Beauchamp-Effet... Beauchamp-Machine... Beauchamp-Thing - how can we name it? The puzzle of this carcass of signs and flux, of networks and circuits... the ultimate gesture toward translation of an unnameable structure: that of social relations consigned to a system of surface ventilation (animation, self-regulation, information, media) and an in-depth, irreversible implosion. A monument to mass simulation effects, the Centre functions like an incinerator, absorbing and devouring all cultural energy, rather like the black monolith of 2001 - a mad convection current for the materialization, absorption and destruction of all the contents within it.

The neighbourhood all around is merely a buffer zone, recast, disinfected by snobbish and hygienic design, psychologically. It's a vacuum-making machine, somewhat like nuclear power centres. Their real danger lies not in lack of safety, pollution, explosion, but in the maximum-security system that radiates from them, the zone of surveillance and deterrence that spreads by degrees over the entire terrain - a technical, ecological, economic, geopolitical buffer zone. What does the nucleus matter? The Centre is a matrix for developing a model of absolute security, subject to generalization on all social levels, one that is most profoundly a model of deterrence. (It is the very same one that serves to regulate us globally under the sign of peaceful coexistence and the simulation of atomic peril.)

With allowances made for scale, the same model is developed through the Centre: cultural fission, political deterrence. This being said, the circulation of fluids is uneven. All the traditional fluids - exhaust, coolant, electricity - flow smoothly. But already the circulation of human masses is less assured (the archaic solution of escalators moving through plastic tubes... they should have used suction, propulsion, or what have you, some kind of motion in the image of that baroque theatricality of flux which makes for the originality of the carcass). And as for the stock - works of art, objects, books - as well as the so-called polyvalent interior workspace: there the flow has stopped entirely. The deeper you penetrate into the interior, the less circulation you find. It's the exact opposite of Roissy, where after moving through a space-age, futuristic design radiating outward from a centre, you end up prosaically at... ordinary airplanes. But the incoherence is the same. (And what of money, that other fluid, what of its mode of circulation, emulsion and fall-out in Beauchamp?)

The contradiction prevails even in the behaviour of the personnel assigned to the 'polyvalent' space and thus with no private place to work. Standing and on the move, the staff effects a laid-back, flexible style: very high-tech, very adapted to the 'structure' of a 'modern' space. But seated in their cubicles which aren't really cubicles, they strain to secrete an artificial solitude, to spin themselves a bubble. Here is another fine strategy of deterrence: they are condemned to expend all their energy on this individual defensive. Here again we find the real contradiction at the centre of the Beauchamp-Thing: a fluid commutative exterior - cool and modern - and an interior upright with old values.

This space of deterrence, linked to the ideology of visibility, transparency, polyvalence, consensus, contact, and sanctioned by the threat to security, is virtually that of all social relations today. The whole of social discourse is there and on both this level and that of cultural manipulation, Beauchamp is in total contradiction to its stated objectives - a brilliant monument of modernity. There is pleasure in the realization that the idea for this was generated not by a revolutionary mind, but by logicians of the establishment wholly lacking in critical spirit, and thus closer to the truth, capable, in their very obscurity, of setting up a basically uncontrollable mechanism, which even by its success escapes them and offers, through its very contradictions, the most exact reflection possible of the present state of affairs.

Granted, the entire cultural contents of Beauchamp are anachronistic, since only an interior void could have corresponded to this architectural envelope. Given the general impression that everything here has long been comatose, that the attempt at animation is nothing but reanimation, and that this is so because the culture itself is dead, Beauchamp figures this forth admirably well, though shamefacedly, when this death called for a triumphant acceptance and the erection of a monument - or antimonument - equal to the phallic inanity, in its time, of the Eiffel Tower. A monument to total disconnection, to hyperreality, and to the cultural implosion actually created by transistor networks continually threatened by a huge short-circuit.

Beauchamp is really a compression sculpture by César: the image of a culture flattened by its own weight, the mobile automobile suddenly frozen into a geometric block. Like César's cars, survivors of an ideal accident, Beauchamp is no longer external but internal to the metallic and mechanical structure, which has made of it a pile of cubas of metal scrap, whose chaos of tubes, levers, chasis, of metal and human flesh within, is cut to the geometric measure of the smallest possible space. So culture at Beauchamp is crushed, twisted, cut out and stamped into its tiniest basic elements - a bunch of transmissions and defunct metabolism, frozen like a science-fiction mechanoid.

Yet, within this carcass, which looks, in any event, like a compression sculpture, instead of crushing and breaking all culture, they exhibit César. Dubuffet is shown, as is the counterculture - whose imagery of opposition merely functions to refer to the defunct culture. Within this carcass that might have served as a mausoleum for the hapless operation of signs, Tinguely's ephemerical, self-destructing machines are re-exhibited under the rubric of the eternal life of culture. Thus everything is neutralized at the same time: Tinguely is embalmed in the museological institution and Beauchamp is trapped within its so-called artistic contents.

Happily, this whole simulacrum of cultural values is undermined from the very outset by the architectural shell. For, with its armatures of tubing and its look of a world's fair pavilion, with its (calculated?) fragility that argues against traditional mentality or monumentality, this thing openly declares that our age will no longer be one of duration, that our only temporal mode is that of the accelerated cycle and of recycling: the time of transistors and fluid flow. Our only culture is basically that of hydrocarbons that of the refining, the cracking, the breaking up of cultural molecules, and of their recombination into synthetic products. This, Beauchamp-Museum wants to hide; but Beauchamp-Carcass proclaims it. And here, truly, is the source of the shell's beauty and the disaster of the interior spaces. The very ideology of 'cultural production' is, in any case, antithetical to culture, just as visibility and multi-
purpose spaces are for culture is a precinct of secrecy, seduction, initiation and symbolic exchange, highly ritualized and restrained. It can't be helped. Too bad for populism. Tough on Beaubourg.

What, then, should have been put inside Beaubourg?

Nothing. Emptiness would signify the complete disappearance of a culture of meaning and of aesthetic sensibility. But even this is too romantic and agonizing; this empty space might have suited a masterpiece of anti-culture.

Perhaps a spinning of strobe lights and gyroscopes, streaking the space whose moving pedestal is created by the crowd?

Beaubourg, however, actually illustrates the fact that an order of simulacra is maintained only by the alibi of a preceding order. A body entirely composed of flux and surface connections chooses for its content the traditional culture of depth. Thus, an anterior order of simulacra (the one of meaning) now supplies the empty substance of a later order: one which no longer even recognizes the distinction between signifier and signified, between container and contents. Therefore, the question ‘What should be in Beaubourg?’ is absurd. It can't be answered because the local distinction between inside and outside can no longer be posited. There is our truth, the truth of Moebius—a utopia that surely is unrealizable, but one which Beaubourg confirms in the sense that any one of its contents is an (internal) contradiction, destroyed from the outset by the container.

And yet... and yet... if Beaubourg really had to contain something it should be a labyrinth, a library of infinite permutations, a game or a lottery for the chance repackaging of destinies—short, a Borgesian world, or better still, a Circular Ruin: a linkage of individuals each dreamed by the other (not a Disneyland of Dream, but a laboratory of practical fiction). An experiment in all the different processes of representation: deflection, implosion, multiplication, chance connections and disconnections—a little like the Exploratorium in San Francisco or the novels of Philip Dick: simply, then, a culture of simulation and simulation, and no longer a culture of production and meaning. Here a proposal of something other than a miserable anticulture.

Is it possible? Clearly not here. But this culture is happening elsewhere, everywhere, nowhere. Henceforth, the only true cultural practice, that of the masses as of ourselves (there is no longer any difference), involves the chance labyrinthine, manipulative play of signs without meaning.

It is, in another sense, not true that Beaubourg displays an incoherence between container and contents. If we give credence to the official cultural project this is true. But what really takes place is the exact reverse. Beaubourg is nothing but a huge mutational operation at work on this splendid traditional culture of meaning, transmuting it into a random order of signs and of simulacra that are now (on this third level) completely homogeneous with the flux and tubing of the facade. And it is really to prepare the masses for this new semiotic system that they are summoned—under the pretext of indoctrination into meaning and depth.

We must, therefore, start with the axiom: Beaubourg is a monument of cultural deterrence. By means of a museological script which is there only to rescue the fiction of humanist culture, the actual labour of death of culture is enacted. It is to this—a real cultural work of mourning—that the masses are joyfully summoned.

And they stampede to it. That's the supreme irony of Beaubourg: the masses rush there not because they slaver for this culture which has been denied them for centuries, but because, for the first time, they have a chance to participate, en masse, in this immense work of mourning for a culture they have always detested.

If, therefore, we denounce Beaubourg as a cultural mystification of the masses, the misunderstanding is total. The masses fall on Beaubourg to enjoy this execution, this disembowelment, this operational prostitution of a culture that is at last truly liquidated, including all counterculture, which is nothing but its apothecary. The masses charge at Beaubourg as they do to the scenes of catastrophes, and with the same irresistible impulse. Even better: they are the catastrophe of Beaubourg. Their number, their trampling, their fascination, their itch to see and touch everything comprise a behaviour that is in point of fact deadly, catastrophic, for the whole business. Not only does their weight threaten the building, but their adhesion and their curiosity destroy the very contents of this cultural spectacle.

This stampede is totally out of scale with the cultural objectives proposed; this rush is, in its very excess and ‘success’, their radical negation. The masses, then, serve as the agent of catastrophe for this structure of catastrophe: the masses themselves will finish off mass culture.

Flowing through the transparent space they are, to be sure, converted into pure movement; but at the same time, by their very opacity and inertia, they put an end to the ‘polynovelle’ of this space. They are summoned to participate, to interact, to play with the models... and they do it well. They interact and manipulate so well that they eradicate all the meaning imputed to this operation and threaten even the infrastructure of the building. Thus, a type of parody, of oversimulation in response to the simulation of culture: the masses, meant only to be cultural livestock, are always transformed into the slaughterers of a culture of which Beaubourg is just the shameful incarnation.

We should applaud this success in cultural deterrence. All those anti-artists, leftist and culture haters have never so much as approached the determent efficacy of this huge black hole, this Beaubourg. This operation is truly revolutionary, exactly because it is involuntary, mad and meaningless, uncontrolled, when every reasonable operation to liquidate culture has—as we know—only revived it.

Frankly, the only contents of Beaubourg are the masses themselves, which the building treats like a converter, a black box, or in terms of input/output, just like a refinery handling petroleum products or a flow of raw material.

Never has it been so clear that the contents—here culture, elsewhere information or merchandise—are merely the ghostly support for the opposition of the medium whose function is still that of beguiling the masses, of producing a homogeneous flow of men and minds. The huge surges of coming and going are like the crowds of suburban commuters: absorbed and disgorge by their places of work at fixed hours. And of course it is work that is at issue here: the work of testing, probing, directed questioning. People come here to choose the objectified response to all the questions they can ask, or rather they themselves come as an answer to the functional, directed questions posed by the objects. No more forced labour. The restraints of programmatic discipline are hidden
beneath a varnish of tolerance. Well beyond the traditional institutions of capital, the hypermarket, or Beaubourg the hypermarket of culture is already the model of all future forms of controlled ‘socialization’: the retotalization of all the dispersed functions of the body and of social life (work, leisure, media, culture) in a single, homogeneous space-time; it is the retranscription of all contradictory movements in terms of integrated circuits. It is the space-time of the whole operational simulation of social life.

This requires that the mass of consumers become equivalent or homologous to the mass of products. And it is this very confrontation and fusion of the two masses that occurs in the hypermarket as at Beaubourg, producing something quite different from traditional cultural settings: museums, monuments, galleries, libraries, cultural centres. It is here that a condition of critical mass develops, surpassing that of merchandise become hypermerchandise, or culture become hyperculture – a critical mass that is no longer tied to exchange or to determine but tied to a kind of total universe of signals; through this integrated circuit impulses travel everywhere in a ceaseless transit of selections, readings, references, marks, decodings. Like consumer objects elsewhere, the cultural objects here have no other purpose than that of maintaining one in a state of hyperreal mass, of transitorized flux, of magnetized molecularity. That’s what we’ve learned from the hypermarket, the hyperreality of the merchandise; and that’s what one comes to learn at Beaubourg, the hyperrealism of culture.

The traditional museum had already begun this process of exciting regrouping, and interfering with all cultures – this unconditional aestheticization that produces the hyperreality of culture – but the museum still had a memory. Never as here has culture so lost its memory to the profit of inventory and functional redistribution. And this records a more general fact: everywhere in the ‘civilized’ world the build-up of stockpiles of objects entails the complementary process of human stockpiling: lines, waiting, bottlenecks, concentrations, camps. That’s what ‘mass production’ is – not massive production or a utilization of the masses for production, but rather a production of the masses. The mass(es) is now a final product of all societal relations, delivering the final blow to those relations, because this crowd that they want us to believe is the social fabric, is instead the place of social implosion. The mass(es) is that space of ever greater density into which everything societal is imploded and ground up in an uninterrupted process of simulation.

Thus this concave mirror: it’s because they see the mass(es) inside it that the masses will be tempted to crowd in. It’s a typical marketing device from which the whole ideology of transparency draws meaning. Or put another way, in presenting an idealized miniature model they hope to produce an accelerated gravitational pull, an automatic agglomeration of culture as an automatic agglomeration of the masses. The mass is the same: the nuclear chain reaction, or, the specular operation of white magic.

Thus for the first time, at Beaubourg, there is a supermarketing of culture which operates at the same level as the supermarketing of merchandise: the perfectly circular function by which anything, no matter what (merchandise, culture, crowds, compressed air), is demonstrated by means of its own accelerated circulation.

But if the stockpiling of objects entails the pile up of people, the violence latent within the object-inventory entails an inverse human violence.

There is violence in stockpiling due to the fact of implosion; and in the massing of people there is also a violence proper to its own specific gravity, to the increase in its specific density around its own centre of inertia. The mass(es) is a centre of inertia and thus a centre of a wholly new violence – inexplicable and different from explosive violence.

Critical mass. Implosive mass. Above 30,000 it threatens to ‘buckle’ Beaubourg’s structure. That this mass, magnetized by the structure, should become a factor of potential destruction for that very structure... what if this were intended by those who conceived the project (but it is beyond one’s hopes)... if it were part of something they had programmed, the chance to finish off both architecture and culture in one blow... well, Beaubourg would then be the most audacious object and successful happening of the century.

MAKE BEAUROUG BUCKLE! A new revolutionary slogan. No need to torch it or to fight it; just go there! That’s the best way to destroy it. Beaubourg’s success is no mystery; people go there just for that. The fragility of this edifice already exudes catastrophe, and they stampede it just to make it buckle.

Sure, they obey the commands of deterrence, for they have been given an object to consume, a culture to devour, a physical structure to manipulate. But at the same time they aim expressly and unknowingly for this annihilation. The only act, as such, that the mass(es) can produce is the stampede – a projectile mass, defying the edifice of mass culture, defiantly responds to the culturalism promoted by Beaubourg by means of its own weight, its most meaningless, stupid, least cultural aspect. In defiance of a mass indoctrination into a sterile culture, the crowd replies with a burst of destruction extended as brute physical manipulation. Thus to mental deterrence the crowd responds with direct physical deterrence. This is the mass’s own form of defiance. Its tactic is to reply in the same terms in which it is solicited, but beyond that, to respond to the simulation within which it is confined by a social enthusiasm which outruns its objects and functions as a destructive hypersimulation.

The people want to accept everything, swipe everything, eat everything, touch everything. Looking, deciphering, studying doesn’t move them. The one mass affect is that of touching, or manipulating. The organizers (and the artists) are alarmed by this uncontrollable impulse, for they reckon only with the apprenticeship of the masses to the spectacle of culture. They never anticipated this active, destructive fascination – this original and brutal response to the gift of an incomprehensible culture, this attraction which has all the semblance of housebreaking or the sacking of a shrine.

The day after the opening Beaubourg could or should have disappeared, dismantled and kidnapped by the crowd as the only possible response to the absolute demand for the transparency and the democracy of culture: each person would have carried away a bolt as a fetish of this fetishized culture.

People come to touch, and they view as if they were touching, their glance being only an aspect of tactile manipulation. It’s really a world of touch, no longer one of visibility or discourse. People now directly implicated in process: manipulate/be manipulated, ventilate/be ventilated, circulate/be circulated. And this process is no longer part of the order of representation or of distance or reflection. It is something connected with panic, and with a world in panic.
Panic in slow motion, without external movement. It is the internal violence of a saturated whole: implosion.

Beaubourg can hardly burn; all precautions have been taken. Fire, explosion, destruction are no longer the imaginary alternatives for this type of edifice. The abolition of this 'quaternary' world - cybernetic and permutation - takes the form of implosion.

Subversion and violent destruction are the forms of response to a world of production. To a universe of networks, permutations and flux, the response is reversal and implosion.

This holds true as well for institutions, the state, power, and so forth. The dream of seeing all that explode through the force of its own contradictions is, precisely, only a dream. In fact what will happen is that the institutions will implode themselves by the power of ramification, feedback, overdeveloped control circuitry. Power implores; that is its real form of disappearance.

And so it is with cities. Fire, wars, plague, revolutions, criminal marginality, catastrophes: the whole problematic of the anti-city, of hostility to the city from without or within, all this has something archaic about it in relation to the real modality of the city's annihilation.

The scenario of the underground city - the Chinese version of burying structure - is also naive. Cities no longer repeat themselves according to a schema of reproduction still dependent on a general schema of production, or according to a schema of resemblance still dependent on the schematic of representation. (That was the type of restoration that followed the Second World War.) Cities no longer renew themselves, even in their depths. They get remade according to a sort of genetic code that allows for an indefinite number of repetitions according to a cumulative cybernetic memory. Even the utopia of Borges - the map that is coextensive with its terrain, reduplicating it completely - is finished. Today the simulacrum no longer works through doubling and reduplication but rather through genetic miniaturization. No more representation, as implosion - there also - of all space occurs within an infinitesimal memory that forgets nothing and belongs to no one. Simulation of an irreversible, immanent order, increasingly dense and saturated to capacity, that will never again know the liberation of explosion.

We used to be a culture of liberating violence (reason). Whether this is seen as a function of capital, of the free play of productive forces, of the irreversible extension of the field of reason and the field of value, of the conquest and colonization of space all the way to the cosmos - or whether we view it as a function of revolution which anticipates the future forces of society and of social energy - the same schema applies: that of a sphere expanding in either slow or violent phases, that of released energy, the image-repertoire of radiation.

The violence that goes with this is the kind that engenders a larger world, the violence of production. This kind of violence is dialectical, energetic, cathartic. It is the kind we've learned to analyse and which is familiar to us, the kind that lays out the paths of socialization and leads to a saturation of the whole social field. This violence is analytic, liberating, determinate.

The violence appearing today is of an altogether different kind, one we no longer know how to analyse because it eludes the traditional model of explosive violence. It is an implosive violence no longer resulting from the extension of a system but from its saturation and contraction - as in the physical systems of stars. Violence as a consequence of unlimited increase in social density, resulting from an overregulated system, from overloaded networks (of knowledge, information, power), and from hypothyroid controls that invade all the interstitial paths of facilitation.

This violence is untranslatable to us because our entire image-repertoire is oriented to the logic of expanding systems. Indeterminate, this violence is nonetheless indecipherable because it is no longer consistent with models of indeterminacy. Because these models of the operations of randomness have replaced the models of determinacy and classical causality from which they are not fundamentally different. They all express the passage from definite systems of expansion to multi-directional systems of production and expansion - no matter whether star- or rhizome-like in structure. All philosophies of the release of energy, of the radiation of intensity, and of the molecularization of desire tend in the same direction: that networks are capable of infinite and interstitial saturation. The difference between the modal and the molecular is only one of modulation - perhaps the last - within the fundamental processes of energy within systems of expansion.

But it's quite another thing if we pass from the millennium of liberation and energy release, after a period of maximal radiation, into a phase of implosion, a phase of social inversion - the enormous inversion of a field once the point of saturation has been reached. (Reconsider in this sense Bataille's concept of loss and expenditure, and the solar myth of an unlimited radiation as the basis for his sumptuary anthropology: this is the last myth of explosion and radiation within our philosophical tradition, the terminal fireworks of a general economy, although the myth is no longer meaningful for us.) After all, stars don't cease to exist once their radiational energy has been expended. They implose according to a process that is slow at first but then accelerates exponentially; they contract at a fabulous pace to become involved systems that absorb all the surrounding energy until they become black holes where the world as we understand it - that is, as radiation and unlimited potential of energy - is destroyed.

Perhaps the great metropolises - these surely, if this hypothesis makes sense - have become implosive centres in the sense of centres of absorption and reabsorption of a society whose golden age (contemporary with the double concept of capital and revolution) is undoubtedly past. Society closes in on itself slowly - or brutally - within a field of inertia that already envelops all politics (is this inverse energy?) We must be careful not to understand implosion as a negative, inert, regressive process, as language tends to force us to do by glorifying the inverse terms of evolution or revolution. Implosion is a specific process with incalculable consequences. Undoubtedly May 1968 was the first implosive episode - which is to say (contrary to its rewriting as the very personification of revolution) a first violent reaction of social saturation, a retraction, a defiance of social hegemony, even though this was in contradiction to the ideology of the participants themselves who thought they were pushing social structures forward - such is the imaginary that continues to dominate us. Even though a large part of the events of 1968 could still be a function of revolutionary dynamism and explosive violence, other things began to happen at the same time: the violent insurrection of society around this focal point; the
consequent, sudden implosion of power, beginning after a brief lag in time but never stopping once it began. That is what continues underground: the implosion of social structure, institutions, power; and not some matchless revolutionary dynamic. On the contrary, revolution, or rather the very idea of revolution, has imploded with far heavier consequences than revolution itself.

In Italy something of the same type is in play. In the actions of students, Metropolitan Indians, radio-pirates, something goes on which no longer partakes of the category of universality, having nothing to do either with classical solidarity (politics) or with the information diffusion of the media (curiously neither the media nor the international 'revolutionary' movement reverberated with the slightest echo of what went on in February–March of 1977). In order that mechanisms of such universality cease functioning, something must have changed, something must have taken place for the effect of subversion to move in some sense in the inverse direction, toward the interior, in defiance of the universal. Universality is subverted by an action within a limited, circumscribed sphere, one that is very concentrated, very dense, one that is exhausted by its own revolution. Here we have an absolutely new process.

Such indeed are the radio-pirates, no longer broadcasting centres, but multiple points of implosion, points in an ungraspable swarm. They are a shifting landmass, but a landmass nonetheless, resistant to the homogeneity of political space. That is why the system must reduce them. Not for their political or militant content, but because, non-extensible, non-explosive, non-generalizable, they are dangerous localizations, drawing their uniqueness and their peculiar violence from their refusal to be a system of expansion.

NOTES

1 One more thing undermines Beaubourg's cultural project: the very mass of people that swarms in to enjoy it (to which we shall return further on).

2 In relation to the critical mass and the radicality of its comprehension of Beaubourg, how silly was the demonstration of the Vincennes students on the evening of the opening!

AMERICA

NEW YORK

In New York there is this double miracle: each of the great buildings and each of the ethnic groups dominates or has dominated the city – after its own fashion. Here crowdedness lends sparkle to each of the ingredients in the mix whereas elsewhere it tends to cancel out differences. In Montreal, all the same elements are present – ethnic groups, buildings and space on the grand American scale – but the sparkle and violence of American cities are missing.

Clouds spoil our European skies. Compared with the immense skies of America and their thick clouds, our little fleecy skies and little fleecy clouds resemble our fleecy thoughts, which are never thoughts of wide open spaces . . . In Paris, the sky never takes off. It doesn’t soar above us. It remains caught up in the backdrop of sickly buildings, all living in each other’s shade, as though it