

ON THE COLONISATION OF WORDS IN THE AMERICAN SIMULACRUM

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In *The Man Without Qualities* by Robert Musil, Ulrich, the novel's main character, comes to realise that he can no longer think of himself as a "man of promise" when he reads an anecdote about a horse. Musil (1979) puts it thus:

"The time had already begun when it became a habit to speak of geniuses of the football-field or the boxing ring, although to every ten or even more explorers, tenors and writers of genius that cropped up in the columns of the newspapers there was not, as yet, more than at the most one genius of a centre-half or one great tactician of the tennis court....But just then it happened that Ulrich read somewhere...the phrase 'the race-horse

of genius'. It occurred in a report of a spectacular success in a race...Ulrich, however, suddenly grasped the inevitable connection between his whole career and this genius among race-horses. For to the cavalry, of course, the horse has always been a sacred animal, and during his youthful days in the barracks Ulrich had hardly ever heard anything talked about except horses and women. That was what he had fled from in order to become a man of importance. And now...he was hailed on high by the horse, which had got there first."

In this passage Musil shows us a use of language that has been hyped by the media (here the Austrian newspaper) to the point where its integrity begins to be shattered. What genius is may be the subject of debate, the question of who is and who is not one may be in some cases unsolvable, but to call an animal a genius is to lose one's grip on the fact that whatever genius is, it is essentially, paradigmatically human, genius being the manifestation of cognitive and imaginative powers which reside as deeply in the human person as, say, their soul does. That at least about the concept, we share. Such exaggerations of language are (perhaps) even

more notoriously rampant in our own times; times when Stephen Soderbergh's film *Kafka* can be called "a mega-masterpiece" by one critic, as if being a mere masterpiece (like *Kafka's* work itself) is no longer good enough for the terms of mass consumption. The production of meaning by the forces of advertising, the un-hinging of language in a world of decadence, the regulation of meaning by the theatre of presentations are things which do tie us to fin de siècle Austria in spite of many differences between then and now.

It should be evident that a culture which treats race horses as geniuses is one for which the term "genius" is in exile, since it is so absolutely basic to the concept of genius and the history of our practices of using that term that geniuses be human beings (genius being a paradigmatically human capacity). Race horses may display something like talent, virtuosity, and brilliance, yet to be a genius one must participate in the human form of life in a way that the horse ultimately fails to do.

Similarly, a culture which has bounded from the domain of the masterpiece into that of the mega-masterpiece has placed the word "masterpiece" in exile. For whatever there is to debate about the meaning of the term "masterpiece," about its domains of application and about the complex (and prominently debatable) practice of speaking of masterpieces,

canonising them, etc., we would all agree that the term is meant to suggest that there is nothing better, a masterpiece being an example of its kind that is nel prima nel ultima. If Soderbergh's work had been called a mere masterpiece, I would have quibbled with the inflated extension of the term to his well-constructed but hardly magisterial film. In my own view such a practice of inflating the term would already bespeak the exile of the term (although I suppose this is debatable). It is "mega" which really hurts, for it signifies a practice which obliterates the "ultimate" feature of the masterpiece in a blaze of language racing out of control in a state of hyper-inflationary energy. Call this the energy-the practices-of advertising, of the media, and of a culture that has lost all sense of comparative language (i.e. "good," "better," "best").

With race horses and mega-masterpieces, we have entered the world of Baudrillard, a familiar post-modernist world (Jameson, 1991). If Baudrillard is correct, these inflationary practices are not isolated but rather indicative of American everyday life-America being the sign of the future of the world. This simulacrum has colonised our linguistic unconscious; we have no more memory of the exile of words from their home. Such a culture is no longer capable of working through its inner disturbances; its way of life is no longer even, Baudrillard will tell us, to be thought of as in exile. For there is no

coherent way to imagine a route back out of exile, no liberation possible. The revolution has already happened, Baudrillard tells us, and what you see is what you get.

Baudrillard speaks of this condition as that in which "the real" has dropped out. He attributes this deformation in the form of life to the forces of media technology. We now replace realities with models provided by advertising, television, sociological studies, and so on. The self is a product of these models, not to mention of plastic surgery, psychobabble, and skin cream; the person a nexus of capitalisation. And the world is a figment of the media, an enormous media event. In this world, one overcapitalises on money, looks, youth, ethnicity, colour, religion or whatever, turning the self into a figment of advertising. Improvising on Baudrillard's ideas with the help of Andy Warhol's, everyone gets their 15 minutes and everyone prepares by turning their personae into salable stereotypes, into items which can be bought and sold on the market. Essentialising the self, its sexuality, identity and ethnicity, allows each person to package themselves and to exploit the racy, juicy features of their persona: those the media, the arts or the academy currently favours. In a peculiarly American perversion of a peculiarly American ideal, the concept of democratic populism is rewritten as that of mass homogenisation, meaning if one person can overcapitalise on their

ethnicity then everybody else can. So all Americans now overcapitalise on ethnicity. If one person can be a victim, then everybody else can be a victim, so we overcapitalise on victimisation. As Robert Hughes says in his *Culture of Complaint*, if all of the endless discourses of talk shows, therapy sessions, family arguments, art exhibitions and the like were canvassed, it would turn out that 97 per cent of all Americans are victims. And if one person can be a genius then everybody else can, so we get America's National Public Radio with its endless homilies by people who sermonise about "life and its tribulations", convinced of the boundless depths in their gelatinous platitudes.

If Baudrillard is correct, the displacement of the terms "genius" and "ethnicity" could hardly be more complete, for the real itself has dropped out, leaving us using these terms wholly in the absence of that context in which even the most basic features of these terms are, it appears, preserved. The habitus of ordinary American practice has wholly alienated these terms from their grammatical functions, from the most deep and obvious features of their use. Thus in the sphere of genius, the concept of genius is controlled by the forces of high-speed, high-concept production values which inflate films into megamasterpieces and race horses into geniuses. The model of genius is the super-model.

Behind this replacement of the real by its models is an inchoate analysis which Baudrillard gives us of what it is to possess a relation to the real: "We no longer invest our objects with the same emotions, the same dreams of possession, loss mourning and jealousy". On my reading of Baudrillard, this amounts to the unhinging of our ordinary practices of construing reality, our ordinary modes of interfacing with it, our ordinary modes of attention to it, our ordinary evaluations of it, our ordinary feel for it and way of acknowledging it. To find in oneself and in one's culture a relation to reality is to feel towards people, entities and events in a certain way, to interpret and respond to these in a certain way, to play certain games with the world as opposed to others. Contra the old philosophical thought that reality is given through direct ostension, to know reality, Wittgenstein showed, is to inhabit it in a certain set of ways. There is no reality, no real to be known apart from our language games, apart from our modes of following rules, treating objects, our ways of intersecting with them. Words do not otherwise refer to things nor do we otherwise know things. The implication is that for the real to "drop out" is for us to remove ourselves from this pattern of ways in which reality is, shall we say, respected, in which our practices have, shall we say, a mode of interfacing with it. For Baudrillard these forms of practice in which the world is related to in a certain way and acknowledged

in a certain fashion have dropped out, and with the defacement of these practices comes the estrangement of words in the simulacrum.

All of this depends on the plausibility of the claim that we no longer recognise even the most basic features of our words, our language games and the reality they construe. Surely, it will be retorted, we by and large do know that race horses are not geniuses and masterpieces are not superseded by the mega in mega-culture? Daily life - the life in which people struggle to earn livings, pay their taxes, drive their cars, and play with their children - is a life in which people by and large use words in basic and stable ways and are therefore in control of the real in equally stable ways. No doubt these modes of interpreting reality are themselves fraught with ideology, aggression, and victimisation, but they also hang on to the world and do not replace it by models. Even in Los Angeles people, it will be retorted, people by and large acknowledge reality in virtue of both what they say and what they do. Most people do not live as if they were on a talk show, or on display in a catalogue, or speaking from a screenplay. Well, perhaps by and large they do not, but to what extent has the simulacrum invaded their fantasies of success, their images of happiness, their patterns of consumption, their ordinary conversations? To what extent do they instinctively conflate politics with television, thinking of political candidates

as mere products which can be discarded after two year intervals when they fail to "deliver" the goods, as if a society can be changed in the way that a television set can be fixed? To what extent do Americans conflate the global world with the media events presented on their local network news? To what extent is the simulacrum especially present in dominant forms of American culture (Hollywood films, the art world, the media generally, etc.). Can one provide clear answers to any of these questions? And according to what epistemological operations would one's answers be assured a criterion of correctness?

Baudrillard's vision of near-total simulacrification is ultimately an incoherent one. For in order to analyse what the real is and how it has been replaced by models, Baudrillard must retain a memory of the real, a sense of its otherness from what is happening now. For were he left with no concept of reality, the concept of a model that replaces it would become equally meaningless. So in claiming that the real has dropped out, Baudrillard proves that it has not dropped out of him. Which means he is still embodied in it. Not that he must be able to define or essentialise this reality, its form might arise through a negative dialectics: through the conviction of something negated by the simulacrum that demands restitution. Baudrillard acknowledges the fact of exile, since he is capable of providing us with the

diagnosis of loss. He has a concept and a memory of the real, as do we.

Baudrillard will counter that there is small consolation in this attribution, for his own grasp on the real is a last vestige of a pre-Post-modern mentality that the culture will soon succeed in evaporating. In the end Baudrillard's claim is modernist in mentality: it is the Hegelian claim to transparently diagnose the fundamental, essential inner structure of the age, the basic shape of the *Zeitgeist* (which is: "the revolution has already happened and this is it"). Many theorisations of the post-modern retain in effect this modernist / Hegelian / essentialising structure. How is the arch-modernist claim to transparency and prophesy substantiated? What do we really know about an age, about its so called shape and its future? To what extent does the Hegelian metaphysics of ages with clear and univocal shapes apply? Who is to tell the extent to which the everyday, the ordinary, has now become Baudrillard's lunar landscape? And for whom?

Like all other regions or theorisations of the post-modern, the domain of the simulacrum is itself clear in places and obscure in others. Not everybody in America dresses and acts as if they were characters in *The Days of Our Lives*, and there is plenty of room in America for all kinds of people, all kinds of communities and all kinds of values. Let us think of the simula-

crum-contra Baudrillard's unsubstantiated, monolithic vision of it-as-a tendency within the space of America, one far more pervasive in certain areas of American life than others, but in some sense generalised into all domains of life, if only in the guise of a threat or a haze of possibility. Let us think of it as a mode of pressure, a free-floating seduction, a training ground for the young. How profound is its effect then, on the young, on those who have grown up in an age in which history is defined through the fact of television? Surely we cannot claim the epistemological presumption to actually answer this question, as if we could render completely determinate judgements about the possibilities and flexibilities of others. History has proved the old wrong about the resources and interests of the young too many times for that. Crucially, cultural critique need not require that kind of certainty in order to seriously proceed with its work. It cannot require it since it will never be forthcoming. One does not need to produce a determinate picture of how far and in what ways the simulacrum is in place in order to resist it. All one need do is to point to significant instances of it, significant regions of its pressure on persons, outstanding examples of it, to make one's work plausible. For the point is that insofar as it is in place, then words exist in a simulacrised hyperspace, and the work of critique is required. We need never be able to tell just how far it is or was in place in order to perform

this work. Ours is the work of acknowledgement-of acknowledging what is at stake in the simulacrum-not of telling exactly where it is and where it isn't. We speak of a tendency, a mode of seduction, not of a mathematical domain and range (Cavell, 1969).

Let us now map some further relations between genius, ethnicity and subjectivity or identity as they are played out within this Baudrillardian space wherever it may be found. We have already seen that as genius is inflated in value it is thereby vulgarised. It becomes practised as the genius of the capitalist and the advertising agent whose creations of ever new products are regulated by principles of association and seduction. The whirl of concepts, attitudes, values and relations which under ordinary circumstances would define the identities of things and their values for us is exploited by being used to generate the auras of new products. Witness that horrendous commercial on South African television during the recent Olympics which featured an ex-political prisoner from Robbin Island recalling the importance of intramural games for prisoner morale during those terrible days of his imprisonment while a loving camera lingers on the now empty prison-site-the point of this piece of national nostalgia being to sell the idea of an Olympics in Cape Town under the banner of South African liberation, and you get the picture. No

doubt Christ, were he alive in the new South Africa, would lovingly recall his experience on the cross for the same purpose. In short, the real becomes in the end a mere aura exploited from our attitudes towards ordinary reality. Reality as defined by our associations to it, our judgements about it, our feel for it and our familiarity with its role in our lives, is the mere material out of which product values are created. Since the history of colonialism performed a similar exploitation of both natural resources and persons (as in the South African mines where the gold and the miners were both thought of as mere material to be used by the British coloniser, call him Mr. Harry Oppenheimer), it is appropriate that one speaks of the simulacrum as a colonisation of reality itself. In Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, reality is mined for its seductive image values. Which in turn give rise to further genres of image values stacked on those image values. Again: Just imagine Madonna dressed up as Rosa Luxemburg in some Rock Video and you get the picture. In the next one she will appear as Mary Magdalene.

Now it ought to be clear that these examples point to a different idea of the simulacrum than that articulated by Baudrillard. For they point to a simulacrum defined by its colonisation of reality rather than one defined by the replacement of reality by various models. No doubt both of these deformations are in place in American

life, but neither is quite the same as the other, which ought to lead us to believe that there are a family of inter-related operations on "the real" which produce this state of affairs. Again, in so far as advertising uses reality as its materials then the materials (reality and its modes of acknowledgement) are still in place-however dormant.

What then are the guiding rules behind this free play of the media? Actual examples from advertising are clear. "Don't blend In/ The Beverly Centre" the sign says At La Cienega Boulevard, near the Beverly Centre itself (a large Los Angeles shopping mall). This sign, one of whose versions is composed in the off-white of designer clothes and presented in a sleek, designer type-font, sells difference through product conformity. "Don't blend in" already suggests the blended materials of designer clothing: the silk/linen or cotton/poly combos which Armani or Vittadini labels describe. Thus you-and thousands like you-avoid blending into the American melting pot by buying these blended products that make you unique. Which is to say that you can only affirm your uniqueness by speaking in the language of product variety, by blending in. Americans no longer need the mythology of the melting pot because they are unified by their shared language of product variety and self-itemisation. This sign has given rise to an entire genre that refers to it. (Images stacked upon images.)

The American "imagined community" is one of a community of shoppers who capitalise on their own identities, who attain individuality through product variation. Note that during the LA riots of a few years ago, what people of colour who smashed plate glass windows and overturned vehicles mostly stole when they entered stores were designer sneakers, jeans and hot stereo equipment, suggesting that their resentment had to do with the fact that they as the underclass had been excluded from the pleasure and privilege of shopping. What this leads us to see is that the issue of class cannot be dispensed with, for up to a point the identity politics of the simulacrum do serve the hegemonic interests of capitalism by expunging from the American consciousness the real constraints of race and class and gender that play themselves out. A black man from the underclass who is encouraged to proclaim his identity as a victim on talk shows, at university gatherings and on the streets may be turning his conditions of race and class into the same saleable products that the white (or black) yuppie does, but in doing so he is removing their sting by using them to play the American game in the same way that everyone else plays it. America has always had a special capacity to repress the fact of class as a determinant of American life, believing itself free of the European strictures of class and tradition. To a degree this is so, and one would not want to deny

that the simulacrum is itself a free-floating space in which people really can-up to a point-freely change themselves and invent new forms of pleasure. By recasting his inner city life with its rampant violence, crime and drug abuse into the stuff that allows him to sell himself, the man from the underclass is transmuting his class into a vehicle for capitalisation, so that he too might enter the world of selling, exploiting and shopping for identity. This may just work for him-again, America really is a place where class is amorphous, where one can get out of one's class and move into the great middle realm of purchase. (No Marxist analysis will be sufficient to characterise this flexibility.) Still, class (and race and gender) do serve as very real and indeed profound limits on the capacities of many Americans to enter the route to the gravy train, and the identity politics of the simulacrum absolutely repress this fact precisely by fetishising the market values of being a man from the underclass.

This discussion of self-production through shopping must inevitably lead to the politics of ethnicity and multiculturalism, as these are played out within the American simulacrum. For the replacement of the myth of the melting pot by the language of not blending in through blending in is nothing other than that of multiculturalism played out within the simulacrum. This particular sign was off-white, but it also appeared in green and in other colours. It could have

been black, Hispanic, Jewish or cast in the sleek shape of the new and aerobicised woman. For in the simulacrum all items of difference, uniqueness and genius, all works of art, literature and music, all ideas, opinions and events are rewritten as products, as items which can be consumed and propagated in the marketplace. America—for this is really what Baudrillard is talking about, television and the media having quite different formats and effects in other parts of the globe—is indeed capable of deforming its most precious values in the simulacrum. Thus the magnificence resident in American multiculturalism is turned from a great and crucial idea into a simulacrum of itself. Real difference is essentialised, turned into an aura, a product difference that can be consumed and exploited in the marketplace of persons. The difference between a Jew and a Chicano becomes that of a caplet vs. a tablet, a gel vs. a powder, a cream vs. an ointment, a solid vs. a spray, a lawyer vs. a lawyer from L.A. Law, an actor or a president.

To unpack such a massive deformation of the real is hardly a simple matter, in particular to unpack the extent to which this blend of hype, self-capitalisation and sentimentality is a specifically American phenomenon. Baudrillard rests too easy in his technological determinism, according to which the media has produced this state of affairs on account of its inherent, essential character. This is

much too simplistic, for television, I remarked earlier, can be quite different in other parts of the world, in Britain say, where it tends to be slower, closer to drama and to cinema, more talky, more newsy and less pornographic and disaster-oriented than its American counterpart, and more of a public space for elitist culture. It is really impossible to determine the extent to which technology “by itself” determines a form of life. I prefer a kind of Foucauldian analysis according to which the power of the simulacrum must be understood as a relationship between various factors understood to be practised in a specifically idomatic way. It is this complex practice involving factors which only in conjunction with one produce power. Note that Foucault’s conception of power, construed in this way, is like Wittgenstein’s conception of language as understood through the concept of practice (language games) and as composed of a variety of “criss-crossing strands of similarity” which organically, in tandem produce language. Language games are composed of a “tissue of interconnections”, what Wittgenstein pictures as a thread “twist[ing] fiber on fiber” whose strength and integrity consists of the overlapping fibers, is what makes a language a language. A language is a multiplicity of distinct and different parts of language games and whole language games connected not in one way — not according to one essentialist criterion of connection — but rather in a multiplicity of interre-

lated ways. It is the Zusammenhang, the overall mode of interconnectedness, that make any of the parts of language language at all. Similarly, for Foucault, what there are a heterotopia of different arrangements which produce the kinds of power, and what makes invests any part of an arrangement with power is nothing other than its embodiment in the whole. The king is literally nothing without an entire system of sovereign power practised as it is in a certain idiomatic way. He is like a particle of language in just this sense.

Now the factors that conspire to produce the simulacrum are many and their domain is deep in the fabric of American and global life. One would have to speak of monopoly capitalism with its colonisation of images and cultural forms in the service of capital (this is familiar from the work of Ernest Mandel, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey and others). One would have to speak of the history of avant-garde art with its adulation of that ceaseless experimentalism without which the media would not be possible. One would have to speak of the concomitant history of technology. One would have to speak of the political simulacrum produced in the student revolt of the 1960s where by appearing in a certain way — growing your hair long, smiling the glazed smile of the bewitched, refusing to wash and reeking of dacha—you could end the war and change the world. One would have to speak of the

breakdown of the American family with its constraints deriving from patterns of attachment and the force of the super-ego. One would have to speak of the formlessness of American cities and the ceaseless movements of Americans from city to city—all of which slowly frees them from the gravity of old norms and modes of interpretation and places them in the wake of mass attitudes and behaviours. And related, one would have to speak of the role of a specific mythology in American life—the myth being that America is the land where you arrive in flight from another place—call it Joburg—so as to shed your past like a reptilian skin and remake yourself in any way you want. This utopian myth of shedding all tradition, class and constraint so as to remake your identity in an as yet undefined way opens America to the encroachments of monopoly capitalism. For America is a huge, amorphous, consumer population ready to become something new and waiting for new products, styles of life and the like to give this dream content.

Moreover, America is predicated on the anti-European rejection of an elitist, national culture and it is, I said earlier, a reigning American myth that by rejecting a national culture predicated on high art and social class every person should therefore be capable of becoming everything anyone else can be or become. This disinhibition about all limitations, this grandiosity of personal domain which

claims that everyone should be able to be everything or that thing is not real and worthwhile leads America to despise genuine talent (ask any serious American writer, artist or intellectual of talent when she was last on American National Public Radio or asked to write a column in an American newspaper and the answer will be: never). For genuine talent and genius make it immediately clear to everybody else that they cannot do it. You might succeed in writing like Norman Mailer or Elmore Leonard but try writing like Henry James or Ludwig Wittgenstein sometime and see how well it comes out. Americans therefore want to believe that every original act, every unique production, is mass producible for all. Indeed they must refuse the culture of the original, of the unique, of the brilliant, of that which is essentially site-specific if they wish to retain this illusion about equality of talent and life style (that everything is available for all). Now America's illusion that genius is available to all virtually requires that genius be construed as a commodity (and hence mass producible). For how else could it become available to all? Thus the world of the "megamasterpiece" in which genius is the latest high concept, product type generated by the industry according to relatively fixed norms which allow the consumer to recognise its value as a mere product difference from others of the type. Hence the closure of genuine fields of creativity in which new works of art and culture of

genuine originality force the consumer to stop and reckon with them. Hence the closure of the American cultural institutions to the genuinely new. Those art forms-films, the media, print capitalism-which allow for the mass dissemination of the required product and which disguise it under the aura of the natural are therefore privileged within this form of life. But also: hence their increasing closure to the genuinely new.

Thus inherent properties of the media-their capacity to naturalise the artificial, to deliver the world with the immediacy of liveness and to generate rapid-fire consumable images-are encouraged to be practised because the American context encourages them. Television exists in a perfect American marriage with a mass culture of recent immigrants nationalised through a shared commitment to the utopian promise of shopping for identities. What distinguishes Mr. A from Mr. B is the amount of dollars each can use to buy a new personality. Clearly an America defined by money more than by rigid social roles allows for the sociological space in which this kind of purchasing power might arise. Indeed most of the people who go on talk shows do so because they are poor and they can thereby earn two free nights in a five star hotel paid for by the television network. Not a bad idea really since it is their fifteen minutes on the bandwagon. (Again, class is transmuted into a spectacle through which the poor and the trashy

may attain a piece of momentary luck in the game of self-promotion.) When Foucault claims that power is nothing other than a relationship defined by its practice, his point is that we cannot say how much each partner in this post-modern relationship of factors contributes to the formation of the other: we can only say that both are as they are only because of their relationship. Would the media be practised in America in the way that it is without the other conditions being present: certainly not in anything like the way that it is. Would the texture of American life have arisen in the way that it did without the pressure of the media and the history of their technological inventions: probably not in the same way. How different would each have been practised? We cannot suppose to answer this counterfactual question.

Except, to an extent, comparatively. Perhaps the only way of getting a handle on how differently these factors might be composed while simulacra might remain in place would be to look and see how similar kinds of simulacra are practised in other parts of the world. My analysis might appear to suggest that the simulacrum is in many ways a specifically American phenomenon, since it seems that all of these factors, some of which might appear to be quite specifically American, must be present for it to exist in full bloom. Think again about how differently television is practised in Britain. Or if that is not restrained

enough, try Swiss television sometime with its situation comedies featuring cows. One thing to say would be that the simulacrum has been transported to other places in the world simply because America has shoved CNN, *Loving* and *Dallas* down everyone else's throats. There is some truth in this. Another more complex thing to say would be that capitalism, being global in its colonisation of reality as well as in its markets, sets the stage for a global simulacrum that exists throughout the world to some degree. Of course James Buchanan's "mono-culture" exists in quite different degrees in different places (Switzerland vs. Los Angeles), so global culture by itself is not a factor capable of explaining this variation in degree. Again, we must look to webs of interrelated factors as they arise or are instituted in other places in ways sufficiently similar to those in the United States. Which will also lead us to expect that where there is variation in the composition of these factors and not simply in their degree, there will be variation in the way the simulacra are practised, that is in the idiom as it appears in France, Japan, Brazil, Spain and say, South Africa.

My point is that the issue of the degree to which the relationship of forces which in tandem comprise the practice of the simulacrum is fixed and the degree to which it is flexible can only be approached comparatively: through an analysis of varia-

tions in global and local factors from place to place as these sets of factors conspire to produce a family of inter-related modes according to which simulacra appear and are practised. If the simulacrum is that mode of life according to which reality is replaced by models: then which models, and in what ways, and to what degrees, and against the backdrop of what other social processes? If reality is colonised, then which regions of it and again, against the backdrop of what other social processes? There are as modes of deformation. Is there for example a web of factors in South Africa which allows for a new variation of the simulacrum to arise here that bears a significant "family resemblance" to the American one but is also in degree and in kind distinctive to the South African situation? No doubt there is an epistemic uncertainty attached to such a question and there is no science which could decide it. Nevertheless it is a very interesting interpretative question whether when I watch Felicia Mabuse and her audience of "new South African types" I am watching television here in the process of creating "New South African types" in the form of product values, or whether what is going on is merely a spectacle according to which old colonialist/racist stereotypes are being stood on their head so that space for people to become something different might be paved in the national imagination: I refer to images of tall and blond Afrikaner women speaking perfect Zulu,

of black Africans with plummy English accents or exaggerated African accents talking on cell phones, and the fare of SABC 1-3. In short, what is the role of spectacle in contemporary South African society, and how does it differ from that of America? Is it rooted in what the Philosopher Mbembe has analysed as traditional forms of visual spectacle in African life? (Consider Dali Tambo's program in this regard). It is such questions that a critique of contemporary communication practices in South Africa ought to be plumbing. Call it a critique of the plummy.

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