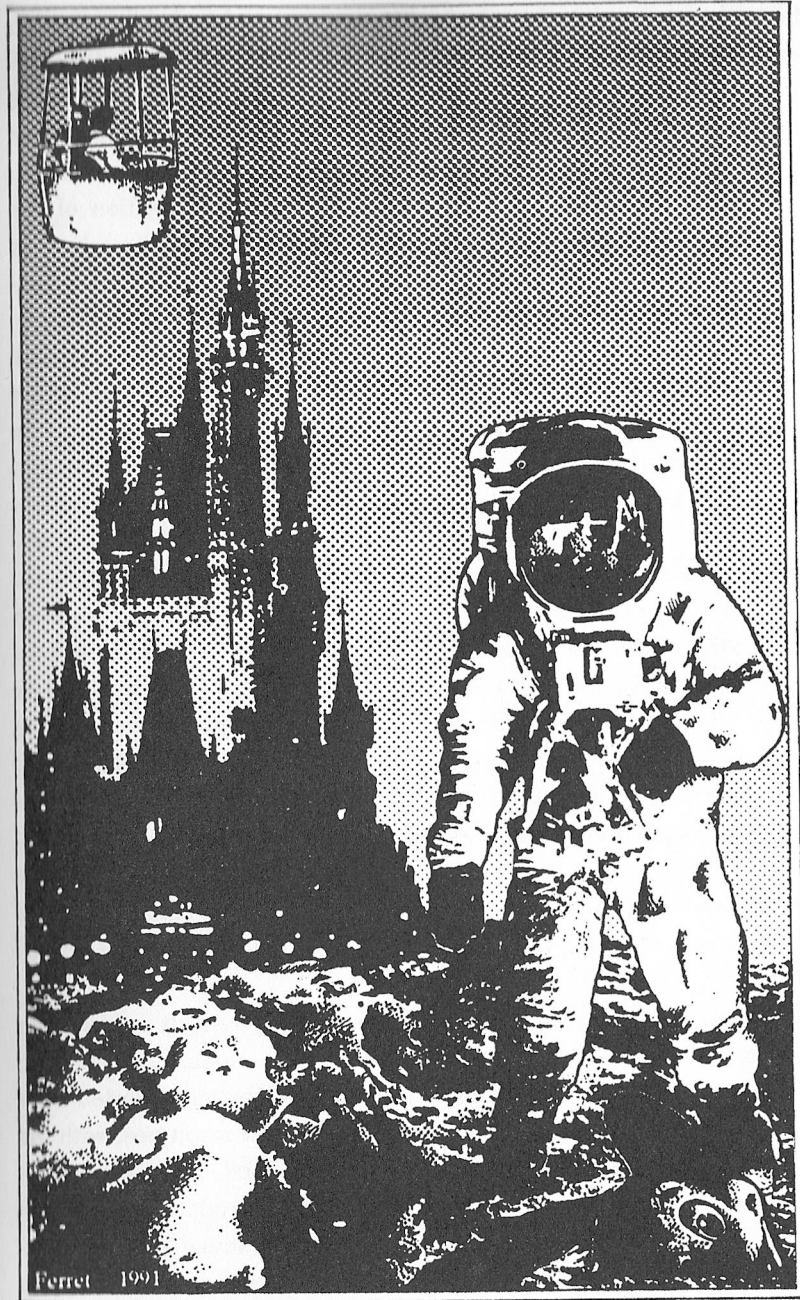


Jean Baudrillard

The Automation of the Robot (from Simulations)

A whole world separates these two artificial beings. One is a theatrical counterfeit, a mechanical and clocklike man; technique submits entirely to *analogy* and to the effect of semblance. The other is dominated by the technical principle; the machine overrides all, and with the machine *equivalence* comes too. The automaton plays the part of courtier and good company; it participates in the pre-Revolutionary French theatrical and social games. The robot, on the other hand, as his name indicates, is a worker: the theater is over and done with, the reign of mechanical man commences. The automaton is the *analogy* of man and remains his interlocutor (they play chess together!). The machine is man's *equivalent* and annexes him to itself in the unity of its operational process. This is the difference between a simulacrum of the first order and one of the second.

We shouldn't make any mistakes on this matter for reasons of "figurative" resemblance between robot and automaton. The latter is an interrogation upon nature, the mystery of the existence or nonexistence of the soul, the dilemma of appearance and being. It is like God: what's underneath it all, what's inside, what's in the back of it? Only the counterfeit men allow these problems to be posed. The entire metaphysics of man as protagonist of the *natural theater* of the creation is incarnated in the automaton, before disappearing with the Revolution. And the automaton has no other destiny than to be ceaselessly compared to living man—so as to be more natural than him, of which he is the ideal figure. A perfect double for man, right up to the suppleness of his movements, the functioning of his organs and intelligence—right up to touching upon the anguish there would be in



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becoming aware that there is no difference, that the soul is over with and now it is an ideally naturalized body which absorbs its energy. Sacrilege. This difference is then always maintained, as in the case of that perfect automaton that the impersonator's jerky movements on stage imitate; so that at least, even if the roles were reversed, no confusion would be possible. In this way the interrogation of the automaton remains an open one, which makes it out to be a kind of mechanical optimist, even if the counterfeit always connotes something diabolical.¹

No such thing with the robot. The robot no longer interrogates appearance; its only truth is in its mechanical efficacy. It is no longer turned towards a resemblance with man, to whom furthermore it no longer bears comparison. That infinitesimal metaphysical difference, which made all the charm and mystery of the automaton, no longer exists; the robot has absorbed it for its own benefit. Being and appearance are melted into a common substance of production and work. The first-order simulacrum never abolished difference. It supposes an always detectable alteration between semblance and reality (a particularly subtle game with trompe-l'oeil painting, but art lives entirely off of this gap). The second-order simulacrum simplifies the problem by the absorption of the appearances, or by the liquidation of the real, whichever. It establishes in any case a reality, image, echo, appearance; such is certainly work, the machine, the system of industrial production in its entirety, in that it is radically opposed to the principle of theatrical illusion. No more resemblance or lack of resemblance, of God, or human being, but an imminent logic of the operational principle.

From then on, men and machines can proliferate. It is even their law to do so—which the automatons never have done, being instead sublime and singular mechanisms. Men themselves only started their own proliferation when they achieved the status of machines, with the industrial revolution. Freed from all resemblance, freed even from their own double, they expand like the system of production, of which they are only the miniaturized equivalent. The revenge of the simulacrum that feeds the myth of the sorcerer's apprentice doesn't happen with the automaton. It is, on the other hand, the very law of the second type; and from that law proceeds still the hegemony of the robot, of the machine, and of dead work over living labor. This hegemony is neces-

sary for the cycle of production and reproduction. It is with this reversal that we leave behind the counterfeit to enter (re)production. We leave natural law and the play of its forms to enter the realm of the mercantile law of value and its calculations of force.

Notes

- 1 Counterfeit and reproduction imply always an anguish, a disquieting foreignness: the uneasiness before the photograph, considered like a witch's trick—and more generally before any technical apparatus, which is always an apparatus of reproduction, is related by Benjamin to the uneasiness before the mirror-image. There is already sorcery at work in the mirror. But how much more so when this image can be detached from the mirror and be transported, stocked, reproduced at will (cf. *The Student of Prague*, where the devil detaches the image of the student from the mirror and harrasses him to death by the intermediary of this image). All reproduction implies therefore a kind of black magic, from the fact of being seduced by one's own image in the water, like Narcissus, to being haunted by the double and, who knows, to the moral turning back of this vast technical apparatus secreted today by man as his own image (the narcissistic mirage of technique, McLuhan) and that returns to him, cancelled and distorted—endless reproduction of himself and his power to the limits of the world. Reproduction is diabolical in its very essence; it makes something fundamental vacillate. This has hardly changed for us: simulation (that we describe here as the operation of the code) is still and always the place of a gigantic enterprise of manipulation, of control and of death, just like the imitative object (primitive statuette, image of photo) always had as objective an operation of black image.