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Image and Imagination at the Crossroads: On Bachelard and Baudrillard*

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Abstract

Examining the problem of image and imagination in the modern age must face to a twofold difficulty: one is to consider the multiple theoretical delimitations in the traditional metaphysics; another comes from the abundance of digital images by technical simulation in which the image usurps the reality. This essay tries to investigate these two dimensions of

* The author must express his gratitude to the two anonymous referees who give many precious critics and corrections. Some suggestions are adopted for the modifications in this text, but the other topics are left, as important as well, to my further research.

image and imagination, by analyzing the visions of Gaston Bachelard and Jean Baudrillard. In the context of metaphysics of imagination, Bachelard takes effort to restore the creativity of poetic image. The image, according to Bachelard, can refer to the intimacy of human being and the world, neither responding to the epistemological demand of perception, nor conditioned by the psychological causality of the remembered past. The poetic image emphasizes the ontological status of image in language, and establishes an open principle of subjectivity for the imagination. Baudrillard is attentive to the significance of the overflow of images and criticizes this phenomenon by a more general irony. For him, the perfect simulation executes a seclusion strategy of reality — the reality murders the reality by making the reality appear. Therefore the imagination is strangled before the real image; meanwhile, the identity of reality devours the creativity implied in the difference. By this contrast, we try to sketch out the possible principle and difficulty of the metaphysics of imagination.

Keywords: image, imagination, imaginary, world, reality, virtuality, Virtual Reality, metaphysics, poetics

*The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human
Existence itself*

*Affection or Love becomes a State, when
divided from Imagination*

— William Blake, *Milton, second Book*¹

By the affluent production and easy reproduction of images, the imagination seems to be treated as an overflow of meaning, and thus to lose its creative power. In fact, considering the status of image is at the same time a task that reveals an intimate destiny of imagination and human being, as William Blake's poem suggests: "*Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Breadth & Height / Calling the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition / In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy, against / Its own Qualities, which are Servants of Humanity, not Gods or Lords [.]*"² In the digital era, the image as a philosophical term must face to a two-sided view, on the one hand, the image and its function – imagination – are related to the originality and the creativity of the subject, and on the other hand, if the image can reveal everything – especially in the digital way, such as Virtual Reality -, it covers the reality at the same time. In the contemporary philosophical reflections, we can find two examples on each side: on the first side, Gaston Bachelard gives a strong defense of image and imagination; on the other

¹ The first verset was cited by Gaston Bachelard, in his *L'air et les songes*(1943, 1987:7-8). The versets of William Blake are in: David V. Erdman (ed.), Harold Bloom (Commentary) *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1988:132, line 32-33).

² William Blake(1988:132, line 18-19)

side, Jean Baudrillard attacks on the metaphysics of appearance in a sophisticated irony. In both ways, the function and dysfunction of images lead us to reflect more deeply on the destiny of humanity in the shadow of imagination.

At first sight, in the Platonic tradition, the image, deemed to be on the lowest ontological level, is nothing but a shadow of being, suppressed far beneath the Forms. Ever since the imagination (*phantasia*) got its more positive role no other than a transmission of the perception under the control of reason, as defined in the Aristotelian psychology. Thus the vision of *mimesis* underlines the main character of imagination. It is the Christian tradition that holds the possibility of the positive quality in the imagination (such as *imago dei*), especially verified in the German mystics. For example, in Paracelsus, the divine *Imaginatio* is the incarnation of the divine will.³ In the philosophical psychology, Kant gives the irreplaceable function to the faculty of imagination. The productive — instead of reproductive — imagination, which renders possible the a priori synthesis in understanding and becomes concrete schema in the time series, is called transcendental imagination. After Kantian epistemological justification of imagination, Schelling approved a metaphysical sense to it, so that this metaphysical action of *Einbildung* can

³ Alexandre Koyré (1971:97), “l’*imagination* est la force magique par excellence ; (...) L’image, que *produit* l’imagination, *exprime* une tendance, une puissante tension de la volonté (...) L’image est le *corps* de notre pensée, de notre désir. En elle ils s’incarnent.”(originally underlined); in the citation of Koyré, we can also see the relation between imagination and belief in the words of Paracelsus : “Also Glauben in Gott gibt *imaginationem* in Gott. ” (ibid, p.95, n.1; Paracelsus, *Erklärung der gantzen Astronomie*, Gesammelte Werke, hrsg. K. Studhof, vol. X, p.29 — the spelling of *Astronomie* is according to the original citation of A. Koyré).

no more be understood as synonymous with the faculty of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) by Kant or even Fichte, but as the *in-form*ation of the cosmos, i.e. the process of construction of the metaphysical elements such as the finite, the infinite and the eternal. In this metaphysical vein, strongly in echo to the Romantic movement, imagination was attributed a constructive function of the world including the spiritual world (often taken as synonymy of humanity) and the nature; thus the imagination is far from a mirror of the world, an imitation of the universe, it is engaged in the formation of the world. Thereafter, following the phenomenological movement, the imagination is rendered, through the justification of subjectivity for the constitution of meaning, as a possible access to the world. In such a context, we know that the imagination conserves a special ambiguity within itself, swinging between creativity and illusion. Thus the present study will try to examine this fundamental ambiguity through two representative contemporary French thinkers: Gaston Bachelard, the manner how and the reason why he defended the imagination; Jean Baudrillard and what worry projected by him in face to the destructive power of digital-virtual imagery. Again, this fundamental ambiguity may not be the default of imagination itself, but a perplex nature inherent in the human being.

1. Bachelard – in search for a metaphysics of imagination

Often being labeled as “philosopher of science” or epistemologist, Gaston Bachelard is no less a thinker of poetic images; by his particular love for the poems, he is ready for *abandoning rationalism*, or talking metaphorically, ready for living *in the nocturne*, situating himself *out of laboratory*. Neither could he be treated as an irrationalist when he tried to search in the human imagination the origin of scientific

evolution. After a long research of the scientific spirit in the modern time, he went on studying the four elements — fire, water, air and earth — as the four basic psychical factors. So that the four elements represented in the poetic images are on the basis of the material imagination, which comes from the human soul and touches the intimacy of the subject with the object. By holding the difference between the perception and the imagination, Bachelard determines the major function of the image not as the formation but as the deformation.⁴ Thus the deformative action of imagination permits a possibility of the “function of the unreal (*fonction de l'irréel*)”,⁵ he synthesized the ancient contraries of the imagination — random fantasy (phantasm, illusion) and mirroring reflection — in a dialectics of the subjectivity and objectivity. But we should stay prudent in avoiding the usual technical terms as subjectivity and objectivity, which are too conceptual. Behind the dialectics lays the chief justification of the reality of the image; it is the image which presents the world, allows the world to appear:

In other words, the images are, from our point of view, some psychical realities. In its birth, in its flight, the image is, in us, the subject of the verb imagine. The image is not its complement. The world comes to imagine itself in the

⁴ G. Bachelard (1943, 1987:7), “On veut toujours que l’imagination soit la faculté de *former* des images. Or elle est plutôt la faculté de *déformer* les images fournies par la perception, elle est surtout la faculté de nous libérer des images premières, de *changer* les images. ”.

⁵ G. Bachelard (1948a, 1986:3); see also, G. Bachelard (1943, 1987:14); (1957, 1984:16).

human reverie.⁶

From this paragraph we can deduce a first principle of the metaphysics of imagination: image as the primary entity that owes nothing to the other faculties such as understanding, sensation or perception, but originates directly from the soul, from the being of the man.⁷ And likewise we should posit that the Bachelardian axiom would be that the metaphysics of imagination is possible.⁸ If the imagination “might have its own metaphysics”, then the image cannot be epiphenomenal, neither can be resonant of the past nor delusive for the future projection. The image is itself a totality having its own reality; in short, it is an imagining subject. This kind of image far surpasses the Kantian reproductive imagination, in which we should see an original function of production. But since the image is productive and real, how does it have the “function of the unreal”? Is this not a paradox?

⁶ G. Bachelard, (1943, 1987:22): “En d’autres termes, les images sont, de notre point de vue, des réalités psychiques. A sa naissance, en son essor, l’image est, en nous, le sujet du verbe imaginer. Elle n’est pas son complément. Le monde vient s’imaginer dans la rêverie humaine.”

⁷ G. Bachelard (1957, 1984:2) : “quand l’image émerge dans la conscience comme un produit direct du cœur, de l’âme, de l’être de l’homme saisi dans son actualité”.

⁸ Cf., G. Bachelard, (1948a, 1986:5) : “En citant cette pensée de Novalis, pensée qui est une dominante de *l’idéalisme magique*, Spénlé rappelle que Novalis souhaitait que Fichte eût fondé une ‘Fantastique transcendante’. Alors l’imagination aurait sa métaphysique”; (1943, 1987:24); (1957, 1984:3). We have in mind the Deleuzean analysis of Bergson about a regression from psychology to ontology: “Il faut que la durée psychologique ne soit qu’un cas bien déterminé, une ouverture sur une durée ontologique. Il faut que l’ontologie soit possible.” (Gilles Deleuze, 1966:44).

The paradox doesn't come from the verbal opposition between "real" and "unreal", but from a deeper level of problem: is there any reference in image and imagination? This question leads the late Bachelard to adopt the phenomenological method in his *The Poetics of Space* (1957), after his grandiose analyses of material images using the psychoanalytical method, from *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (*La psychanalyse du feu*, 1938) to *The Earth and the Reveries of Rest* (*La terre et les rêveries du repos*, 1948). The perception has surely its referential objects, but it is not necessary for the imagination to be referential; in another way, an image will be auto-referential, or taking the phenomenological term, intentional. The intentionality contained in the imagination is not the bare reality of the objective world; it rather concerns the pure immanence and intimacy. The "unreal" doesn't revoke the reality of whatever matter, but suspends this reality by giving place to the intimacy of the matter linked to the human consciousness. Even the matter has a depth, an intimacy! We can cite the affirmation of Bachelard:

Briefly, the matters doubtless real, though inconsistent and mobile, demanded to be imagined in depth, in an intimacy of the substance and of the force. But with the substance of earth, the matter brings so many positive experiences; the form is so brilliant, so evident, so real, that one can hardly see how one can give flesh to the reveries that touch the intimacy of the matter.⁹

⁹ G. Bachelard (1948a, 1986:2) : "Bref, des matières sans doute réelles, mais inconsistantes et mobiles, demandaient à être imaginées en profondeur, dans une intimité de la substance et de la force. Mais avec la substance de la terre, la matière apporte tant d'expériences positives, la forme est si éclatante, si évidente, si réelle, qu'on ne voit guère comment on peut donner corps à des rêveries touchant l'intimité de la matière. ".

By the word *intimacy*, while guarding the discrepancy with the term *reality*, the soul is connected to the matter; the image renders possible the communication, the *correspondence* (in the sense of Baudelaire) of the two beings.¹⁰ For the image is itself deeply rooted in the sphere of Being. The communication between the soul and the matter is certainly not situated in the social domain that is attributed to the “function of the real”; on the contrary, the function of the unreal will “find the values of solitude” that throws the imagining being into the space of the intimacy.¹¹ In this way, the intentionality of the image fulfills, not the demand of reality, but the demand of intimacy.

Through this solution of the primary paradox, we can go further to consider the ontological status of the image. Since

¹⁰ See the versets of Charles Baudelaire from the poem *Correspondances* : “La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers / Laissant parfois sortir de confuses paroles / L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles / Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers./ Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent, / Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité, / Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté, / Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent. ” (originally collected in *Les Fleurs du Mal*),(1975:11). Bachelard gave his remarks, concerning the theme of “intimate immensity”, on the word *vast* (*vaste* in French) by which the intimacy and the *correspondence* -communication are united. The deductive chain is as the following -- 1) the synthetic function : “sous le signe du mot *vaste*, l’âme trouve son être synthétique. Le mot *vaste* réunit les contraires. ” (1957, 1984:175) ; 2) the immensity with the intimacy : “ En leur principe, les ‘correspondances’ accueillent l’immensité du monde et la transforment en une intensité de notre être intime. ”(1957, 1984:176). Baudelaire’s idea of “universal analogy” — in relation to the imagination — is of interest, but cannot be studied in details here (cf. notes of C. Pichois in his Pléiade edition of *Baudelaire. Œuvres complètes*, 1975:841; Lois Boe Hyslop, 1992:39-42, I am also grateful to the referee’s comment on this topic.).

¹¹ Cf., G. Bachelard (1948a, 1986:3).

the image rises out of the sphere of intimacy and reserves the pure solitude, the imagination can initiate an intimate world in the sole image. Again, we should not forget the methodological demand: Bachelard uses the concept of the pure sublimation, instead of the psychoanalytical concept of sublimation forced by the unconscious. In the eyes of Bachelard, the principle and causality of the unconscious is submitted to the function of the real, rather than to the function of the unreal. The psychical depth determines no more the causes of any complexes from the past experience, from the nightmare; in fact, the image is evoked to set free the human soul from all these suffering causes. A quasi cutting-off between the past and the present is inserted by the images that "open toward the future".¹² Using the concept of pure sublimation "*which sublimates nothing, which is relieved from the burden of passions, free from the pression of desires*",¹³ Bachelard took a methodical turn: the phenomenology is now in first rank. By taking into account the image as a phenomenon, what is concerned is no more the personality of the poet, of the author, but the impersonal personality, "*the poetic act, the sudden image, the blaze of the being in the imagination*";¹⁴ in short, it concerns a phenomenology of imagination, which is:

A study of phenomenon of the poetic image when the image emerges in the consciousness as a direct product of heart, of the soul, of the being of man caught in his actuality.¹⁵

¹² G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:16) : "L'imagination, dans ses vives actions, nous détache à la fois du passé et de la réalité. Elle ouvre sur l'avenir. "

¹³ G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:12).

¹⁴ G. Bachelard (1957, 1984:2).

¹⁵ Ibid.

The task of this phenomenology is to get rid of the secret suffering of the poet, pointed out by the psychoanalyst, and to pass to “*the unlivd images, to the images that the life don’t prepare and that the poet creates. It is a matter of living the unlivd and to open oneself to the opening of language.*”¹⁶ This is at the same time an opening to language and an opening to novelty; what is new is that which is not already seen, already known, already experienced, in a word, which is not yet lived. The function of the unreal is jointed to this kind of opening to novelty, opening to the future. But is this opening to the future a simple projection of desire? Bachelard will give us a negative answer; for the key to the door of the future is the image, and precisely is the imagining image that can create, produce and bring the novelty to the life. Not only getting a methodological value and a certainty in phenomenology, Bachelard also recognized an ontological value through the image which have access to the language. The poetic language is equally a speech of Being.

Here we meet our second principle of metaphysics of imagination, which is more complicated, for the language is engaged in the play of image and Being, wherein the vital and permanent Logos is recalled as the key-term: “*the poetic image, event of logos, for us is personally innovative*”.¹⁷ Curiously Bachelard owns the same view as Heidegger without ever

¹⁶ G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:13).

¹⁷ G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:7)

mentioning the name,¹⁸ he said,

In a general thesis, we think that all that is specifically human in man is logos. We can't reach to meditate in a region that would be before the language.¹⁹

As we have seen earlier, Bachelard always emphasizes the priority of poetry — “*the poetic image puts us in the origin of the speaking being.*”²⁰ The language, the uttering of Being, reveals the intimacy of man with Being and the depth of the soul. In this context, the soul is different from the spirit, similarly, the poetry is “*a phenomenology of the soul, rather than a phenomenology of spirit*”;²¹ and in a further search of the domain of dreaming consciousness, the soul, returned to its Latin etymology *anima*, guards an intrinsic distinction between *animus* and *anima*, in which Bachelard expands also the vision of C. G. Jung. In parallel to this distinction of psychic faculties,

¹⁸ Even the name of Husserl is hardly mentioned as the representative role of phenomenology. Apparently, there is no place for ignorance of the discipline; eventually, Susan Bachelard, daughter of our philosopher, is a well-known translator and commentator of Husserl's *Formale und Transzendente Logik* (*Logique formelle et logique transcendante*, Paris: PUF, 1957).

¹⁹ G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:7).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:4).

he insists on the priority of the reverie to the dream,²² which corresponds to the emphasis on the importance of imagination instead of the manipulation of the unconscious. But as a whole, to clarify the significance of poetic image, the soul “*possesses an interior light, a light that an interior vision knows and translates into the world of shining colors, into the world of the sunlight*”,²³ a light that is never the reflection of a light of outer world. The main function of soul is not to know the external world, which is rather the task of spirit, but to pay attention to the fulguration of Being, the instant of its appearance. In his earlier work *Intuition of the Instant*, Bachelard had meditated the close proximity between the poetic instant and the metaphysical instant:

The poetry is an instantaneous metaphysics. In a short poem, the poetry must give a vision of the universe and the secret of a soul, a being and the objects, all at the same time.²⁴

The poetic image can thus be single, very concentrated, but filling the whole space without a long interval. The poetic

²² In French, the reverie (*rêverie*) is feminine, and the dream (*rêve*) is masculine, just like *anima* in latin is feminine, designating the “soul”, and *animus* masculine, the “spirit”; the distinction of the gender of words leads Bachelard to open a series of “reveries on reverie” and to say: “Dreams (*rêve*, m.) and reveries (*rêverie*, f.), dreams (*songe*, m.) and daydreams (*songerie*, f.), memories (*souvenir*, m.) and remembrance (*souvenance*, f.) are all indications of a need to make everything feminine which is enveloping and soft above and beyond the too simply masculine designations for our states of mind.” In: G. Bachelard (1961a, 1986:25); (1969:29).

²³ G. Bachelard(1957, 1984:5).

²⁴ Paragraph written in: *Messages : Métaphysique et Poésie*, 1939, Number 2; recollected in: G. Bachelard(1932, 1985:103).

instant, incarnated in the sole image, has the possibility to recall the speech of Being; Bachelard borrowed from E. Minkowski a term, reverberation (*retentissement*), to designate this instantaneous filling, a quasi non-temporal constitution of totality. In the usage of the word *retentissement*, Minkowski explicated it as a fundamental phenomenon of life, not limited in the sonorous, auditory type, but allowing every tiny part in the universe to be touched and to be synchronous with all the others:

I believe that it's by this [word, i.e. *retentissement*] that we saw the world to be animated and filled, out of all instruments, out of all physical properties, out of penetrating and deep waves which, for not being sonorous in sensory sense of the word, will be no less harmonious, resonant, melodious, susceptible of determining all the tonality of life. And this life itself will reverberate, until in the deepest part of its being, in contact with these waves, sonorous and silent at the same time, it will be penetrated by them, will vibrate in union with them, to live their life in confounding with them in a whole.²⁵

Just as Minkowski used the metaphor of reverberation to indicate this basic and synchronous sympathy in revealing the totality of life, Bachelard gave a great credit to the image, — even to single, immediate and instantaneous image. So Bachelard held the cosmological sense of the image, as Minkowski, that the poetic image is as well rooted in the world as revealing the visage of the world. Thus he said,

In the poet's reverie, the world is imagined, directly imagined. There, we are touching on one of the

²⁵ Eugène Minkowski(1936:102), (We add the bracket “[word, i.e. *retentissement*]” to make the sentence more clear.).

paradoxes of the imagination: while thinkers who reconstruct a world retrace a long path of reflections, the cosmic image is immediate. It gives us the whole before the parts. In its exuberance, it believes it is telling the whole of the Whole. It holds the universe with one of its signs. A single image invades the whole universe. (...) The dreamer could not doubt that he is in a world. A single, cosmic image gives him a unity of reverie, a unity of world.²⁶

The singularity of image can evoke the totality of the world, but the immediacy of image allows no distance between the one who imagines (or the dreamer) and the universe. The poetic image of solitude and of singularity recalls the ontological intimacy and releases the anxiety of solitude, so *“when he has detached himself from the worry which comes to him from the worry of others, when he is thus truly the author of his solitude, when he can finally contemplate a beautiful aspect of the universe without counting the minutes, that dreamer feels a being opening within him. Suddenly such a dreamer is a world dreamer (rêveur du monde)”*.²⁷ But this reverie of world is never illusory, i.e. not to be taken as a dream that will be destructed, annihilated while being awoken, a pseudo-reality to be corrected by the true reality; this image of the world can be productive: *“From the time of the opening of the world through an image, the world dreamer inhabits the world which has just been offered him. A universe can be born from an isolated image.”*²⁸

So we come to the thesis about the imagination of the

²⁶ G. Bachelard (1961a, 1986:150); (1969:175).

²⁷ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:148); (1969:173).

²⁸ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:150); (1969:175).

world, imagination related to the world and in the world. The imagined image and the imaging image have the same destiny and the same vocation. The real couple is the being-in-the-world and the image-in-the-world. The metaphysics of imagination is thus based on the fundamental intimacy of Being and Image, of ontology and poetry. The search for the original, for the primitive gives credit to the pure intimacy crystallized by the pure sublimation; therefore the image of the world raises the purity of the world which is the sole originality:

Cosmic reverie makes us live in a state which must be designated as ante-perceptive. The communication between the dreamer and his world is very close in reverie; it has no 'distance', not that distance which marks the perceived world, the world fragmented by perception.²⁹

In his imagination, the poet-dreamer contemplates the world —

In his solitary reverie, the dreamer of cosmic reverie is the veritable subject of the verb 'to contemplate', the primary evidence of the power of contemplation. The World is then the direct object of the verb 'to contemplate'.³⁰

But since "the contemplating subject" retains also "*the double valorization of the world and of its dreamer, it seems that one knows a communication of two principles of vision between the beautiful object and seeing it beautiful*".³¹ Thanks to the imagination and the fact of being imagined, the object could become active. The subject transmits his activity to this

²⁹ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:149-150); (1969:174).

³⁰ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:149); (1969:174).

³¹ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:159); (1969:185).

object, and the identity of subject-object is no more a fact of perception, of knowledge, but a fundamental communication of the two poles. The dynamics is transmitted in double directions: the contemplating subject is merged to the imagined, contemplated world; on the contrary, the world becomes active, it activates the imagination of a subject. The monotonous fixation of directional activity is suspended:

The world wishes to see itself; the world lives in an active curiosity with ever open eyes. In uniting mythological dreams (*songes*), we can say: The Cosmos is an Argus. The Cosmos, a sum of beauties, is an Argus, a sum of ever open eyes. Thus the theorem of the reverie of vision is translated to the cosmic level: everything that shines sees, and there is nothing in the world which shines more than a look.³²

Through the cosmic image, the world is *reduced* (in a phenomenological, positive sense) to its own original activity. Every action in the world is thus regarded as a cosmic action. The body fire is a cosmic fire, as well as the immobility of the earth stands guarantee for the dreams of cosmicity,³³ thus the breath turned out to be a cosmic air-breath:

It would be too little to say that the earth breathes as man does. One must say that Goethe breathes as the earth breathes. Goethe breathes with all his lungs as the earth breathes with all its atmosphere. The man who reaches the

³² G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:159); (1969:185-186).

³³ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:161); (1969:187): "The great dreams of cosmicity are guarantees of the immobility of the earth. Even if reason, after long work, comes to prove that the earth turns, it is no less true that such a declaration is *oneirically absurd*."

glory of breathing breathes cosmically.³⁴

So we have the cosmic subjectivity in total, the intimacy is situated in the bond linking the human subjectivity to the cosmic subjectivity. Meanwhile, the linking “bond” here, or the In-between, borrowing the term “*das Zwischen*” elevated by Heidegger, is “the World of the word (le *Monde de la parole*)”. The word (*parole*), i.e. poetic entity, constitutes the bridge between the poet (dreamer, speaker) and the world, and it makes possible all types of communication based on the cosmic communication. We can suppose further that the *communicatio sui* is not sufficient if only being enclosed in the *absolute* (which means “excluding”) subjectivity, the word establishes a basic type of communication which is specifically focused on the opening of the subjectivity. So the cosmic communication explains the mutual, double opening of the human subjectivity and of the cosmic subjectivity. Bachelard assured us this point:

A spoken reverie transforms the solitary dreamer’s solitude into a company open to all the beings of the world. The dreamer speaks to the world, and now the world is speaking to him. Just as the duality of the looked-at to the looking-at is magnified into a duality of the Cosmos to the Argus, the subtler duality of the Voice and the Sound rises to the cosmic level of a duality of the breath and the wind. Where is the dominant being of the spoken reverie? When a dreamer speaks, who is speaking, he or the world?³⁵

The image that gives birth to the imagined being is endorsed by the spoken image as the bridge between the Human and the world. The Being is incessantly animated and proved by the poetic speech. The image of the world authorizes,

³⁴ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:155); (1969: 180-181).

³⁵ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:160-161); (1969:187).

in the free communication, the transcendence of Being, but before this transcendence, the image must firstly be immanent in the world. So the image in the world is suddenly both an assurance of the cosmicity of Being and a proof of the beingness of the world.

As a temporary conclusion, we can be sure that, by the attempt of justifying the image and the imagination, Bachelard conducted and, if better, in-ducted us to the dimension of freedom,³⁶ of the intimacy, and of immanence-transcendence. It is Bachelard who makes us to listen:

The Water which 'is sleeping' all back in the pond, the fire which 'is sleeping' beneath the ashes, all the air of the world which 'is sleeping' in fragrance — all these 'sleeping beings' (*dormants*) bear witness, by sleeping so well, to an interminable dream. In the cosmic reverie, nothing is inert, neither the world nor the dreamer; everything lives with a secret life, so everything speaks sincerely. The poet listens and repeats. The voice of the poet is a voice of the world.³⁷

We imagine worlds where our life would take on all its brilliance, warmth and development. Poets lead us into cosmoses which are being endlessly renewed.³⁸

The originality of the Bachelardian discovery will exactly be that the image speaks for us, through us, to the inner core of

³⁶ Bachelard has interpreted the *empathy* as *in-duction* (playing with German words *Ein-fühlung* and *Ein-führung*), which reveals the intimate space as "the space of null dimension" (« *l'espace à nulle dimension* », terms of Joé Bousquet); see, G.Bachelard(1943, 1987¹⁶:16-17).

³⁷ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:162); (1969:188).

³⁸ G. Bachelard(1961a, 1986:21); (1969:23).

us; and reversely, when we learn to express ourselves by listening to the Logos of image, our expressions will be “a voice of the world”.

2. Baudrillard— question of the appearing reality

In a quite different way, Jean Baudrillard criticized the illusion of the world, which may seem at first sight to be a negative answer to the demand of image. But in fact, the imagination is not the producer of this illusion; on the contrary, the “reality” in modern times (esp. in the times of mass media) is suspect of murdering the life of imagination. This is the difficult concept of “crime” in the sense of Baudrillard. He showed a crisis of the truth in the digital era where the reality itself becomes the problem. The search for the reality, whatever physical or psychic, or even ultimate, is easily replaced by the cheap reproduction of the reality — the quasi-perfect simulation, the Virtual Reality. In other words, the reality is no more an object of desire, an X, but becomes a surplus. The reality is immediately a hyperreality, an irony of itself.

The primary irony of the world is, according to Baudrillard, that the world is itself, in providing the reality, the radical illusion. But the second (and inverse) irony comes after: since the existence of the illusion is for its own annulment, thus, in so far as existent, the illusion gives way to the reality of the world; the illusion exists for the disillusionment. This corresponds to the theological justification of evil: the evil exists in order to prepare the nullification of itself. How comes the “perfect crime”? — By affirming the reality as **the** Reality, by “*This gigantic enterprise of disillusionment — of, literally, putting the illusion of the world to death, to leave an absolutely real world in its stead — is what is properly meant by*

simulation.”³⁹ Unfortunately, we live in the age of the “crime” — “*of a crime — of the murder of reality. And the extermination of an illusion — the vital illusion, the radical illusion of the world.*”⁴⁰ Within this crime, the technology is the killing machine, the murdering tool, without knowing the fact; or put in another way, the naivety of modern technology consists in its full function and its total exploit, in its essence of usurpation. Fortunately, the crime is not yet perfect, still unaccomplished:

Were it not for appearances, the world would be a perfect crime, that is, 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 [traces] being left behind.

But the fact is that the crime is never perfect, for the world betrays itself by appearances, which are the clues to its non-existence, the traces of the continuity of the nothing. For the nothing itself — the continuity of the nothing — leaves traces. And that is the way the world betrays its secret. That is the way it allows itself to be sensed, while at the same time hiding away behind appearances.⁴¹

These citations from the first paragraph of the first title in *Le crime parfait* (*The Perfect Crime*) speak in the warning tone kept all over the book, and allow developing a continuous confrontation of the clues and the scenes of a crime.

³⁹ J. Baudrillard (1995:35); we cite here the English translation(1996:16).

⁴⁰ J. Baudrillard(1995:13), (2 pages before page 1, where there is no pagination).

⁴¹ J. Baudrillard(1995:15); (1996:1).

In parallel to the procedure of crime, the imagination is not deemed to be a criminal, but itself being the victim. There is a difference between imagination and simulation. In Bachelard, the characteristic function of image/imagination is to deform, likewise, what Baudrillard laments on the fabricated image is not its distortion of the reality, but the castration of the ability of distortion.

If we begin to examine the state of fact of images in the contemporary world, the scene will soon appear before the eyes as an infinite proliferation of the images; the images are on TV, in the Movie, in videocassettes, in DVD, in every title of magazine, in the journals, in DM, in the PC, in Internet, in short, in everywhere. The images are there to be looked up, to be seen, to be viewed; behind the sight, there is infinite merchandizing process. For the best, the image is for sale, so the well-printed page, the high resolution, the huge pixels, the rich colored picture, etc., the more enchanting a image is, the more overbid it is on the market. But this kind of image is an ultimate presentation of imagination? Not really. Especially when we examine more closely, we will find, behind the cutely produced image, there is a procedure of production, a technology, and a highly developed intelligence. Thus the problem is no more to blame the domination of eyes, of sight, but the intelligence that manipulates the vision. Taken metaphysically, this is the crossroad of the intelligence and the imagination, of the presentation (including representation) and the concealment. The very question is concerned with the image and its duplicate.

Therefore we can read in the lines of Baudrillard how the imagination is blocked up:

Now, the image can no longer imagine the real, because it is the real. It can no longer dream it, since it is its virtual reality. It is as though things had swallowed their own mirrors and had become transparent to themselves, entirely

present to themselves in a ruthless transcription, full in the light and in real time. Instead of being absent from themselves in illusion, they are forced to register on thousands of screens, off whose horizons not only the real has disappeared, but the image too. The reality has been driven out of reality. Only technology perhaps still binds together the scattered fragments of the real. But what has become of the constellation of meaning in all this?⁴²

For Bachelard, in imagining the world, the image presents itself **as** a reality; by the realization of image, the traditional philosophical dream of reaching the object finally finds its actualization in the imagination where the subject meets the object. When the imagination is proved to be real, the identity of the imagining and the imagined turns out to be true. But the accusation of Baudrillard shows a worry about the total appearance of the reality in the image; meanwhile, **the image is the reality**, so that there is no further need to activate the imagination, to approaching the image to the reality. The original alterity between the image and the reality is postponed — the metaphor of mirror reflection is no longer peaceful, nor full of wonder, but indicating the scene of crime, *“as though things had swallowed their own mirrors and had become transparent to themselves”*—, correlatively, the reality annihilates itself in an unimaginable way. The reality replaces the reality, disappears in the reality: this illogical raving sentence covers a basic logic of the “strategy of disappearance”. In the absolute transparent reality, the imagination is short-circuited. Together with the dysfunction of imagination, the symbolic function, the interpretation, the explanation of signs and the industry of the meanings are fallen into nonsense. Along with the “strategy of disappearance”, the will to truth is

⁴² J. Baudrillard(1995:18-19); (1996:4).

reversed:

Perhaps, through technology, the world is toying with us, the object is seducing us by giving us the illusion of power over it. A dizzying hypothesis: rationality, culminating in technical virtuality, might be the last of the ruses of unreason, of that will to illusion of which, as Nietzsche says, the will to truth is merely a derivative and an avatar.⁴³

The will to truth, better to be specified as truth as presence in total technical exploit, gets what appears to it; but as a whole, the horizon of presence is a play of illusion. The technical virtuality dominating the objects is merely the ruse of the will to illusion, a ruse that may finally be the ruse of the world, or even the ruse of God. Now, the image is engaged in the gigantic fraud of the reality. In the theological sense, it is the retreat of Father that makes possible the advent of the Son; the retreat of God allows the appearance of the world. The world may be the conspirator of the illusion game plotted by God. The technology, using the simulation of no flaw, is also the by-product of this retreat:

On the horizon of simulation, not only has the world disappeared but the very question of its existence can no longer be posed. But this is perhaps a ruse of the world itself. The iconolaters of Byzantium were subtle folk, who claimed to represent God to his greater glory but who, simulating God in images, thereby dissimulated the problem of his existence. Behind each of these images, in fact, God had disappeared. He was not dead; he had disappeared. That is to say, the problem no longer even arose. It was resolved by simulation. This is what we do with the problem of the truth or reality of this world: we

⁴³ J. Baudrillard(1995:19-20); (1996:5).

have resolved it by technical simulation, and by creating a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see.

But is it not the strategy of God himself to use images in order to disappear, himself obeying the urge to leave no trace?⁴⁴

In this observation, Baudrillard takes the turn to answer the question about the “essence of technology” posed by Heidegger, the basic line of thinking remains similar — the affair of technology is far from being simple abuse of human power, it is rather the symptom of all the invisible strategy of the becoming history of the world in accomplishing the retreat of God; in short, it is an affair of metaphysics and theology. Seen from this point of view, the image is as the sacrifice and the simulation will be the rite itself.

Also seen from the metaphysical level, the inverse function of the image is not astray from the line of the metaphysics of will — the basic presupposition, from Paracelsus to Jacob Boehme, that the imagination is ontologically related to the will (will to creation, will to truth); the misery of the suspension of imagination in digital synthetic images tells a story of the becoming phantom of the will, so this will is actualized as the will to illusion. The destiny of the will to illusion declared and determined by Nietzsche is strongly approved, in an extreme way, in so far as it reveals the radical illusion and the final illusion — the world itself and its history as illusion —. The creation is transplanted with and usurped by the simulation, and the redemption is evaporated in the crime. Here is the description of Baudrillard:

The radical illusion is that of the original crime, by which

⁴⁴ J. Baudrillard(1995:20); (1996:5).

the world is alter-ed from the beginning, and is never identical to itself, never real. The world exists only through this definitive illusion which is that of the play of appearances - the very site of the unceasing disappearance of all meaning and all finality. And this is not merely metaphysical: in the physical order, too, from its origin - whatever that may be - the world has been forever appearing and disappearing.

An alter-ation which tends to diminish with increasing information and which will, in the end, be eliminated by absolute information: the world's equivalence to the world - the final illusion, that of a world which is perfect, fully realized, fully effectuated, a world which is consummated and has attained the height of existence and reality, and also the furthestmost extent of its possibilities. It is God (this we cannot hide) who stands at the end of this process of increasing information and complexification, of verification of the world in real time. It is God who presides over this dissolution of the world as illusion and its resurrection as simulacrum and virtual reality, at the end of a process of extenuation of all its possibilities by the real. It is God who presides over the unconditional realization of the world and its final illusion. God is never at the origin, but always at the end. And so we can say that that end is necessarily an unhappy one, and it is as well to leave it hanging.⁴⁵

This citation of two paragraphs is of high interest: from the rhetoric side, 1) Baudrillard notified the execution of both realities — metaphysical and physical—, perhaps we should add the theological reality, even it was the effect of God's abandoning the reality, 2) all possibilities of escaping from the illusion are exhausted, therefore, this illusion is radical and

⁴⁵ J. Baudrillard(1995:25); (1996:8-9).

final. These two implicit formulations rejoin in one thing, that is, there is no more escape space for the metaphysical meditation in keeping the distinction between the meta-physical and the physical. The effect is in fact global, cosmic; or put in another way, however many the worlds are, the result is the same, the manifold world must be reduced to the one world-effect, the effect of the withdrawal of the reality. This insistence on the cosmological consequence by Baudrillard is similar to that of Bachelard and Minkowski, although in the opposite direction. The triumph of the total illusion is pretty conforming to the modern scientific dream which is the pure transparency of the material world, of the observed and the lived world, in short, the transparency of the world as object; this dream has come true, while realizing it, the further possibility of dream is at the same time destroyed. To the extent that the whole world is encoded into the information system and the landscapes translated into the huge database, or databank, the information equivalence pushes the world into its end, its perfection, but beyond this point, there is no more world, no more need of world.

By considering the basic discovery of Baudrillard on the metaphysical consequence of the cosmic information, we can further understand the dark side of the romantic idea of In-formation (*Ein-bildung*) as seen in Schelling and Novalis; the black-out of this “Gay Information Science” needs to be notified in the encoding/decoding process which transforms the world to be its digital double. Since the In-formation is connected to the writing-in of cosmic codes, the reality shows it in the “automatic writing of the world” —

Our ‘thoughts’ will be actualized even before they occur, exactly like the event in the information system. If that is what we must necessarily come to, then the consequence would be that the whole system of thought would soon be aligned to the system of the machine. Thought would end up

thinking only what the machine can take in and process, or would think only when the machine requests it. This is already how things stand with computers and information technology. In the generalized interface, thought itself will become virtual reality, the equivalent of computer-generated images or the automatic writing of wordprocessors.⁴⁶

Another strange consequence of this “automatic writing of the world”: ironically, when we count on the recording process of our daily reality, by recording everything (images, sounds, words, thought waves, genes), we simulate everything on the screen and become the actors of world theatre. And Baudrillard reminds us of the fact that:

No need of the headset and the data suit: it is our will that ends up moving about the world as though inside a computer-generated image. We have all swallowed our receivers, and this produces intense interference on account of the excessive proximity of life and its double, and the collapsing of time and distance. Whether in this telepresence, in the live TV psychodrama or in the immediacy of information on all screens, what we have here is the same short-circuiting of real life.⁴⁷

The result is that we can make us the actors, actually as seen in the TV games, in the interactive PC games, and even less virtually, in the interactive on-line talk, like ICQ, Net-Meeting. The connection of the image and the will is so well, maybe too well, too perfect, so that the perfection and the disalienation form the new terror — “*Having no more victims to devour, the critical illusion has devoured itself*”⁴⁸. There is

⁴⁶ J. Baudrillard(1995:56); (1996:32).

⁴⁷ J. Baudrillard(1995:49); (1996:26-27).

⁴⁸ J. Baudrillard(1995:50); (1996:27).

no need of spectators, for we are “*actors in the performance, and actors increasingly integrated into the course of that performance*”.⁴⁹ Further more, the action to change the world, to avoid the alienation in the exploitation of labor, seems to be of trivial sense in comparison to the clone operation containing the socio-, photo- and videosynthesis. What is touched is not only the social, economical, political dimensions, it is global and cosmic, so the basic factor of labor is losing itself in the labyrinth of artificial interface of the world. Even the aesthetical function of artistic labor stands at no while, as the perfect simulation halts the imagination, so we have under the digital circumstance:

The high-definition image. This has nothing to do with representation, and even less to do with aesthetic illusion. The whole generic illusion of the image is cancelled out by technical perfection. As hologram or virtual reality or three-dimensional picture, the image is merely the emanation of the digital code which generates it. It is merely the mania for making an image no longer an image or, in other words, it is precisely what removes a dimension from the real world.⁵⁰

How then can we laud the intimacy with the world in the imagination, as Bachelard has taught us? In the eyes of Baudrillard, the alienation and the alterity are necessary to prevent us from the illusion of the world. The time delay is natural and necessary, the “Real Time” defined in communication science is just an illusion of time; similarly, the gap in space is necessary: “*This distance is vital, for without it we would perceive nothing; everything would be totally crowded together, as it doubtless was in the primal state of the world - the*

⁴⁹ J. Baudrillard(1995:49); (1996:27).

⁵⁰ J. Baudrillard(1995:53); (1996:30).

only state we can say existed in real time, since all matter was coexistent with itself, present to itself at a single point and a single moment. Once that initial (and perfectly hypothetical) state came to an end, the illusion of the world began."⁵¹ The time interval and space distance are of the same order of difference, of alterity; the alterity is justified on the cosmological scale and on the ontological level. And with the omnipotence of technology which makes possible what is "impossible at the cosmic level or in the sphere of memory and time", the warning is: "*That distance, that absence, are under threat*",⁵² "*Today we are threatened with lethal sunstroke, with a blinding profusion, by the ceaseless feedback of all information to all points of the globe.*"⁵³ The control of human technology over the world is in fact not so "human", maybe the cunning intelligence of the world consists in the surrendering to the technical simulation, to the Artificial Intelligence. So that the human race will be enslaved by its own invention, and at that time, the declared triumph of the human being is, in the end, a defeat.

A possible suggestion might be to reserve the place of alterity:

Now, otherness is that happy distortion without which everyone would simultaneously be me. It is the vital illusion of otherness which prevents the ego from succumbing to absolute reality. Language, too, is what prevents everything from signifying at every moment, and allows us to escape the perpetual irradiation of meaning. This specific illusion of language, this poetic function, no longer exists in virtual or

⁵¹ J. Baudrillard(1995:82-83); (1996:52).

⁵² J. Baudrillard(1995:83); (1996:52).

⁵³ J. Baudrillard (1995:83); (1996:53).

digital languages, where the equivalence is total, the interaction as well regulated as in closed question-and-answer circuits and the energy as immediately decodable as a heat source's energy is decodable by water in a pan. These languages are no more languages than the computer-generated image is an image.⁵⁴

This is another way to search for oneself in the otherness. The contribution of Baudrillard is to note out the trap of identity, the illusion of identity. Any prosthesis of the Other can cause the chain of the crime. The identity may be more fatal than the alienation. Under the will to reality, there should be a threshold regulated by the alterity, preventing the illusion from being absorbed in the omnipresence of reality.

3. Conclusion

The contemporary reflection on the fundamental status of imagination is inevitably a struggle on both sides: a revival of metaphysical force in image and an awakening from the nightmare of simulation technology. Bachelard tried to discover the imaginative creativity in the material dreams and to indicate the constructive cooperation of the image and the world. The romantic metaphysical suppositions of Imagination as creation ferment in Bachelardian poetics of images. This imagination is also the *In-formation* (*Einbildung*) that gives the new forms. On the other side, Baudrillard saw the danger of the decadence of in-formation, realized in the handicaps of images. The perfect simulation by and with the computer, on the omnipresent screen, ruins the original connection between the image and the world. The *too real* image blocks the imagination — whatever aesthetical, social, political or

⁵⁴ J. Baudrillard(1995:84); (1996:53).

ethical —, just as the artificial language doesn't really expand nor enrich the realm of *logos*.

Some questions are still remained. Following the indication to the intimacy of the poetic image and Being, a metaphysical desire is deduced peacefully. Does the search for the intimacy mean to restore the original relation of being to reality? Is this restoration itself illusory? Whether the ontological intimacy is necessarily a regression to the origin or, on the contrary, a forward creation? On the other side, if the role of imagination is mediation between the subject and the world, can the imagination refrain from the over-expansion of the infinite mediation, i.e. the risk of self-annihilation in mediating oneself? To view these points as a whole, we can take into account the above-mentioned two-sided consideration of image. However, a threshold of difference, of alterity should be respected: for together with the vanishing of the otherness, the world disappears in its appearances. The synthetic image fails its function of building the reality, while the reality of the world is usurped by the illusion. In paying attention to the play of difference, we have the sense that the image is at the crossroads of the world.

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徘徊於十字路口的形象與想像：論巴修拉與波希亞*

黃冠閔

摘要

檢討形象與想像的問題，在現代的電子紀元中，同時必須面對兩方面的困難，其一是傳統形上學的多重理論界定，另一面為今日來自科技模擬的電子影像充斥，逐漸使得形象、影像的地位竄奪了實在。本文藉由分析巴修拉與布希亞的觀點，對照地探索形象與想像的兩種面向。巴修拉的觀點扣在想像的形上學之脈絡下，嘗試恢復想像在詩意象中的創造功能。形象（意象）所涉及的是人與世界的內在親密性，因此，既非呼應於知覺的認識功能，

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也不受制於記憶中過去的心理因果律；詩意象特別突顯出語言中形象的存有論地位，從而為想像奠定一種非封閉的主體性原則。布希亞則注意到影像氾濫時代中的哲學意涵，他提出了深具反諷意味而更普遍的批判；逼真的模擬其實執行著「實在」的隱身策略—「實在」用顯現實在來謀殺實在。因此，在真實的影像面前，想像被扼殺了；而實在的同一性則吞噬了差異所蘊含的創造性。本文藉著這兩方面的檢討，嘗試將想像的形上學中可能的內在原則與困難勾勒出來。

關鍵詞：形象、意象、影像、想像、世界、實在、虛擬性、
虛擬實境、形上學、詩學

