

## HETEROLOGY: THE SILENT MIDDLE IN THE ECONOMIES OF EXCHANGE

In the classic Marxist division between use value and exchange value, the “rational” mechanisms of the market are discovered to be founded on the same rules as ancient rituals of gift-giving, silent trade, magical origins of craftsmanship, and theft. What has always been confusing, especially when the general public attempts to garner information about ancient peoples, is that the modern counterpart of gifts, craft, larceny, etc. are structured within an exclusively transitive set of operations, where equations balance, borrowed items returned, and lines can be drawn clearly between pieces of property. In the transitive, well-divided world, the ancient idea of the gift makes no sense, neither do the customs of theft, integrated into everyday life, which allowed Hermes to be, simultaneously, a god of commerce, erotic love, theft-by-stealth, and transfer of souls to Hades. This streamlining attempt is made in the face of evidence to the contrary that suggests, as Marx did, that modern counterparts are as complex and heterogeneous as their ancient forerunners — that, for example, the exchange value exceeds use value by a small margin requiring, among other things, for an “idiotic symmetry” between buyers and sellers in order for any exchange to happen (one party must think the exchange object is overvalued, while the other must think that it is undervalued). This irrational margin is silenced, suppressed, or ignored in order for the appearance of rationalism (homogeneity of principles and applications) to dominate.

The “heterology” that interested Georges Bataille when he wrote “The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade” in response to André Breton’s *Second Surrealist Manifesto* addressed this contrast and began, appropriately, with the contrast between use value and exchange value in Marx’s classic text. Bataille was trying to get around the problem of “the sacred,” which in modern contexts meant anything glorious, marvelous, and excellent, but which in ancient times also meant that which was despised, rejected, stained. The *homo sacer*, as Giorgio Agamben has detailed, was the outcast left aside by Law, someone anyone could kill without being punished, yet simultaneously “hallowed” by his exclusion. Rather than take the complexity of the sacred head-on, Bataille, impressed psychoanalysis, where Freud seemed to be saying, quite independently, that the unconscious worked according to this principle of inclusion of incompatibles, proposed “a science of what is entirely other.” The term *agiology* would have possibly worked better, he explains, because it paralleled the sacred in defining something that was soiled as well as holy. *Scatology*, the science of excrement, was possibly too concrete but it incontestably preserved the notion of the other at all levels of perception and abstraction. The fact that young children frequently have no trouble grasping the exchange value of their excrement — something that is clearly a component of the economy of toilet training where the child negotiates for maternal approval — shows how deeply the double nature of exchange and exchange’s relation to the *double-entendres* of the sacred are embedded in the psyche and, collectively, in culture.

If the boundary is related to anything, it is related to the twinned ideas of shit and exchange. Shit is, understandably, something we wish to “get rid of,” and this is the primary motive in its function as the second of the Freudian “partial objects,” objects around which a spatial field is constructed that mediates, through a topology that cannot be reduced to Cartesian coordinates, the use of a currency we insist on “denying.” Denial is an evident component of similar “fields of marginal exchange,” such as silent trade, where parties devise a system of exchange that allows them never to meet physically. The details of this trade — the pile of stones (“herm”), the crossroads, the belief in a god who protects the trading space and who transports the exchanged goods from his “treasury” in Hades (“the invisible”) — are simple but effective. Some silent markets have been in operation continuously for over a thousand years! Their stability owes to the structure of this topological “field,” so it is in our best interest to understand it, and its diversification through other partial objects such as shit, the phallus, the voice, and the gaze.

Bataille’s heterology shows that the materiality of this field endured with or without the support of human belief, concept, or perception. Its users could think anything they wanted, as long as they *used* the field according to the rules that the field itself maintained. Such, after all, was the principle of modern economies, where the marginal discrepancy between use value and exchange value (what something is worth is not ever completely determined by its “actual” utility; rather, a certain fetish-like attraction/repulsion determines who will buy it and for how much) created the dynamics of buying and selling. Idealism had to be avoided entirely, but materialism could not be allowed to re-import idealism by allowing itself to be defined “in contrast” or “opposite” idealism. Materialism, as the notion

of the sacred showed, came with its own internal dichotomy. Silent trade worked with or without anyone's idealized concept of it. Belief and conception were not components. Where, as Bataille put it, deviation is the rule rather than the exception, idealism must not be allowed to come in and clean things up. Bataille sought to find his founding science in Gnosticism, but even in Gnosticism a certain religious idealism is present — the same corruption that made Neoplatonism a false spin-off of Plato's Socratic teachings. There is a more rigorous source to be found in the *ars topica* of classical rhetoric, in the principle of the "enthymeme," whose silent middle term allowed the syllogism describing the relations between speakers and audiences to function as a "Janusian" double: facing in one direction to create one field of meanings, in another to construct a quite different set of conditions. If the enthymeme is also the basis of what Lacan called the "master signifier," able to organize the seemingly heterogeneous conditions of details within a semantic field, then the Janusian middle term, "silent," is also silent within the system of language in which it appears and, hence, the very stuff of the final partial object that Lacan added to the Freudian list, the "voice," related as Mladen Dolar has demonstrated, to the "acousmatic" logic where the voice cannot be located, either in the space in which it is heard or the linguistic (phonemic) system in which it refuses to be defined.

That a principle of heterogeneity should begin with shit and end with the voice is entirely appropriate, but somewhat unexpected. It is a trace that theory should follow. The middle term is, after all, what it is because it is in the middle (i.e. a locational power) and negative (a pure resistance). On one hand, this combination yields the powerful ideological constructs of the Master Signifier (racism, anti-Semitism, neoconservatism, etc.) which organizes all other details of a signifying field. On the other hand, it doesn't have to be anything itself. It can, like the princess who demanded that she not feel a pea beneath her mattresses, be permanently disruptive, capable of entering into any symbolic relationship and spoiling its stability through ideology. In one New Yorker cover, George W. Bush was shown standing in a proverbial china shop looking at broken dishes and vases with a "Not me!" look of denial. Like the child who hits another child and then says "He hit ME!" the inversion of cause and effect also involves a spatial transformation, an inversion of the here-and-there separations that make space "transitive." Just as Judge Schreber (the famous paranoiac that Freud studied *in absentia* solely through Schreber's lucid accounts of his afflictions) had to invert both the agent and act of *his love for his analyst* to perceive that his analyst *hated him*, transitivity's polarities have to be inverted for the new ideological signifier to take control. Once in control, as the Schreber papers demonstrate, a full "treasury of signifiers" unfolds. Schreber imagined that he was in constant contact with God and a multiplicity of magical beings. It is not the specific content of these visions that is important as much as their encyclopedic and universal nature. They "explained everything" and compelled Schreber to reveal what he believed were simultaneously delusions and the Ultimate Truth. In other words, the scale inverting quality of Lacan's *pointon*, <>, is necessarily related to the "authenticity aspect," ◇, the silversmith's stamp on the bottom of the cup or bowl that guarantees value.

Necromancy is the idea that "we want to hear what the dead have to say," that is, their being dead, as such, is the guarantee of authenticity. How do the dead speak? Their location is problematic, and this yields not only the emblem of the labyrinth we use to model Hades but the idea of the "acousmatic voice," which cannot be located, but of course the negative journey of *katabasis* solves that through its double negation. We get the voice if we do something impossible, namely visit Hades without actually dying. Why is it that the dead are regarded to be important as such because they have something to say? Isn't this connection with the final partial object in Lacan's extended list enough to conflate the rest, from the breast and shit through the phallus and the gaze, with voice? It's strange perhaps to begin with such a nourishing model of spatial organization (the breast) and end with the voice, except that in the voice we have the idea of resonance and echo, which put poetry back into the driver's seat, just as the myth of Narcissus, so optical in its primary component, is amended by the nagging detail of Echo's frustrated love and her curse which is also revenge, the small difference between the Narcissus's last word and her first. It comes from Elsewhere.