

Pages 636-650 (Baudrillard)

Biographical Sketch (1929-2007)

- Born in Reims, France
- First in family to attend the university – studied German
- Taught German to high schoolers, then completed his doctoral work in sociology
 - o Under Henri Lefebvre
- 1966 – completed first doctoral thesis, which became *The System of Objects*
- Taught as assistant professor in 1966-1987 at University of Paris X, Nanterre
- With the Algerian War and student revolts arising, began supporting and contributing to Marxist writings.
 - o Marxist influence on his early work
- With rise of postindustrialism, ended up abandoning Marxism
- Began to study culture more than economics
 - o Especially looked at semiotics and changing nature of signs.
 - o *Hyperreality and Simulations*
- Gained popularity in the 1980s
 - o *America and Cool Memories* told his stories of travels that showed his cynical attitude toward consumer culture, especially of that in the US.
- In response to the US-Iraqi conflict in the 1990s, he wrote about how the Gulf War “did not take place”, but what took place was a carefully scripted media event that had a predetermined outcome.
- Continued to write about terrorism, politics, television, symbolic exchange, and virtual reality until his death in 2007.

Intellectual Influences + Core Ideas

- Argued to be the most important postmodern theorist
 - o **Simulacra** = copies of objects for which there is no true original
 - o **Hyperreality** = “reality” that has always already been reproduced
- Began career influenced by Marxist theory, but in more of a focus on the capitalist mode of consumption, not the means of production.
 - o *The System of Objects* (1968) – consumerism, commodity fetishism
 - o “He examines how mundane elements of home décor create environments of ‘modern’ functionality (through furnishings like the ‘kitchen set’ or the ‘living room set’), signify ‘keeping up’ with technological progress (through the increasing accumulation of ‘gadgets’), and contribute to the overall process of conspicuous consumption (especially through the accumulation of ‘collections’)” (637).
- Then began shifting his cultural views from that of overt, obvious meanings of household objects to the multiple meanings designated to objects of consumption.
 - o Role places play in creating a culture of consumption (malls, TV programs, etc.)

- *Critical of mass consumption and how it has the ability to create false needs/desires and to tie individual identities to commodities.
- Says signs no longer convey simple, clear meanings
 - o "Today, consumer goods, and in particular mass media, have created a uniquely complex cultural world where signs routinely take on multiple meanings or have no stable meaning at all" (638).
 - o Symbols no longer just refer to concrete reality (ex: imagistic advertising).
 - o Today is more based on implicit values and lifestyle images than explicit values in advertising.
 - o We now understand who we are through symbols.
 - o Example → Nike Swoosh Symbol
 - It is a **floating signifier** - able to move from one signified to another.
- **Hyperreality** occurs when the distinction between "reality" and the model/simulation is completely blurred.
 - o The meaning of signs used to be nonarbitrary based on an irrefutable social order.
- **1st True Order of Simulacra** = the order of obligated signs is replaced by the first 'modern signs' in an era of 'counterfeit," where the meaning of signs is no longer bound to the obligations of a feudal order.
 - o Thus the signs begin to multiply with expansion strategies by which human beings come to represent the world.
 - o Order of signs is based on "natural law of value"
- **2nd True Order of Simulacra** = begins with Industrial Revolution
 - o Mass proliferation of signs due to the newfound technological advances.
 - o Mass advertising represents products/their uses, but also refers to lifestyles found in those ads.
 - o Value of objects = logic of marketplace signs
- **3rd True Order of Simulacra** = contemporary period
 - o Signs no longer have contact with material reality.
 - o "Structural law of value" - meaning of a sign isn't derived from its connection to a real signified, but its structural relationship to a semiotic code.
- Examples of Simulacra
 - o Theme Parks (Disneyland)
 - Simulate space travel, submarine voyages, journeys into fairy tales, etc.; presented as a fantasy, thus seeing America as real.
 - o Television
 - Brings viewers into counterfeit world with intimate and personal details of fictional/nonfictional characters
 - o The 1st Gulf War
 - Didn't recall occur; more of simulation of feared nuclear war.
 - o Watergate

- Simulated political scandal; hyperreal event created to simulate political credibility during era of political stigma/cynicism.
 - Demographic polls/statistics/voting are simulated attempts to represent the "mass society".
 - Flight simulators, interactive video games, virtual-reality, IMAX films, robotic pets, virtual celebrities, Barbie dolls, museums, zoos, aquariums, etc.
- "For Baudrillard, it is the mass media with its endless ability to create and reproduce images and signs that drives this process, becoming the great simulation-producing machine of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (641).
 - Images and signs become our primary references

Theoretical Orientation

- Collective
 - Little to say about individuals and their social interaction
 - Examines the role of simulations and their transformative effects on culture.
 - Culture is what is in power and is filled with simulacra that construct an artificial world and minimize the efficacy of individual agency.
- Nonrational
 - How systems of meaning shape action

Introduction to *Simulacra and Simulations*

- The circulation of signs in contemporary society with the mass media is creating a semiotic "code" that is not based on "reality", but on a symbolic logic.
- Believes we face a conflict today because in contemporary society, there are many simulations of reality and mistaking them for reality itself.
 - Conflict because cannot distinguish from what is the simulation and what is real (hyperreality).
- Hyperreality
 - Occurs as a result of the separation of signifiers from signifieds.
 - Simulations now stand for reality; signifier is mistaken for signified.
- Thus power has been replaced by signs of power.

***Simulacra and Simulations* (1981)**

- Introduction
 - Present-day "simulators" try to make the real coincide with their simulations.
 - No longer has to be rational
- The Divine Irrelevance of Images
 - "To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't" (644).
 - Simulation threatens the difference between true (real) and false (imaginary).
 - Seen in medicine and the army
 - Also seen in religion and the simulacrum of divinity.