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Theoretical Times: Realigning Baudrillard and Žižek

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The Italian cultural theorist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has reversed Baudrillard's own injunction to 'Forget Baudrillard' (Baudrillard, 2007: 71-123). In conversation with Benjamin Noys at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London in March 2015, Berardi cajoled us belatedly into thinking seriously about Jean Baudrillard's lasting legacy and the importance of remembering - not forgetting - Baudrillard. This process of constantly remembering, and reassessing, Baudrillard's life and work some eight years after his death is essential, despite the much changed theoretical landscape in our post-crash globe after 2007/8. Baudrillard's death in March 2007 from cancer was quickly followed by the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007/8, an upheaval which in many ways his theoretical work prefigured. He remains, along with

fellow theorists such as the ‘Slovenian Lacan’ (Irwin and Motoh, 2014), Slavoj Žižek, a necessary if insufficient resource for the millions of followers who gather on the precarious vantage point of social media and other virtual communities after the uneven global shocks of the recent past. Theory, though, and theorists, are no longer optional or marginal: they are central to reconstruction - political, economic, cultural, social in so-called ‘postmodern capitalism’. As Slavoj Žižek himself has gently reminded us ‘today is the *time for theory*...These are, and not just in a cynical way, the proofs of our interesting times...it is a very good effect of postmodern capitalism that everyone is given a chance’ (Žižek, 2013: 32-34)

We live now, I would argue, interestingly, in theoretical times. Previously we lived, theoretically, in interesting times. Study and political practice has attached itself to ‘theory’ and ‘theorists’ as never before. Theoretical times (1) is the moniker I have given to a continuing project looking at the way in which certain theorists have begun to displace academic disciplines in the contemporary post-crash world, and how we might generate more more meaningful and appropriate concepts and theories for the contemporary globe. An array of new concepts – claustropolitanism, foreclosure, reproletarianisation, accelerated culture – and fresh approaches (claustropolitan sociology, bunker anthropology) have been generated in my work as part of the focus on theoretical times (Redhead, 2016). Pairs of theorists, who were also friends, and correspondents, were also explored in this project: Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti, Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard and Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. Or, alternatively, Althusser/Colletti, Virilio/Baudrillard and Badiou/Žižek. These pairs were the most obvious historical partners but some theorists cut across these pairings – Alain Badiou for example was a student of Louis Althusser’s in the 1960s. For the purposes of the present essay there is in fact very little cutting across of my original pairings in the case of Slavoj Žižek and Jean Baudrillard. Although they both came originally from the Marxist left, and both drew heavily on psychoanalysis, especially Jacques Lacan, they rarely mentioned each other in their work when Baudrillard was alive (Redhead, 2008). Nevertheless there was an important implied shared critique of Foucault’s anti-statism (and closet neo-liberal sympathies) in the work of Baudrillard and Žižek which bound them together. Moreover, as we shall see in this essay, there is in my view fertile ground for a considerable ‘realignment’ of Baudrillard and Žižek in my theoretical times schema especially through some aspects of their work on the ‘symbolic’. This realignment finds possibility especially in

Baudrillard's posthumously published writing and Žižek's most recent, and most influential, texts. It is, for instance, clear from a detailed consideration of Baudrillard's work since the mid-1970s that:

'what interests Baudrillard is the fact that gifts are obligatory, they are a form of empowerment through debt, and the counter-gift cancels this power and any accumulation. This counter-gift is conceived by Baudrillard as a kind of reversibility which annuls power, a reversibility that is founded on the fundamental dualism of the world.'

(Mike Gane in Smith, 2010: 211)

Slavoj Žižek's own long term theoretical concerns, with Hegel/Lacan at their root, are not a million miles from the theory of symbolic exchange which Baudrillard developed for the last few decades of his life and which have pervaded his posthumous publications. With their most recently published work Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2010a, Smith and Clarke, 2015) and Slavoj Žižek (Žižek and Horat, 2013, Žižek, 2014a, 2014b) are clearly two of the most significant and widely read theorists in these theoretical times and the traditional disciplines they are displacing are multiple, interconnected and often surprising - for example witness the fascinating case of Žižek and law and jurisprudence (De Sutter, 2015). Manifestly, they are key theorists in these theoretical times. However, strangely, as we have noted, the work of these two theorists rarely mentions the other and the realignment of the theorists is at present a pioneering enterprise, begun specifically in the virtual pages of this special issue of the *International Journal of Žižek Studies* and more generally in recent issues of the parallel open access journal the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* (Pawlett, 2014a, 2014b, Gane and O'Mahoney, 2014, Genosko, 2015). This essay is a contribution to that realignment which is still ongoing.

The current watershed for theory is the continuing, widening global financial crisis of 2007/2008, a global mega event, a radical political rupture, an 'event' of the kind envisaged by Slavoj Žižek in his work on what he calls 'Philosophy in Transit' (Žižek, 2014a). The global financial crisis was followed by a brief 'global Keynesianism' before a return to business as usual and an even more brutal neo-liberalism pervasive in all aspects of contemporary life. For Žižek, after such an event nothing remains the same, even if there are no obvious large changes. The GFC, and the tectonic twenty-first century shifts preceding and following the event,

have been seen generally as fatal consequences of a post-millennial catastrophic search for 'fool's gold' in the shadow banking system of global financialisation and partially the result of widespread 'automatic speculation in the futurism of the instant' (Virilio, 2012: 34) which produces flash crashes where trillions of dollars disappear, and reappear, in fractions of a second. Now that we are 'after the goldrush', as Neil Young once succinctly put it in the early 1970s when yet another 'capitalist crisis' was manifesting itself, and furthermore weirdly 'post-catastrophe' (Redhead, 2011), a frantic search for, and consumption of, theory is beginning again. It is, in this context, worth taking stock of the relationship between the 'post-crash' condition of the global society and its relation to contemporary theory and the new disciplinary and interdisciplinary movements. In some senses disciplines have been superseded. We have become post-disciplinary in our interdisciplinarity.

Discipline after discipline in the academic world has agonised over whether the tenets of yesteryear still hold good after this earth shattering event. This process, displaying elements of the 'agony of power' identified by Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2010), has, for instance, already begun in a reenergised contemporary political economy which attempts to demystify finance and show how finance exploits us all. Also, after cultural studies lost its way as some have seen its founding fathers have asked agonisingly the question what is the future of cultural studies? before redeploying theorists like Žižek and Alain Badiou in their new neo-communist phase (Badiou, 2010) in order to save it. Further, criminology has charted new directions away from both neo-liberalism and liberal postmodernism (Hall and Winlow, 2015) and towards a new ultra-realism which draws on theorists such as Žižek, Lacan, Badiou and Baudrillard as well as Etienne Balibar and Jacques Rancière. In turn, law has renewed its call for a 'new interdisciplinary legal studies', incorporating new critical legal theory and the rediscovery of 'critical legal thinkers' including Žižek (De Sutter, 2015) and Badiou and for 'law and critique' and 'critical legal studies' as never before. Even economists, largely in seductive thrall to neo-liberalism in the first place, have pondered about what is left of economics after the (economic) crisis. This has happened whilst all the while their profession has been cheerfully regenerating the fundamental tenets of neo-liberal economics. Interestingly, students of economics (at the University of Manchester in England) even set up a Post-Crash Economics Society to demonstrate their vehement displeasure at the modern university curriculum seemingly devoid of explanatory power and contemporary

relevance after the crash. Psychoanalysis, once again, has renewed its love/hate relationship with Jacques Lacan's life and work just as Žižek's 1982 Ph.D thesis on Hegel and Lacan (Žižek, 2014c) was published in English for the first time. Theology has moved beyond its previous terrain to look at 'God in Pain' (Žižek and Gunjević, 2012) and a materialist Christianity, whereas philosophy has returned to Hegel, Marx and dialectical materialism (Žižek, 2014d), to forge a transcendental materialism. Politics, too, has mused about whether it still has the power to explain contemporary events like the 2011 riots in the UK and the various aspects of the Arab Spring (Žižek, 2012, Badiou and Žižek, 2009) in the way that, for instance, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels once analysed the revolutions in Europe in 1848. Finally, postmodernism, pervading all the disciplines and sub-disciplines, sometimes attributed misleadingly in its origins to the long term work of both Baudrillard and Žižek since the 1970s, has waxed and waned, emerging even weaker than before in the post-crash condition (Redhead, 2011).

Rather than attracting the tired old postmodernist label Jean Baudrillard's theoretical contributions should be seen as rooted in his overall theory of symbolic exchange. Part of this essay will consider how around the term 'symbolic exchange' and in significant work published posthumously but written in the last few years of his life, he was able to develop this concept towards elements of a new theory of power which is acutely relevant to our post-crash global capitalist world and which helps with the realignment of Baudrillard and Žižek. As one astute Baudrillard scholar has noted, 'rather than a "postmodernist" Baudrillard was in fact a trenchant critic of many of the-taken-for-granted features of advanced capitalism and western culture - consumerism, the postmodern celebration of pluralism and "diversity", globalisation, capitalism, modernity, mass communication and the information economy - as destroyers of the act and social relation of symbolic exchange' (Smith, 2010: 1). The theoretical times project, and the present essay on the realignment of Baudrillard and Žižek in that template, is a part of long term work on the philosophy and politics of the contemporary post-crash global condition and the narrow theoretical ledge we now inhabit in its wake. Jean Baudrillard, and his theory of symbolic exchange developed since 1976, is a vital part of this theoretical and political reconstruction. It is also the most promising ground for a reconsideration of Žižek and Baudrillard – in terms of their conception of the symbolic and symbolic exchange.

The celebrity intellectual culture which has developed over the past few years has, for instance, helped to produce open access online journals such as this one, devoted to major global theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Alain Badiou and Žižek amongst a number of others. The *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* began in 2004, the *International Journal of Žižek Studies* began in 2007 and *Badiou Studies* began in 2012, massively stimulating global interest in these theorists' singular output. More recently such theorists have been allocated their own full book length specific dictionaries. In the case of the task of realigning Baudrillard and Žižek, innovative theoretical dictionaries devoted to their work are invaluable. *The Žižek Dictionary* (Butler, 2014) and *The Baudrillard Dictionary* (Smith, 2010) assist us greatly with this present enterprise, especially in the area of the exploration of the symbolic and especially symbolic exchange. Social theorist Mike Gane (Smith, 2010: 210-213) draws our attention to the importance of symbolic exchange in the glossary of Baudrillard terms in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*. Gane contends that 'symbolic exchange is perhaps the most central of Baudrillard's terms and yet the most allusive' (Smith, 2010: 210). He further proclaims that 'the concept of symbolic exchange is the basis of Baudrillard's critical thinking of contemporary societies, and in this sense is comparable to Marx's notion of communism' (Smith, 2010: 211). Although Baudrillard was influenced by Marxists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre his work has always born a tangential relationship to any brand of Marxism, neo-, post-, or otherwise. His work is, though, explicitly more radical than Marx's in a certain sense. Philosophical antecedents of Baudrillard's work are very complex and need careful consideration. Marx and Bataille and Nietzsche are ever present but so too is Mani, the Persian Gnostic prophet who wrote one thousand eight hundred years ago. Symbolic exchange as a concept certainly is central to any proper understanding of Baudrillard (Pawlett, 2013: 32-37) and Gane is absolutely prescient in his view on this. In contrast most commentators over the years have concentrated on Baudrillard's writing on more well known concepts like simulation and hyperreality, and even, mistakenly as it turns out, topical influences of the day such as 'postmodernism' (Redhead, 2011). Re-reading today a book like the second edition of *The Spirit of Terrorism* (Baudrillard, 2004), first written in the immediate aftermath of the 'event' of 9/11, it is obvious that Baudrillard's 'requiem for the twin towers' that saw him vilified internationally, but especially in America, is wholly dependent on his subtle development of the concept

of symbolic exchange. Symbolic exchange is uppermost in the text though ideas of the Real, reality and hyperreality were prominent in media commentary and publicity around the 2002 Verso books mini-series which also included an enigmatic book by Baudrillard's long time friend Paul Virilio and Slavoj Žižek's own five essay discourse on hyperreality entitled *Welcome to The Desert of the Real!* (Žižek, 2002) which managed, somehow, not to engage with Baudrillard on what was then regarded as his own 'hypereal' terrain. Jean Baudrillard's mid-life epiphany with regard to symbolic exchange came in San Diego in America in the mid-1970s when, teaching with Fredric Jameson, Michel de Certeau and Jean-Francois Lyotard, Baudrillard came to the realisation that, in Sylvere Lotringer's words, society was "losing all its moorings" (Baudrillard 2010a: 11). The precise and productive structure of symbolic exchange in Baudrillard's work was quickly forged and the following thirty years of his work unfolded accordingly. As Lotringer, who was geographically present on the West Coast of the USA some of this time, recalls, the speed at which Baudrillard wrote his great tome *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Baudrillard, 1993) manifestly signified its importance'. The watershed nature of this book in Baudrillard's life and times is also noteworthy. The next such watershed is his death in 2007 and the small range of significant posthumous publications which are an important aspect of Baudrillard's entire thought. The rest of Baudrillard's work after 1976 is, in some sense, an extended event of this mid-1970s history. Before leaving for Europe at the time of its construction (1975/1976), Baudrillard clearly wrote furiously about the anthropology of symbolic exchange. Lotringer, as the Semiotext(e) publisher of much of the English language work of Baudrillard, tells us in the fascinating introduction to Baudrillard's posthumously published *The Agony of Power* (Baudrillard, 2010a) much about the genesis of his major work. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, this key book in the Baudrillard pantheon, was actually written at a frantic pace as if new theory had literally emerged at what I later termed the 'speed of light' (Redhead, 2011). The book was originally published in 1976 in French but not really fully read or appreciated by English speaking theorists and students until very much later. Crucially, this work contained the theory of reversibility which would become so important to Baudrillard's writing until his own death in 2007. As Sylvere Lotringer puts it succinctly, if enigmatically, 'reversibility is the form death takes in a symbolic exchange' (Baudrillard 2010a: 14).

Jean Baudrillard has been savagely vilified by his detractors, but the lasting influence of his work on twenty first century critical thought, cultural politics, war studies, media events, art theory and pop culture is impossible to deny, much of which is the chosen 'field' of Zizek studies too. My comprehensive collection of extracts from Baudrillard's texts, *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*, (Redhead, 2008) now digitally available through Edinburgh Scholarship Online (Redhead 2008), features work from all periods of Baudrillard's long writing career and still stands as a last will and testament to his remarkable life and work. *The Jean Baudrillard Reader* is an introduction for global readers to Baudrillard's commitment to a critical poetics of the modern object and his complex, controversial theory of reality, society and modernity, much of which stems from his specific interpretation of the idea of symbolic exchange. As Mike Gane, in my view the clearest of all international interpreters of Baudrillard, has recently noted in an interview in the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* (Gane and O'Mahoney, 2014) there is still a full biography of Baudrillard waiting to be written, especially in view of the fact that many of the people who knew him during his own life are still alive. The same goes for the life and work of the very much still alive Slavoj Zizek, with only fragments of his Slovenian life and work having been explored so far in this way (Irwin and Motoh, 2014) leaving much of the life and times of Zizek tantalisingly out of reach. This present essay on realigning Baudrillard and Zizek, and my earlier full length book *The Jean Baudrillard Reader* (Redhead, 2008), can be seen as a small part of a biographical, and bibliographical, enterprise of these two significant theorists.

The critical fulcrum of the realignment of Baudrillard and Zizek is the year 1976. 1976 is the year of the publication in French of Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Baudrillard, 1993) and is the period when Baudrillard, correctly, tells us to 'forget Foucault' (Baudrillard, 2007) with all the opprobrium that brought him in his home country. In 1976, the year zero of punk in global popular culture, that saw the emergence of the Sex Pistols, emerged a culture which Slavoj Zizek has often embraced wholeheartedly himself, most recently in his collaboration with Russian punk band Pussy Riot (Zizek and Tolokonnikova, 2014). In 1976 punk cultural stirrings were embracing antecedents that Baudrillard shared – the 'pataphysics' of Albert Jarry and Pere Ubu. At this time a Cleveland punk band emerged with the name Pere Ubu to globally popularise the drama of Albert Jarry from the late nineteenth century which had so fascinated Baudrillard since the early

1950s. US musician David Thomas in 1975 in Ohio named his band Pere Ubu after Albert Jarry's caricature king because, to Thomas, it added a texture of absolute grotesqueness, a kind of darkness descending over everything which fitted the mid-1970s in America. In his lifetime, Baudrillard never declared any awareness of this popular music culture/Ubu connection, though he did once dress in public in a full 'punk' costume of his own. He appeared, gloriously, in a gold lame jacket with mirrored lapels reading the text of his own self-penned 1980s poem, entitled 'Motel-Suicide', backed by a rock band at the Chance Event held at Whiskey Pete's in Las Vegas in November 1996. The only surviving photo of the event shows the short, balding, academic Baudrillard appearing as if he was failing an audition for a place in a mid-late 1970s English punk band and Edinburgh University Press duly reproduced the precious photograph as the front cover of my own book on Baudrillard in 2008 (Redhead, 2008). In Žižek's case the punk ethos has pervaded much of his work and the important prison letters to and from one of the imprisoned members of Pussy Riot made punk globally political again in the contemporary world. Indeed Žižek's political engagement with Syriza (Žižek and Horat, 2013) and Podemos in post-crash Europe furthered this activism in a way which, apart from an early Maoist phase, Baudrillard never displayed.

Nevertheless, Jean Baudrillard consistently attempted to produce a radically uncertain picture of the modern world, and posthumously published Baudrillard is no exception. Two of Baudrillard's essays in French from 2001 drawing on his analysis of *Loft Story* (the French TV version of reality show *Big Brother*) have recently been translated into English and published posthumously in book form under the overall title of *Telemorphosis* (Baudrillard, 2011, Genosko, 2015). However, interesting and suggestive though they are, the *Telemorphosis* essays do not compare with the body of work produced just before he died, and which depend on the development of the concept of symbolic exchange from 1976 onwards. Neither is it useful to include in posthumously published Baudrillard the new edition of his 1980s book *America* (Baudrillard, 2010c) rereleased in 2010 with a new introduction by British fiction writer Geoff Dyer which even drew the *Financial Times* into nominating it as one of the best non-fiction books of the year. Jean Baudrillard's main posthumously published writings, released after his demise but specifically written in the last two years of his life, what we might refer to as post(humorous) Baudrillard theory, provide us with serious and well laid out theoretical clues to the numerous mysteries he set

up in the myriad other texts published in his lifetime from the early 1950s to early 2007 (Redhead, 2008). This post-Baudrillard body of work is in my view very significant and is likely to have a lasting effect on the kind of 'left' field of theory which he and Slavoj Žižek have cultivated way into the future and depending as it does on the development of the concept of symbolic exchange into a new theory of power. It is one of the posthumously published writings of Baudrillard, entitled *The Agony of Power* (Baudrillard 2010a) published in English in 2010 by Sylvère Lotringer's Semiotext(e), which I want to especially highlight here in the context of realigning Baudrillard and Žižek. Two other publications, *Carnival and Cannibal* (Baudrillard, 2010b) and *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* (Baudrillard, 2009), are also very significant texts. There are overlaps. Writing from *The Agony of Power* text bleeds into these other texts from the post-Baudrillard era. There are also, for example, elements of the theoretical and political position taken by Baudrillard in *The Agony of Power* repeated in the other late texts.

The Agony of Power is a collection of three original texts written in 2005 which were read or presented by Baudrillard at various conferences around the world, together with an interview with French cultural magazine *Chronic'art* from that same year. This collection of fascinating Baudrillard texts is prefaced by a substantial contextual introduction by Sylvère Lotringer entitled 'Domination and Servitude'. Two years after he produced these important texts Jean Baudrillard was no longer with us, and Sylvère Lotringer reveals, as publisher as well as friend, that although Baudrillard had intended to 'turn all the texts he was writing at the time into a new book...a few months later he was diagnosed with cancer and never regained enough strength to follow up on this project' (Baudrillard 2010a: 7-8). The three texts and one interview which make up the Baudrillard part of *The Agony of Power* are 'From Domination To Hegemony', 'The White Terror of World Order', 'Where Good Grows' and 'The Roots of Evil'. The book itself was published by Lotringer's longstanding iconic imprint Semiotext(e), as number 6 in its 'Intervention' series. A photograph by Jean Baudrillard adorned the inside of the front and back covers of *The Agony of Power*. Two other essays which Sylvère Lotringer was originally going to publish alongside the three papers in *The Agony of Power* appeared posthumously by Baudrillard's publishers as another book altogether – namely *Carnival and Cannibal* (Baudrillard, 2010b). *Carnival and Cannibal* was eventually published in 2010 comprising the essay "Carnival and Cannibal, or The Play of Global Antagonism",

effectively a talk from 2004, and the text of another address, “Ventriloquous Evil” from 2006. A third posthumously published Baudrillard book *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* (Baudrillard 2009), written in 2007, literally just before his death, sparingly illustrated with haunting images by Alain Willaume, was published in 2009. Taking all of this post-Baudrillard writing together, the legacy of ‘post(humous)’ Baudrillard thought may be seen as a singular ‘post-theory’, a form of extreme thinking for an even more extreme world which we now somehow still manage to cling to as the desire to leave the planet becomes compulsive (Redhead, 2011) and, as the Baudrillard scholar William Pawlett has pointed out (Pawlett, 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b), a significant development of his earlier work on ‘evil’ and ‘good’ and ‘duality’, all ideas which stem from the mid-1970s development of the concept of symbolic exchange by Jean Baudrillard.

It is striking, reading these Baudrillard texts again in 2015, that in posthumously published Baudrillard, there is no trace of the earlier debate about postmodernisation, postmodernity and postmodernism. Baudrillard in his lifetime, as critical commentators have noted, often endured a reading of his work which ‘became fixated on a handful of concepts – most notably “postmodernism”, “simulation” and “hyperreality”’ (Smith, Clarke and Doel, 2011: 326). Focus on ‘dystopia’ and ‘apocalypticism’, conditions more attuned to the coming 2007/8 global financial crisis, were actually much more common in the Baudrillard works in the 2000s (Featherstone, 2011). These concepts were used explicitly and implicitly by Baudrillard in the few years before his death in 2007 much more than ideas of postmodernism, simulation and hyperreality. As some of these critical commentators, and reinterpreters of Baudrillard and his significance, have rightly pointed out:

‘While it is perhaps understandable that this situation should have arisen, particularly given Baudrillard’s initial reception within the English-speaking world as the “high priest” of postmodernism, it is far from an accurate portrayal of the potential Baudrillard’s work offers, or indeed, of Baudrillard himself. It is telling that the waning of interest in the postmodern since the 1990s has not, in fact, led to a corresponding decline of interest in Baudrillard. On the contrary, now that his work is no longer interpreted in the one dimensional terms dictated by the modern/postmodern debate, a far, fuller, richer, and more diverse understanding and appreciation of Baudrillard’s import is beginning to emerge’.

(Smith, Clarke and Doel, 2011: 326)

A very similar commentary could be made about Slavoj Žižek’s relationship

to postmodernism, postmodern capitalism and postmodernity . The conflict over Baudrillard's legacy, especially in terms of postmodern debates, stems largely from the fact that a comprehensive selection of his writings had, until recently, to be satisfactorily translated from the original French. Consumers of Baudrillard tended to read pithy 'fragments' of his often fragmentary, aphoristic, cryptic work, or quote his myriad interpreters who usually had an axe to grind on one or other of the debates. 'Baudrillard for Beginners' books (Horrocks and Jevtic, 1996) often compounded the problem, rarely focusing on symbolic exchange but always mentioning postmodernism and Marxism. In any case, the politics of postmodernism are evaded in these 'noughties' Baudrillard writings and a clear legacy of the concept of symbolic exchange emerges. Instead of postmodernity he urgently raises different, more contemporary, questions of 'death', 'evil', 'integral reality' and the 'duality' of the world, as well as symbolic exchange. As Sylvere Lotringer stresses in his introduction to Baudrillard's book *The Agony of Power*, sharply rethinking the concepts of "domination and servitude" in terms of Baudrillard's posthumously published work, 'Baudrillard was hailed as the inventor of 'postmodernism', a concept he rejected...it got him pigeonholed as the denier of reality, and he was adulated or hated for it' (Baudrillard, 2010a:10) .

The 'agony of power ' which Baudrillard alludes to was in fact as much about the 'power of agony' (to borrow playfully from Baudrillard's theory of reversibility). In his own agonising introduction to *The Agony of Power* (Baudrillard, 2010a). Sylvere Lotringer claims powerfully, and in my view correctly, that Baudrillard's two key ideas throughout his work, especially since the mid-1970s epiphany were that, firstly, reality had disappeared and became replaced by simulacra and, secondly, that there was a potential symbolic challenge in this process of disappearance (the point at which symbolic exchange becomes crucial). We should pause to consider these insights into Baudrillard, so important are they in any consideration of Baudrillard's

legacy after his death. These are crucial insights into Baudrillard by a friend and colleague who had known Baudrillard personally and published Baudrillard since the 1970s. *The Agony of Power*, a book praised from within by Lotringer as nothing less than Baudrillard's intellectual testament, is undoubtedly an important work.

Baudrillard's *The Agony of Power* offers a different view of power from the classical legal conception of power, often reproduced in major works of jurisprudence right up until today. Baudrillard's alternative perspective is a form of 'patasociology' as hailed by Jacques Donzelot, who worked with Baudrillard at the University of Nanterre in the late 1960s at the time the university sparked the events of May 1968 in France (Donzelot, 2011). In all this posthumous work, especially in *The Agony of Power*, Baudrillard offers us a unique theory of power incorporating what he calls 'a double refusal' – in other words, the sovereign's refusal to dominate as well as the subject's refusal to be dominated. This new Baudrillardian theory of power has echoes of Žižek's psychoanalytic notion of how one can be the master by virtue of not being the master. As he points out in *Carnival and Cannibal* in a passage repeated word for word from *The Agony of Power* (and partially extracted by Semiotext(e) as the quote on the back cover of *The Agony of Power*) the radicality of his thinking is in the argument that power itself has to be abolished. Baudrillard claims:

'It is power itself that has to be abolished – and not just in the refusal *to be dominated*, which is the essence of all traditional struggles, but equally and as violently in the refusal *to dominate*. For domination implies both these things, and if there were the same violence or energy in the refusal to dominate, we would long ago have stopped dreaming of revolution. And this tells us why intelligence cannot - and never will be able to – be in power: because it consists precisely in this twofold refusal'.

(Baudrillard 2010b: 17-18)

The refusal to dominate, or to exercise sovereign power, according to Sylvère Lotringer, seeking to illustrate Baudrillard's theory at its most banal, can be seen in the agonies of those involved in the revolts of May 1968 or the later activities of the Italian Autonomists in the 1970s but there are many contemporary events such as the global financial crisis and Arab spring, written about by Slavoj Žižek (Žižek, 2014b, 2012), which resonate too. The participants who refused power were, in Baudrillard's theory, according to Lotringer's interpretation, less than confident in wanting to dominate – they agonised about power, in both their resistance to sovereignty and their unwillingness to become involved in its exercise. Indeed, as

Baudrillard says emphatically, 'power itself is an embarrassment and there is no one to assume it truly' (Baudrillard 2010a: 82).

This essay on the realignment of Baudrillard and Zizek is a fragment of longer term work on philosophical and political reconstruction in the wake of the global event of the GFC and its aftermath. The theoretical times project which this essay draws upon features Baudrillard and Zizek prominently, although not necessarily in a specific pairing. This essay has tentatively suggested ways in which Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Zizek are worth considering together rather than apart.

Notes

1. See my twelve freely downloadable podcasts on Theoretical Times:

"Theoretical Times: Claustropolitanism"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesClaustropolitanism>

"Theoretical Times: Accelerated Culture"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesAcceleratedCulture>

"Theoretical Times: Reproletarianisation"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesReproletarianization>

"Theoretical Times: Foreclosure"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesForeclosure>

"Theoretical Times: Claustropolitan Sociology"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesClaustropolitanSociology>

"Theoretical Times: Bunker Anthropology"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesBunkerAnthropology>

"Theoretical Times: Louis Althusser"

https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesLouisAlthusser_201412

"Theoretical Times: Alain Badiou"

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesAlainBadiou>

“Theoretical Times: Slavoj Žižek”

<https://archive.org/details/TheoreticalTimesSlavojZizek>

“Theoretical Times: Paul Virilio”

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“Theoretical Times: Jean Baudrillard”

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“Theoretical Times: Lucio Colletti”

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Also, see the forthcoming book on theoretical times (Redhead, 2016).

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