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“Throw[ing] the Longest Shadows”:  
The Significance of the Bogus  
Quotation for *Arcadia* by Jim Crace

# ABSTRACT

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Preceding his *Arcadia* with a non-existing quotation, Jim Crace proves to be no Arcadian innocent: challenging the shrewdness of his readers, the contemporary novelist seems to take pleasure in inviting them to an intellectual game which begins before the novel unfolds. The highly evocative title and the bogus quotation are bound to evoke associations which become the subject of minute examination in the novel. Its result turns out to be as astounding as the uncommon aphoristic trap laid for the readers. This article examines the significance of the bogus quotation as a part of the novel’s message and a key to its interpretation.

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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary writers seem to have a predilection to precede their works of fiction with quotations. The epigraphs constitute a heterogeneous group, some of them excerpted from prose or poetry composed by world-famous authors,<sup>1</sup> others originally appertaining to popular art<sup>2</sup> or literature of fact.<sup>3</sup> They may either be placed above the first lines of a novel or may

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the excerpts included in *Possession* by A.S. Byatt (1990) or *The Time Traveller’s Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the excerpts from contemporary songs included in *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* by Roddy Doyle (1996). The quotation preceding the novel is taken from “The Ballad of Lucy Jordan” by Shel Silverstein.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the introductory extract from the minutes of the Geographical Society meeting included in *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje (1992).

be brought into relief on an extra sheet separating the title page from the actual text. Intended to evoke certain images and as an inspiration to drawing parallels, they enrich the reading of a literary work.

Jim Crace's *Arcadia* (1992) is no exception to this rule. The critical attention is activated in *Arcadia* before one becomes absorbed in the plot since the much-telling title makes any potential reader consider their notions of pastoralism. For ages, poetic Arcadia has been known as a region of peace, leisure and happiness, and the pastoral, in the broadest sense, as "any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (Gifford 2). A delight in the natural is visible in the literary milestones of the pastoral convention, in the *Idylls* by Theocritus and the *Eclogues* by Virgil. As far as anglophone literature is concerned, the same holds true for the pastoral praise of English countryside; it is enough to mention *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare<sup>4</sup> or William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, which is famous for its worship of "the sovereign Nature" (VIII, 126). Such a concept of Arcadia, even in its most narrow pejorative definition, dispraising the pastoral simplicity as the one reduced to mere kitsch and sentimentality (Gifford 2),<sup>5</sup> is hardly met by *Arcadia*.<sup>6</sup> To the consternation of the readers, the novel turns out to be an enigmatic version of the pastoral. Instead of employing the well-established set of pastoral *loci communes*, its author attempts to revise their nature by joining concepts traditionally disjunctive in the pastoral convention. Thus, Crace investigates the viability of creating Arcadia within the city and experiencing rural life in the heart of the cityscape.

In fact, the feeling of consternation is a constant companion to the readers of *Arcadia*. Before indulging in the book, they are offered a quotation of apparently seminal significance for the text, granted by the fact that it has been placed in the middle of a blank page preceding the novel:

"The tallest buildings  
throw the longest Shadows  
(thus Great Men make  
their Mark by  
blocking out the Sun,  
and, seeking Warmth

<sup>4</sup> A useful study of the pastoral dimension of *As You Like It* in Alpers (69ff).

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the variety of literary Arcadia and the pastoral cf. Empson; cf. also James and Tew, eds., *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> The enigma of Crace's *Arcadia* is brought into relief by the design of the cover versions of the novel, be it the first 1992 or any subsequent 1993, 1997, 2008 editions of the text. None of the cover images endorses the conventional image of Arcadia. More information about the convention, the genre and the mode in Alpers, *passim*.

themselves, cast  
 Cold upon the rest).”  
 Emile dell’Ova, *Truismes*, Editions Baratin, Paris, 1774 (original formatting)

Given the name of its author, the title of the source and the details concerning its edition, one is expected to assume that it is a genuine quotation excerpted from a famous collection of an eighteenth-century book of aphorisms. To the complete astonishment of the readers, however, the search for its source reveals that neither Emile dell’Ova nor his *Truismes*, nor Editions Baratin has ever existed. The learned content of the quotation notwithstanding, it is but authorial mystification. Admittedly, the revelation comes as a surprise since the few lines of the epigram have been assigned a careful form, stressed by the evident scrupulousness of formatting, and the philosophical content pivoted on the centuries-old theme of human transience. As a consequence, the readership is biased towards believing in the authenticity of the excerpt, an assumption which finally proves a fallacy.

Interestingly enough, there is a hint in the bibliographical notes helping an attentive reader out of the trap. He or she might be slightly alarmed at the English meaning of the French word “baratin”: a verbose speech, in marketing denoting a sales pitch, a spiel. The reading of the linguistic game is left open to the readers: is the implied meaning of the name of the fake publishing house a pure coincidence, or is it an intentional word play of the author? If the latter is true, does the “spiel” only refer to the game the author has arranged for his readers by having offered them the bogus quotation, a literary trick licensed by *licentia poetica*, or is the word “spiel” targeted at delivering further means for enriching the interpretation of the text of the novel? Since *Arcadia* is focused upon laying bare the extent to which mercantile forces predetermine the life of an individual, the latter assumption seems perfectly plausible. Thus, the word “baratin” may indirectly signal the main field of action of the novel’s protagonist: Victor’s brilliant success in trade is the best illustration of the “spiel.” In a wider context, one might argue that “baratin” hints at the novel’s major concern with the economic growth of the city primarily based upon the act of selling goods. Soaked in materialism, it is “no wonder Victor never fell in love” (Crace 3),<sup>7</sup> “a cheque [being] . . . his version of a kiss” (9). Interestingly, the social dimension of the novel has been the subject of a heated discussion between Crace and the scholars commenting on his *Arcadia*. Defying Frank Kermode’s claims that “his [Crace’s] novels are devoid of direct political reference,” Crace has argued that his “books are full of politics and social commentary” (Farren).

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the references to Crace’s work are to *Arcadia*.

The intentionality of the author's mystification finds confirmation in the bibliographical research as well. It is worth mentioning that Crace's awareness of applying a bogus quotation with all pretensions to authenticity is given its due significance in the light of other works by this author. In fact, the epigraphs included in his earlier novels, *Continent* (1987) and *The Gift of Stones* (1989), attest to the rule generally applied by Crace in his fiction, namely to the authorial habit of preceding his books with bogus quotations. In the context of the present article, this reiteration is a fact which must stay in its focus.

The curious quotation, or more precisely Crace's pointed epigram, requires its due interpretation, first of all, in terms of the philosophical contents. The aphoristic message intensifies the feeling of consternation in the readers who first try and analyze its contents in relation to the concept of "Arcadia." As mentioned above, they expect a poetic vision of idyllic bliss and happiness, implied in the title, but the aphoristic lines are apparently at odds with such a mood and such inferences. Taken thoroughly out of the natural context, the strife for light far better resembles Darwinian notion of the struggle for the survival of the fittest than the idyllic concept of ease and repose. The examination of the epigraph is further complicated by the fact that the leading simile dominating the lines, "the tallest buildings . . . [like] Great Men," disclaims the pastoral approval of the natural and, by comparing people to artefacts, it perversely advocates the unnatural in them. The only feature which characterizes the epigraph and, at the same time, endorses the pastoral convention is the ongoing interplay of binary oppositions which governs the lines. The strife for light and warmth, emphasized by the references to shadow and cold, relates to the same idea of polarity which is inherent in the pastoral convention. The convention, notorious in scholarly circles for lacking an accurate definition of its nature,<sup>8</sup> springs from the struggle between the antagonistic forces in the world, between the sophisticated and the ordinary, the innocent and the experienced, the young and the old, the natural and the artificial. As one contemporary critic describes the pastoral space: "Arcadia may be best regarded as a realm of action, of certain intersections full of innate contradictions, which it attempts to partially solve" (James and Tew 13). Having adopted the idea of polarity inherent in the pastoral, Crace has adjusted it to his own post-modern vision. The result is a curious deployment of a tension of a clear pastoral origin and of a counter-pastoral value ensuing from the exchange between the natural and the artificial. By and large, Crace's new attitude towards the core pastoral notions, signalled in the epigraph, marks the novelty which his

<sup>8</sup> More information, cf. Snyder (1).

*Arcadia* offers to the readers. Recently, Crace's idiosyncratic version of the pastoral has been called "enigmatical" (Tew 230).

As may be expected, the epigraph plays a crucial role as far as the structure of the novel is concerned. It opens the text of *Arcadia* and it closes the novel, the aphoristic message being resumed again in the middle of the book (Crace 52, 209–10) as well as on its penultimate page (Crace 345). It skilfully predicts the *leitmotif* of the novel whose pivot is the desire of the main protagonist, Victor, an eighty-year-old successful businessman, to leave a lasting trace of his existence upon the city in which he arrived as an infant. A child of the country, who has grown up in the environs of an urban open-air market, of "The Soap Market,"<sup>9</sup> Victor is an example of a rags-to-riches multimillionaire. His world view is an odd mixture of country worship, on the one hand, and of an archetypal representation of the city as the place of all opportunities, on the other. Thus, the countryside appears to be an ideal land of "Milk and Honey,"<sup>10</sup> which Victor adores, even if only knowing the object of his adoration from his mother's idealized recollections of their native village. Never in his adult life has Victor visited the place he was born in, which is apparently no obstacle for him to consider himself one of "all good farmers" (52). However, striking as the fact is for a literary vision of Arcadia, it is the city that gives Victor's family shelter and saves them. Such an emphasis on the magic appeal of urbanity violates the basic assumptions of the pastoral ethos and renders Crace's *Arcadia* a curious contribution to the tradition of the pastoral.

Now eighty, Victor has set his mind on enacting his dream of Arcadia, the basis for which are his mother's nostalgic recollections of the countryside. Living in the city, he longs for rurality. He decides to have an exclusive shopping mall built, "the tallest building" called "Arcadia," which is his answer to the claim of "make[ing his] Mark" in the world. Arcadia, the mall, his "earthly paradise" (334) sarcastically nicknamed "the Glass Meringues" (215), embodies the thought expressed in the epigraph. Indeed, its contents are paraphrased in the text of the novel: "The luck that Victor wished upon himself was this: that he would live into his nineties, long enough to make his lasting, monumental mark upon the city" (52).

As the novel unfolds, the readers witness the gradual process of erecting the mall. Finally, they are confronted with an assessment of the achievement voiced by a journalist, by one of those who have allegedly seen the dream realized. It turns out that the journalist is the narrator of Victor's life story. Although he has accepted Victor's offer to write down his mem-

<sup>9</sup> This is the title of part one of *Arcadia* focused on the presentation of Victor's adult life.

<sup>10</sup> This is the title of part two of *Arcadia* which pictures his difficult childhood.

oirs, the credible source of all personal details, his attitude towards Victor's "monumental mark" is not that of enthusiasm. His explicit approval of the architectural wonder is, in fact, its cynical derision:

Yet, Arcadia is a triumph. Let's admit it. It weathers as I watch; it settles in. There is no complacency, just the swagger and ambition that cities flourish on. I'd stand here happily—glass in hand, alone—all day, and not be bored, and not grow tired, and not be stifled by its flamboyant uniformity, by its recreant geometry, by its managed cheerfulness. Give me the chance. Give me the time. Give me the bottle and the glass. (333–34)

This ironic claim is a prelude to the most important section of the novel. (Dis)approving of Arcadia, the journalist makes the readers think of the mechanisms governing "Victor's earthly paradise" (334). "Let's admit it" (333), what governs our lives is ambition and money, the journalist seems to expect his readership to confess. The paragraph lays bare the satiric potential of the pastoral mode. As Andrew V. Ettin justly observes:

The pastoral is an ironic form, based on a perceivable distance between the alleged and the implied. . . . Its real subject is something in addition to (or perhaps even instead of) its ostensible subject. The pastoral impulse toward containment involves holding contraries together in apparent unity, forged by art out of discordant emotions and perceptions. (qtd. in James and Tew 232)

The passage of *Arcadia* quoted above is governed by the irony founded on the discord between the alleged and the implied. Allegedly, the narrator approves of Victor's great achievement by emphasizing "Arcadia is a triumph" (333). Yet, the readers are expected to realize that something fails to flourish in the cities. Further in the novel, the narrator elaborates on "the sorcery of cities":

This is the sorcery of cities. We do not chase down country roads for fame or wealth or liberty. Or romance even. If we hanker for the fires and fevers of the world, we turn our backs on herds and hedgerows and seek out crowds. Who says—besides the planners and philosophers—that we don't love crowds or relish contact in the street with strangers? We all grow rich on that if nothing else. Each brush, each bump, confirms the obvious, that where you find the mass of bees is where to look for honey. (263)

The strange appeal of cities and of places similar to Arcadia, the mall, is rooted in power, money and fame. At first glance, the assumption seems

to hinge upon the pastoral convention: promoting “fame” and “wealth,” the city appears hostile to the simple and the unsophisticated. In keeping with the convention, the city designates counter-pastoral space, since such notions as money, fame or career, perversely claimed worthwhile and desirable in the passage, are fundamental constituents of the vice associated with the city. Nonetheless, what renders the citation enigmatic in terms of the pastoral ethos is the implication that the man is not actually searching for simplicity. Nor is anybody looking for the space where *otium*, i.e. repose and contemplation, counts for more than *negotium*, i.e. active life. From the pastoral point of view, this is a hazardous claim and it utterly destroys the pastoral quality of the passage.

The emphasis on power and fame also marks the achievements of the “Great Men” in the introductory epigraph of *Arcadia*. Its closing resumes the thought expressed in the motto in a more direct manner on the penultimate page of the novel. The last few paragraphs function as brackets since they re-phrase the aphoristic verses. This time, the leading idea is put in prose. Having seen all the artificial naturalness, a curious oxymoron which, however, properly describes the mark made by *Arcadia*, the mall,<sup>11</sup> the journalist resumes the thought expressed in the motto:

The tallest buildings throw the longest shadows, it is said, by those who spend their lives in contemplation of their monuments, and those for whom *the shadow life* is better than the real. But most of us who live in cities die and take our shadows to the grave. . . . It is said that great men have the grandest tombstones, too, and throw the longest shadows even after death. The cemeteries prove the truth in that. (345, my emphasis)

The same imagery which characterizes the bogus quotation governs the paragraphs closing *Arcadia*. The motif of the shadow becomes the core around which the thought of the journalist is oscillating. Contemplating Victor’s monument, *Arcadia*, the mall, he begins pondering upon the Horatian idea of “*exegi monumentum*” but concludes on a more sober, realistic note. “I’ll leave no monument to me. No bar, no restaurant, no market hall will bear my name” (334). Resuming the thought expressed in the epigraph, the journalist goes as far as to cynically deride the idea which has become the *leitmotif* of the novel. Mentioning the tombstones of the long-forgotten deceased literally “throw[ing] . . . Shadows” in cemeteries, he aims at making the readers aware of the pointlessness of the strife for “mak[ing such a] Mark.” By contrast to the introductory aphorism, no tensions animate the sober discourse any more. The realistic conclusion of the novel,

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the paragraphs describing nature confined within an artificial frame (Crace 336).

stressing the democratic dimension of death, has been devoid of the notion of Darwinian struggle. The journalist claims: "But I prefer to think that worms and damp and degradation are open-minded democrats which treat us all the same. We are all citizens at last. At least until we are all soil" (345).

Leaving aside the structural and contextual significance of the bogus quotation for the text of *Arcadia*, the readers might try and analyze the mere fact of enclosing an aphoristic trap in a novel. The question is what has been the *spiritus movens* of the author's apparent intention of putting his potential readers to the test of bogus quotations preceding *Arcadia* as well as his other six novels. The answer is suggested in the text of *Arcadia*. Once again one recurs to the motif of the shadow, first announced in the epigraph and taken up further in the text. At the end of the novel it is meant to describe not only the lives of the characters but, in a wider context, the ones of the contemporaries in general, the "shadow li[ves]" (345). Next to the protagonist of *Arcadia*, other characters also live catching at shadows. Victor's mother, Em, and Rook (Victor's first-hand man) and Anna (Victor's secretary) as well as Joseph ("Rook's ne'er-do-well [foil]" 31), all of them live their "shadow li[ves]," their daydreaming resulting in a complete final disappointment. By contrast, the novel is closed with a picture of the journalist really tasting his life. He admits: "I make my mark upon the city, too. My living mark. I stretch my legs as best I can and set off slowly down the street. My rainy footprints on the pavement will soon dry, but footprints . . . are more substantial—are they not?—than shadows" (345). The rhetorical question, directed at the readers, seems to be targeted at addressing the problem of the authenticity of experience.

It is significant that a short piece of research makes it clear that Crace has taken much pleasure in the intentional delusion of his readers. In an article, he admitted:

I have in the past acquired a reputation for concocting non-existent writers and unwritten volumes. My first seven novels were flattered by sham epigraphs from invented works by counterfeit authors, including Pycletius,<sup>12</sup> Emile Dell'Ova, and the "excavationst" Sir Harry Penn Butler.<sup>13</sup> It always cheered me up when my books were badly received to learn that the scholarly critic<sup>14</sup> was nevertheless more than familiar with the works of my bogus epigrapher. (Crace, "New Kind")

<sup>12</sup> The alleged author of the epigram preceding another novel by Crace, *Continent* (1986). Interestingly enough, "[t]he current edition of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* includes an entry (written by Crace) for Pycletius, continuing the joke and enhancing its post-modern credentials" (Farren).

<sup>13</sup> The alleged author of the introductory epigram in *The Gift of Stones* (1988).

<sup>14</sup> Probably, Frank Kermode—cf. Farren.

In an interview, he admits: “I like to tease people” (Crace, “In Conversation”). If so, the question is whether it is only for the sake of deception that Crace wants to disorient the readers? It seems that his motives are deeper. By offering them the quotations bearing all signs of genuine excerpts, he puts them to a test in order to find out if they content themselves with mere appearances. The detailed way of annotating the alleged quotation proves Crace’s desire to disguise the delusion. If the readers fall into the trap, it will mean that they are perfectly satisfied with judging by appearances and dealing with copies instead of originals. As a consequence, they may be regarded as those who catch at shadows.

The idea of perfect satisfaction with second-hand experiences, the principle of “the shadow life,” suggests still another dimension of the novel. I would like to argue that Crace’s *Arcadia* employs the idea of hyperreality presented by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*. The famous intellectual claims that a new era of hyperreality began in the 1980s, the time his monograph was first published. It is marked by the loss of distinction between the real and the hyperreal. On the first page of his monograph he argues that:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—that engenders the territory. (1)

Baudrillard’s claim that contemporary society worships “the precession of simulacra,”<sup>15</sup> i.e. with copies without the original, is further furnished by an analysis of its participation in the world created by the media, in the first place, by TV and places like Disneyland. Theorizing the post-modern society, he investigates the nature of the interaction between the hyperspace and those who enter it:

By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatorial algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication,

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<sup>15</sup> The epigraph preceding the monograph defines simulacrum as follows: “‘The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.’ Ecclesiastes” (Baudrillard 1).

nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. (2)

*Arcadia* is Crace's endorsement of the idea of hyperreality. Interestingly enough, it begins at assigning the novel its enigmatic title. The evocative name, which offers a rich array of pastoral connotations, turns out to designate an odd place, in Baudrillard's words, the map without the territory. Victor's Arcadia, the mall built of glass and concrete, is a tangible example of Baudrillard's simulacrum: seemingly representing the original, the pastoral Arcadia, it is only a kitsch image of the pastoral ideal driven *ad absurdum*, underpinned by no original at all. It is, indeed, a simulacrum without the original. The modern building in the heart of the cityspace, "the fruit and vegetables . . . so polished and so uniform" (336), the "lab-grown lettuces" (336) together with the "glasshouse broccoli" (336) and "bio-technic aubergines" (336), all sold in the shopping centre, whose logo is "a dancing apple with a hygienic, grub-free smile" (336), is this not a provocative idea? What does this image represent but the idea of hyperreality, of blurring traditionally antagonistic elements, of enclosing nature within the cityscape as well as the natural within the artificial? As Baudrillard notices, "*that is where simulation begins*" (31), in the implosion of polarities. "[N]othing separates one pole from another any more, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: *implosion* . . . , an implosion of meaning" (31). This is the absurdity of Victor's version of Arcadia.

In a wider sense, this is the absurdity of any shopping mall readers know from first-hand experience of reality (or better, of hyperreality): the artificial-looking fruit, the fountains and plants, which one is not allowed to touch, the "perfect surveillance" of the hypermarket (Crace 76),<sup>16</sup> all these characteristics are perfectly familiar to contemporary readers. The characters of Crace's novel, alongside the readers easily deceived into believing in the authenticity of the epigraph, represent a hyperreal society which contents itself with mere substitutes. In the case of hypermarkets, they are satisfied with "this hyperspace of the commodity where in many regards a whole new sociality is elaborated" (Baudrillard 75) and are involved in its "immense to-and-fro movement totally similar to that of suburban *commuters*" (75). The same to-and-fro movement is discernible in Crace's description of the market: "here was chaos, a nightmare for pedestrians. To cross the market by foot was to volunteer for service in the bruising labyrinths of an ants' nest. . . . Insane. Insane" (Crace 211).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the description of Arcadia, the mall (333).

In a more specific sense, the act of the intentional deception, performed by the author, exemplifies the process of simulation, “feign[ing] to have what one doesn’t have” (Baudrillard 3). The habit of preceding his novels with fake quotations proves Crace a literary designer of hyperreal space.

Crace’s *Arcadia*, an enigmatic version of the pastoral, functions as a touchstone of hyperreality. The introductory epigraph seems to be its herald. Thoroughly conscious of setting a trap with the bogus quotation for his potential readers, Crace proves himself to be a true representative of contemporary society, a society which, on the one hand, is well versed in simulation and manipulation<sup>17</sup> and, on the other hand, has long lost the ability to discern between the real and the fabricated. In terms of Christian standards of morality, such an attitude towards the world and society as well as towards our inner selves may be judged sinful. If so, it seems plausible to assume that Crace’s point of reference in composing his introductory epigram might have been an English proverb: “Old sins cast long shadows.” *Arcadia* may be interpreted as a novel examining one of the oldest sins, greed, leading to the dehumanization of the protagonist of *Arcadia*. In a wider context, it may be an accusation of contemporary society, re-oriented at profit-making, gained at the expense of the authenticity of experience. Since materialism and industrialism have led to the commodification of the human, Crace’s epigram may be regarded as a commentary on the state of affairs: “buildings [like great men] throw the longest shadows.”

The ambiguity of the introductory epigraph, its philosophical context as well as structural function, indicate that the aphorism is meant to play a pivotal role in shaping the interpretation of *Arcadia*. Crace’s cynical attitude towards his potential readership seems to aim at delivering a tangible proof of how superficial and easily contented readers have become. It is left for each of them to decide whether they want to feel “as though [they] were more [themselves]”<sup>18</sup> after having read *Arcadia*.

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<sup>17</sup> First of all, performed by the media—cf. Baudrillard’s examples connected with TV and Disneyland.

<sup>18</sup> In a dystopia, *Brave New World*, the phrase is used by a disillusioned member of Fordian society who wanted to find his way back to his real self (Huxley 90).

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