

Vanessa Freerks, *Baudrillard with Nietzsche and Heidegger: Towards a Genealogical Analysis*, Studies in Historical Philosophy, Vol. 4, Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2021, 222 pp., €35, ISBN: 9783838214740

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One does not have to dig deep to get the sense that contemporary society seems to be suffering from a crisis of reality not unlike the one foretold by Nietzsche's nihilism or Baudrillard's "psychotic stage of culture."⁹ While all new philosophies can be seen as informed by those that came before, it takes a certain acuity to pick out recurring themes they have not yet been identified and whose connection might not be immediately apparent. In her work *Baudrillard with Nietzsche and Heidegger: Towards a Genealogical Analysis*, Vanessa Freerks is convincing in her endeavor to show that "certain critical elements within Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* resurface in Baudrillard's work."¹⁰

Most of the book, and where she is most compelling, focuses on the connection between these two thinkers. To show how Nietzsche "foretells" Baudrillard and how Baudrillard "transforms Nietzschean concepts,"¹¹ she combs through their works, particularly focusing on Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *On Truth and Lies in the Non-Moral Sense*; along with Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* and *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. While it is a daunting task to fit together the extent and depth of these texts, Freerks is coherent and incisive, furnishing the reader with a comprehensive guide to the concepts, ideas, and themes in the works of these authors.

⁹ Vanessa Freerks, *Baudrillard with Nietzsche and Heidegger: Towards a Genealogical Analysis* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2021) 144.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12

Although Baudrillard admits a great admiration for Nietzsche, his works contain few references to him. Freerks makes a compelling case for the reappearance of “Nietzschean positions, processes, practices and figures” in the work of Baudrillard¹² – demonstrating, she claims, Baudrillard paying his debt to Nietzsche, not simply indulging in banal citation. Whether or not that is indeed the case, what cannot be denied is the commonality of spirit between these thinkers. In any detailed dystopian philosophical work, both Nietzsche and Baudrillard are sure to make an appearance. Baudrillard describes (and laments) “hyperreality” – a condition of having no ground in any reality other than its own – which nicely parallels with Nietzsche’s nihilism.

The connection that Freerks makes between the roles of Nietzsche’s “ascetic priest” with that of the advertiser in Baudrillard’s “consumer society” is especially notable. Nietzsche’s figure, characterized by an “economy of guilt,”¹³ an always unattainable perfection and limitless sinfulness, is paralleled in the “process without end”¹⁴ of Baudrillard’s consumer society. In both, the process is unending in that the ideal set forth by either the ascetic priest or the advertiser can never be achieved, but instead compels more consumption (or redemption). For Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal places before us an inaccessible source of transcendent value; for Baudrillard, consumer society reaches “the end of transcendence” but this still “does not make meaning any more accessible or less abstract.”¹⁵

As a connected and secondary aim of her book, Freerks attempts to tease out a theory from Baudrillard’s figurative “rhetoric aiming” to show that behind the “art” of Baudrillard there is a systematic philosophy that “recontextualizes and transposes Nietzsche’s genealogy into a modern setting.”¹⁶ However, this is intentionally left undistilled according to Baudrillard’s “heterodox notion of theory,”¹⁷ entailing that a good theory should eliminate, following such a strategy of “reversibility”, all

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

that remains of Baudrillard's systematic philosophy are "fragmented insights."¹⁸ Whether or not this is Baudrillard's actual intention, Freerks compellingly constructs a kind of "genealogical foundation"¹⁹ of Baudrillardian thought, beginning with Nietzsche and meandering through other thinkers such as Martin Heidegger.

The Heideggerian connection with Baudrillard is analyzed through both thinkers' efforts at highlighting the "central role of death"²⁰ in our human condition. Though Baudrillard distanced himself from Heidegger's "subjectivity," Freerks maintains that this distancing is due to Baudrillard's reading of a "Sartrean Heidegger." She includes other sources to argue for a closer relationship between Heidegger and Baudrillard's views on mortality.

Other authors that make their way into the book for a comparative analysis include Claude Lévi-Strauss and Gilles Deleuze. While both Deleuze and Baudrillard employ the term "simulacrum," Freerks discusses how their perspectives differ. As regards Levi-Strauss, on the other hand, and in a quite convincing manner, she highlights the way in which structural linguistics – in disregarding the connection between language and reality, given that the system of signs (signified and signifier) does not include the referent (the 'actual' thing referred to) – can be seen as a foreshadowing Baudrillard's simulation.

One comes away from a comprehensive and in-depth work like Freerks' *Baudrillard with Nietzsche and Heidegger: Towards a Genealogical Analysis* having been enriched by the experience. The work stands out as an insightful accompaniment to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. More generally, by systematically pursuing the intuitively felt connection between Baudrillardian diagnostic rhetoric and Nietzschean foreboding, Freerks provides us with a genealogy of Baudrillardian thought that ought to be of particular interest to students and scholars of both Baudrillard and Nietzsche.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰ Ibid., 164.