Simulacra, Symbolic Exchange and Technology in Michel Tournier's La Goutte d'Or

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Abstract

In *La Goutte d'Or*, Michel Tournier offers a critique of Western culture by constructing a novel that reflects both Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulacra and the political economy of the sign and Martin Heidegger's meditations on technology. Tournier's novel explores the relationship between Heidegger's explanation of technology as an act of Enframing (*Ge-stell*) and Baudrillard's description of an economy based upon exchange-sign value. Thus, through *La Goutte d 'Or*, Michel Tournier depicts the violent confrontation between a symbolic exchange economy based on *poietic* acts and late capitalist economies of autonomized signs.

Keywords

La Goutte d'Or, Michel Tournier, Western culture, critique, Jean Baudrillard, simulacra, political economy, Martin Heidegger, technology, Heidegger, Enframing, Ge-stell, exchange-sign value, violent confrontation, violent, poietic, autonomized signs, late capitalist economies, capitalist economy

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Michel Tournier has both delighted and shocked the reading public since his first novel, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, appeared in 1967, but his works have rarely attracted critics in France and the United States who are concerned with contemporary literary theory. Experiments in French fiction over the last half century have provided critics with vexing puzzles, which in turn have generated new narrative theories and *recherché* critical vocabularies. And as scholars examine and discuss the work of writers such as Nathalie Sarraute, Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras, and Philippe Sollers, and the terms *nouveau roman*, *nouveau nouveau roman*, and OULIPO reach a broad and expanding critical audience, the works of a novelist who claims that he wants to write like Zola and who sees his own work growing out of a tradition of writers that includes Alexandre Dumas, Jules Verne, Victor Cherbuliez, and Anatole France may appear odd, if not intellectually retrograde (Koster 149-58). This is not to suggest, however, that Tournier is ignored. On the contrary, he has a devoted reading public in France and he has often been the focus of heated debates concerning the relationship between morality and literature.[1]

Michel Tournier's works have spawned a first generation of critical analyses that by and large attempt to examine the major themes and structures of his entire literary corpus.[2] Similarly, scholarly articles in French and English by Christiane Baroche (1978), Susan Petit (1986), and two special issues of *Sud* (1980, 1986), uncover the historical events and the philosophical underpinnings that inform Tournier's various novels and stories. Common to all of these studies is a type of phenomenological method in which the critic examines Tournier's works on their own with little or no reference to other theories of interpretation. Notwithstanding Gilles Deleuze's early study of *Vendredi* (*Friday*) in his book *Logique du Sens* (*The Logic of Sense*), this trend has only recently begun to change. Gérard Genette devotes several pages to *Vendredi* in *Palimpsestes* (418-25) and Peter Bürger, struggles to read *Le Roi des Aulnes* (*The Ogre*) as a work of postmodern fiction. Mireille Rosello's *L'indifférence chez Michel Tournier*, on the other hand, offers a rich and sophisticated reading of Tournier based upon the theoretical writings of Barbara Johnson. Among English speaking critics, only Colin Davis, Susan Petit and Lawrence R. Schehr attempt to position Tournier's

writings in the context of contemporary literary theory.[3] In the pages that follow, I hope to continue this trend in English criticism begun by Davis, Petit and Schehr. The underlying ambitions of this study, therefore, are to draw attention to both the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of Tournier's work and to spur greater interest in an English-language readership that may immediately associate postmodern theory and fiction with names like Pynchon, Calvino, Coover, Gaddis, and (of course) Borges but which may remain ignorant of one of France's most controversial and celebrated novelists.

In order to examine Tournier in light of contemporary theory, I will focus my attention on his 1985 novel, *La Goutte d'Or* (*The Golden Droplet*). Using Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulacra and the political economy of the sign, I will argue that Tournier's novel presents a critique of the hyperreality of Western culture and suggests an alternative means of symbolic exchange through *poietic* acts. I will also argue that Tournier's novel conducts the essential reflection upon technology that Martin Heidegger calls for, and that Tournier's text reveals the fundamental relationship between Heidegger's explanation of technology as the act of Enframing (*Ge-stell*) and Baudrillard's description of late capitalist economy.

In *La Goutte d'Or*, Michel Tournier provides his readers with a view of Western culture as seen through the eyes of a North African child. Idriss, a Berber shepherd who tends his flock near the village of Tabelbala, meets a French woman tourist who takes his picture. When she fails to keep her promise to send him a copy of the photo, Idriss begins a long and terrifying journey across North Africa to the heart of Paris in the hopes of finding her. The movement from South to North plunges Idriss into a vortex of manipulated signs, and he discovers a society replete with images on placards and postcards, in shop windows and museums, and on television and film.

It is this first photograph, this *cliché* taken by *la femme blonde*, that serves as the absent cause, the *ab initio* of Tournier's novel. But if for Roland Barthes the photographic image is a "message without a code" (17), for Idriss the photograph becomes one of the principal indices of *the* code in the political economy of the sign. Each step along the way, Idriss confronts photographic images that neither imitate nor reduplicate the reality to which they refer (e.g. while in Béchar, Idriss helps Mustapha, a photographer who takes posed shots of tourists standing before painted backdrops of the Sahara; a passport photo machine in Oran ejects a photo of a bearded man instead of a likeness of Idriss; while in Paris Idriss serves as an extra in Achille Mage's television commercial for a fruit drink which has the taste of an African oasis, etc.). On the contrary, Idriss encounters

a culture in which photographic images are signs, a culture in which, in the words of Jean Baudrillard, the principal endeavor involves "substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (PS 254).

Baudrillard distinguishes four successive stages of the image, four stages which correspond to successive encounters Idriss has as he plunges into the "mer d'images" of Western culture. In the first phase, the image "is the reflection of basic reality" (PS 256). Idriss sees such an image when he visits his uncle Mogadem, the veteran of the Second World War who possesses the only photograph in Tabelbala. Pinned to a wall in his home, the photo depicts the young Corporal Mogadem and two comrades stationed in Italy in 1944. Mogadem received three prints of the photo and intended to give one to each of his friends, but before he could do so, they were both killed in the fateful attack on Monte Cassino. Mogadem believes he was spared a similar fate because he held the photos (i.e. the likeness of himself) in a pocket against his chest. For Mogadem the lesson is clear: "c'est qu'une photo, il faut la tenir, la maîtriser (63)" 'you must hold on to a photo, you must master it (63, 45).' In other words, the image must not become separated from that which it represents, or as Baudrillard would say, it must not achieve a state of autonomization.

In the second phase, the image "masks and perverts a basic reality." Idriss experiences this imagistic perversion when he travels to Béni Abbès and visits a museum that contains a display depicting the life-style and habits of indigenous tribes of the Sahara. The display contains dummies preparing a "typical" meal. Idriss is shocked. The narrator informs us:

> Idriss ouvrait de grands yeux. Tous ces objets,
> d'une propreté irréelle, figés dans leur essence
> éternelle, intangibles, momifiés avaient entouré
> son enfance, son adolescence. Il y avait moins
> de quarante-huit heures, il mangeait dans ce plat,
> regardait sa mère actionner ce moulin. (88)

> Idris opened his eyes wide. All these objects,
> of unreal cleanliness, frozen in their eternal
> essences, intangible, mummified, had surrounded his
> childhood and adolescence. Less than forty-eight
> hours before, he had eaten from that dish, watched his mother using
> that grinder. (67)

This method of codification and abstract conceptualization is completely foreign to Idriss. As the narrator indicates, "Ces règles de vie quotidienne, il [Idriss] les connaissait pour les avoir toujours observées, mais comme

spontanément et sans les avoir jamais entendu formuler'' (89) 'Idris listened in amazement. He knew all these rules of daily life because he had always observed them, but as if spontaneously, and without ever having heard them formulated' (68). Idriss experiences first hand the outcome of the crisis that first gripped Western culture in the eighteenth century and resulted in critical self-reflection. ''The effect of this crisis,'' writes Baudrillard, ''was that it reflected on itself also as a culture in the universal, and thus all other cultures were entered in its museum as vestiges of its own image (MP 88-89).'' The representation of the other culture, therefore, masks a difference and perverts the reality of that culture.

When Idriss meets Achille Mage in Paris, he confronts images that Baudrillard would consign to the third phase, images that mask ''the absence of a basic reality.'' Mage is the king of advertising. He produces television commercials for all types of commodities, and he uses Idriss and a sickly camel as extras for an ad for Palmeraie fruit drink. But the fruit drink bears no relation to the oases of the Sahara. By making Mage such a pivotal figure, Tournier constructs a savage critique of the virulent consumerism of the West.[4]

As Baudrillard has argued, ''if we consume the product as product, we consume its meaning through advertising'' (SW 10). But the language of advertising is ''the most impoverished of languages,'' it is a ''language of signals'' (SW 17). Tournier concurs. ''La télévision, c'était l'image, la vie moderne, la langue française,'' 'television was image, was modern life, the French language,' writes the narrator (222, 176), and television is the primary medium of advertising. As Mage himself contends, ''la pub, c'est le sommet du cinéma'' (174) 'commercials are the cream of the cinema' (138). This cinematic form, however, is the ''systematic act of the manipulation of signs,'' (SW 22) which for Baudrillard is the definition of consumption. The sign manipulation nourishes the immigré population of France with dreams. As Idriss's cousin Achour tells him, ''nous autres, privés de tout, on n'a que le rêve pour survivre, et le rêve, eh bien c'est le cinéma qui nous le donne, . . . c'est notre maître d'école'' (169) 'the rest of us, who have nothing, we only have dreams to keep us going, and dreams, well, we get them from the cinema. . . . The cinema is our school-teacher' (133). Concurrently, the drive for consumption (i.e. the systematisation of sign manipulation) effects the ultimate objective of late capitalism which Baudrillard has characterized as the annihilation of all ''tribal, communal, precapitalist structures, every form of exchange, language and symbolic organization'' (PS 279). Tournier expresses this same idea at the beginning of the novel when Salah Brahim picks up Idriss on his way to Béni Abbès. Salah Brahim

drives an old truck and brings goods from Béni Abbès to Tabelbala. But as he informs Idriss, he also transports the youth from Tabelbala to Béni Abbès. "Ça s'arrêtera quand il n'y aura plus que des vieillards et des viellardes dans l'oasis," he says. "Pour un jeune, que faire à Tabelbala? Pas de cinéma, pas de télévision" (72) 'It'll stop when there are only old men and old women left in the oasis. What is there for a young person to do in Tabelbala? No cinema, no television' (54). Tournier clearly suggests that the hyperreality of the West threatens the North African culture with extinction.

The fourth and final phase of the image, the phase of pure simulacrum in which the image "bears no relation to reality whatever," appears when Idriss meets Monsieur Milan. Milan is an eccentric who collects little boy mannequins and then photographs them in life-like settings. He states his theoretical intentions quite clearly:

> Quant aux mannequins, étant eux-mêmes déjà des
> images, leur photo est une image d'image, ce qui
> a pour effet de doubler leur pouvoir dissolvant.
> Il en résulte une impression de rêve éveillé,
> d'hallucination vraie. C'est absolument la réalité
> sapée à sa base par l'image. (211)

> As for the dummies, since they themselves are already
> images, their photo is the image of an image, and
> this has the effect of doubling their dissolving
> power. The result is an impression of a waking
> dream, a genuine hallucination. It is, absolutely,
> reality being undermined at its very foundations
> by image. (167)

Such a pronouncement sounds as if it came from the pen of Baudrillard. "Unreality," he argues, "no longer resides in the dream or the fantasy, or in the beyond, but in the real's hallucinatory resemblance to itself" (SW 145). By producing images of images, Milan effects the autonomization of the sign and signals to the reader the fundamental similarity between Tournier's and Baudrillard's respective critiques of Western culture. This similarity is made all the more striking when we read how the fashion industry uses Idriss's body in order to make a cast for a North African boy mannequin that will be reproduced and distributed in Third World markets. Thus, Idriss himself becomes a simulacrum in the endless repetition of the hyperreal.

According to Baudrillard, late capitalist economies that create exchange value by mediating abstract social labor through a system of capital (MP 103) undergo a further mutation when all values become exchange-sign value, and the sign serves as the "operational structure" that makes structural manipulation possible (MP 121-22). This type of political economy "is the simulation of a universal finality of calculation and productive rationality, the simulation of a determination whereas symbolic exchange knows of neither determination nor end" (MP 150). Only the symbolic can strike a fatal blow against "all the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems . . . present in the internal logic of the sign," writes Baudrillard (SW 92). "The symbolic," he claims, "is the abolition of the imaginary of political economy" (MP 151). The finality of value inscribed in a product of labor eliminates the ambivalence of the work of art, an ambivalence that one also finds in the "primitive exchange gift" and in language itself (MP 97-100). Baudrillard correctly points out that for certain groups language is neither produced nor consumed. Rather, language is a symbolic form that serves as "an immediate reciprocity of exchange" (MP 97-98).

Michel Tournier draws many of the same conclusions. In one of the pivotal scenes of the novel, Idriss complains to a goldsmith, a fellow traveller on the ferry to Marseilles, that up to this point none of the photos he has seen resemble the reality with which he is familiar. He shows the goldsmith his passport photo as a perfect example. "Ce n'est pas à moi à ressembler à ma photo," he complains. "C'est ma photo qui doit me ressembler, non?" "Tu crois ça?" the *orfèvre* replies slyly. "Mais déjà l'expérience te prouve le contraire. L'image est douée d'une force mauvaise" (114) 'It isn't up to me to look like my photo. It's my photo that ought to look like me, isn't it? Do you really believe that? But your experience already proves that it's the other way around. An image is possessed of a force of evil'(88).

The goldsmith suggests that it is the sign, the photograph, that substitutes itself for the real. We should keep in mind that Idriss has no trouble passing through customs; the photo of the bearded man in his passport is not called into question. But the *orfèvre* also reveals an alternative to the sign economy of late capitalist culture. The goldsmith notices *la goutte d'or*, the little drop of gold on a necklace that Idriss wears. The goldsmith informs Idriss that *la goutte d'or* is really the *bulla aurea*, the Roman symbol of a free child. Free born children would carry the drop of gold until they came of age, at which time they took on the toga and "abandonnaient également la bulla aurea en offrande aux lares domestiques" (118) 'abandoned the *bulla aurea* and gave it as an offering to the household gods' (91). The symbolic exchange and offering to the

gods marks the alternative to the sign economy extant in the West. Tournier expresses this struggle between the political sign economy and a symbolic exchange economy through the very title of his novel. *La Goutte d'Or* is both the *bulla aurea* and the street in Paris that lies in the notorious district where today the majority of the Arab immigré population lives. The title of the novel signifies both the possibility of a new imaginary and the harsh reality of the existing political economy in France.

Thus, Tournier's novel is an exploration of an alternative to the sign economy, an alternative that consists of a system of symbolic social relations rooted in an oral tradition. Tournier appears to agree with Baudrillard once again. The sign economy, writes Baudrillard, seeks to neutralize "the symbolic power of the spoken word" (MP 137). Tournier's novel depicts this relentless process of neutralization as Idriss attempts to thwart the malign influence of autonomized images by recalling the rituals, legends, and customs of his Saharan culture.

Early in the novel, Idriss attends a wedding in Tabelbala. He sees a display of abundant gifts for the bride, and the groom follows the custom which "exige qu'il soit enveloppé jusqu'aux yeux dans un vaste burnous ceinturé par la corde qui aida sa mère à le mettre au monde" (32) 'demands that the bridegroom should be enveloped up to his eyes in a vast burnous girdled by the rope that helped his mother bring him into the world' (19). The symbolic nature of the exchange is highlighted by the dance of Zett Zobeida during which each person "répétait une litanie obsédante et énigmatique" (34) 'repeated a haunting, enigmatic litany' (20). Zett Zobeida is also the person who first wears *la goutte d'or*, and the day after the wedding Idriss retrieves it from the sand.

The wedding ceremony constitutes one of many instances in which Tournier describes a symbolic exchange economy and, in so doing, re-inscribes "the play of ambivalence," a condition which the world of production has eliminated (MP 99-100). "The symbolic social relation," writes Baudrillard, "is the uninterrupted cycle of giving and receiving" (MP 143). And this continuous cycle without finality, which Baudrillard characterizes as speech (MP 137), emerges from Tournier's novel in the form of the Saharan oral tradition. First there is the litany, the little poem about the dragonfly and the cricket that Idriss sings to himself throughout his journey. Then there is the story "Barberousse" that Abdulluh Fehr tells at the wedding. Idriss also learns of Oum Kalsoum, the Egyptian woman who became the voice of Islam on Arab radio in the 1950s. Finally, there is the legend of "La Reine blonde," a story the calligrapher Abd Al Ghafari tells. Each of these stories serves as a counter-current to

the sea of images that threaten Idriss, but the two most revelatory of the tales are ''Barberousse'' and ''La Reine blonde.''

There are several elements which these two tales have in common. Both stories are transmitted orally, both involve an artistic rendering or portrait of a human likeness (an obvious counter example to the plethora of photographic images that dominates the rest of the novel), and both concern themselves with the image of the veil—Kheir ed Dîn covers his red beard with a green silk veil, and the blond queen, as well as her portrait, is concealed behind a veil.

At the Tabelbala wedding, Abdulluh Fehr tells the story of the ''ancien pirate levantin,'' Kheir ed Dîn, otherwise known as ''Barberousse.'' Having conquered the sultan Moulay Hassan, Kheir ed Dîn commissions Hassan's official portraitist, Ahmed ben Salem, to paint a portrait of him as the conquering pirate; but he insists that the portrait be rendered in black and white so as to conceal the fact that he has a red beard and red hair. Ahmed ben Salem only succeeds in producing a rough sketch from memory because Kheir ed Dîn refuses to remove his turban and veil and sit for his portrait. Troubled by this failure, Ahmed ben Salem takes his sketch to the Scandanavian artist Kerstine. She uses the sketch and creates a beautiful tapestry that depicts a European autumnal scene filled with fallen leaves, foxes, squirrels, and deer and rich in reddish hues. Viewed from a distance, however, the tapestry reveals itself to be a portrait of Kheir ed Dîn in which his hair and beard make up the forest. When he finally sees this artwork which speaks the truth, Kheir ed Dîn removes his veil, declares himself Barberousse, and eventually seeks refuge in Europe after he suffers a defeat at the hands of a reinforced Moulay Hassan.

In a similar fashion, Abd Al Ghafari tells his students about the portrait of a blond queen that was so captivating that whoever owned the portrait would become mezmerized and eventually die. When the portrait finally falls into the hands of the fisherman Antar, his son Riad, a student of calligraphy, succeeds in saving him by using a calligraphic technique of interpretation. By placing a series of thin sheets of paper over the portrait, Riad is able to trace out a series of sentences written in Arabic that express the meaning of the portrait. This act of decipherment frees Antar from the grip of the image of the queen.

These two tales within the novel offer a critical counterpoint to the hyperreal. Both tales focus on a truth revealed through art, and both concern themselves with the act of unveiling. The notion of truth as unveiling naturally brings to mind Martin Heidegger, who himself defined ''Being-true'' as ''taking entities out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness (their uncoveredness)'' (BT 262). That Michel Tournier, the essayist and philosopher, alludes to Heidegger should

come as no surprise. What is intriguing, however, is the manner in which Tournier inscribes the Heideggerian inquiry on technology into the text of his own novel.[5]

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger examines technology as a form of bringing forth truth that effects a revealing different from that offered by *poiesis*. Heidegger argues that the "revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such" (14). The principle means by which technology "reveals" the truth is through the act of Enframing (*Gestell*), which for Heidegger constitutes a specific type of challenging-forth (*Herausfordern*). This setting-upon or challenging-forth induced by the act of Enframing, "unlock[s], transform[s], stor[es], distribut[es], and switch[es] about" things in nature (16). Enframing, therefore, "demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve" (23), which Heidegger calls *Bestand*. Thus modern technology produces a truth, a revealing dependent upon the act of Enframing which in turn reduces nature to a standing-reserve.

In *La Goutte d'Or*, the technological apparatus *par excellence* is the camera, and both the still photography and motion picture cameras "enframe" the world. Even Heidegger's concept of *Bestand* appears in Tournier's work. Monsieur Milan, for example, stores the boy mannequins in his room, distributes them in a life-like setting, and transforms them into inhabitants of an hallucinatory landscape. Similarly, when Mage shoots his commercials, all of the objects and actors used in the scene, even Idriss and his camel, are quite literally a "standing-reserve," standing by waiting to be "ordered" within the boundaries of the frame of film.

But Tournier is not simply constructing parallels that can be drawn between Heidegger's thought and his own novelistic scenes. On the contrary, Tournier explores Heidegger's questioning of technology, concurs with Heidegger's characterization of technology as a challenging-forth (*Herausfordern*), and offers his own *poietic* alternative, what Heidegger would call a bringing forth (*Her-vor-bringen*).

During his discussion of *Bestand*, Heidegger writes, "whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object" (17). Although Heidegger does not use this term, he clearly implies that whatever becomes standing-reserve, in essence, becomes sign. Tournier's novel repeatedly indicates that the contemporary world of signs, the hyperreality of a Western culture of simulacra, in effect, is made possible by the challenging-forth of particular technologies (video, film, advertising, etc.). The object as sign, be it Saharan ambiance conveyed through the image of a camel, or human sexual desire

expressed through photographs of human body parts, is always available for an ordering process in a system of signification. Perhaps this is best expressed through the transformation that occurs to *la goutte d'or* during the course of the novel.

Originally a talisman worn by the dancer Zett Zobeida, the little drop of gold is taken by a prostitute who allows Idriss to fondle her breasts, and eventually it ends up in a Paris jewelry shop window. The drop of gold, therefore, becomes *Bestand* and is absorbed into a syntax of commodification. The symbol of the free born child, the *bulla aurea*, is quite literally enframed by the shop window and thereby becomes a sign in the political economy of late capitalism.

For Heidegger, Enframing, like all forms of revealing, is a type of destining; but he adds, ''when destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it is the supreme danger'' (26). Heidegger explains that as soon as man is solely concerned with standing-reserve, he is in the midst of objectlessness and ''comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve'' (27). Tournier places Idriss at this exact precipice when Idriss himself becomes *Bestand* in the form of countless mannequins that are produced from a mold taken of his body.

In contradistinction to the destining of Enframing, Heidegger refers to the destining of *poiesis*, a bringing-forth (24-25). This, too, Tournier includes in his novel. The interpretive methodologies and artistic orderings rendered by Kerstine the tapestry maker and Riad the calligrapher in the two tales embedded in the novel are not a challenging-forth (*Herausfordern*). Rather, Kerstine and Riad practice a bringing-forth (*Her-vor-bringen*), a destining of *poiesis*.

The opposition between Enframing and *poiesis* lies at the heart of the Heidegger essay as well as Tournier's novel. Heidegger argues that Enframing reduces revealing to a simple ordering, and at the same time, ''the challenging Enframing not only conceals a former way of revealing, bringing-forth, but it conceals revealing itself and with it that wherein unconcealment, i.e. truth, comes to pass'' (27). In other words, Enframing obscures the truth, a truth revealed only through a *poietic* destining. We should not forget that Heidegger's word for destining (*Geschick*) can also mean aptitude and skill, and it is precisely this *poietic* aptitude that is essential for revealing truth.

In *La Goutte d'Or*, two modes of aptitude or skill, (*Geschick*), prevail. On the one hand there is the technology of the video age represented by ''la femme blonde,'' Monsieur Milan, and Achille Mage. On the other hand there is the artistic skill of revealing as represented by Abdulluh Fehr the story teller, Kerstine the tapestry maker, and Abd Al Ghafari the calligra-

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pher. Michel Tournier juxtaposes these two types of skills in order to examine the consequences of choosing the technological "challenging-forth" that impoverishes contemporary Western culture and results in the late capitalist economy in which all value becomes exchange-sign value.

At the end of his essay on technology, Heidegger writes:

> essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.

> Such a realm is art. (35)

In *La Goutte d'Or*, Michel Tournier conducts the essential reflection Heidegger calls for. Tournier confronts the technology of contemporary Western culture through the construction of his own novel which opposes a *poietic* to an Enframing activity. Through the art of the novel, Tournier shows how Western late capitalism of exchange-sign value grows out of the ordering activity which is the essence of technology.

Through his novel, Tournier puts the theories of Baudrillard and Heidegger into play and underscores the similarities and differences between their two perspectives. It would not be unfair to say that *La Goutte d'Or* expresses a profound nostalgia for a privileged position for art— Abdulluh Fehr, Abd Al Ghafari, Kerstine, and even Ahmed ben Salem are all presented in a favorable light. Kerstine's tapestry makes it possible for Kheir ed Dîn to gain self-esteem. Similarly, the calligraphic arts provide Riad with a means for freeing his father from the captivating power of the image. But to suggest that Tournier's novel articulates a solution that can be found in the writings of Heidegger and the early Baudrillard simplifies the complex nature of the novel's final scene and ignores two crucial aspects of how Tournier represents the power of artists and their work in *La Goutte d'Or*.

First, the privileged position of art only obtains in non-Western milieux. Tournier's depiction of contemporary French culture through the eyes of the Other provides a critique, but it cannot be said to offer the possibility of a solution. *La Goutte d'Or* expresses the tension between two cultures: one in which it is possible to privilege art through an economy of symbolic exchange, and the other in which no thing and no one can escape commodification in a sign-exchange economy of value. Tournier's novel does not resolve this confrontation of cultures; rather, it exhibits a profound ambivalence about art and its position in contemporary Western culture.

Tournier's ambivalent attitude lies at the heart of the second feature of his representations of the power of artists and art. Namely, art's redeeming power only affects fictional worlds embedded in Tournier's own novel. Kheir ed Dîn achieves self-fulfillment in a story told by Abdulluh Fehr, just as Riad's father, Antar, is saved in the story told by Abd Al Ghafari. But in Tournier's story, which has as its referent contemporary France, the fictional character, Idriss, is not saved.

In the novel's final paragraphs, Idriss has become a construction worker who wields a jackhammer. He sees *la goutte d'or*, the "symbole de libération, antidote de l'asservissement par l'image" (256) 'the symbol of freedom, the antidote to enslavement by the image' (203), enframed in a jewelry store window and he imagines that his jackhammer is Zett Zobeida "métamorphosé en robot enragé" (257) 'metamorphosed into a rabid robot' (203). Dancing with his mechanical partner, Idriss does not notice that the vibrations from his drill have cracked the jewelry store window, that alarms have gone off, and that helmeted police have sealed off the streets and are running in his direction. Instead, Idriss only hears Zett Zobeida's little litany about the dragonflies and the crickets.

Such an ambiguous ending to the novel invites speculation, and it would not be far-fetched to argue that Tournier's novel indicates that if Idriss cannot be redeemed by art because a symbolic exchange economy no longer exists for him, then acts of violence appear to be the only viable alternative available to him. Denied the possibility of transformation by art, Tournier's Idriss symbolically engages in destructive activities that disrupt the political economy of the Parisian society that he serves. The language in the final paragraphs is unmistakable. The "formidable" jackhammer that Idriss uses so he can "défoncer le bitume" (256) 'demolish the asphalt' (203) emits sounds like "la mitraillade" (257) 'machine gun fire' (203), as the asphalt comes up like a snake skin. In short, Tournier offers a hellish vision of combat and destruction. The final tableau is one of hallucinatory violence in which Idriss adheres to his imaginary symbolic system even as he assaults the system of sign economy that prevails in the West. Such an interpretation of the ending would mean that in writing *La Goutte d'Or* Tournier acknowledges that in Western culture, Heidegger's privileged space for art is untenable and may only be illusory, but art can avoid being absorbed (to some degree) into what Baudrillard has described as the contemporary sign economy either by articulating modes of violence in opposition to Western culture—which will only elicit the repressive response of that culture—or by sounding a warning to the West that such violent confrontations between the two economies are inevitable.

Notes

1. Améry, Fischer and Friedlander discuss the ethics of using historical material obtained from the Nazi death camps as aesthetic components in the construction of a novel.

2. See for example in French, Bevan, Bouloumié, Merllié, and Rosello; and in English, the pioneering work of Cloonan, Davis, and Petit.

3. Davis and Petit offer the most complete and theoretically informed treatment in English thus far of Tournier's works. In a fascinating article, Schehr uses the theories of Jacques Derrida and Michel Serres to discuss Tournier's theory of writing as it is expressed in the novel *La Goutte d'Or*.

4. Note that the name Achille Mage signifies the confluence of the two major traditions in Western culture: the ancient Greek culture of Achilles and Christianity as signified by the Magi.

5. In this regard, it is interesting to examine an excised chapter from *La Goutte d'Or* reprinted in *Petites Proses* entitled "Le peintre et son modèle" (155-67). Idriss meets Charles Frédéric de l'Épéechevalier, who paints the pyramids of Gizah while looking at Notre Dame and whose verbal puns and word play may be seen as a parodic treatment of Heidegger's own penchant for breaking up and reassembling words.

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