

CHAPTER THREE

FETISHISM AND IDEOLOGY:
THE SEMIOLOGICAL REDUCTION¹

The concepts of commodity fetishism and money fetishism sketched, for Marx, the lived ideology of capitalist society — the mode of sanctification, fascination and psychological subjection by which individuals internalize the generalized system of exchange value. These concepts outline the whole process whereby the concrete social values of labor and exchange, which the capitalist system denies, abstracts and “alienates,” are erected into transcendent ideological values — into a moral agency that regulates all alienated behavior. What is being described here is the successor to a more archaic fetishism and religious mystification (“the opium of the people”). And this theory of a new fetishism has become the icing on the cake of contemporary analysis. While Marx still attached it (though very ambiguously) to a *form* (the commodity, money), and thus located it at a theoretically comprehensive level, today the concept of fetishism is exploited in a summary and empirical fashion: object fetishism, automobile fetishism, sex fetishism, vacation fetishism, etc. The whole exercise is precipitated by nothing more sophisticated than a diffuse, exploded and idolatrous vision of the consumption environment; it is the conceptual fetish of vulgar social thought, working assiduously towards the expanded reproduction of ideology in the guise of a disturbing attack on the system. The term fetishism is dangerous not only because it short-circuits analysis, but because since the 18th century it has conducted the whole repertoire of occidental Christian and humanist ideology, as orchestrated by colonists, ethnologists and missionaries. The Christian connotation has been present from the beginning in the condemnation of primitive cults by a religion that claimed to be abstract and spiritual; “the worship of certain earthly and material objects called fetishes. . . for which reason I will call it fetishism.”² Never having really shed this moral and rationalistic connotation, the great *fetishist metaphor* has since been the recurrent leitmotiv of the analysis of “magical thinking,” whether that of the Bantu tribes or that of modern metropolitan hordes submerged in their objects and their signs.

1. This article first appeared in *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* Vol. II (Autumn 1970).

2. De Brosse, *Du Culte des dieux fetiches* (1760).

As an eclecticism derived from various primitive representations, the fetishist metaphor consists of analyzing myths, rites and practices in terms of *energy*, a magical transcendent power, a *mana* (whose latest avatar would possibly be the libido). As a power that is transferred to beings, objects and agencies, it is universal and diffuse, but it crystallizes at strategic points so that its flux can be regulated and diverted by certain groups or individuals for their own benefit. In the light of the “theory,” this would be the major objective of all primitive practices, even eating. Thus, in the animist vision, everything happens between the hypostasis of a force, its dangerous transcendence and the capture of this force, which then becomes beneficent. Aborigines apparently rationalized their experience of the group and of the world in these terms. But anthropologists themselves have rationalized their experience of the aborigines in these same terms, thus exorcising the crucial interrogation that these societies inevitably brought to bear on their own civilization.³

Here we are interested in the extension of this *fetishist metaphor* in modern industrial society, insofar as it enmeshes critical analysis (liberal or Marxist) within the subtle trap of a rationalistic anthropology. What else is intended by the concept of “commodity fetishism” if not the notion of a false consciousness devoted to the worship of exchange value (or, more recently, the fetishism of gadgets or objects, in which individuals are supposed to worship artificial libidinal or prestige values incorporated in the object)? All of this presupposes the existence, somewhere, of a non-alienated consciousness of an object in some “true,” objective state: its use value?

The metaphor of fetishism, wherever it appears, involves a fetishization of the conscious subject or of a human essence, a rationalist metaphysic that is at the root of the whole system of occidental Christian values. Where Marxist theory seems to prop itself up with this same anthropology, it ideologically countersigns the very system of values that it otherwise dislocates via objective historical analysis. By referring all the problems of “fetishism” back to superstructural mechanisms of false consciousness, Marxism eliminates any real chance it has of analyzing the *actual process of ideological labor*. By refusing to analyze the structures and the mode of ideological production inherent in its own logic, Marxism is condemned (behind the façade of “dialectical” discourse in terms of

3. Being *de facto* rationalists, they have often gone so far as to saturate with logical and mythological rationalizations a system of representations that the aborigines knew how to reconcile with more supple objective practices.

class struggle) to expanding the reproduction of ideology, and thus of the capitalist system itself.

Thus, the problem of the generalized "fetishization" of real life forces us to reconsider the problem of the reproduction of ideology. The *fetishistic* theory of infrastructure and superstructure must be exploded, and replaced by a more comprehensive theory of productive forces, since these are *all structurally* implicated in the capitalist system — and not only in some cases (i.e., material production), while merely superstructurally in others (i.e., ideological production).

The term "fetishism" almost has a life of its own. Instead of functioning as a metalanguage for the magical thinking of others, it turns against those who use it, and surreptitiously exposes their own magical thinking. Apparently only psychoanalysis has escaped this vicious circle, by returning fetishism to its context within a perverse *structure* that perhaps underlies all desire. Thus circumscribed by its structural definition (articulated through the clinical reality of the fetish object and its manipulation) as a refusal of sex differences, the term no longer shores up magical thinking; it becomes an analytic concept for a theory of perversion. But if in the social sciences, we cannot find the equivalent — and not merely an analogical one — of this strict use of the term, *the equivalent of the psychoanalytic process of perverse structure at the level of the process of ideological production* — that is, if it proves impossible to articulate the celebrated formula of "commodity fetishism" as anything other than a mere neologism (where "fetishism" refers to this alleged magical thinking, and "commodity" to a structural analysis of capital), then it would be preferable to drop the term entirely (including its cognate and derivative ideas). For in order to reconstitute the *process of fetishization* in terms of structure, we would have to abandon the fetishist metaphor of the worship of the golden calf — even as it has been reworded by Marxists in the phrase "the opium of the people" — and develop instead an articulation that avoids any projection of magical or transcendental animism, and thus the rationalist position of positing a false consciousness and a transcendental subject. After Lévi-Strauss' analysis, the "totem" was overthrown, so that only the analysis of the totemic system and its dynamic integration retained any meaning. This was a radical breakthrough that should be developed, theoretically and clinically, and extended to social analysis in general. So, we started by meddling with received ideas about fetishism, only to discover that the whole theory of ideology may be in doubt.

If objects are not these reified agencies, endowed with force and *mana* in which the subject projects himself and is alienated — if fetishism designates something other than this metaphysic of alienated essence — what is its real process?

We would not make a habit of this, but here an appeal to etymology may help us sort through the confusion. The term "fetish" has undergone a curious semantic distortion. Today it refers to a force, a supernatural property of the object and hence to a similar magical potential in the subject, through schemas of projection and capture, alienation and reappropriation. But originally it signified exactly the opposite: a *fabrication*, an artifact, a labor of appearances and signs. It appeared in France in the 17th century, coming from the Portuguese *feitiço*, meaning "artificial," which itself derives from the Latin *factitius*. The primary sense is "to do (to make," *faire*), the sense of "to imitate by signs" ("act as a devotee," etc.; this sense is also found in "makeup" [*maquillage*], which comes from *maken*, related to *machen* and to make). From the same root (*facio*, *facticius*) as *feitiço* comes the Spanish *afeitar*: "to paint, to adorn, to embellish," and *afeite*: "preparation, ornamentation, cosmetics," as well as the French *feint* and the Spanish *hechar*, "to do, to make" (whence *hechizo*: "artificial, feigned, dummy").

What quickly becomes apparent is the aspect of faking, of artificial registering — in short, of a cultural sign labor — and that this is at the origin of the status of fetish object, and thus also plays some part in the fascination it exercises. This aspect is increasingly repressed by the inverse representation (the two still exist in the Portuguese *feitiço*, which as an adjective means artificial and as a noun an enchanted object, or sorcery), which *substitutes a manipulation of forces for a manipulation of signs* and a magical economy of transfer of signifieds for a regulated play of signifiers.

The "talisman" also is lived and represented in the animist mode as a receptacle of forces: one forgets that it is first an object marked by signs — signs of the hand, of the face, or characters of the cabal, or the figure of some celestial body that, registered in the object, makes it a talisman. Thus, in the "fetishist" theory of consumption, in the view of marketing strategists as well as of consumers, objects are given and received everywhere as force dispensers (happiness, health, security, prestige, etc.). This magical substance having been spread about so liberally, one forgets that what we are dealing with first is signs: a generalized code of signs, a totally arbitrary code of differences, *and that it is on this basis, and not at all on account of their use values or their innate "virtues," that objects exercise their fascination.*

If fetishism exists it is thus not a fetishism of the signified, a fetishism of substances and values (called ideological), which the fetish object would incarnate for the alienated subject. Behind this reinterpretation (which is truly ideological) it is a *fetishism of the signifier*. That is to say that the subject is trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. It is not the passion (whether of objects or subjects) for substances that speaks in fetishism, it is the *passion for the code*, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation. This is the fundamental articulation of the ideological process: not in the projection of alienated consciousness into various superstructures, but in the generalization at all levels of a structural code.

So it appears that "commodity fetishism" may no longer fruitfully be interpreted according to the paleo-Marxist dramaturgy of the instance, in such and such an object, of a force that returns to haunt the individual severed from the product of his labor, and from all the marvels of his misappropriated investment (labor and effectiveness). It is rather the (ambivalent) fascination for a form (logic of the commodity or system of exchange value), a state of absorption, for better or for worse, in the restrictive logic of a system of abstraction. Something like a desire, a perverse desire, the desire of the code is brought to light here: it is a desire that is related to the systematic nature of signs, drawn towards it, precisely through what this system-like nature negates and bars, by exorcising the contradictions spawned by the process of real labor — just as the perverse psychological structure of the fetishist is organized, in the fetish object, around a mark, around the abstraction of a mark that negates, bars and exorcises the difference of the sexes.

In this sense, fetishism is not the sanctification of a certain object, or value (in which case one might hope to see it disappear in our age, when the liberalization of values and the abundance of objects would "normally" tend to desanctify them). It is the sanctification of the system as such, of the commodity as system: it is thus contemporaneous with the generalization of exchange value and is propagated with it. The more the system is systematized, the more the fetishist fascination is reinforced; and if it is always invading new territories, further and further removed from the domain of economic exchange value strictly understood (i.e., the areas of sexuality, recreation, etc.), this is not owing to an obsession with pleasure, or a substantial desire for pleasure or free time, but to a progressive (and even quite brutal) systematization of these sectors,

that is to say their reduction to commutable sign values within the framework of a system of exchange value that is now almost total.⁴

Thus the fetishization of the commodity is the fetishization of a product emptied of its concrete substance of labor⁵ and subjected to another type of labor, a labor of signification, that is, of coded abstraction (the production of differences and of sign values). It is an active, collective process of production and reproduction of a code, a system, invested with all the diverted, unbound desire separated out from the process of real labor and transferred onto precisely that which denies the process of real labor. Thus, fetishism is actually attached to the sign object, the object eviscerated of its substance and history, and reduced to the state of marking a difference, epitomizing a whole system of differences.

That the fascination, worship, and cathexis (*investissement*) of desire and, finally, even pleasure (perverse) devolve upon the system and not upon a substance (or *mana*) is clarified in the phenomenon, no less celebrated, of "money fetishism." What is fascinating about money is neither its materiality, nor even that it might be the intercepted equivalent of a certain force (e.g., of labor) or of a certain potential power: it is its *systematic nature*, the potential enclosed in the material for total commutability of all values, thanks to their definitive abstraction. It is the abstraction, the total artificiality of the sign that one "adores" in money. What is fetishized is the closed perfection of a system, not the "golden calf," or the treasure. This specifies the difference between the pathology of the miser who is attached to the fecal materiality of gold, and the fetishism we are attempting to define here as an ideological process. Elsewhere we have seen⁶ how, in the *collection*, it is neither the nature of objects nor even their symbolic value that is important; but precisely the sense in which they negate all this, and deny the reality of castration for the subject through the systematic nature of the collective cycle, whose continual shifting from one term to another helps the subject to weave around himself a closed and invulnerable world that dissolves all obstacles to the realization of desire (perverse, of course).

Today there is an area where this fetishist logic of the commodity

4. In this system, use value becomes obscure and almost unintelligible, though not as an original value which has been lost, but more precisely as a *function derived from exchange value*. Henceforth, it is exchange value that induces use value (i.e., needs and satisfactions) to work in common with it (ideologically), within the framework of political economy.

5. In this way labor power as a commodity is itself "fetishized."

6. In my *Le Système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 103ff.

break of connection to production
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 fetishism
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 code
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 fetishism

can be illustrated very clearly, permitting us to indicate more precisely what we call the process of ideological labor: the body and beauty. We do not speak of either as an absolute value (speaking of which, what is an absolute value?), but of the current obsession with "liberating the body" and with beauty.

This fetish-beauty has nothing (any longer) to do with an effect of the soul (the spiritualist vision), a natural grace of movement or countenance; with the transparency of truth (the idealist vision); or with an "inspired genius" of the body, which can be communicated as effectively by expressive ugliness (the romantic vision). What we are talking about is a kind of anti-nature incarnate, bound up in a general stereotype of *models of beauty*, in a perfectionist vertigo and controlled narcissism. This is the absolute rule with respect to the face and the body, the generalization of sign exchange value to facial and bodily effects. It is the final disqualification of the body, its subjection to a discipline, the total circulation of signs. The body's wildness is veiled by makeup, the drives are assigned to a cycle of fashion. Behind this *moral* perfection, which stresses a valorization of exteriority (and no longer, as in traditional morality, a labor of interior sublimation), it is insurance taken out against the instincts. However, this anti-nature does not exclude desire; we know that this kind of beauty is fascinating precisely because it is trapped in models, because it is closed, systematic, ritualized in the ephemeral, without symbolic value. It is the sign in this beauty, the mark (makeup, symmetry, or calculated asymmetry, etc.), which fascinates; *it is the artifact that is the object of desire*. The signs are there to make the body into a perfect object, a feat that has been accomplished through a long and specific labor of sophistication. Signs perfect the body into an object in which none of its real work (the work of the unconscious or psychic and social labor) can show through. The fascination of this fetishized beauty is the result of this extended process of abstraction, and derives from what it negates and censors through its own character as a system.

Tattoos, stretched lips, the bound feet of Chinese women, eyeshadow, rouge, hair removal, mascara, or bracelets, collars, objects, jewelry, accessories: anything will serve to rewrite the cultural order on the body; and it is this that takes on the effect of beauty. The erotic is thus the reinscription of the erogenous in a homogeneous system of signs (gestures, movements, emblems, body heraldry) whose goal is closure and logical perfection — to be sufficient unto itself. Neither the genital order (placing an external finality in question) nor the symbolic order (putting in question the

division of the subject) have this coherence: neither the functional nor the symbolic can weave a body from signs like this — abstract, impeccable, clothed with marks, and thus invulnerable; "made up" (*faict* and *fainct*) in the profound sense of the expression; cut off from external determinations and from the internal reality of its desire, yet offered up in the same turn as an idol, as the *perfect phallus for perverse desire*: that of others, and its own.⁷

Lévi-Strauss has already spoken of this erotic bodily attraction among the Caduvéo and the Maori, of those bodies "completely covered by arabesques of a perverse subtlety," and of "something deliciously provocative."⁸ It suffices to think of Baudelaire to know how much sophistication alone conveys charm (in the strong sense), and how much it is always attached to the *mark* (ornamentation, jewelry, perfume) — or to the "cutting up" of the body into partial objects (feet, hair, breasts, buttocks, etc.), which is a profoundly similar exercise. It is always a question of substituting — for an erogenous body, divided in castration, source of an ever-perilous desire — a montage, an artifact of phantasmagorical fragments, an arsenal or a panoply of accessories, or of parts of the body (but the whole body can be reduced by fetishized nudity to the role of a partial object as well). These fetish objects are always caught in a system of assemblage and separation, in a code. Circumscribed in this way, they become the possible objects of a security-giving worship. This is to substitute the line of demarcation between elements-signs for the great dividing line of castration. It substitutes the significant difference, the formal division between signs, for the irreducible ambivalence, for the symbolic split (*écart*).

It would be interesting to compare this perverse fascination to that which, according to Freud, is exercised by the child or the animal, or even by those women "who suffice to themselves, who properly speaking love only themselves" and who for that reason "exercise the greatest charm over men not only for aesthetic reasons . . . but also on account of interesting psychological constellations." "The charm of a child," he says again, "lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-sufficiency and inaccessibility, just as does the charm of certain animals which seem not to concern themselves about us, such as cats and the large beasts of prey."⁹ One would have to distinguish

7. Now this is how the body, re-elaborated by the perverse structure as phallic idol, manages to function simultaneously as the ideological model of socialization and of fulfillment. Perverse desire and the ideological process are articulated on the same "sophisticated" body. We will return to this later.

8. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Atheneum, 1975), p. 188.

9. Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), in *Collected Papers*

between the seduction associated, in the child, the animal or the women-child, with *polymorphous perversity* (and with the kind of "freedom," of libidinal autonomy that accompanies it), and that linked to the contemporary commercialized erotic system, which precipitates a "fetishistic" perversion that is restricted, static and encompassed by models. Nevertheless, what is sought for and recognized in both types of seduction is another side or "beyond" of castration, which always takes on the aspect either of a harmonious natural state of unity (child, animal) or of a summation and perfect closure effected by signs. What fascinates us is always that which radically excludes us in the name of its internal logic or perfection: a mathematical formula, a paranoid system, a concrete jungle, a useless object, or, again, a smooth body, without orifices, doubled and redoubled by a mirror, devoted to perverse autosatisfaction. It is by caressing herself, by the autoerotic maneuver, that the striptease artist best evokes desire.¹⁰

What is especially important for us here is to demonstrate the general ideological process by which beauty, as a constellation of signs and work upon signs, functions in the present system simultaneously as the negation of castration (perverse psychic structure) and as the negation of the body that is segmented in its social practice and in the division of labor (ideological social structure). The modern rediscovery of the body and its illusions (*prestiges*) is not innocently contemporary with monopoly capitalism and the discoveries of psychoanalysis:

1. It is because psychoanalysis has brought the fundamental division of the subject to light through the body (but not the same "body"), that it has become so important to ward off this menace (of castration), to restore the individual (the undivided subject of consciousness). This is no longer achieved, however, by endowing the individual with a soul or a mind, but a body properly all his own, from which all negativity of desire is eliminated and which functions only as the exhibitor of beauty and happiness. In this sense, the current myth of the body appears as a process of *phantasmagorical rationalization*, which is close to fetishism in its strict analytical definition. Paradoxically, then, this "discovery of the body," which alleges itself to be simultaneous and in sympathy with psychoanalytic discoveries, is in fact an attempt to conjure away its revolutionary implications. The body is introduced in order to liquidate the

(New York: Basic Books, 1959), Vol. IV, p. 46.

10. Ideological discourse is also built up out of a redundancy of signs, and in extreme cases, forms a tautology. It is through this specularity, this "mirage within itself," that it conjures away conflicts and exercises its power.

unconscious and its work, to strengthen the one and homogeneous subject, keystone of the system of values and order.

2. Simultaneously, monopoly capitalism, which is not content to exploit the body as labor power, manages to fragment it, to divide the very expressiveness of the body in labor, in exchange, and in play, recuperating all this as individual needs, hence as productive (*consummative*) forces under its control. This mobilization of cathexes at all levels as productive forces creates, over the long term, profound contradictions. These contradictions are still political in nature, if we accept a radical redefinition of politics that would take into account this totalitarian socialization of all sectors of real life. It is for these reasons that the body, beauty and sexuality are imposed as new universals in the name of the rights of the new man, emancipated by abundance and the cybernetic revolution. The deprivation, manipulation and controlled recycling of the subjective and collective values by the unlimited extension of exchange value and the unlimited rival speculation over sign values renders necessary the sanctification of a glorious agency called the body that will become for each individual an ideological sanctuary, the sanctuary of his own alienation. Around this body, which is entirely positivized as the capital of divine right, the subject of private property is about to be restored.

So ideology goes, always playing upon the two levels according to the same process of labor and desire attached to the organization of signs (process of signification and fetishization). Let us consider this articulation of the semiological and ideological a little more closely.

Take the example of nudity as it is presented in advertising, in the proliferation of erotica, in the mass media's rediscovery of the body and sex. This nudity claims to be rational, progressive: it claims to rediscover the truth of the body, its natural reason, beyond clothing, taboos and fashion. In fact, it is too rationalistic, and bypasses the body, whose symbolic and sexual truth is not in the naive conspicuousness of nudity, but in the *uncovering* of itself (*mise à nu*), insofar as it is the symbolic equivalent of putting to death (*mise à mort*), and thus of the true path of desire, *which is always ambivalent*, love and death simultaneously.¹¹ Functional modern nudity does not involve this ambivalence at all, nor thus any profound symbolic function, because such nudity reveals a body *entirely positivized by sex* — as a cultural value, as a model of fulfillment, as an emblem, as a morality (or ludic immorality, which is the same thing) — and *not a body divided and split by sex*. The sexualized body, in this case, no

11. These terms are drawn from Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957).

longer functions, save on its positive side, which is that of:

- need (and not of desire);
- satisfaction (lack, negativity, death, castration are no longer registered in it);
- the *right* to the body and sex (the subversiveness, the social negativity of the body and sex are frozen there in a formal “democratic” lobby: the “right to the body”).¹²

Once ambivalence and the symbolic function have been liquidated, nudity again becomes one sign among others, entering into a distinctive opposition to clothing. Despite its “liberationist” velleities, it no longer radically opposes clothing, it is only a variant that can coexist with all the others in the systematic process of fashion: and today one sees it everywhere acting “in alternation.” It is this nudity, caught up in the differential play of signs (and not in that of eros and death) that is the object of fetishism: the absolute condition for its ideological functioning is the loss of the symbolic and the passing over to the semiological.

Strictly speaking, it is not even because (as has just been said) “once the symbolic function has been liquidated there is a passage to the semiological.” In fact, it is the semiological organization itself, the entrenchment in a system of signs, that has the goal of reducing the symbolic function. *This semiological reduction of the symbolic properly constitutes the ideological process.* Other examples can illustrate this semiological reduction, this fundamental scheme of the process of ideology.

The Sun: The vacation sun no longer retains anything of the collective symbolic function it had among the Aztecs, the Egyptians, etc.¹³ It no longer has that ambivalence of a natural force — life and death, beneficent and murderous — which it had in primitive cults or still has in peasant labor. The vacation sun is a completely positive sign, the absolute source of happiness and euphoria, and as such it is significantly opposed to non-sun (rain, cold, bad weather). At the same time as it loses all ambivalence, it is registered in a distinctive opposition, which, incidentally, is never innocent: here the

12. The whole illusion of the *Sexual Revolution* is here: society could not be split, divided and subverted in the name of a sex and a body whose current presentation has the ideological function of veiling the subject's division and subversion. As usual, everything holds together: the reductive function that this mythical nudity fulfills in relation to the subject divided by sex and castration is performed simultaneously on the macroscopic level of society divided by historical class conflicts. Thus the sexual revolution is a subsidiary of the industrial revolution or of the revolution of abundance (and of so many others): all are decoys and ideological metamorphoses of an unchanged order.

13. Cf. Alain Laurent in *Communications*, No. 10.

opposition functions to the exclusive benefit of the sun (against the other negativized sun). Thenceforth, from the moment it functions as ideology and as a cultural value registered in a system of oppositions, the sun, like sex, is also registered institutionally as the right to the sun, which sanctions its ideological functioning, and morally registered as a fetishist obsession, both individual and collective.

Masculine-Feminine: No being is assigned by nature to a sex. Sexual ambivalence (activity-passivity) is at the heart of each subject, sexual differentiation is registered as a difference in the body of each subject and not as an absolute term linked to a particular sexual organ. The question is not “having one or not.” But this ambivalence, this profound sexual valence must be reduced, for as such it escapes genital organization and the social order. Once again, the ideological labor consists in semiologically reducing, in dispersing this irreducible reality into a great distinctive structure, masculine-feminine — into sexes that are full, distinct and opposed to one another. This structure leans on the alibi of biological organs (the reduction of sex as a difference to the difference of the sexual organs); and, above all, it is pegged to the grandiose cultural models whose function it is to separate the sexes in order to establish the absolute privilege of one over the other. If everyone is led, by this controlled structuration, to confuse himself with his own sexual status, it is only to resign his sex the more easily (that is, the erogenous differentiation of his own body) to the sexual segregation that is one of the political and ideological foundations of the social order.¹⁴

The Unconscious: The contemporary unconscious is diffused by the mass media, celebrated by semiology, but still given a substance that is individualized and personalized. Today, everyone “has” an unconscious: mine, yours, his. The structure and work of the unconscious is primarily a challenging of the conscious subject. Here, then, the possessive pronoun is itself semiologically reductive and ideologically effective insofar as it reduces this unconscious to a

14. The fact that from the very first this great structural opposition is a functional, hierarchical, logistic difference for the social order, the fact that if there must be two sexes it is so that one may be subjected to the other, makes clear the ambiguity of “sexual liberation.” Since this “liberation” is that of everyone's sexual needs as assigned to his sex in the framework of the ideological-structural model of bisexuality, any reinforcement of sexual practices in this sense can only reinforce this structure and the ideological discrimination that it bears. In our “liberal” society of “mixedness,” the separation between masculine and feminine models has never ceased to entrench and crystallize itself since the start of the industrial era. Today, in spite of pious, liberal pathos over the question, it is taking on ever more generalized forms.

simple oppositional term *vis-à-vis* consciousness. Together, they operate in the name of the individual (as the possessive case indicates), fundamentally to the advantage of the subject of consciousness. So, the "rediscovered" unconscious, generally exalted from the beginning, runs directly counter to its original meaning: initially structure and labor, it is transformed into a sign function, labor power and object of appropriation by a unified, autonomous subject, the eternal subject of consciousness and of private property. Henceforth, to each his own unconscious, his own symbolic deposit to exploit, his capital! And shortly, there will be the right to the unconscious, the *habeas corpus* of *homo cyberneticus*, that is, the transfer of bourgeois liberties into a domain that everywhere escapes them and which denies them. But the reason is clear: it is the transfer of social control to the domain of the irreducible. The revolution of the unconscious becomes the avatar of a new humanism of the subject of consciousness; and through the individualist ideology of the unconscious, fetishized and reduced by signs such as sex and sun to a calculus of pleasure and consumed satisfaction, each subject itself drains and monitors the movement and the dangerous labor of the unconscious for the benefit of the social order. The myth of the unconscious becomes the ideological solution to the problems of the unconscious.¹⁵

It is seen that the *semiological reduction* of the unconscious to a simple term opposed to consciousness implies a hierarchical subordination to consciousness, a reductive formalization of the unconscious to the benefit of consciousness, and thus an *ideological reduction* to the (capitalist) system of order and social values.

There is no conclusion to this preliminary analysis of the ideological process. In summary, the schemes that emerge are:

1. Homology, simultaneity of the ideological operation on the level of psychic structure and social structure. Here we find neither cause nor effect, neither super- nor infrastructure, nor the analytical privilege of one field or the other, of one agency or the other — *without risking causal distortion and desperate recourse to analogy.*

2. The process of ideological labor always aims toward reducing the process of real labor (the process of unconscious symbolic labor in the division of the subject, the process of labor of productive forces in the explosion of relations of production). This process is always a

15. Also, logically, this "liberation," like that of any other productive force, takes on the force of a moral imperative. Everyone is called upon (be it in the name of hygiene, even) to *become conscious of his unconscious*, not to let this productive potential lie fallow, to make his unconscious emerge in order to "personalize" it. Absurd, perhaps, but coherent with the logic of the ideological system.

process of abstraction by signs, of substituting a system of distinctive oppositions for the process of real labor (the first moment: process of signification). But these oppositions are not neutral; they rank themselves hierarchically, privileging one of the terms (second moment: process of discrimination). Signification does not always carry discrimination with it (phonemic differences at the level of language), but discrimination always presupposes signification — the sign-function that reduces ambivalence and the symbolic.

3. Bifurcation, or marking by signs, is always accompanied by a *totalization via signs* and a formal autonomy of sign systems. Sign logic operates by internal differentiation and by general homogenization. Only labor on the homogeneous formal, abstract material of signs makes possible this closure, this perfection, this logical mirage that is the effectiveness of ideology. It is the abstract coherence, suturing all contradictions and divisions, that gives ideology its power of fascination (fetishism). This coherence is found in the erotic system as well as in the perverse seduction exercised by the system of exchange value, which is entirely present in even the very smallest of commodities.

4. This abstract totalization permits signs to function ideologically, that is, to establish and perpetuate real discriminations and the order of power.