the evidence itself is secondary; it is merely the ball which the opponents use to play. It is not so much about the "truth" as about the opponent.⁹⁰ That is why Auster brings Poe into play: "what is it that Dupin says in Poe? 'An identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent'" (48).⁹¹ Poe, as an early theorist of simulation, builds complex systems of manipulation and counter-manipulation interlocked in a spiral of increasing indeterminism (it is only his insistence on an ultimate "solution" that makes these narrative structures detective stories rather than simulations, sacrificing overdetermination and settling for determination). But

until the case is “solved,” Dupin employs the methods of simulation: “Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents” (231). The point is that when he is guessing, he is not guessing at the answer, but guessing at his opponent, simply because there is no answer independent of the opponent’s theory of what the answer should be.⁹² But what the opponent is thinking would change depending on whether the opponent knows that we know what he is thinking. Or, as Poe explains in “The Purloined Letter,” the detective (who takes his method from a boy who always used to win at marbles) “would have reasoned thus: ‘This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;’—he guesses even, and wins” (231). Unlike the detective story, however, in the game of simulation no one ever “wins,” even though things escalate in a similar fashion. As Butler says, simulation involves “a simultaneous attempt to take it [the other] into account and to take into account the fact that we cannot take it into account” (97).⁹³ Butler further explains this mechanism by citing Baudrillard’s example of the woman (Calle) following the man who might be aware of her presence: “But then Calle’s taking of this into account opens up the possibility of him taking *this* into account, and so on. There is a kind of asymptotic process of taking into account each other’s strategy—Calle follows, the man knows Calle follows, Calle knows the man knows Calle follows . . . —that is the real game” (115).⁹⁴ Each person in turn proposes his or her own reason for the events, which become doubled every time: as Butler says, “[t]o the doubling of the one before, each proposes a certain counter-doubling” (116).⁹⁵ In this multi-dimensional

game of self-conscious and preventive moves, the goal is not just to predict the outcome, but to anticipate someone else's prediction and take into account the fact that that person can also anticipate our anticipation of his prediction.

For Poe, the whole chain of "the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber" (227), or, more generally, the "identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent" (231), eventually stops at the "reasoner's" discovering the "truth." In other words, the detective emerges victorious, smarter than his opponent, capable of producing the most complex system (the system which would account for the most discordant facts), and therefore capable of producing the truth. In Auster's universe, however, no truth ever emerges beyond the truth of the two opponents, the truth of each of them looking for the truth he assumes the other is hiding. Since neither of them "has" the truth, they are both bluffing continuously, each betting that the other doesn't know himself any better than he is known by his opponent, so the outcome of the game doesn't depend on what cards they have (they don't have any, or they don't know what cards they have, in the sense that neither of them knows the truth about himself) but on how they play them. Each wants to outsmart the other, while trying to make it impossible for his opponent to anticipate that possibility: "Play dumb, Blue tells himself, for he knows that it would make no sense to reveal who he is, even though he knows that Black knows" (213). And it's the same from Black's point of view, as he explains to Blue: "Of course he [Blue] knows [that I follow him]. That's the whole point, isn't it? He's got to know, or else nothing makes sense. . . . Because he needs me. . . . He needs my eyes looking at him. He needs me to prove he's alive" (215-16). The game with the other is no longer a way to get to the truth, but the illusion of a "truth" is a way to go on playing with the other. Blue needs Black, because only from Black can

Blue find out if he himself has the truth. While Black may be manipulating Blue's actions, taking the truth away from them, Black may also be manipulating Blue into *thinking* that he's being manipulated. In other words, Black may be manipulating Blue into not knowing that he has the truth. If Black is hiding the truth, he may be hiding it in Blue, without Blue's knowledge. Blue may be free and not know it. But he needs Black as a proof that he is free from him (just as the other Auster character needs Fanshawe to be alive so he can walk away from him). If the truth (freedom) is in Blue but there is no other place it could possibly be, that would undermine it; but if Black exists, and the truth (freedom) is still with Blue, then that means something. In other words, we cannot be free from the system if the system does not exist; we need the system as the only proof that we are free from it; only if it exists can we walk away from it.

Needless to say, Auster's characters never walk away, never win, because both opponents are equally good at pretending not to play: "for deep down Blue wants Black to know that he's just as smart as he is, that he can match wits with him every step of the way" (221). Their ability to "match" each other's moves means that they will go on playing forever. If they are equally "smart" (that is, equally doubtful of themselves), that would ensure that neither of them will ever win, and that the game will never be over the way Poe wants it to be.⁹⁶ If Poe's mysteries come to a conclusion, it is because Poe stops the game at an arbitrary point of his choice (and it is this interruption in the cycle that creates the notion of truth, or morality). If Dupin's opponent were smarter, he would have been able to take the game one level up and deceive/escape Dupin, not on Dupin's turf, but on his own. In other words, the opponent can never beat Dupin at Dupin's game; but he can change the game Dupin is playing to one he can win.⁹⁷ If Dupin wins (although his winning interrupts the detective story just short of simulation), it is because he never allows

himself to be manipulated by his opponent. With every move, the rules of the game change (just as in evolution), and whoever is the last to change the rules makes the other retrospectively play *his* game (whatever species happens to survive defines the game the other species are retrospectively forced to play (and lose), namely, the game of becoming the winning species).

Baudrillard suggests that, to beat the system, it is “necessary to play a game of at least equal complexity” (*Selected* 122), and he quotes Anthony Wilden from *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange*: “All dissent must be of a higher logical type than that to which it is opposed” (qtd. in Baudrillard, *Selected* 122).⁹⁸ Like Dupin, Baudrillard is looking for an ultimate escape from the system, an ultimate answer: “Can we invent simulacra of an even higher logical (or illogical) order . . . beyond determination and indetermination? If so, would they still be simulations? Perhaps only death, the reversibility of death, is of a higher order than the code. Only symbolic disorder can breach the code” (*Selected* 122). Two problems with this passage: one, Calvino reminds us that “against simulated order simulated disorder is impotent” (“Crystals,” *T Zero* 41); it is not the order or the disorder that Baudrillard wants to defeat, but the simulated nature of both. And two, even death can be incorporated into the system, just as any other absence is.⁹⁹ Even death cannot avoid being a repartee on the part of the person who dies, which in turn propels the semiotic loop by posing Sebeok’s question “What do you suppose he meant by it [death]?” (89).¹⁰⁰ In this sense, Baudrillard’s hopeful conclusion that “[t]he play of simulation must therefore be taken further than the system permits” (*Selected* 123) must of necessity fail, because the whole “system” consists of taking the system further with every move. One cannot, it seems, escape the system by escalating the system, because the very nature of the system is the escalation of the attempts to escape it.¹⁰¹

Each of Auster's three novels enters a spiral of second-guessing (the existence of) the opponent and the game itself. In *The Locked Room*, we find this example:

Addressed to the house in New Jersey, they [the letters to Ellen] are of course opened by Mrs. Fanshawe, who screens them before showing them to her daughter—and more often than not, Ellen does not see them. Fanshawe, I think, must have known this would happen, at least would have suspected it. Which further complicates the matter—since in some way these letters are not written to Ellen at all. Ellen, finally, is no more than a literary device, the medium through which Fanshawe communicates with his mother. Hence her anger. For even as he speaks to her, he can pretend to ignore her. (322)

In other words, Fanshawe can make a move and still refuse to play the game; he is outside the reach of the game his mother wants to play, because he (very much like Macbeth) changes the rules and plays his own game (which consists of letting his mother know that he is playing a different game). In this way, the person who is in control not only defines, retrospectively, the game his opponent has been playing *so far*, but also the game he will be playing from now on. In other words, the opponent is deprived not only of his freedom in his past actions, but of his freedom in the future. When Butler says that “to the doubling of the system we oppose our own doubling,” he also gives this a temporal dimension: “We do not—or not only—offer a description of the way things are, but a *prescription* of the way they will be” (138). i ek also draws attention to the temporal side of the problem: “the double inversion calls into question the very standard of ‘normality’ which they make use of to measure the invertedness” (*They* 13). In other words, the “prescription” creates the categories used to evaluate the next move; the next move can either confirm or contradict the system, but it cannot exist outside the system.¹⁰² What doesn't fit in the system would be an exception, a symptom incongruous with the system, until it creates its own, higher system in which it now fits and which includes both itself and the

previous system.

Even a “new” system cannot erase the old one; it can simply build onto it. There can be no subtraction, only addition. In *The Rustle of Language*, Barthes also alerts us to this phenomenon: “Speech is irreversible; that is its fatality. What has been said cannot be unsaid, *except by adding to it*: to correct, here, is, oddly enough, to continue. In speaking, I can never erase, annul; all I can do is say ‘I am erasing, annulling, correcting,’ in short, speak some more . . . annulation-by-addition” (76). Nothing is truly negated. As Calvino says, “there [is] no way to arrive before the sign and to warn them not to pay attention to the sign” (“The Light-Years,” *Cosmicomics* 137). Arriving before the sign would make signification reversible, susceptible to absolute erasure without the cumulative effect of *the act of erasure*, as a positive thing, being added to the previous act of signification without erasing it; it is impossible, by an act in the future, to erase signification from the past, so that signification “is going to have never happened” (Pratchett, *Mort* 248-49). Subtraction does not equal absence, because the act of subtraction is something positive itself, added to the previous pile “to signify the annulment of what it signifies” (Lacan, “Seminar” 63). Things erased are not equal to things never having been.¹⁰³ This temporal reversal, as both Barthes and Calvino suggest, is impossible. Eco gives us the similar analogy of memory:

This [computer memory] is better than real memory, because real memory, at the cost of much effort, learns to remember but not to forget. . . . [W]hen Diotallevi and I tried to construct an *ars oblivionalis* . . . we couldn’t come up with rules for forgetting. It’s impossible. It’s one thing to go in search of a lost time . . . and quite another deliberately to misplace time refund. . . . There is no discipline of forgetting; we are at the mercy of random natural processes, like stroke and amnesia, and such self-interventions as drugs, alcohol, or suicide. (*Pendulum* 22-23)

It is significant that the “forgetting” (the ability to go back in time, to redeem the temporal asymmetry of escalation, to erase self-consciousness) can happen only by physical intervention and cannot be done on the level where the concepts of reality and simulation exist. We can take the concepts one level up, but never one level down. To take them down, we must take down the whole structure, or rather, our physical ability to envision a theoretical structure of any kind. It would be like trying to get rid of a specific software by smashing the whole computer to pieces. We do not have the semiotic means to undermine the spiral of simulation, because the semiotic cannot be a means of undermining the semiotic. We cannot stop or rewind the semiotic spiral, because any semiotic act would be adding to the semiotic structure rather than subtracting from it. We can change the simulation, by adding to it, but we cannot change the fact that there is simulation; we can change *what* it is, but not *that* it is. (We could, of course, destroy the *content* (the hardware) which the semiotics of simulation is based on, but, as simulation shares this same content with reality, we would be destroying reality as well.) It would be like an elevator which can only go up to the next floor, or crash down all the way; we cannot forget: we can only destroy our capacity to remember. There is no controlled descent, no way to subtract from what we know, to reduce the cumulative levels of self-referentiality. As Auster says, “[a] lie can never be undone. Even the truth is not enough” (103).¹⁰⁴ “In other words,” Butler explains, “after the hypothesis of simulation, everything can only be conceived of as though it were simulated, even if it is not” (43). Once we’ve started playing, no new game can escape the fact of being a game. Even *our* game would be just a game. In other words, although further evidence can change things back to their original meaning and restore the “essence” of our actions by placing them in a new system where they are inviolably ours again, true again (we are not going to the museum

after all; it's just a walk), it can never make the possibility of agency as convincing as it was the first time. The phrase "true again" itself contradicts the concept of "true," since a thing cannot be alternatively true and false and then true. Once the suspicion of falsehood, of "doubling" has been raised, no subsequent events can return the event to its "singular" state. Agency is free because it is unique; once it becomes clear that it can be reproduced, an exact reproduction of the initial "reason" would do nothing to solve the problem, since the reproduction of freedom is still a reproduction, and the simulation of a singularity is still double, and therefore un-free. A simulation of free will, in other words, is not free in the sense "free will" is: free will can only be free the *first* time, while simulation can be free any time we want, it can add more instances of freedom without subtracting the possibility of manipulation. What we imagine to be the original, internally motivated action is still there and can never be erased; but there is an added suspicion that it was always externally motivated by the system, that our thoughts were never our own. It is not a question of coming up with new truths, but of retrospectively negotiating the status of that original one. This first event or action (which started the game) is never fully determined, because it is more than fully determined (overdetermined): it can be one of two things, ours or not, free or not, first or not. The apparently binary game we play is between meaning and loss of meaning, and neither of them ever wins, although they both take turns raising the stakes. And what is at stake, above all, is whether something is at stake or not. Auster's protagonists are never sure: "[I had] a secret feeling that Fanshawe was somehow better than I was . . . that he was more truly himself than I could ever hope to be" (247). What makes their competition undecidable is that they are competing at being themselves: they're not after the same thing. The protagonist can never beat Fanshawe at being Fanshawe¹⁰⁵, and vice versa: "The point being that,

in the end, each life is irreducible to anything other than itself. Which is as much as to say: lives make no sense” (Auster 298). What we are playing for is the value of what we are playing for: as in an auction, “it is the rising bids themselves that produce this increasing value” (Butler 83). Each of the opponents has to ask himself, “Is this a bluff or a bluff in anticipation of my calling it?” After all, Holmes himself understands the importance of bluffing: “What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence. . . . The question is what can you make people believe you have done” (qtd in Truzzi 71, from *A Study in Scarlet*). It is the opponents themselves who define the meaning of each other’s actions (is Auster’s protagonist winning at being himself or, through the same action, losing at being Fanshawe?).¹⁰⁶

But once the singular action is doubled and becomes both, this is not a simple binary alternative; even though all the possibilities among which the unpredictability is distributed are known (yes/no, heads/tails), the outcome itself is not.¹⁰⁷ The answer is never “yes,” but, as we saw before, it will be a “yes” via “no,” or a “yes” in anticipation of the “no” or in reaction to it.¹⁰⁸ The interaction between the two “sides” (we can imagine “heads” interacting with “tails” instead of being mutually exclusive) is a layered semiotic structure of increasing complexity, as each option (heads/tails, true/false) will recur on a higher level of second-guessing, on every other level; metaphorical and literal will alternate in a spiral of ascending self-referentiality,¹⁰⁹ approximating the odds of blind chance. In this structure, a return from the second to the “first” (we throw heads, then tails, then heads again) would be impossible: it will result in a continuation on to a third, because the second can never be erased.¹¹⁰ The third would then consist of the first plus a doubt that the first might be a second, or a memory of the first being the second.¹¹¹ (And so on: if from the third we attempt a return to the second, we would in fact be

dealing with a new element, the fourth, which would be like the second, but with the added memory of the second being false and revealing the third, and then the third being false in turn.) All we want is to shed all those accretions and return to the original alternative (true/false, self/system, subject/structure, free/predetermined), but each move takes us farther away, each step back takes us forward (or, to misquote Calvino, it “obliges you to say rather than repeat”). Every next move retrospectively throws doubt over the previous ones, while at the same time throwing doubt over this doubt as well. In the end, the closest we can get to the truth is saying that the falsity may be false. The true nature of the first move, the original action, then, does not lie in the past, but in the future; it depends on our next move, with which we can again create a context for it to *mean* what we want it to mean, rather than what our opponent (or “the system”) wants it to mean. In a sense, there are only two possible moves, but multiple games in which they exist. We retrospectively decide which move is to be the first and which game we are playing. We win *first*, and then we choose, retrospectively, what game that would be at, by choosing a game in which our action, whatever it is, would be considered a victory.

If this victory seems a matter of chance rather than necessity, that is correct:

the final structure of the game is the infinite overdetermination of the same basic alternative: either Calle follows the man or the man ‘follows’ Calle. There are any number of ways of arriving at this, but in the end we are always confronted with the same choice. In this sense, the highest strategy comes increasingly to resemble chance. We might compare all this to the game of ‘odds-and-evens’ in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’, where also ‘symbolic determination is not opposed to chance’, but is ‘what emerges as the syntax of chance’ (Johnson 1977: 504). . . . [T]he same situation (the world) can be doubled and redoubled indefinitely. (Butler 118)

Contrary to the mathematical calculation of probability, the semiotic probability would be cumulative, as Foucault says in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”: “Chance is not simply the

drawing of lots, but raising the stakes in every attempt to master the chance through the will to power, and giving rise to the risk of an even greater chance" (*Language* 155). Mathematically, or even physically, there is no observable difference between the probability and the probability which takes into account its own probability¹¹²: "There are no odds to beat, no rules to set a limit on bad luck, and at each moment we begin again, as ripe for a low blow as we were the moment before" (Auster 296). Semiotically, however, we never start from scratch; we always find ourselves in a system of cumulative temporality, where the chance of A happening would depend on whether the last thing that happened was a B. In other words, even though the result is always A, in one case (chance) it simply happens *after* B, while in the other case (game, strategy) it happens, in a respectable Aristotelian fashion, *because of* B (just as in Calvino's story "The Chase" car A is either chasing car B or simply being stuck behind it, but in both cases we observe the same result: A follows B). While it would be mathematically absurd to say that "tails" happens *because of* the 85 cases of "heads" that came before (Stoppard 14), this causality is less absurd if it refers not to what happens but only to what people *think* is likely to happen (so, instead of "the next one must be tails because the last one was heads" we are dealing with "I bet you think the next one will be tails"). In other words, the occurrence or non-occurrence of the event has been replaced by the prediction or non-prediction of the event.

Now imagine that, instead of throwing a coin, we were playing Poe's game of "odds-and-evens," so that what we think the other thinks has a *physical* manifestation, since we can decide to make the next one "even" if we suspect that our opponent will guess "odd." We can make our will materialize. However, even in this situation, even if we were in control of what happens, it would be very unlikely for us to make something improbable happen. Baudrillard asks, "What

destination can we give the world in general once we have it at our command? Physically and metaphysically, the universe has no other destiny than to be the universe itself" (*Perfect* 42). We can make any move, but we choose to make the "natural" one, to replicate chance in our free will. Since we do not want our opponent to be able to guess our next move, we do not want to make a move which would reveal our intentions. An unusual move (a move against the odds), even if it is within our power, would be a *clue* to what we intend to do (because it would be incongruous with the previous moves), and therefore would make our future moves predictable and decipherable in the classical detective genre sense. And if the information about a thing is seen as more important than the thing itself, we naturally want to avoid giving the opponent any information; to that end, we want to make our moves as "featureless and commonplace" as possible. The only way to make our intention undetectable is not to have an intention at all. Since the other expects from us to control the next move, we make a move such that it would appear not to be our own. To thwart the other's plans, we thwart ours, because what the other expects from us is the opposite. In this sense, we seek to hide our agency, hide the extent to which we are in control ("play dumb," as Auster says)¹¹³; after all, the most manipulative system is the one most stealthy in its manipulation. To cover up our involvement, we don't make any moves which would not also happen without us (cf. Aristotle's poet, who can create anything whatsoever but creates only things which are probable).¹¹⁴ In other words, the extreme form of controlling the situation is not to control it at all. (Furthermore, once we've established that the things we make happen look exactly like the things that happen anyway, we can then claim to have caused even the things we did not cause to happen; cf. the retrospective control of Exupéry's king over his world). Consequently, there is no essential difference between Poe's

game and Stoppard's game, between the highest strategy and pure chance. As i ek says, "the optimal solution is sometimes equivalent to tossing a coin" (*They* 277). The two coexist in Stoppard's play, for example, where Rosencrantz adopts the artificial strategy of guessing "heads" every time, regardless of what came before (which is always heads as well), choosing the least likely approach, but remains unflappable in the face of the overwhelming improbability of what he is doing, namely, winning every time: chance always backs up his strategic decision, so that his "free will" cannot dissociate itself from chance.¹¹⁵

It is in this sense that Auster's characters eventually submit to chance: "In the end, each life is no more than the sum of contingent facts, a chronicle of chance intersections, of flukes, of random events that divulge nothing but their own lack of purpose" (Auster 256). The "detective" loses track not only of the "criminal" but usually also of the victim and the truth about whether or not there was a "case" to begin with: "Quinn could walk through the streets every day for the rest of his life, and still he would not find him [Stillman]. Everything had been reduced to chance, a nightmare of numbers and probabilities. There were no clues, no leads, no moves to be made" (109). But this aporia of chance doesn't happen by chance; in a sense, the characters use their free will *to get to chance*¹¹⁶ (the intervention of strategy into chance *is* the difference between chance and strategy). In other words, it wasn't always and only chance, as we see from the opening lines of *The New York Trilogy*: "Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance. But that was much later. In the beginning, there was simply the event and its consequences. Whether it might have turned out differently, or whether it was all predetermined with the first word that came from the stranger's mouth, is not the question. The question is the story itself, and whether or

not it means something is not for the story to tell” (Auster 3). If the problem of free will and simulation “is not the question,” then the events that happen may be, interchangeably, either those of Rosencrantz’s chance or those of Dupin’s strategy, but Auster is not concerned with finding out which, since they both would produce the same story. What matters is “the story itself,” not the motives behind it: “You can’t possibly know what’s true or not true. You’ll never know” (Auster 368). What matters is the move, not the game. This would also suggest that simulation is not our enemy but our parallel alternative, a different way of getting the same result. As in a semiotic double-slit experiment, free will and simulation are impossibly, simultaneously aware of each other’s influence on the events, but that doesn’t change the events themselves. In a sense, free will and simulation exist in a Möbius unity impervious to answers. The detective who goes after the man who disappeared also disappears. In the end, Auster’s characters are no longer on opposite sides of the equation: “Why should he [Blue] suddenly begin to trust Black? What earthly cause could there be for him to think they are both working on the same side now?” (221). The reason that comes to mind is that there never was *another* side. It is not the case that we are fighting against simulation; rather, we are on the same side. Or, as the “Wakefield” evidence suggests, we are not on the side of ourselves, but on the side of the outside observer (more precisely, we are both the observer and the observed), and that is why we can trust the outside. Being on the same side, however, means that the whole detective premise of discovering the hidden truth is irreversibly compromised, which is why in *The New York Trilogy* the detective story arc eventually dissolves into indeterminacy. The “case” is never solved.

NOTES

1. It is in fact impossible to say that simulation is “bad” and we need to get rid of it, just as it is impossible to say that reality is “bad” and we need to get rid of it. Like Calvino’s Montezuma, we would only like to understand the phenomenon we encounter (although, in our case, understanding simulation would mean in some sense defeating it): “Kill them [the Spanish] . . . I wanted to do something far more important: conceive them. If I could have conceived the Spanish, brought them into my manner of thinking, been sure of their true nature, whether gods or evil demons it didn’t matter which, . . . in short if I could have made of them—inconceivable as they were—something my mind could dwell on and grasp, then, and only then, would I have been able to have them as my allies or enemies, to recognize them as persecutors or victims. . . . It was the same for him [Cortés] as for me. The real victory he sought to gain over me was the same: that of conceiving me” (“Montezuma,” *Numbers* 192-93). In order to know that simulation is “bad,” first we need to know that it *is*. Of course, with simulation we have the additional complication that, even if we are aware of the simulation, we face the possibility that this awareness itself is simulated, so defeating simulation would mean distrusting the awareness.

We can also cite Baudrillard’s statement, “Good is when Good comes out of Good, or Evil out of Evil. That is when there is order. Evil is when Evil comes out of Good, or Good out of Evil. That is when things are all wrong” (*Perfect* 67). Even if it is all “bad,” simulation is *consistently* bad, and therefore, according to Baudrillard’s definition, good (structurally speaking). However, applying moral categories to the structural make-up of simulation, rather than to its content, does not seem to make a lot of sense. And since, according to our definition, simulation is nothing but a structural phenomenon, which can have any and all content, moral judgments in general seem inapplicable.

2. From *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, London: Sage, 1993, p. 133. Calvino also addresses this problem. In the story “The Last Channel,” the protagonist suspects the existence of a system (a single message which infiltrates all television channels) from which he cannot escape: “whether I go wild with my remote control or whether I keep my hands in my pocket makes no difference, because I’ll never be able to get out of the system” (*Numbers* 257). As with simulation in general, Calvino sees that the possibility of escape is thwarted by the all-inclusive totality of that which the protagonist seeks to escape from. In other words, there is no “other” channel: “Whether they’re transmitting a film or news or ads there is only one message whatever the station since everything and everybody are part of one system” (*Numbers* 257).

Accepting, for a moment, Baudrillard’s terms of what we can call “applied simulation,” which often equates simulation with the consumer society, there is still a sense in which the structure (system) cannot be manipulative (“bad”), because manipulation and domination in general seem to be content-based: they seek to promote specific content (“this is the best thing to do; therefore, you should do this”), while simulation can work with any content at all (“whatever you do, it’s fine with me”). There usually is some concern about a system which can swallow and incorporate any content; however, the opposite situation seems dangerous as well: in a system where content has not lost its meaning, its authority over form, manipulation based on content becomes possible, because, knowing that content matters, we would naturally want to force a specific content on others, the content we think is best. (While totalitarianism says, “this

is what you should do," democracy (or the consumer society) says, "you should do whatever you want"; one legislates content, the other form; one prescribes, the other describes, a difference which is temporal in nature.) That is why totalitarian systems feel threatened by certain ideas and seek to banish them outside the system, because the system cannot handle certain content. At the same time, the system doesn't care for form: it can handle having an outside and is not bothered by the fact that certain things are structurally excluded from it, as long as they are also materially excluded as content. Simulation, on the other hand, allows all content as long as it has control over all form; it is willing to admit any content whatsoever inside itself, in order to prevent the existence of an outside. (Or, more precisely, both kinds of systems are threatened by an "outside," but while for simulation the outside is structural, for totalitarian systems the outside is material, content-based, defined as the content which cannot be allowed in.) While the totalitarian system doesn't care about what's outside it, but is very careful about what's inside it, simulation doesn't care about what's inside it, as long as there is no outside.

In this sense, extrapolating from Baudrillard's definitions, we seem to be presented with a choice between a content which is meaningful but excluded and a content which is included but meaningless. If we think content in itself is important, we would logically have to choose the system in which the content is included, and prefer simulation to totalitarianism, structure to manipulation (e.g., if we think that love/freedom/peace *are* good, in themselves, regardless of the fact that love is required, freedom is forced, and peace is advertized). While Baudrillard is likely to dismiss a freedom which is structurally meaningless (meaningless because forced on people), and seek out "real" freedom which is not legislated by the system, his position seems to originate in his own privileging of structure over content, which automatically undermines his search for "real" freedom. If such a thing as "real" freedom existed, it would be able to exist in any structure of simulation (although it would be banned from systems of totalitarianism); if content had any value, as content, we would have no grounds to dismiss it just because it is structurally ineffective, unless we put the value of the structure over that of the content we seek to defend. In other words, if we valued content over simulation, we would have to choose systems of simulation over systems based on content, because content is freely admitted in the former and screened in the latter (without any guarantee that the "good" content will be admitted and the "bad" will be rejected, because the "good" is retrospectively defined as that which is admitted). In a way, in the content-based systems morality is a structural decision (whatever is accepted is good), while, conversely, in systems of simulation both "good" and "bad" content is allowed, so we cannot tell that something is good just because it is in the system; in fact, the system does not offer us any way to recognize, promote, or destroy what is "good" in terms of content, simply because content as such falls under the radar of the system. E.g., simulation does not allow us to define freedom as something structurally opposed to the system (good because it is outside the system), because there is no such thing; since freedom is not structurally distinguishable from the "code," if we define it at all we must define it in terms of content. The structure itself forces us to give non-structural definition to values.

3. Baudrillard's optimism (i.e., it is possible to escape simulation, or at least to speak about escaping simulation, "not by directly contesting it [the system] or proposing an other to it, but by asking what allows this self-definition or tautology, what is excluded to bring it about" [Butler 56], thereby suggesting that there is something excluded from the system), is not without

precedent. Similar getaways have been theoretically charted in the realm of the absurd, for example: as Camus points out, “even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism” (1). However, in the case of the absurd, the problem of totality does not seem to exist, since “absurdity springs from a comparison” (Camus 30). Where there is comparison, there is a way out, and being aware of absurdity means being aware of an alternative to absurdity. Simulation, however, does not offer, structurally, such an easy egress.

4. “Without restriction but within limits” is a definition reminiscent of Terry Pratchett’s god, who is “an omnipresent god, although only in a small area” (*Last* 146).

5. See previous chapter for a discussion of this paradox (pp. 177-94).

6. In this sense, the power of simulation is exactly that of Exupéry’s king (Chapter Three, note 38). It is forever right in its predictions, forever absolute in its fiats, because it wills only that which happens anyway. At the risk of stretching it, we can say that simulation is exactly like reality in this sense (“it happens anyway”), except that we are willing to suspect intent or purpose behind simulation (i.e., it wants to manipulate us and we want to escape it), whereas reality does not aim at manipulation and we don’t want to escape it. Reality, we believe, does not make things *seem* a certain way: it makes things *be* a certain way; it is not about appearances because it doesn’t care how we perceive things, because it is not about *us*, designed for our benefit alone.

7. Cf. Eco’s version: “‘Do you have the password?’ was the question. And the answer, the key to knowledge, was ‘No.’ Not only does the magic word not exist, but we do not know that it does not exist” (*Pendulum* 516). Since the computer password is “no,” the “no” is a confirmation rather than denial. The key to getting in is to admit that one cannot get in: a reversed version of simulation, where it’s a question of getting *out*. As in Auster, here the “no” is simultaneously a “no” (in content) and a “yes” (in form).

This is analogous to having an argument whose logic is incorrect and yet it leads to a conclusion which is correct; but there is no way to measure the truth of the conclusion as content (just as the “no” against the system cannot have an impact *as* a “no”): “The accidental nature of the truth values comes about because the syllogism is formally incorrect, but nonetheless there are some cases in which it leads to materially true conclusions” (Manetti 82). Since the correctness of the argument is structural, what we measure is its form; if the structure is incorrect, we would dismiss the correctness of any content that happens to be inside it as well, even if that content is true (if the whole structure spells “yes,” it would continue saying “yes” even if we infuse it with “no”-valence content). Truth is a structural property of the system. To see the value of the content, we would have to change our method of determining value and evaluate the argument in terms of content, not form: then, however, we would have to settle for an incorrect formal argument and lack of logic in the relations between things; truth would then be an individual property of things, regardless of whether they are consistent with other things. (E.g., it would be like looking at a drawing (which does not derive its meaning from other drawings), rather than a word in a sentence (which depends on all the other words); this would be the ultimate poetic truth, found in the beauty of a single image.)

8. This problem has been widely discussed in regard to the specific issue of the “consumer society” by Baudrillard, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, etc.
9. Baudrillard also points out that instead of “the critique of all illusions,” we now have “the illusion of criticism itself” (*Perfect* 27).
10. “Dreams, too, give us the illusion that we are in control of them. . . . They even give us the illusion of being aware of dreaming, which is part of their mechanism” (Baudrillard, *Perfect* 11).
11. In the words of William Bogard in “Baudrillard, Time, and the End,” “simulation points at nothing beyond itself; it is an interior, sealed space, a closed system that cannot be transcended or dialectically negated (negation is powerless before what is ‘truer-than-true’)” (316-17).
12. “‘You’re not Death,’ she said. ‘You’re only doing his job.’
‘DEATH IS WHOEVER DOES DEATH’S JOB.’” (Pratchett, *Mort* 230)
13. We don’t seem to have a name for this Möbius compound, although one example of it would be the “self-fulfilling prophecy” of the Oedipus type. The name of this phenomenon, we notice, awkwardly attempts to convey its double nature: it would be like calling the Möbius strip a “self-anticipating recursion,” emphasizing its impossible double nature rather than its equally impossible but more succinct singularity.
14. Auster makes the same comment about thinking: “By definition, a thought is something you are aware of. . . . [I]f you are not aware of having a thought, is it legitimate to say that you are thinking?” (286).
15. In Beckett’s plays (*Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days* especially), we see characters who are unable to register their own suffering, because, as we saw, they are not aware of the repetition they undergo. In that case, the suffering is there only because it becomes apparent to the reader/viewer, and it can be said to exist in the same way dramatic irony exists. However, in the case of *The New York Trilogy*, the reader has no advantage over the protagonists, since they are equally aware of the “truth,” or possibly even contributing, through the interpretations they put forth, to the creation of this “truth” as it appears to the reader.
16. Or, more generally, whoever designed the system does not have the privilege of being outside the system; the simulation is as real to him as to everyone else, if not more so (cf. Oedipus).
17. The phrase “self-fulfilling prophecy” in fact comes up in the Baudrillardian universe: as Butler says, citing Baudrillard’s views on the specific subject of the consumer society, “the difficulty of speaking against the system . . . is that . . . there is nothing outside of it by which to judge it. It is beyond true and false, a kind of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (CS, 197)” (53).
18. Baudrillard quotes this in a slightly different translation in *The Perfect Crime*: “We ought now to turn those lines of Hölderlin around: ‘But where there is danger, there grows also what saves’ . . . and say ‘But where what saves grows, there also grows danger’ . . . which would

characterize the much graver threat of disintegration and death represented by our excess of security, prevention, immunity, and the fatal excess of positivity” (49).

19. For a wordier explanation (and one which deals with the specific case of technology), see Charles Levin in *Jean Baudrillard: A Study in Cultural Metaphysics*: “The promise of emancipation through knowledge has already been superceded [sic] by its technologically enhanced autonomization: our knowledge is not really ours after all, but a hybrid formation increasingly dominated by nonhuman and nonsubjective components. Human knowledge is in fact becoming a programme designed to recycle itself automatically, effectively imposing a higher order closure of the structuration process. The self-conscious participation of the increasingly knowing Hegelian subject never catches up with the regulatory functioning of the system” (80). In other words, the attempt to get out of the system only results in a higher order system with more sophisticated preventive measures, and this system in turn produces a more sophisticated subject, which, by fighting the system, will create a more sophisticated system, and so on. The subject doesn’t catch up with the system, but neither does the system catch up with the subject.

20. The passage as it appears in Baudrillard: “Consider the story of the soldier who meets Death at a crossing in the marketplace, and believes he saw him make a menacing gesture in his direction. He rushes to the king’s palace and asks the king for his best horse in order that he might flee during the night far from Death, as far as Samarkand. Upon which the king summons Death to the palace and reproaches him for having frightened one of his best servants. But Death, astonished, replies: ‘I didn’t mean to frighten him. It was just that I was surprised to see this soldier here, when we had a rendez-vous tomorrow in Samarkand’” (*Seduction* 72). Baudrillard only says that “[w]hat is astounding about the story is that this seemingly inevitable rendez-vous need not have taken place” (72), and then goes on to discuss the meaning of Death’s gesture, rather than the structure of the events as a whole. For this, Butler’s analysis of this passage seems more relevant to the current argument, as it explicates in greater detail Baudrillard’s hypothesis that “Death is a rendez-vous, not an objective destiny” (73). Simulation, we can say, is similarly an encounter, rather than a thing.

21. Baudrillard, for one, envisions such an outside: “Anomaly is what escapes not only the law but the rule. What is outside the game, ‘offside’, no longer in a position to play” (*Perfect* 146). However, in terms of the current argument, no possibility of an “offside” position is readily apparent; nothing is external to the game, and there are no spaces which are not also squares on the chess board.

22. The concept of “doubling” is also connected to the concept of the performative statement. As Butler says, “this again is what we might mean by . . . ‘doubling’, the saying of something that makes it true” (20). To use the same example, the usurper’s becoming a king by becoming a usurper is a performative, since, in effect, the usurper becomes a king by saying that he is a king.

23. We can see examples of such “doubling” in all of the authors we have considered so far, such as Stoppard and Calvino.

Stoppard:

ROS: I watched it [the sun] come up.

GUIL: No . . . it was light all the time, you see, and you opened your eyes very, very slowly. (85)

Calvino:

POLO: *Unless the opposite hypothesis is correct: that those who strive in camps and ports exist only because we two think of them, here, enclosed among these bamboo hedges, motionless since time began . . . washerwomen bent over stones, mothers stirring rice as they nurse their infants, exist only because we think them . . .*

KUBLAI: *To tell the truth, I never think them.*

POLO: *Then they do not exist.*

KUBLAI: *To me this conjecture does not seem to suit our purposes. Without them, we could never remain here swaying, cocooned in our hammocks.*

POLO: *Then the hypothesis must be rejected. So the other hypothesis is true: they exist and we do not.*

KUBLAI: *We have proved that if we were here, we would not be.*

POLO: *And here, in fact, we are. (Invisible 117-18)*

24. Vonnegut's version: "What the Englishman said about survival was this: 'If you stop taking pride in your appearance, you will very soon die.' He said that he had seen several men die in the following way: 'They ceased to stand up straight, then ceased to shave or wash, then ceased to get out of bed, then ceased to talk, then died'" (*Slaughterhouse* 145). This is an absurd version of Searle's example of the walk in the park: to an outside observer the cause and the effect would be interchangeable in what Poster calls "a [Baudrillardian] world where anything can be anything else, where everything is both equivalent to and indifferent to everything else" (Baudrillard, *Selected* 5).

25. What is "inside" for Searle is the "outside" for simulation, the position from where one can see the truth in contrast to the illusion. The inside and the outside are ultimately two equal but opposite functions of having an "other" point of view, the only point of view from which the simulation can be seen as such.

26. Here, Searle would be in agreement with Aristotle (and we, for the first time, will not): "And there is no other mode besides these; for one must necessarily either do the deed or not, and with or without knowledge of what it is" (*Poetics* 42). Things are never that simple. As Stoppard's Guildenstern comments, "[a] Chinaman of the T'ang Dynasty—and, by which definition, a philosopher—dreamed he was a butterfly, and from that moment he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher. Envy him; in his two-fold security" (60).

27. From "Please Follow Me," *Art & Text* 23/4, 1987: 103-12; 104.

28. This invites the question of whether a person can be not-free without his knowledge (which is similar to the question of whether a person can feel pain without *knowing* that something hurts). In both cases, awareness seems essential (although we shouldn't forget Harold Brown's advice that "we should sever any *definitional* ties between the concepts of knowledge and of truth" [221]). If an outside observer is aware of a person's lack of freedom (which he himself is not aware of), can we trust this judgment any more than we can trust the people sitting outside the Chinese room in their belief that they are chatting in Chinese with the person inside? And conversely, what would make us trust the person inside more than the outside observer? As Merleau-Ponty says, "[s]eer and seen are exactly interchangeable" (16). We can accept as a tentative and oblique answer Barthes' observation that "[a]ll classical culture lived for centuries on the notion that reality could in no way contaminate verisimilitude" (147), and conclude that reality has no part in making things seem true.

29. In Lacan's terminology: "what is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place*, as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in the library. And even if the book be on an adjacent shelf or in the next slot, it would be hidden there, however visibly it may appear. For it can *literally* be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always in its place" ("Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" 55).

30. Cf. Chapter Three, pp. 190-91.

31. Similarly, Oedipus suspects that there is a conspiracy, but he never suspects that it is his own: the notion of the "other" who is responsible for the simulation is the condition for the success of the simulation. Not unlike our need to find a creator for what we create, to blame someone else and to credit someone else in order to make our creation (simulation) more genuine than we are.

32. That would be that same north of the arrow from chapters two (pp. 105-106) and three (pp. 149, 192-94).

33. We do not distinguish here, as Davidson would, between "cause" and "intention." According to Davidson, "cause" is "a mark of agency that does not use the concept of intention" (47). For our purposes, however, cause and intention will be used interchangeably to mean the thing which precedes the event itself and has bearing on it. This would allow us to see the complicated nature of the beast, such as the fact that Oedipus' intention causes an event exactly opposite to what he intended and yet the same.

34. We can also take as an example Baudrillard's observation that "from the perspective of the satisfaction of the consumer, there is no basis on which to define what is 'artificial' and what is not" (*Selected* 40). In other words, there is no way to distinguish between what Herbert Marcuse, for example, defined as "true" and "false" needs of the consumer (6). But the "truth" is a temporal category again, because if we could determine beyond any doubt which "needs" came first, there would be little question that these needs are the genuine ones and the others are artificial. We would be able to distinguish what is true and what is simulated on the basis of

their chronology. However, such a neat chronology is hard to come by, and on the subject of the consumer society Baudrillard clarifies this problem by saying that “*the system of needs is the product of the system of production*” (*Selected* 42).

35. As the protagonist in the film *SimOne* says, “you made me, but I made you first.”

36. He has the freedom to fight but not the freedom not to fight. More on negative freedom later. For now, we’ll just mention Baudrillard’s observation that “doing something solely because you can’t not do something has never constituted a principle of action or freedom” (*Perfect* 133).

37. Cf. the description of the biography the protagonist has to write in *The Locked Room*: “There was never any question of telling the truth. Fanshawe had to be dead, or else the book would make no sense. Not only would I have to leave the letter [from Fanshawe, showing that he is alive] out, but I would have to pretend that it had never been written. . . . The book was a work of fiction. Even though it was based on facts, it could tell nothing but lies” (291).

38. This is classic Baudrillard: “The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (Ecclesiastes, qtd. in Baudrillard, *Selected* 166).

39. The same problem comes up in Heidegger: “Only when the meaning of something is such that it makes a pretension of showing itself—that is, of being a phenomenon—*can* it show itself *as* something which it is *not*. . . . What appears does *not* show itself; and anything which thus fails to show itself, is also something which can never seem” (*Being and Time* 51-52). In other words, only something which stands for itself can also stand for something else, since the disguise simultaneously makes something absent (what it hides) and something present (itself). The phenomenon is not an “appearance”; it is something which is both true (shows itself as what it is) and false (hides something it isn’t). As in simulation, what *is* is the same as what *seems* to be. In order to *seem* it also needs to *be*.

40. The negative event (just like simulation) does not appear to have a physical manifestation: “one can thermodynamically explain why there are observations though no ‘un-observations’ in which originally existing information (about the future) would disappear by means of an interaction between the observing and the observed systems” (Zeh 5).

41. Calvino also senses the same paradox of the negative event, the doubling, when his narrator in the story “A King Listens” begins to suspect that the he has been overthrown: “Perhaps everything continues as before, but the palace is already in the hands of the usurpers” (*Jaguar* 44). And Baudrillard makes a similar point: “Indeed it is possible that [the simulation] never existed, and the world’s order would remain the same. But the assumption of its existence changes everything. The assumption alone is enough to change reality, as it is, as it cannot be otherwise, into one immense simulacrum. Reality is nothing other than its own simulation” (*Seduction* 151).

42. As Aristotle says, the cause is also “[t]he end, i.e. that for the sake of which a thing is. For example, health is the cause of walking” (*Metaphysics* 4). In other words, even if the “purpose” behind the walk is only discovered at the *end* of the walk, it reaches back to the beginning, because in some sense the end is and has always been the *cause* of the walk.

43. Note that the word “itself” here refers to the form, not the content of the action, contrary to the traditional Kantian usage, for example, where the appearance of the action would not qualify as a bearer of the “itself”; for Kant, the “itself” would be the noumenal content, the internal essence.

44. Aristotle: “each man likes not what is good for himself but what appears to him to be good for himself” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 141).

45. Being an observer of oneself does not necessarily deprive one of the truth, as we can see from the logical problem of the three wise men. Logical problems of this kind apparently exist in a variety of forms across cultures; the version here is derived from memory from an untraceable source, but for purposes of documentation another version can be found in a collection of logical problems online:

problem: <http://einstein.et.tudelft.nl/~arlet/puzzles/logic.html>

solution: <http://rec-puzzles.org/sol.pl/logic/smullyan/painted.heads> [accessed June 7, 2002]

Problem: Three wise men fall asleep under a tree. A man walks by and decides to play a trick on them. He draws a mark on each man’s forehead. When they wake up, they all start laughing at one another, each of them seeing the marks on the others’ foreheads. After a few minutes, however, one of them stops laughing, realizing that he too has a mark. How did he arrive at this conclusion?

Solution: Let’s call this man A. A reasons this way: if his own forehead is clear, then B is laughing at C, and C is laughing at B. Then A imagines what this situation would look like from the point of view of B, who would be looking at A (with a presumably clear forehead) and C (with a mark on his forehead). B would also see that C is laughing, and, A imagines B would reason, not having anything else to laugh at, C probably is laughing at the mark on B’s forehead. This would make B stop laughing, since he would realize that C is laughing at *him*. But since B does not stop laughing, the above situation is not true, B apparently assumes that C is laughing at A, and therefore A also has a mark on his forehead. In other words, it is because no one stops laughing that A stops laughing.

In a similar way, in Andersen’s tale about the emperor each person’s behavior depends on what he thinks *the others* see: everyone “pretends” (80), because everyone suspects the others are *not* pretending. We should note that Andersen’s emperor is put in a more complicated semiotic situation than the three wise men, a situation in which the “other,” whose reaction the emperor is supposed to interpret, is pretending, altering his behavior because he *knows* he is being observed by the emperor. On the contrary, wise man A can trust that the behavior of B and C he observes is genuine, not put on for his own benefit. i ek says that “this double reflection produces a symbolic point the nature of which is purely virtual: neither what I immediately see . . . nor the way the others see me . . . but *the way I see the others seeing me*” (*They* 13). The other doesn’t see us; we don’t see ourselves; but in seeing what the other fails to see in us we can get at a

negative truth about ourselves: that is, unless the other, knowing that we are observing him, changes his behavior to make us believe that he sees (or fails to see) something else. Either way, only in the broadest possible sense can we say that, as Auster fears, we “exist for ourselves” (292). We are always involved, even as neutral observers, in the events of the world, since we are constantly faced with “the problems of a universe that contains its observers” (Zeh 65). As Baudrillard says, “[w]e are no longer spectators, but actors in the performance, and actors increasingly integrated into the course of that performance” (*Perfect* 27).

46. Hawthorne’s narrator seems to lean heavily in the direction of predestination or necessity at times, but he does it in a way that throws doubt on his own words: “Would that I had a folio to write, instead of an article of a dozen pages! Then might I exemplify how an influence beyond our control lays its strong hand on every deed which we do, and weaves its consequences into an iron tissue of necessity” (78). In other words, he admits that this short story does not exemplify the necessity he talks about; but he would have been able to exemplify it if he had had more space. However, it is not very clear how exactly he is prevented from writing a longer story (or the *whole* story).

In another passage, we see the same thing: “Watch him long enough to see what we have described, and you will allow that circumstances—which often produce remarkable men from nature’s ordinary handiwork—have produced one such here” (79). All the credit for Wakefield’s actions goes not to him but to the power of circumstances, *if* we could only observe him long enough, *if* only this story were long enough, *if* this story were true enough. But here we notice a curious temporal confusion in the phrase “Watch him long enough to see what we have described.” The meaning of the story should be found in what is *already* described: the story does not in fact need to be longer because the truth lies in what is already given to us. In other words, the narrator suggests that the truth is right here, in the story he has told, and advises us to look harder for it. The narrator does everything possible to convince us that it is not the case that there is no message, but that the message is scrambled by interference in the process of reading or writing. Even if we do not see the moral (the meaning of the story, the reason behind Wakefield’s actions), it is still there and we should read, “trusting that there will be a pervading spirit and a moral, even should we fail to find them, done up neatly, and condensed into the final sentence” (75). But how can we fail to find the moral if we are told it is going to be in the last sentence? An interesting concept: a moral that we fail to find. Isn’t the very definition of a “moral” something which the reader learns? How can we learn something without knowing it? We recall Searle’s observation that “[t]he distinction between reality and appearance cannot apply to the very existence of consciousness. For if it seems to me that I’m conscious, I *am* conscious” (99). And conversely: if I do not *appear* to myself to be conscious, then I am not conscious. The same is true of the moral of the story: if we don’t notice that we are learning (becoming conscious of) anything, then we are not learning anything; if we don’t see a moral, then there isn’t one, since the moral is by definition that which we see.

But the narrator promises a moral “in the final sentence,” and there is one: “Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe” (80). But this moral is obviously not true, because Wakefield does

not “lose his place”: he can and does return to his home as if nothing has happened. Instead of stepping out for a moment and losing his place forever, Wakefield steps out for twenty years without losing his place at all. He is not the capitalized “Outcast of the Universe”: he cannot be cast away from the universe, because the universe is by definition everything there is (hence the “uni” prefix). At no point is he fully independent of the “system,” but neither is the system putting any objective pressure on him: he is free to do whatever he wants, to change the rules, to be dead and then alive again, disregarding even the most basic laws of nature (transforming, like Macbeth, laws into rules). (It is interesting that Hawthorne should describe reality in terms of self-consistent systems interacting with each other, which is how we would describe simulation.) In other words, instead of a “true” moral that we reach on our own, we get a moral which is flatly stated and obvious (the narrator doesn’t trust us to find it on our own even when we are told which sentence we should look at), but not “true.” It seems that the narrator cannot find a moral in the story any more than we can; and just as the narrator has no advantage over the reader, Wakefield has no advantage over the narrator, since not even Wakefield has an explanation for his own actions.

47. “[A] myth which Socrates relates . . . tells how the signs of the alphabet were a gift of the Egyptian god Thoth to Thamus, the king of Thebes. The god invited the king to make the signs known throughout Egypt since, he said, they were a medicine for knowledge and memory (*Phaedrus*, 274 e). Thamus, however, does not accept the gift very enthusiastically, for he is convinced that the signs of writing would have an effect opposite to that claimed by the god, that is, that they would weaken the memory. The king fears that, trusting writing, people would no longer recall things from within themselves, but from outside, through external signs” (Manetti 54).

48. Another translation of Alcmaeon of Croton can be found in Manetti, in *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*: “The gods have immediate knowledge of invisible and mortal things, but men must conjecture” (qtd. in Manetti 44). Manetti goes on to explain the historical importance of this statement: “With Alcmaeon there originates a deep fracture between humankind and reality. Knowledge of the world of experience is no longer transparent. The semiotic method hinges on this fracture inaugurated by Alcmaeon, for this fracture imposes the necessity of replacing the procedure of analogy [possible only if the world is all homogenous and each part is homologous with the whole] with a procedure based on evidence [necessary, we can say, where the relationship between things is one of metaphor rather than metonymy]” (44).

49. In contrast, Poe, as we shall see later, is capable of asking the same questions but without answering them: “And again, and again, in secret communion with my own spirit, would I demand the questions ‘Who is he?—whence came he?—and what are his objects?’ But no answer was there found” (“William Wilson” 281-82).

50. Manetti tells us that “this type of reasoning [going backwards from the signs to their causes] cannot produce a true fact-based knowledge, which can be obtained only by *starting from causes*. Reasoning based on signs starts not from causes but from effects, and it enables merely the affirmation of a fact—that is, the *hóti* (‘that’)—without leading to the understanding of the

cause—that is, the *dióti* ('why'). . . . [Aristotle] makes the distinction between 'knowledge that something is' and 'knowledge why something is'" (Manetti 88). The knowledge "that" would characterize the present, while the knowledge "why" would characterize either the past (how it came to be, by what means) or the future (to what end); see Chapter Three, note 62. When Aristotle says, "we think we have knowledge of a thing when we have found its primary causes" (*Physics*, Book I 1), the knowledge of the cause is knowledge either of the past or of the future. The "why" is never available in the present. The difference between "the 'sign' and the 'cause' of a phenomenon" (Manetti 55) is again a function of temporality. With Wakefield and Fanshawe, all we can establish as a fact is *that* they left, but not *why* they left: we have the sign but not the cause, the event but not the meaning. Their condition doesn't have a history; their present doesn't have a past.

51. Banquo's initial impulse in *Macbeth* is the same, as he wants to reveal the truth of the witches and speaks to them "[i]th' name of truth" (I. iii. 52).

52. The first "detective story" can be traced back to various versions of this tale: "Three brothers (runs a story from the Middle East told among Kirghiz, Tatars, Jews, Turks, and so on; Vesselofsky 1886:308-309) meet a man who has lost a camel (or sometimes it is a horse). At once they describe it to him: it's white, and blind in one eye; under the saddle it carries two skins, one full of oil, the other of wine. They must have seen it? No, they haven't seen it. So they're accused of theft and brought to be judged. The triumph of the brothers follows: they immediately show how from the barest traces they were able to reconstruct the appearance of an animal they had never set eyes on" (Ginzburg 88-89). Ginzburg also suggests that "[t]he hunter could have been the first 'to tell a story' because only hunters knew how to read a coherent sequence of events from the silent . . . signs left by their prey" (89); "the language of deciphering tracks is based on figures of speech—the part for the whole, the cause for the effect" (89).

53. Cf. also Baudrillard: "the latent discourse turns the manifest discourse not *from* its truth, but *towards* its truth. It makes the manifest discourse say what it does not want to say" (*Seduction* 53).

54. As Brown explains, "there are situations in which we encounter an unfamiliar object and give it a name for ease of reference, and in which, at least initially, this name conveys no information" (87). We can also add that this describes *all* situations when they happen for the first time, and that the meaning of words and names comes only from repetition (cf. Chapter Three, pp. 170-71). Interpretation is simply a reference back to another similar occasion, and if we could go back in time to the first occasion when a name was used, we'll see that the name won't mean anything, simply because there is no occasion earlier than the first it can refer to. Again, we encounter a temporal problem with a semiotic solution.

55. From *A Scandal in Bohemia*. Similarly, Brown points out Dretske's distinction between information and meaning. *Information* is present in the signal whether we recognize it or not; what *meaning* is found in the signal depends on the background of the individual and the context: "The meaning that I find in a signal may match the information carried by the signal, but that

need not happen" (Brown 82).

56. Consider Eco's observation about the meaning of a religious rite: "The animal that coils in a circle is the serpent; that's why so many cults and myths of the serpent exist, because it's hard to represent the return of the sun by the coiling of a hippopotamus. Furthermore, if you have to make a ceremony to invoke the sun, it's best to move in a circle, because if you go in a straight line, you move away from home, which means the ceremony will have to be kept short. The circle is the most convenient arrangement for any rite . . . because in a circle everybody can see the one who's in the center" (*Pendulum* 302). In other words, the serpent is not the symbol of the sun as much as a sign of how it got to symbolize the sun; what the serpent *means* is not the sun, but, self-referentially, the fact that the serpent is the best representation of the sun. As a non-clue, it tells us more about itself than it does about anything else.

That is why it is impossible to have clues to simulation (or to reality): just as when you turn your back on the king it is no longer the king you're turning your back on, when you reveal simulation, it is no longer simulation that you have revealed. When we find out that the "clue" is not a clue but a part of reality, not a symptom but a sign, not an exception but the rule, it ceases to be a clue to something else and becomes a "clue" to itself.

57. While simulation is characterized by a paradox of the kind "I am a liar," the detective genre is rather characterized by the statement "You are a liar," which reaffirms the category of truth rather than destabilizing it. Unlike the structures of the detective genre, simulation complicates things by being honest about its falsity: as one character says in the film *SimOne*, "We're fine with fake, as long as you don't lie about it." But we cannot really call not lying about being false "false"; it has a fair chance of being true. Is anything true unless it knows it's true? Is anything false if it knows it's false? The awareness of what it is can change the definition of what it is. Anything which is "true" in content can become "false" in its function ("even a child knows that the truth can be used for devious ends" [Auster 313]), and anything which is "false" can be redeemed by being aware of its falsity ("As long as you tell people what you are going to do, . . . you are free to do what you want" [Auster 125]).

58. We reserve the right to qualify this statement later, to the effect that, even if we assume there are no *illusions* of interiority, there still may be *truths* of interiority, in the sense of truths *about* interiority (such as the fact that it doesn't exist).

59. Reichenbach gives an example of the same process in scientific reasoning, where, in order to distinguish between reality and dreams, we look for the set of "facts" that has the greatest coherence: "The dream islands [the pieces of information which we call "dreams"] . . . could be distinguished from the remainder because the remaining totality admit[s] of an order in terms of causal laws" (265). While in reality facts are consistent among themselves (e.g., every time we check, water is wet and things tend to fall down rather than up), dreams are inconsistent and present us with various random events which never becomes causes and effects since they are unsusceptible to repetition. Reichenbach has to conclude that consistency is the main criterion for reality, and we'll have to give up this reality if one with a higher degree of consistency comes about: "We cannot completely exclude the possibility that later experiences will prove that we

are dreaming even now” (29).

60. Baudrillard: “This means simulation in the sense that from now on signs will exchange among themselves exclusively, without interacting with the real” (*Selected* 125).

61. Cavell: “It [the literal] is also a mode in which prophecies and wishes are fulfilled, surprising all measures to avoid them. Birnam Forest coming to Dunsinane and the overthrow by a man of no woman born are textbook cases. In the *Inferno*, Lucifer is granted his wish to become the triune deity by being fixed in the center of a kingdom and outfitted with three heads. *Endgame* is a play whose mood is characteristically one of madness and in which the characters are fixed by a prophecy, one which their actions can be understood as attempting both to fulfill and to reverse” (122-23). These are all cases of self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the prophecy is treated as a symptom (metaphorically) only to discover that it should have been treated literally, not as clue to something else, but as a clue to itself, i.e., not a clue at all. (We should point out that Manetti disagrees, reversing the terms and saying that “in all literary episodes of oracular divination, the human individual invariably interprets the text in a *literal mode* when it should have been read in what we may term an *enigmatic* [metaphoric] *mode*” [24].) If the clue is a “figure of speech” (Ginzburg 89), then it suffers from what Cavell calls “[a] wish to escape connotation” (120). While Oedipus and Macbeth think they are interpreting the prophecy, they are in fact acting it out, because they don’t know that interpreting the prophecy *is* acting it out, that denotation has replaced connotation (isn’t the performative statement a temporal denotation?). It is impossible to talk *about* things from the distance of the metaphorical, i.e., without making them happen. That is why the self-fulfilling prophecy is the ultimate failure of detection, since we are asked to investigate something which is already given, to seek something which has been found, to treat as future something which is already in the present.

62. From *Ghosts*: “it suddenly occurs to Blue that he can no longer depend on the old procedures. Clues, legwork, investigative routine—none of this is going to matter anymore. But then, when he tries to imagine what will replace these things, he gets nowhere. At this point, Blue can only surmise what the case is not. To say what it is, however, is completely beyond him” (Auster 175). And another, interchangeable Auster protagonist (interchangeable because the three novels are “the same story” [346]) is aware of the same futility of detection: “there were no signs . . . no clues to tell me what was happening” (286); “There were no leads, no clues, no tracks to follow” (340).

63. Here we will have to disagree with i ek, who contends that “[d]etective stories . . . operate a radical turnround of this relation between law and its transgression” (*They* 29). i ek specifically has in mind the fact that the detective himself is often the greatest “law-breaker” in those stories, collapsing the law/transgression binary. In terms of detection, however, detective stories do not depart from the traditional reality principle, in that they still postulate that there is something there for the detective *to* detect.

64. We can say the same about acting: one of Stoppard’s characters, a player, complains about a fellow player ruining the scene of his death by actually dying: “he just *wasn’t* convincing! It was

impossible to suspend one's disbelief[,] . . . he did nothing but cry all the time—right out of character” (84). The actual crying distracts the audience from the real action on stage, even if this action also happens to be crying, one would imagine. In other words, pretending to cry is not the same as crying (the same way “no one supposes that a computer simulation of a storm will leave us all wet” [Searle 37-38]); crying on stage is not the same as stage crying, and, instead of suggesting a sad character, it suggests a bad actor. In this sense, one cannot fake crying by crying; the real crying distracts from the stage crying and interrupts the play; it is no longer a play but reality. The impossibility of interrupting the play, whatever you do, would be called simulation. In this sense, simulation is never about the actor but always about the character (even the actions of a bad actor would be interpreted as failings of the character, e.g., he would be perceived not as someone who is a bad actor, but as someone who is *pretending* to be a bad actor: “bad actor” would still be a role, not the true identity).

65. Holmes elucidates this method of his on many occasions: “What is out of the common is usually a guide rather than a hindrance” (qtd in Truzzi 65, from *A Study in Scarlet*). And: “There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact” (qtd. in Sebeok, “You Know My Method” 23). [From *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*.] Truzzi also tells us that “Holmes recommends special inspection of the unique and unusual details present in the situation” (65).

This holds even in the situations where “Holmes notes that extreme uneventfulness may itself be a singular event which gives a clue to the mystery” (Truzzi 65). The “uneventfulness” would be meaningful only if it is uncommon, only if it constitutes an “event” which stands out, incongruous against a background of everyday eventfulness. In this scenario the ordinary itself becomes extraordinary, the common becomes unrealistic, so that, even though the terms are inverted, the principle remains the same.

66. Auster's characters are faced with this problem in more general terms as well, not specifically in terms of the “case”: “I let my mind drift without purpose, hoping to persuade myself that idleness was proof of gathering strength, a sign that something was about to happen. . . . It's possible that I would have worked my way out of this slump. Whether it was a permanent condition or a passing phase is still unclear to me” (288-89). The characters suffer from an inherent inability to decide whether their behavior is an exception or the rule, whether it truly shows what their personality is like, who they really are. This is a question they can't answer because they can't say what constitutes evidence and what doesn't. In “The Light-Years,” Calvino also considers this problem: “Just think, one who is like y can by chance be seen as x and you might believe he *is* x although it's clear that he's absolutely y” (*Cosmicomics* 132). But what if he behaved like x all the time, or at least all of the time he's being observed (by himself or another)? Does that make him an x? Or is this a passing phase, while he's actually y? Auster leaves this question unresolved, except to say that “the circumstances under which lives shift course are so various that it would seem impossible to say anything about a man until he is dead. Not only is death the one true arbiter of happiness (Solon's remark), it is the only requirement by which we can judge life itself” (298-99). But even this method fails, since Auster's characters never actually die; they usually disappear at the end of the novel, making it impossible to observe them further and make a conclusive pronouncement about their lives as a whole. They prevent us from knowing them in a way that also prevents us from knowing that they are preventing us

from knowing. In other words, we are never certain whether we are unable to observe them because there is nothing to observe (because they're dead), or because they're very well hidden. We never know whether the game is over, or whether the rules have changed so as to make us *think* the game is over.

67. There is no real "detective" either, since the protagonist is always someone who merely plays the role of the detective, a role that invariably takes over his life, suggesting that in some sense he has been a detective all along, that he is only a detective and nothing else, that he has no life outside the case.

68. Baudrillard's use of "sign" here is closer to our use of "symbol," and what we call "sign" seems closer to his "code."

69. Even though Eco says that "the phenomenal teaches us nothing about the noumenal" (*Kant* 91), the opposite is also true: all we know about the noumenal is the phenomena we observe. In this sense, the noumenal *is* the phenomenal.

70. Recall the paranoid suspicions of Eco's character that he is being followed (even though he's not): "I made no noise. Neither did he. . . . Do I hear footsteps behind me? But I wouldn't, of course; the killer has stopped, too" (*Foucault's Pendulum* 475, 500). This is not simply a silence of something absent, but "[the] silence of something making no noise" (Pratchett, *Reaper Man* 105). And Pratchett again: "There had been a sound like someone making no noise at all. Forget peas and mattresses—sheer natural selection had established over the years that royal families that survived longest were those whose members could distinguish an assassin in the dark by the noise he was clever enough not to make" (*Mort* 90). Or Butler's example from Baudrillard: "The absence of Calle is now only proof that she is following him" (116). In this sense, we can say that meaning is always paranoid. ("I knew it! I knew it! Well, not 'knew it' in the sense of having the slightest idea, but I knew there was something I didn't know" [*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, episode 26, "Innocence," original air date Jan. 20, 1998].)

71. Cf. Eco: "There exists a secret society with branches throughout the world, and its plot is to spread the rumor that a universal plot exists" (*Pendulum* 265).

72. Cf. discussion of proof in relation to good and evil, Chapter Two, pp. 97-99.

73. Consider another example: if I tell a joke to a person who doesn't get it, and he doesn't laugh, that does not tell me anything about the joke; it doesn't mean anything. If, on the other hand, I tell the joke to a person who gets it and still doesn't laugh, that means something: it tells me that this is a bad joke. Here, we have a situation where the *same* joke is told and it gets the *same* response (silence rather than laughter), but in one case it means something, while in the other it doesn't. However, as with the Chinese room example, there is no way to know which case I am dealing with. The silence itself doesn't tell me whether the silence is meaningful or not; to find out the meaning of the silence, I would need something outside the silence itself (e.g., somebody saying "I don't get the joke" or "This is a bad joke").

74. Eco also points out that “the more ambiguous and elusive a symbol is, the more it gains significance and power” (*Pendulum* 360).

75. We can think of necessary silence as “general” (since what the person doesn’t tell falls under the general category of everything he doesn’t know) and of motivated silence as “specific” (since, unlike everything else he doesn’t tell us, the person knows the answer to this question; the absence of an answer is then unique among other absences in that the person is trying to hide this specific answer). In this connection, consider Stoppard:

GUIL: Death is the ultimate negative. Not-being. You can’t not-be on a boat.

ROS: I’ve frequently not been on boats.

GUIL: No, no, no—what you’ve been is not on boats. (108)

Just like his not having the letter, Rosencrantz’s absence from the boat (a general negativity) cannot constitute a clue of any kind (clues being things that point to a specific negativity, a motivated attempt to hide something), unless we assume that he was *supposed* to be on the boat in the first place (in that case, we can interpret his absence as a clue pointing to some hidden fact, such as that he may be dead or tied up in traffic; his absence would be *meaningful*). Knowing whether or not he was supposed to be on the boat constitutes the real problem. We know that someone is on the boat from the fact that he is on the boat, but we don’t know that someone is supposed to be on the boat from the fact that he’s not. The fact that he is absent doesn’t mean that he is *missing* from the boat; it doesn’t *mean* anything (just as we can’t say that Rosencrantz has *lost* the letter just because he doesn’t have it). Like Baudrillard’s question, “useless for what?” (*Perfect* 48), Rosencrantz’s situation is based on a negative event, a general negativity which can be wrongly conceived of as specific negativity, an intentional denial of something specific: if we were to paraphrase Baudrillard’s question in relation to Rosencrantz’s letter, we would be asking the absurd question, “What is it that he doesn’t have?” Since there are any number of things Rosencrantz doesn’t have, the question is general and yet the answer (“the letter”) is specific and motivated, set up in such a way as to imply intention or other necessity on the part of Rosencrantz. It would be like trying to define a negative event by asking, “What is it that didn’t happen?” or “Negative *how*?” Asking this question means automatically setting up the assumption of positivity, a reference point in relation to which the negativity occurs, and which endows this negativity with meaning and motivation: it is no longer merely a negativity but a failure, a secret, a clue, etc., something bound up with what it is not. (Later we will see the same problem of negativity vs. failure in terms of absence vs. subtraction.)

Cf. Aristotle: “The statement that ‘Socrates is ill’ is the contrary of ‘Socrates is well.’ Yet we cannot maintain even here that one statement must always be true and the other must always be false. For, if Socrates really exists, one is true and the other is false. But if Socrates does not exist, both the one and the other are false. To say ‘he is ill’ will be false, and to say ‘he is well’ will be false, if no Socrates so much as exists. . . . ‘[H]e is not ill,’ however, is true” (*The Organon* 95). As in the case of Rosencrantz, all the things Socrates is *not* will be true but meaningless, meaninglessness being the price of their truth. In this sense, they are truly analytical and tautological.

76. Or we can recall Calvino: “while I was making it [the shell] I had no idea of making it because I needed it; on the contrary, it was like when somebody lets out an exclamation *he could*

perfectly well not make, and yet he makes it, like ‘ha’ or ‘hmpf!,’ that’s how I made the shell: simply to express myself” (*Cosmicomics* 146) [italics mine]. As Aristotle says, “[t]hings could just as well happen as not” (*The Organon* 135).

77. In this tortoise sense, simulation (and reality) seem to reflect closely Nietzsche’s skepticism toward this kind of negative freedom: “popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (*Genealogy* 45). Which leads us to simulation, where there is nothing hidden and essential, everything is exactly what it appears to be, and its identity lies in this manifestation of itself. Simulation is the ultimate WYSIWYG, and even though our detective faculties refuse to accept it at face value, or because of that, it can also simulate depth: depth is precisely that “belief that *the strong man is free* to be weak” (45), that three-dimensional illusion of a hidden cause, as in this passage from Aristotle:

men think that it is in the power of the just man to *act* unjustly no less than in the power of the unjust man, since the just man is not less but even more able to do each of these unjust things; for he is able to commit adultery or to strike a neighbor, and a brave man can throw away his shield and turn to flight in this or that direction. Yet to *act* in a cowardly way or unjustly is not simply to do these things, except accidentally, but to do so by being disposed in a certain manner. (*Nicomachean Ethics* 97)

While Aristotle grants a certain negative freedom of the virtuous man to be wicked or the strong man to run, this is possible only at the price of granting them an *essence* as well. The connection between essence and freedom means that the man is free to be weak only because he is *not* weak. The lapses from that essence are only used to highlight the contrast between what the man is and what he does (a contrast which does not exist in Nietzsche). Notice that the interiority is a temporal construct: if a strong man acts weak (now), we are still convinced that he is strong (now), because he can act strong whenever he wants to (in the future), the two layers of “now” suggesting that one of them is hidden. The strong man may not have expressed his strength, but we believe he has it and could express it *in the future*. In this way we are making a temporal statement about what the man is *really* like, despite his deceptive appearance at the moment. Essence is nothing more than continuous appearance, appearance over time. In this sense, freedom from essence would be freedom from time.

78. This logic is not necessarily false; the problem is that there is no way to know whether it is false or not. In some cases, it *is* true, as in these two examples from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. “So his papers are gone. That doesn’t prove anything. . . . Except that somebody didn’t want us to prove anything.” (episode 49, “Consequences,” original air date Feb. 16, 1999); “It’s okay. I didn’t see you so I should have known you were there” (episode 52, “Earshot,” original air date Sept. 21, 1999).

79. Caprettini: “We find an effective example of the problem of coherence in a set of clues arranged for simulation in the world of the fairy tale. We choose for this purpose the tale called

The Wolf and the Seven Kids, from the Grimm brothers' collection. The wolf tries twice to get into the house where the kid goats are locked in, waiting for the return of their mother. And twice he fails, because of an incomplete or incoherent act of simulation. The first time he is betrayed by his hoarse voice; the second time (after he softened his voice by chewing a piece of clay) by his black paw lying on the window. On the third attempt he is more careful; having whitened his paw with flour, he successfully deceives the kids, who open the door. Only one of them saves himself, hiding in the grandfather clock, almost as if he had suspected a snare, despite the wolf's skilled deceit. Therefore not even the *coherence* of a set of clues authorizes a trustful or inattentive attitude on the part of the investigator" (139). However, we can hardly say that coherence has been achieved the third time; in fact, it is still the *coherence* that fails in the wolf's disguise, since the disguise is still partial: once he is in the house, the wolf doesn't bother to maintain his pretense. For the purposes of absolute coherence, imagine the wolf entering the house and continuing to behave like the mother. If *all* the clues are consistent with each other, including his behavior, the simulation would remain intact. However, the wolf has no reason to maintain the simulation for any length of time, and it is his malicious *purpose* behind the illusion that limits his disguise to only a few tricks which will help him get in the house but will fail to create a totality of coherent clues. Such a totality would be possible only if it is not motivated by any ulterior purpose, only if it includes *everything* so that there really is nothing left of the wolf himself "under" the disguise.

80. Cf. also *The Truman Show*. Interestingly enough, the writer of *The Truman Show*, Andrew Niccol, is also the man behind *SimOne*, a film which poses the problem not of a simulated environment but of a simulated self (the name of the simulated person, Simone, is an abbreviation of "Simulation One"): "Like *The Truman Show*, *Simone* finds its bite in the manipulation of reality: Whereas *Truman* planted a real person into an artificial world, *Simone* does the exact opposite" (Macdonald).

81. Baudrillard talks about "the perfect crime," which cannot be solved because it "has no motivation and no perpetrator, and therefore remains perfectly inexplicable. . . . [T]here is neither murderer nor victim. If there were either, the secret of the crime would be unmasked some day, and the inquiry concluded" (*Perfect* xii). If simulation could be called a crime at all, it would be "a crime without a criminal, without a victim and without a motive. And the truth would forever have withdrawn from it and its secret would never be revealed, for want of any clues . . . being left behind" (1).

82. Note, however, that it need not create the sea *first*, since it is not the sea that causes the sea breeze but both the sea and the breeze are simultaneously caused by the simulation. This simultaneity will not endanger the realism of the illusion of temporality. Temporality is simulated with the simulation of the sea (the cause).

To take this analogy back to the detective genre, a similar dynamics can be seen in the crime/clue causality. In simulation, there never was anything *to* cover up before the cover-up began, no hidden truth, no arch-criminal and first crime. That is where the detective story as a genre falls short of simulation and is closer to an "illusion" which presupposes an "original"; the genre needs a "truth" the way a murder presupposes a murderer or the breeze suggests a sea. But

the simulated, Nietzschean murder does not have a murderer in a cause-and-effect way, since both are equally part of a common simulation which also simulates their temporality in the precedence of the “doer” over the “deed” (cf. also Oedipus as “detective” and Oedipus as “criminal”).

83. To see that an absolute totality is impossible in practice, we just need to follow Hume one step further: “When trying to frame reality, whether as scientist or writer, where can you stop? If you focus on some details, you see *a* system but you lose other details and other systems of meaning. The universe and any of its phenomena are infinitely divisible” (50). Clearly, nothing can be detailed enough to approximate reality except reality itself. But we can always call that which can approximate reality in such detail “simulation” rather than “reality.” Simulation is the word for the ideal “approximation” of identity: we would use “reality” to refer to that which *is*, and “simulation” to refer to that which *resembles* itself, that which is aware of its identity (it is no less identical to itself; it’s just that it makes a fuss about it, as Stoppard would say). (Cf. also Chapter One, note 15.)

84. Note that the evidence against simulation (in *The 13th Floor*, for example), is the opposite of the evidence of purpose in evolution (Chapter Three, pp. 190-91).

85. We would have to disagree with Caprettini here, who argues that “simulation, being the creation of a surreptitious but not completely groundless reality, is based on the coherence and probability of the clue it produces” (138). More specifically, the disagreement concerns the definition of simulation as “not completely groundless reality”; we believe it is, indeed, completely groundless (as well as being nonexistent). The “coherence” of simulation is also a problematic concept. Simulation appears to be coherent because it doesn’t make any effort to be coherent, because a purpose behind it cannot be detected (such a purpose would disrupt its coherence). And if “purpose” means that something is so unlikely that the odds of its happening by chance are unconvincing, then simulation is consistent with chance, not intent.

86. Cf. Baudrillard: “Chance is never neutral, the game transforms it into a player and agonistic figure. Which is another way of saying that the basic assumption behind the game is that *chance does not exist*” (*Seduction* 143).

87. For most of reality, the proof we get is of the same kind as the proof of simulation, namely, none. We take a lot for granted in both cases, as we see from Reichenbach’s example: “What you said was that your house was there when you did not see it; what you verify is that your house is there when you see it. How can you tell whether it was there while you were absent? ... [O]nly if you assume what you want to prove, namely, that the house continues to exist while you do not see it” (177, 179). (The question has been around at least since Aristotle: “when they [things] are outside of our observation, we are not in a position to know whether they exist or not” [*Nicomachean Ethics* 103].) For a simulated house, the same but reversed argument would take place: what you see is that your house is there when you look; what you assume is that it is not there when you’re not looking (i.e., that it was designed specifically for your benefit, and by an obviously malicious mind which is trying to fool you).

88. Notice that, according to the detective genre, the “clues” left deliberately for the detective to find must not be too obvious, since that would undermine their status as clues; they must be small, insignificant details, since, as Eco points out, the truth is by definition something which is hard to get to: “If this machine gave you the truth immediately, you would not recognize it, because your heart would not have been purified by the long quest” (*Pendulum* 29). It is the difficulty of getting to the information that guarantees its truthfulness. The “purification” is the belief in the hidden truth and a distrust for the obvious truth; it is the ability to look for the truth without seeing it.

89. That is why there are so many stories and movie plots where policemen or other status quo persons make the best criminals, because they use exactly the same methods in both cases. In a similar way, a computer programmer can use the same skills to create either a computer virus (a deception) or an anti-virus program (a device which exposes the deception). In this sense, we can never find ourselves in a situation where, as the protagonist in the film *Simon* says, “our ability to manufacture fraud has exceeded our ability to detect it”; the two will always be equal, because they are the same skill, doubled by the illusion of an “inside” set against an “outside” from which the inside may or may not be detectable.

90. Even Caprettini admits that “simulation can be not only the result of an act of concealment performed by the criminal or by the policeman who wants to unmask him, but it can also be the result of our hypotheses. It is up to our perception of things to consider a clue as sufficiently valid, changing its status from symptom to sign” (*Three* 139-140). The perception defines the thing perceived: as Kenneth Steele White points out, Einstein supported the idea that “no phenomenon could be a phenomenon until it was an observed phenomenon” (29). The primacy of perception over that which is perceived (or form over content) highlights the opponents’ mutual awareness. The clue is not a “thing” but a way of interpreting the antagonist’s behavior. We are no longer dealing with investigation but with a rhetorical technique and, as Manetti says, rhetoric means “concentrating not on the message . . . but rather on the emotions of the intended receiver of the message” (140). The focus is not on the truth that the opponent is hiding but on the opponent himself, or rather, the truth will depend on the behavior of the opponent.

91. *The New York Trilogy* has multiple references to Poe (the most explicit ones are on pages 3, 48, 100, 153, 252, 300). Significantly, the references to Poe are occasionally references to William Wilson (not to be confused with Arthur Conan Doyle’s Mr. Wilson), the character Poe created as a perfect double of his protagonist in the story “William Wilson,” as well as a double of Poe himself: the character in the story has the same birthday as Poe (Jan. 19, 1813), or rather, the right date combined with the year Poe falsely gave as the year of his birth (Poe 291, note by Levine). For that matter, “William Wilson” is not the real name of the character either: the story begins with, “Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation” (271). Not coincidentally, in Auster’s novels William Wilson is also a double for Auster’s characters: for example Quinn, the writer from *City of Glass*, uses “William Wilson” as an alias under which to write his detective novels, before he takes on the fake identity of a man he thinks is a “real” detective by the name of Paul Auster (who exists, in the novel, but is not a detective) in order to solve a “case” which

obliterates his identity as Quinn (and although the case requires writing of him, it eventually obliterates his identity as a writer as well).

There is the suggestion in Poe's story that, even though the protagonist would like to think of his double as an "impostor" and "villain" (283), the two persons are in fact identical, so that there is no "bad guy" (or "other" guy), and by killing the impostor, William Wilson kills himself. Poe creates a character whose imitation of identity is in fact the acquisition of identity: "The same name! the same contour of person! the same day of arrival at the academy! And then his dogged and meaningless imitation of my gait, my voice, my habits, and my manner! Was it, in truth, within the bounds of human possibility, that *what I now saw* was the result, merely, of the habitual practice of this sarcastic imitation?" (278). In other words, the identification with the other takes place from the outside in, by "habitual practice," so that the surface imitation results in the creation of identity. Going back to the alias of "William Wilson," we now notice that the false is not significantly different from the true: "In this narrative I have therefore designated myself as William Wilson,—a fictitious title not very dissimilar to the real" (274). The illusion Poe creates in this story is problematic as illusion precisely because it, like simulation, is "not very dissimilar to the real."

92. This is similar to the example of versions without an original described by Nelson Goodman in "The Telling and the Told": "if I say that the geocentric and the heliocentric systems describe the same motion, I do not imply that there is some absolute motion that both systems describe but only that the two systems are related in a certain way. If I say that two terms have the same or virtually the same meaning, I am not saying that there is any such entity as a meaning that they have but am only speaking of a relation between the terms. And when I speak of several versions of the same or virtually the same story, I am by no means conceding that there is some underlying story, some deep structure, that is not itself a version" (256-57). To give a somewhat extreme analogy, there is no letter that is not itself a theory about the letter. There is no evidence that is not itself in some sense the opponent. As Zeh says, "there has always been speculation that the intervention in physical processes by conscious beings must require new fundamental laws [of physics]" (5). In other words, the role of the opponent in the game changes the game.

93. Cf. Levin: "the real problem is not to discover the difference of the other, but to establish one's own difference from the other, whose sameness to ourselves reveals our own failure to be different. Fine. But the problem of identifying the other returns, since it becomes crucial to understand what it is that we have failed to differentiate ourselves from" (277).

94. Baudrillard calls this "seduction" rather than simulation. His definitions of seduction and simulation occasionally overlap significantly (cf. *Seduction*, pp. 11, 163, 178), and occasionally do not (166), as he also sees seduction as "the only possibility of . . . overcoming [simulation]" (11). In contrast to Baudrillard, we would 1) use the term "simulation" rather than "seduction" to describe the passage above, and 2) not postulate a way out of simulation.

95. Cf. Eco: "So those who say they're Rosicrucians are lying, which means they really are! No, no, . . . we must not fall into their trap. Their spies are everywhere, even under this bed, so now they know that we know, and therefore they say they aren't" (*Foucault's Pendulum* 168).

96. In the detective stories. In “William Wilson,” for example, the two “opponents” are not only equal (“I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority; since not to be overcome cost me a perpetual struggle” [274]), but remain equal until the end, since neither of them is “overcome” and neither of them wins.

97. Eco: “‘But is there no way out?’ / ‘There’s a way back in, actually’” (*Pendulum* 186). In other words, instead of trying not to play (which would mean still playing but losing, playing the other’s game), we can propose our own game, take the initiative of going back into the game on our own terms, raising the simulation to a higher level.

98. Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange*, London: Tavistock, 1977, xxvii.

99. Death is not an event as much as an absence, as we can see from Guildenstern’s explanation: “Death is not anything . . . death is not . . . It’s the absence of presence, nothing more . . . the endless time of never coming back . . . a gap you can’t see” (Stoppard 124).

100. The proposition of death as a move also recalls Baudrillard’s observation that “the rules’ basic dictum is that the game continue whatever the cost, be it death itself” (*Seduction* 131).

101. Baudrillard, for example, suggests that it is possible to escape the system by escalating it: “Every revolution brings about a general involution in a kind of downward spiral. This negative spiral can be countered only by striking an opposite blow, by upping the stakes—outdoing insignificance with the nothing, the visible with appearance, the false with illusion” (*Perfect* 18). However, it seems that “upping the stakes” does not “counter” the spiral as much as it makes the spiral possible in the first place. Baudrillard’s vision of defeating the system at its own game leaves itself vulnerable to the objection that even defeating the system would be playing the game of the system, doing what the system *wants* us to be doing.

102. Contrary to Brown’s account of a *first* semiotic encounter (“there are situations in which we encounter an unfamiliar object and give it a name for ease of reference, and in which, at least initially, this name conveys no information” [87]), in the escalating spiral of simulation we won’t be able to name anything for the *first* time: everything we encounter would be already defined by the previous moves, everything would have a meaning *before* we can give it a name. Instead of a name without meaning, we would have meaning to which we are free to give a new name, or, rather, if we give it a new name, we would be free, as one of Auster’s characters is: “My happiness was immeasurable. I exulted in the sheer falsity of my assertion, celebrating the new power I had just bestowed upon myself. I was the sublime alchemist who could change the world at will. The man was Fanshawe because I said he was Fanshawe, and that was all there was to it” (348). (This is as much the character speaking as it is the author, and in the case of the author it is more obviously true: that he creates the characters by naming them.) This semiotic freedom is reminiscent of Socrates, who “states that ‘whatever name you give to a thing is its correct name’ and explains that ‘if one replaces that name with another name and no longer uses

the previous name, the later name is by no means less correct than the earlier one' (384 d)" (qtd. in Manetti 59).

103. "Things can reach a state of Breakdown greater than themselves, that is to say, they can attain a degree of impairment at which their existence has less value than a zero-existence" (Macedonio Fernandez, qtd. in Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* v).

104. Cf. Chapter Two, pp. 97-99.

105. If it were possible to identify with the other, we would be finally in a position to play the same game as the other, to win and lose meaningfully: "You've got a big advantage. You've been him, and he's never been you" (Pratchett, *Mort* 258).

106. Cf. Macbeth: Willard Farnham says that "Macbeth gives himself to evil in order to gain worldly position" (8), with the implication that evil is metaphysical, while the throne is physical, that they are different in kind. We notice that, with the same action of killing Duncan, Macbeth either wins the worldly game or loses the supernatural one. While the rules within each game are fairly clear as to what would constitute victory or loss, it is not clear who decides what game Macbeth is playing.

107. As Baudrillard would say, it is "a game that has always already been worked out, yet remains forever indecipherable" (*Seduction* 152); the options are finite and known, yet the final result is not. This is reminiscent of the ancient distinction between dialectic and rhetoric: "The discussion which takes place before the [Greek] Assembly is in the typical form of dialectic discussion. The obscure sign [from the gods] sets off an interpretative process which offers various possibilities of development. However, dialectically it is basically a dichotomy between two opposing, mutually exclusive solutions [e.g., to go to war or not]" (Manetti 33). We can call the multiple build-up rhetorical (dependent on the other's response, unpredictable), and the binary outcome dialectical.

108. In a simplified but entertaining version of this interaction, we can think of simulation as a jinxed reality; a direct connection between the myth of jinxing and the myth of Oedipus (or the self-fulfilling prophecy) is easy to see, in that both are attempts to suppress *knowledge* that we *know* would lead us to harm, knowledge that we don't know, but that we know *about*. (In a more poetic version: "There should be a word for the microscopic spark of hope that you dare not entertain in case the mere act of acknowledging it will cause it to vanish, like trying to look at a photon" [Pratchett, *Mort* 241].) This elaborate mechanism works very much like that of the self-fulfilling prophecy: if we jinx something by talking about it to someone, talking about how we must have jinxed it de-jinxes it; but then if we are aware of the de-jinxing, it gets jinxed all over again.

This is exactly how simulation works, in cumulative levels of awareness spiraling up to infinity. It is a possibility of simulation that it be fully aware, even more than fully: even when there is nothing to be aware *of*; it goes into the negative Boolean values of consciousness, into a self-consciousness so deep that it is deeper than what exists. When consciousness penetrates so

deep that it goes further than there are *things* to be penetrated, it becomes self-consciousness and begins to create, make up, simulate. Stories usually put an end to the process of simulation, because otherwise the story cannot be told, but if we were to visualize *Oedipus Rex*, for example, as a truncated version of the spiral of simulation, we would see, beyond Sophocles' tragedy, an endless spiral in which Oedipus is originally aware of the prophecy but not of the impact of his awareness (jinxing; tragedy), but then he is aware that his awareness of the prophecy would cause him to murder his father (de-jinxing; comedy), and then he will be aware of *that* (aware that he is aware that his awareness of the prophecy would cause him to murder his father), but without knowing what this higher awareness would mean (re-jinxing; tragedy), and so on. It is a vicious circle of dramatic irony alternatively exposed (destroyed) and re-built. There is no definitive answer or unambiguous meaning, and if the process is interrupted, it is an arbitrary stop. Just as Poe's stories stop when the detective uncovers the criminal's plan, the self-fulfilling prophecy "stops" at Oedipus not being aware of it. Neither the criminal nor Oedipus is given the chance to "outwit" the system, since, when their turn comes, the story ends.

Note, in this connection, that the ancient liar paradox can be seen as an infinite if-then string in a temporal loop: "All Cretans are liars. I am a Cretan." If this loop were to stop at either statement, without returning to the previous statement and without oscillating between the two in order to consider them simultaneously, it would have resolved its internal contradiction: the Möbius "side" it happens to stop at would be taken as true, and the other "side" as false, just as, if the game ends with Dupin's move, the truth is "revealed." What we call the "truth," however, would be more accurately "Dupin's truth": the truth is simply the fact that Dupin wins, while his opponent, who doesn't get a chance to respond by incorporating Dupin's move into his own game, loses. But in an infinite loop, such as that of the Cretan liar, there is no last move, and therefore no truth. Truth is, again, a function of time, another word for the lack of simultaneity of the "two" Möbius sides.

109. In the detective story they don't. E.g., the more literal method of the police (mocked by Dupin) is appropriate when dealing with a case, until the case catches up with it like a virus catches up with an antibiotic, or like a species adapts to its environment. In the beginning of the escalating spiral, the initial literalness of the search (conducted by the police) has gone through a stage of metaphoricity (Dupin's assumption of the hidden), and this is where the story ends, just short of coming back to a higher level of literalness, one which is aware of itself (which would have been possible if Poe had given us a policeman smarter than Dupin). Baudrillard associates simulation with "[t]he end of metaphor, the absolute realization of all metaphors" (*Illusion* 103). However, it is rather an interaction between the literal and the metaphorical where each raises the stakes and takes the game to a new level of complexity, and where each becomes the other *plus* something else, where the "else" is the consciousness of being the other plus something else, and so on *ad infinitum*.

110. Baudrillard: "We shall never get back to pre-stereo music (except by an additional technical simulation effect); we shall never get back to pre-news and pre-media history" (*Illusion* 6). A return back to a previous state can be accomplished only by *adding* an effect, the special effect of faking the retro, of going back.

111. In this context, consider Heraclitus: “one cannot enter the same river twice” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 136), meaning that, even though one can do the same thing many times, one can never do it for the first time again.

112. Stoppard’s version: “If we postulate, and we just have, that within un-, sub- or supernatural forces *the probability is* that the law of probability will not operate as a factor, then we must accept that the probability of the *first* part will not operate as a factor, in which case the law of probability *will* operate as a factor within un-, sub- or supernatural forces. And since it obviously hasn’t been doing so, we can take it that we are not held within un-, sub- or supernatural forces after all; in all probability, that is” (17).

113. Lacan’s objection to that binary game with the opponent: “But what will happen at the following step (of the game) when the opponent, realizing that I am sufficiently clever to follow him in his move, will show his own cleverness by realizing that it is by playing the fool that he has the best chance to deceive me? From then on my reasoning is invalidated, since it can only be repeated in an indefinite oscillation” (footnote in “Seminar” 50; from *Ecrits*). (In *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare’s Macbeth and King Lear*, Leon Harold Craig similarly claims that infinite self-reflexivity eventually “self-destructs” [75].) The mock regression in the act of “playing dumb” in order to mask the move the player is most likely to make next means that the game is approaching the odds of chance, the “indefinite oscillation” which covers all of the available options (both heads and tails). In other words, even if the person is in control of his next move, he avoids making a move that would show that he is in control.

114. Aristotle also suggests that everything we desire is likely to happen, because what we desire are things of the kind that tend to happen, things that are likely to happen anyway: “And things which we love or desire naturally are possible; for as a rule no one loves the impossible or desires it” (*The Art of Rhetoric* 267).

115. Compare this passage from Aristotle’s *Physics*, Book II: “Thus the man would have come for the purpose of getting back the money when his debtor was collecting contributions, if he had known; in fact, he did not come for this purpose, but it happened concurrently that he came, and did what was for getting back the money. And that, though he used to go to the place neither for the most part nor necessarily. The end, the recovery, is not one of the causes in him.... And in this case the man’s coming is said to be the outcome of luck, whilst if he had chosen and come for this purpose, or used to come always or for the most part, it would not be called the outcome of luck” (34). The actions of the man will be the same whether he knew that his debtor was there or he merely met him by chance, whether he intended to go to the market with a specific purpose in mind (to collect his money) or he merely went for a walk. To an external observer the presence or absence of any motive behind the walk to the market would not be apparent. Or we can cite Craig again: “Should it [determinism] happen to be true, there would be no way to *know* it” (73). There is no way to *distinguish* between determinism and chance. It is possible to argue that chance can be distinguished from determinism by its unpredictability: “The causes of chance events are indeterminate, and therefore chance is difficult for us to predict” (Aristotle,

Metaphysics 367). But here we come against the self-fulfilling prophecy, which is always true but there is still “no way to know it” until it happens. The absolute determinism of the prophecy is as unknowable as chance: even though the events are predicted, they are not *predictable*.

116. While Baudrillard wonders, “Where, then, does this wish to substitute the human will for the random course of things come from?” (*Perfect 12*), in the simulation we have in mind it is rather the opposite: there is a wish to substitute chance for free will, to “fulfill the desire we ourselves have of escaping our will” (*Perfect 39*).

CONCLUSION

Simulation is an artificial construct. As such, it can be seen as something which is created, or something which has a creator. In some of the works discussed here, we encounter such a creator and are invited to adopt his point of view, to see what simulation would look like to somebody who knows this is a simulation. In this sense, we are not dealing with a simple scenario of manipulation or deception of one person by another. On the contrary, we see that the inside knowledge or absolute control that the creator has over simulation does not in fact give him any advantage over everyone else. Quite often, it destroys him. Invariably, there is the impulse of the creator of the simulation to sever the connection between himself and his creation in order to make it objective: Oedipus accepts severe punishment in exchange for the reality of his theory that he should be punished; Macbeth, having compromised the reality of kingship (which allowed him to usurp the throne), seeks to restore it (which would allow the throne he has usurped to have meaning again, even at the price of Macbeth's death). Calvino's characters do not sacrifice themselves in the process of the verification of their reality, but they bind themselves in physical forms, in self-imposed temporal linearity, in all-or-nothing bets of their futures. They seek to limit themselves rather than free themselves, to escape from the absolute freedom of the initial nothing which is given to them.

All of these characters seek an objective world whose truth is proved by the fact that the characters, even if they are the creators of the simulation, are bound by its harsh laws and rigid

forms. It is the limitations and dangers of this world that give it reality, since they prove that the world is independent of the subjective will of its creator, that it is not a whim, a fiction. As Baudrillard says, we seek “to create an autonomous world, a fully achieved world, from which we could at last withdraw . . . to invent a faultless world and withdraw from it without leaving a trace” (*Perfect* 39-40). However, simulation does not even need to be “faultless,” and, in fact, sometimes making it faulty can guarantee its reality better than any perfection. Baudrillard’s description is reminiscent of Hawthorne’s Wakefield again, who “finds himself curious to know the progress of matters at home—how his exemplary wife will endure her widowhood for a week; and, briefly, how the little sphere of creatures and circumstances, in which he was a central object, will be affected by his removal” (77). The creator is also a “central object” to his creation, although his “removal” is not as easy. Since simulation cannot escape its origin (the temporal term for “creator”), the creator never leaves the simulation entirely: if he did, he would occupy a place outside of the simulation, and such a place, as we know, does not exist. The creator (Oedipus, Macbeth, Umberto Eco’s Belbo, Dustin Hoffman’s producer) remains inside. His is not a position significantly different from anybody else’s in relation to simulation. Eventually, Auster presents us with a world in which the simulation does not *have* a creator, and where the perception of agency, intent, or design behind the events is illusory. But the opposite is also true: simulation exists in an ambiguous space where the absence of intent is intentional, where chance gets produced by the protagonists’ choices; they have the power (like Macbeth) to make things happen, but what they make happen seems to have certain limitations, such as the necessity of being precisely itself: “That which is arbitrary is simultaneously endowed with a total necessity” (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 75).

Linear time is another way of limiting experience. When Baudrillard says that simulation “is the end of linearity” (*Illusion* 10), we can qualify this statement, keeping in mind that, for example, for Calvino’s characters temporal linearity is a free assumption: “Since there were no reference points, I had no idea whether my fall was fast or slow. Now that I think about it, there weren’t even any proofs that I was really falling. . . . [S]ince there was no above or below these were only nominal questions and so I might just as well go on thinking I was falling” (*Cosmicomics* 115). This is exactly the nature of simulation: since we don’t have proof, we might as well go on thinking that this is simulation (or that this is reality). The assumption of linear time can be similarly described as optional. It cannot disappear on its own, as Baudrillard suggests, since linearity, as a concept, is not a natural phenomenon but a semiotic entity.

In semiotics, the trope of the self-fulfilling prophecy has established itself early on as a central problem. As Giovanni Manetti says in *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, the search for answers from the oracles was possibly the first systematic semiotic endeavor: “Divination forms the first homogeneous area of ancient Greek culture in which it is possible to talk about the use of signs” (14). Manetti also talks about “the general, total nature of the knowledge represented by divination. It is a type of knowledge which can be matched in scope, though very much later, only by philosophical knowledge” (15). In other words, the knowledge that comes from the oracle is not so much a specific knowledge about (the content of) an event (even though Oedipus would like it to be more specific), but “knowledge in general” (139), or, we can say, knowledge about how to attain knowledge. The ability to decipher signs is a human skill which has nothing to do with the message behind the signs but only with cracking the code in which the message was written. Semiotics has been, from the beginning and for over 2000

years now, a theory about structure, not content. It is about the difference between three apples and the number three. The emergence of the idea of structure is essential to theories of simulation. In discussing simulation, we cannot discuss its content, because the content is not what makes it simulation; rather, we can only interpret the position of the content or “message” in relation to others. It is like talking about constellations rather than stars: the arbitrary shape we call a constellation has no bearing on the physical life of any of its stars; they will remain the way they are, regardless of the imaginary lines we draw between them (at the same time, we are tempted to think of a constellation, which is nothing more than a structure, as a thing in itself). The same is true for simulated events: they are real events with different imaginary lines connecting them. We see, for example, how in Auster’s novels a character can, without moving from his place physically or changing his daily routine, structurally change his place in the game he plays with his opponent. He can win or lose without any visible sign that this is what is happening to him, just as he can enter a simulation without changing anything about his life except the awareness of a game being played. People can be part of a simulated structure, and yet this structure will not necessarily affect them in any way.

In the cases where people *are* influenced by simulated or semiotic events, such as oracular prophecies, their behavior changes (as with Oedipus), but this change is not enforced from the outside; it is an act of the subject. Invariably, people are better off *not* changing their behavior in response to simulation. Simulation does not ask people to change; it does not demand a response from them, just as a constellation makes no demands on the stars it is composed of. Above all, the constellation, the semiotic configuration, is not external to the elements that go into it. The constellation is made up of exactly the same things the stars are

made up of. If one of the stars disappears, the remaining stars will form a new constellation; the simulation will adapt to the behavior of its elements. With people, however, there is the urge to adapt *our* behavior to the simulation, to respond to it somehow, to reject or resist it or control it, when all it takes for it to exist is to imagine it. As Baudrillard says, “what one has discovered, one can never then invent” (*Perfect* 97). In other words, what one engages with on the level of reality one cannot engage with on the level of imagination, even if it is the *same* thing. In a way, even though simulation and reality are made up of the same thing, they are not made up of the same *kind* of thing. By the time things begin to have “kinds” (or species), we are in the realm of the semiotic. We could say that the thing and the kind of thing it is (subject and predicate, thing and sign) exist on different levels and do not interact. They are identical and incompatible.

That is why the simulation destroys its creator: because he (or someone else) thinks he has physically created it, that he can do things with it *in reality*, which can be seen as a kind of presumption, the presumption that simulation is real: “If the essential failing of humanity is a sin of pride, the resulting human error is in the area of knowledge and has a strictly semiotic nature” (Manetti 24). But once we have imagined simulation, we cannot engage with it in any “realistic” way, for example, resist it or escape it, because that would mean responding to the *content* while simulation is simply a *form*, a form which can adapt to any new content we throw at it and incorporate it into its system. Aristotle asks, “How, then, can a reality be constituted by things which are not realities?” (*Physics*, Book I 14), and we can say the same about simulation: it is made up of things which are not simulated. Any “real” action we take against (or for) simulation would change our reality, the “real” things simulation is made of, but it won’t change the simulation. Only a semiotic approach can grapple with simulation on its own terms (for

example, only by means of a semiotic precedence can Macbeth win the throne, since the throne itself is a semiotic construct, a game which Macbeth learns to play). To take a “real” action in response to simulation means to assume that something is really at stake: and this is true, but only because our action *makes* it true, it gives the game real stakes which it didn’t have on its own. As Manetti says, “there is no intrinsic punishment for failure in rhetoric (as there is in dialectic)” (32). So when we give simulation real stakes, the game seems “disproportionate to the risks of life and death which it involve[s]” (Manetti 30). There are no real stakes in simulation until we begin to treat it as something real. In the words of Searle, “nobody supposes that the computer simulation is actually the real thing; no one supposes that a computer simulation of a storm will leave us all wet, or a computer simulation of a fire is likely to burn the house down. Why on earth would anyone in his right mind suppose a computer simulation of mental processes actually had mental processes?” (Searle 37-38). There is nothing real at stake in simulation, and without us fighting it, or observing it, or investigating it, it would not exist, just as the constellations would not exist without the external observer looking at the stars (although the observer is such an integral part of the phenomenon that he should be properly called “internal” rather than “external” observer). He is the creator of the constellations, and the constellations tell us less about the real stars than they do about him. Like any other semiotic phenomenon, simulation consists in our being conscious of its existence. Simulation exists only when we pay attention.

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