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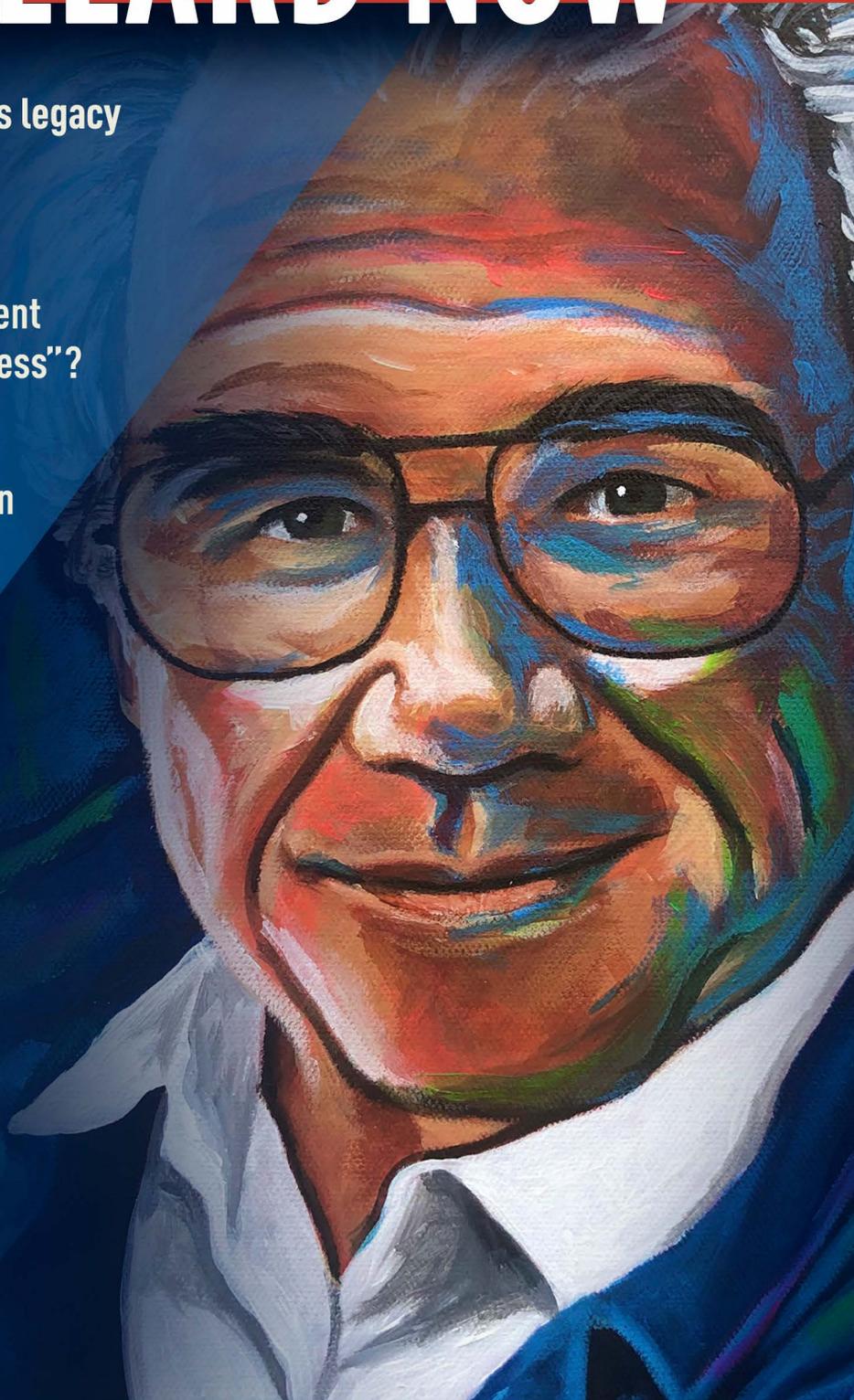
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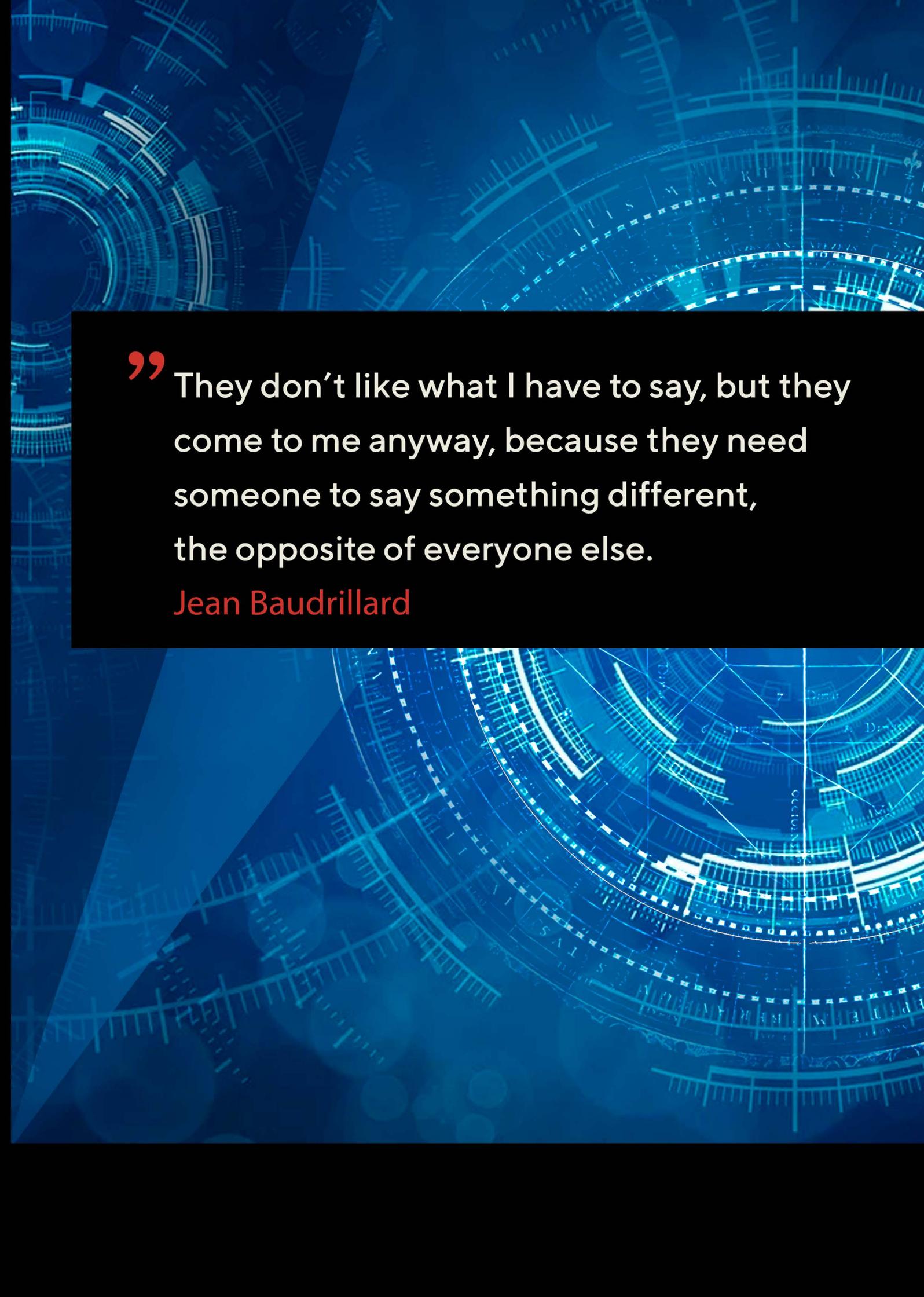
INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL BAUDRILLARD NOW

- Innermost depths of Baudrillard's legacy in the book of Dr. Oleg Maltsev
Jerome Krase
- How did the world's most prominent publications turn into "tabloid press"?
Oleg Maltsev
- Baudrillard: Theorist of Alienation
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Alexzander Mazey
- With Jean Baudrillard in Paris
Nina Zivancevic
- Stucco Angel
Jean Baudrillard



They don't like what I have to say, but they come to me anyway, because they need someone to say something different, the opposite of everyone else

Jean Baudrillard



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Jean Baudrillard

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In his richly illustrated text, Maltsev presents a reasonable (if that is the right word) argument for a Baudrillardian unified philosophy; something that Jean himself might find a bit “out there.” Most readers of Baudrillard have most frequently seen his fifty-odd works, that Maltsev deftly synthesizes, as a jumble of discrete jigsaw puzzle pieces that might, with great mental effort, be fit together into a single image. Allow me here a bit of a Baudrillardian quip in that there might be many, completely different, images assem-

about “seeing “urban lives and cultures. For example, having been on many of my own photographic expeditions to Southern Italy and having been greatly informed by the description and analysis of its opaque political culture by the well-known urban anthropologist Italo Pardo (2003), Maltsev’s allusion to Southern Italian philosophy as a resolution Baudrillard’s paradoxical claim that because the masses cannot invent anything, therefore they synthesize everything warrants close attention.

Baudrillard seems to be saying that one cannot make “common” sense out of the manipulated worlds in which we live, but only either accept it and pretend it is real or try to lift the many veils that hide the phenomenon from actual view. Like Maltsev, I prefer the latter.

bled from these jumbled pieces. Maltsev assembles his work into what he feels is a coherent system. Having not read most of the works to which he refers, I can’t judge the system’s reliability or validity, but the argument he makes, as enhanced by the visual logic of many supporting images, is quite convincing and, as intended, has practical value for a wide range of scholars. I should also note here that creating coherent systems from varied data is a distinctly “modernist” project. However, as he intended, it helps to increase its practical value in the philosophy of science, psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology which are dependent on simpler paradigms.

Although an adequate refining of the rich ore from Maltsev’s deep mining is beyond both my ken and the scope of this necessarily brief review, I must touch upon those that have the most valuable for my continuing research and writing

Today the values are democratic. This implies an insoluble contradiction at the level of “services”, the practice of which is irreconcilable with the formal equality of people. The only way out is to spread the social Game (for today everyone is forced to receive and provide services, not only in private life, but also in their public and professional practice — everyone is more or less “tertiary” in relation to the other). The social game of human relations in a bureaucratic society is different from the terrible hypocrisy of Swift’s servants. It is a gigantic model of “simulation” of absent reciprocity. It is not stealthy, but functional simulation. The minimum life of social communication is achieved only at the cost of this relationalist training in which everyone is included — a magnificent optical illusion designed to mask the objective attitude of alienation and distance directed from everyone to



everyone. (Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*)

However, while people appear to be forced to “support” each other, creating the synthesis, according to Maltsev, Baudrillard’s philosophy paradoxically argues that a person still can choose.

As a visually-oriented social scientist I was especially appreciative of Maltsev’s chapter, “*Baudrillard’s Photography*”. As he explains it, his acquaintance with Baudrillard began with his philosophy and subsequently discovered that Baudrillard’s photography was a mirror-reflection of his theory about simulation and simulacra which emerged during Baudrillard’s visit to America. It seems that while photographing the desert, Baudrillard unexpectedly came across mirages that, as optical illusions, demanded explanation (or meaning) beyond the visual data. As Maltsev relates:

... in this aspect, I relate to Baudrillard a lot; for me, as a scientist, a camera is also a research tool, not simply an illustrator. The photos I make are incomprehensible sometimes, as is the question of why I took them in the first place. But I see in those images things that others don’t. Back in time, “watching” and “seeing” meant very different things and people were aware of this difference. As chairman of one of the oldest scientific photographic societies globally, the Odessa Photographic Society, and as a head of the Expeditionary Corps (a special unit of the Memory Institute) I take a lot of photographs in different parts of the world under different circumstances and conditions. If all my photographic work made in expeditions in different countries is looked at, then half of them are not artistic at all, but aimed at assisting research. (202)



I was first introduced to Baudrillard's ideas while working on a book, *Seeing Cities Change: Local culture and Class* (2012) that I intended to be the capstone of my visual studies of urban neighborhood communities. I must also note here that my introduction to Maltsev's work is more direct and less relevant for the current review. Some time ago, we had a long conversation about Baudrillard. (Krase 2021) In that conversation, I reflected on how even the vaguest understanding of his work impacted on the practice of urban ethnography, especially in this growing practice of digital-related other related multimodal ethnography in which it is almost impossible to distinguish among visual and other simulacra.

To conclude this review, I should share some words on Maltsev's final chapter "A Composite Conceptual Model Of Baudrillard's Philosophy" in which he attempts to sketch his philosophy with the help of what he claims is a "simplified," model "which will be easy to grasp" consisting of three parts:

- 1) The world we live in;
- 2) A prism (or screen) through which we look at this world;
- 3) Unexplained mystical phenomena. (253)

Only a basic understanding of Baudrillard's work is needed to grasp the first two parts, but the last requires a much closer reading, as Maltsev, via both physical and mental expeditions, (re)connects European mysticism and ancient science to both (modern) abstract philosophy and empirical science, as he concludes;

The outstanding philosopher of the twentieth century, Jean Baudrillard in his writings, clearly described not only what is happening in the world today, but also gave very precise reasons for

why everything is so, and not otherwise; how the modern world has formed, and what awaits humanity if nothing changes. His philosophy is extremely practical but only for those who want to understand it and apply it in their lives. And the choice, as Baudrillard himself noted, is up to every human being himself. On this note and at this stage of scientific work, I have the honor to bid you farewell, dear reader! (266)

After reading Maltsev's rendition (perhaps construction is the better term) of *The Maestro*, for me, Baudrillard seems to be saying that one cannot make "common" sense out of the manipulated worlds in which we live, but only either accept it and pretend it is real or try to lift the many veils that hide the phenomenon from actual view. Like Maltsev, I prefer the latter.

PS: I would be remiss if I did not commend the excellent Preface "Why Baudrillard, Why Now" by Andrew McLaverty-Robinson which pointed me in the best direction for appreciating, if not apprehending, Oleg Maltsev's *Maestro*.

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How did the world's most prominent publications turn into "tabloid press"?

Dr. Oleg Maltsev

Author, EUASU Academician and Presidium Member,
founder and head of the Memory Institute

2

**What's going on in the world right now?
Why are participants of the information process playing around?**

(Feb 17, 2022)

Research premises

The ongoing events of today's world are of interest to literally every world citizen. Global, large-scale problems replace one another, transcending the borders of countries and continents. The world has not completely recovered from the consequences of the two-year pandemic, as the virus that took over the entire planet has been replaced by a military conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Military actions between these countries began back in 2014, but the progress of events and attention that the conflict has now taken could compete in scale and power with the consequences with world wars. Hence, the question asks itself, what will be the next event and subsequent test for humanity? Perhaps an alien invasion of our planet? The latter assumption is undoubtedly the product of irony.

Current events are very interesting to me from a scholarly research perspective: in the present day, the vast majority of people, regardless of their position in society, education, or level of intellectual development, believe in what “the world” broadcasts to them through thousands of technological sources from every corner of the planet.

However, this article offers not a mere reflection on current events and trends in the global geopolitical situation. On the contrary, events, changes, and

stopped or ceases to exist). In fact, we are witnessing the direct realization of the paradigm of this threat. Let us consider the stages in order. Despite the fact that global events and changes concern everyone on a different level, the results of this study are relevant and promising for experts and persons associated with such forms of professional activity as marketing, management consulting, crisis management, HR management, journalism, as well as experts of the security field, including integrated business security.

Under conditions of uncertainty, the absence of an orientation system, and the increasing challenges of the environment, everyone becomes subject to various forms of information influence and is deprived of the ability to perceive reality objectively.

challenges of modernity serve as demonstrative examples, which allowed the author of this text to comprehend and formulate a particular heuristic model. Thus, the subject product of the presented scientific comparative analysis is **the model of operational threat**. By looking into current global trends in the given article, I will present the premises and logic of the emergence and formation of this model, and demonstrate how the retransformation of the model takes place by shifting from the operational to the strategic.

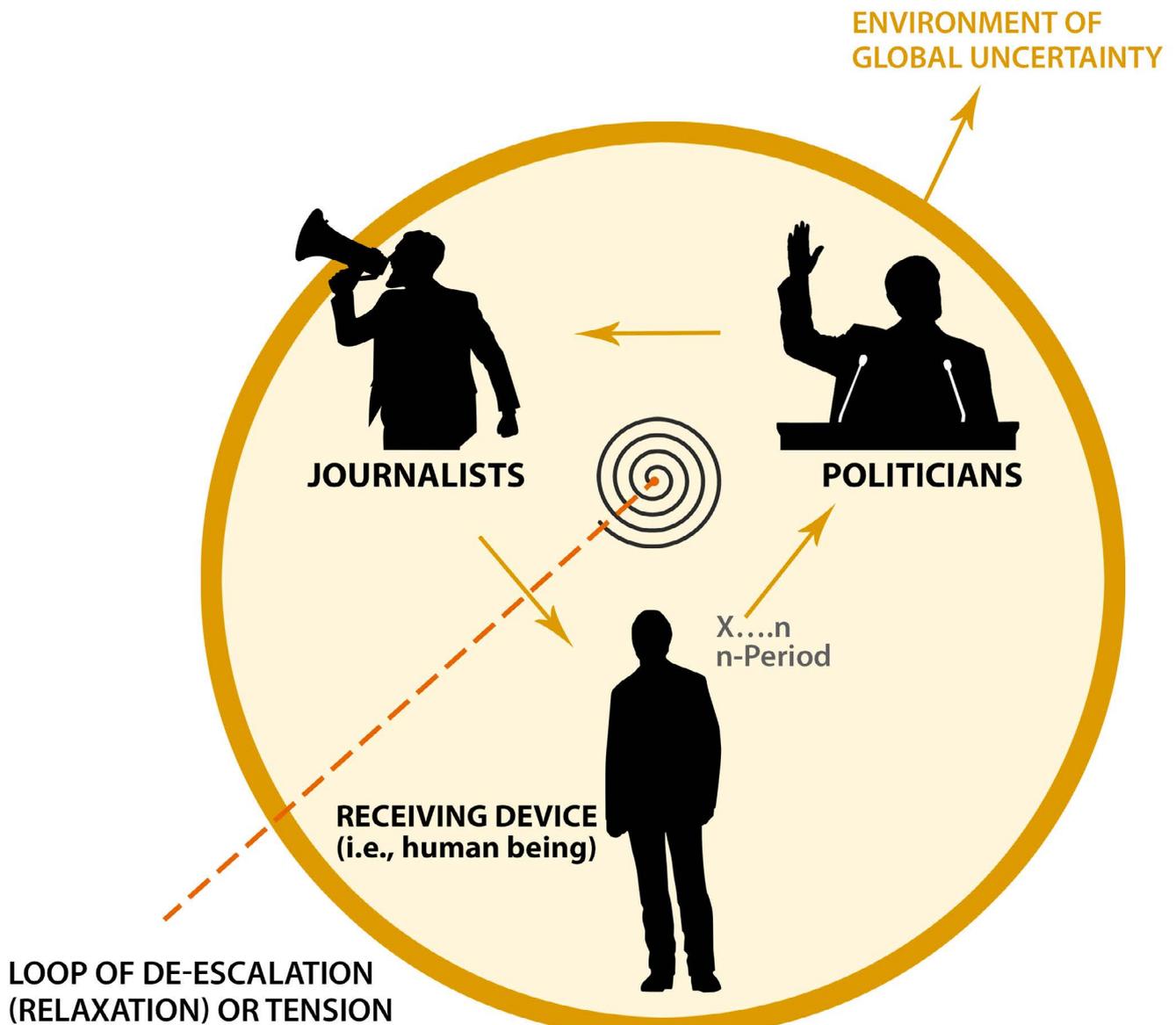
The presentation of basic material

The operational threat or immediate temporary threat (ITT) is the basic form of current threats. The primary characteristic of ITT is its temporary nature. This threat arises, exists for some time, then some event (or complex) occurs, after which the current threat is deactivated (it is defeated,

Why is the comprehension of operational threats and their consequences important and relevant?

From a psychological perspective, if a person does not understand the cause-and-effect relationships that determine the nature of current events (in other words, s/he does not understand “how” and “what” is exactly happening), it is extremely difficult for him/her to process data, to form his/her own opinion about these events and, even more so, to form a forecast or probabilistic judgment about the future. Under conditions of uncertainty, the absence of an orientation system, and the increasing challenges of the environment, everyone becomes subject to various forms of information influence and is deprived of the ability to perceive reality objectively. The following scheme demonstrates the operational threat model.

OPERATIONAL THREAT MODEL



Human in the state of tension tends to accept any kind of information for the purpose of de-escalation, (that is, relaxation), and to make the incomprehensible comprehensible.

The presented scheme reflects a special case of the current events taking place. The model can also work according to another scheme. But in this article, we will consider this configuration.

Along with the workings of the model, I believe it is also important to consider how this model emerged. Understanding the cause-and-effect relationships and stages of model formation can also help to understand the functionality of both its elements and the structure as a whole.

First, I would like to begin my analysis with the book of Nassim Taleb, an American essayist and statistician, titled “The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable” (2007). “Black Swan,” unlike the author’s next book, “Antifragility,” was a true bestseller. The book’s message can be summed up succinctly as follows: “*you can’t be sure of anything.*” An audience familiar with the book’s contents should remember the following episode. As a non-scientific writer and journalist, Nassim Taleb went to a Japanese conference to personally ask scientists how many of their predictions had come true. The answer was: “None”.

Second, during my interview with Israeli-American psychologist Daniel Kahneman, one of the founders of behavioral economics, he conveyed the same message, that one *cannot be sure of anything.*

Third, turning to the works of the eminent French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism” and “The Gulf War did not take place”, we observe a clear judgment of the role and influence of universal uncertainty. Baudrillard even identified this judgment as the basis of the spirit of global terrorism. It is universal uncertainty as a prerequisite for the operational threat model depicted in the scheme. But what creates this uncertainty?

The first element is timelessness. For example, the world information computer network Internet is not influenced by any laws of time. The Internet is a global environment of uncertainty, where events occur “suddenly.” Accordingly, we might conclude that analyzing and predicting events and reactions to them on the Internet is a semi-structured task, practically not comprehensible through mathematical methods.

Let me provide an example: suppose I posted a photo on social networks, under which I got 100 “likes.” Then I posted another photo, in my opinion, a very good one, and I didn’t get a single “like.” I think every person has experienced something like that at least once. It is an example of how it all happens “suddenly,” by some incomprehensible and unpredictable law.

At the same time, society increasingly tends to identify the Internet environment with the real physical world. First of all, this is reflected in the communication change among people in life. Internet slang adds to our every day speech. It is worth noting that the attempt to identify the virtual world with the actual world is one of the first prerequisites for creating an environment of uncertainty. In modern cinematography, we also find several examples through which society is immersed in an environment of uncertainty. The way it works is that one of the central forms of film-making today is the *psychologeme*. Psychologemic films are made from a cliché; the storyline is almost absent (a video sequence without a plot). Such a film is for the viewer (in other words, for the consumer of dynamic images teeming with signs and symbols without meaning) completely unpredictable and illogical. As an example, we can consider an average detective story. Conventionally, there is

a certain inciting incident (say, a murder or robbery), then there is a detective who investigates the crime. In the end, the “hero of the day” is uncovered. Now let’s imagine that something happens every minute throughout the film, but the detective doesn’t show up. At the same time, the viewer meets many people interested in the events taking place. He meets everybody except the detective. Moreover, the viewer can’t be sure that the murdered character won’t come back to life in the next episode, and he *might* come back without any explanation. This is how the psychologeme works in cinematography. The Russian TV series “Mediator” and “Nevsky” are striking examples, and among American films,

within the U.S. are dramatically different from those that are distributed outside the U.S., and if certain websites didn’t translate them (with further publication on the Internet), we wouldn’t even know about many of them. These films are not hidden, but neither are they replicated worldwide. (Of course, it is not about world premieres shown in cinemas).

Anyone can conduct their research on the Internet, with books and movies, tracing the environment of uncertainty into which we are inevitably immersed. But the main point to be made is as follows: ***the environment of uncertainty generates various “off guard” events that are almost impossible to predict.***

The interactive environment of uncertainty turns into the environment of uncertainty where humans live.

perhaps, it is worth noting the infamous film “Joker”. There are many more examples, and the viewer encounters “general uncertainty” as an inherent characteristic of the environment in each of them.

According to my observations, it’s not that modern Hollywood has started making bad movies, but it has started taking specific orders, and I think it is hard to disagree with that. Of course, there are opposing examples of American cinema, among which I would single out the Paramount Network recent series “Yellowstone”. This series, consisting of four seasons, has a clear, understandable plot and, of course, great acting. However, there are fewer and fewer films like this. Besides, I’ve done my research and found a rather curious pattern: films that are broadcast

Returning to the model of operational threats, let us pay attention to the presented scheme. The scheme reflects that the indispensable condition for the emergence of these threats is the environment of uncertainty. At the same time, ***the environment of uncertainty is always created artificially.*** To provide more details on the scale of the realization of this model, let us consider the environment of modern science. On the one hand, science has perhaps become freer. Any scientist or person “employed in science” (as a friend of mine figuratively and accurately put it) can publish his “essays” and other kinds of written works in a variety of sources, regardless of public opinion or approval of his position. Writing articles for publications, websites, magazines, blogs, etc. is not forbidden,



and conversely, it is very popular. Anyone can cover their work for a large audience, including a foreign one. Previously, publishing the results of research activities was much more difficult.

On the other hand, science is conventionally “preserved” in itself. What does this mean? *There is a clear tendency in the scientific community towards abandoning “fields of the unknown”*. It looks like, today, nobody needs a scientific discovery. The first counterquestion that every scholar is asked in response to his or her research findings is: *Who can you refer to?* And if s/he has no one to refer to, that means they “made up” what is written in their work. At any rate, such material is immediately questioned (even if the research is groundbreaking and unprecedented). Still, in a perfect scenario, any scholarly research is designed to clarify the field of the unknown. The purpose of any study is to clarify the unknown direction and make it known, practical, applicable, and thereby of benefit to humanity. Consider the following sequence: suppose we know A) the “unknown” and B) the “known” (as two parts of a whole). Then: the “unknown” can be made “known” through research (naturally by applying a methodology, logic, tools, etc.). However, since current research has become irrelevant in today’s scientific environment, and only a form of “rehashing” the past is welcomed, research as such disappears. As a result, there is a generation of teachers instead of researchers, and these are completely different roles due to the different ways and methods of implementing professional activities.

What happens next? Since there is no access to the field of the unknown and it is considered irrelevant because there are no researchers, instead, there are the figures

who go through and recompile known facts and already described paradigms of the past; respectively, there is no possibility to clarify any part of the objectively existing field of the unknown through factual research. Conclusion: the scientific sector becomes uncertain.

Further, it is proposed to analyze what type of methods and forms global information sources use to impose universal uncertainty in every possible way. In particular, this can be seen in the example of the military conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. By “global information sources,” I mean the foreign media, which in the most sophisticated forms cover the course of events, assigning and announcing, in particular, the exact dates of the attack on Ukraine. For those who, for some reason, have not seen this news, I will give some examples of what the official Western media claim on the pages of their publications and what the information message of the speakers of these media is (it is relevant to analyze public speeches).

According to foreign media reports, Ukraine is expecting invisible drones, killer robots, assault rifles with their “own brains”, kamikazes, and commando dogs that are about to be thrown into battle. The following message became quite a topic of discussion: “Aliens avoid contact with Earth because of military threats from the Russian Federation.” A German newspaper published a map image of an attack plan, allegedly in possession by the Russian leadership. Apparently, this map is more than a century old because the city of Lviv is marked on this map as Lemberg. This was the name of Lviv in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The American press makes predictions about how many civilians and military personnel will die.

This is just a small part of what is happening in the world media today. By such methods, events escalate, and tensions rise in society, as the information war is “inflated,” while prominent publications turn into the tabloids.

But how are such events possible? How are “news occasions” and “information messages” generated, the essence and meaning of which are “beyond the realm of fiction”? And why do the masses believe them? We will discuss it next. Everything begins, as already mentioned, with the formation of an environment of general uncertainty. The presentation of informa-

Of course, this example is ridiculous, but it accurately reflects the essence and order of events. Through such methods, the general environment of uncertainty is created and developed.

It seems possible to conclude that such an interactive, indeterminate, semi-structured environment, in which we now find ourselves, is characterized by its special own laws that do not correspond to the laws of the human mind and individual perception. *As a result, the interactive environment of uncertainty turns into the environment of uncertainty where humans live.* A person who can no lon-

*The greater the degree of tension, the greater the fear.
Conversely, there is less fear when the degree
of tension is lowered.*

tion in the media has reached such a level that the facts, literally, make no matter. That is why a simple statement can convincingly enough deny previously exposed statements: “I didn’t say that.” And “they” (the various speakers) can afford such denial tactics because they know in advance that they will not be held accountable for what they have done. If the case were in court, it would be difficult to deny the facts (which could lead to imprisonment). But in the case of the top leading media, the information is distorted and simply made up.

For example, one might present to the public that I’ve written a specific book. And as soon as people start asking questions about the book that I don’t like, I can change my mind and say that I didn’t write it. And then, after a certain period, claim my rights again and, in addition, sue those who deny it. Isn’t it absurd?

ger know for sure what is true and what is not. As the host of a Russian-language media outlet said, “...this is a new kind of madness, a new kind of insanity and inadequacy.” Let us assume that the environment of uncertainty arose naturally due to the development of the Internet. Initially, this environment was quite predictable. I would say that those who needed qualitative predictions could succeed in predicting by building a model, conducting scientific experiments, etc. But now, the environment, whose events we are all witnesses to, has become completely unpredictable. At this point, let’s refer to the operational threat scheme again.

Note the element called X...n (n-period) is the so-called “receiving device.” The receiving device is neither a machine nor a computer, as one would probably assume. It is human beings. This conclusion has nothing to do with humor or irony.

This is what experts in the study of critical forms of social influence call the electorate that is being influenced.

Humans today have become so-called “receiving devices.” The term “human” certainly does not refer to absolutely all the people on the planet, but, unfortunately, most of them. In his writings many years ago, Jean Baudrillard used terms such as: “silent majority” and “screened out.” Today, we could use another term “*receiving device*,” essentially a radio receiver, the passive one and it would not be an exaggeration. This term was not invented by me. I heard it from my colleagues who work in the global security field. That is what they call, among themselves, the majority of modern people who succumb to the events described earlier.

Next, let us consider in the scheme how this model functions. So, in an environment of complete uncertainty, people choose certain leaders, i.e., politicians. And since most people in society, being under the influence of uncertainty and information tension, lose the ability to assess the situation correctly and think constructively, the electorate elects rulers like itself. Voting is done through *majority choice* and the so-called “receiving devices” vote for those with whom they seem to be on the same wavelength. In other words, the more “fools” there are in a state, the more likely it is that a fool president will come to power (as is being observed on the world stage). I will not name specific figures; it can be an aspect for everyone’s further personal analysis and observation.

Let us return to the example of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. There is the following question: who is talking about the conflict? Politicians do. But to speak intelligently about war, one must not be a politician but a professional

of a different kind — a military professional. Otherwise, the figurative analogy to this situation looks like it is “consultation on gynecology with an agronomist”. Putting aside the war example and returning to the pandemic, the same, identical information line can be seen. The people who talked for hours and days about the pandemic were not virologists. Competent virologists were not given a voice on the world stage, and interviewers did not approach them for various reasons. Why not? The point is that a specialist would immediately bring certainty to the topic of discussion. And universal certainty is not needed because otherwise, the operational threat model would not function.

Let us also point out some other aspects and features of the operational threat model. Thus, journalists retransmit the statements of “experts,” globalizing and scaling such “statements” through the leverage of the media. This is how prominent publications become tabloids. They keep working as if confirming that the statements of the country’s leaders are official and reliable information. The media print politicians’ statements and produce reports. And for some reason, no one is aware that much of the information is fake. As a result, fakes retransmit and multiply the statements of officials who should be responsible for what they say. However, the latter does not happen.

Next, in the scheme, let us focus on the “receiving device” component. It should be noted that “receiving devices” are tuned to the waves of various media, according to the principle of “I listen to the speakers I like” (rather than according to the principle of reliability). At the same time, most Western media today transmit unreliable and even false information, which consumers (society, the electorate,

masses, etc.) are literally forced to absorb. Then, by surfing in the Internet, people confirm the claimed information on the example of video messages of the leaders of European countries and the United States. As a result, after receiving several confirmations (in fact, just repetitions), the masses start to believe in the claimed information. As a result, the whole world is literally “screaming” that there will be war. But no one knows when. This is how uncertainty works again.

It is also worth noting how a certain magnet is “wound up” (the arrows in the scheme show this). The described mechanism, which is also a fear generator, becomes habitual and ordinary; a person gets used to living in fear. Where does fear come from? From the endless tension because of the individual’s being in this electric circuit. ***The greater the degree of tension, the greater the fear. Conversely, there is less fear when the degree of tension is lowered.*** Thus, fear arises from the individual’s placement in this magnetic informational electric circuit. But why is this electrical circuit required and organized? The answer is simple. For the human being, it is very uncomfortable to be in a state of tension, so to release the tension s/he is ready to believe even in such absurdities as killer robots and commando dogs. In other words, ***a psychological form of “unburdening” the human psyche is triggered.*** And as a result of the unconscious triggering of the mechanisms of the psyche that provide temporary unloading, it seems to man that certainty appears in his life.

There can be many magnets that generate and multiply fear. Military conflict is just one particular case. As a result, ***the sum of the magnets creates total uncertainty and the desire to make some-***

thing understandable. And every time an individual, having received another informational confirmation of previous statements - even if these statements are absurd by definition - seems to make the situation clearer. At this moment, the individual’s psyche works so that s/he relaxes; however, not for long. After a while, the circular psychological chain, which generates fear and tension, will be restarted. The pandemic acted as such a strain for two years. Remember how everyone feared the epidemic and how many thousands of different prognosticating speeches we heard. Being in the described above state, a person becomes most suggestible and is ready to believe even in aliens who are planning to “contact us.”

For the realization of events in the environment of uncertainty, a mechanism presented in the form of a model of the operational threat is raised to the level of a Strategic Threat. Such a mechanism allows for the manipulation of certain views of the whole world. I suggest returning to the writings of Jean Baudrillard, such as “America,” “The Spirit of Terrorism”, and “The Gulf War did not take place.” In the pages of these works written long ago, the outstanding thinker described politicians’ tools to realize their marketing and political objectives. The example of military conflict clearly shows how state power and official position are used for selfish purposes. Please pay attention to the fact that this state of affairs seems to have become the norm in the modern world. To the possible question, “when will it all end?” I answer this way: “This formulation is fundamentally wrong; the question should be redefined.” The question should rather be: ***What new methods and forms of global and large-scale simulations await us in the near future?*** The reason I am confident

in the continued existence and functioning of the operational threat scheme is as follows: once people have been given a weapon in the form of an advantage over the majority, they will no longer be able to relinquish that advantage. And only under conditions when this model becomes less effective will the search for new, more effective methods and ways of implementing such tasks at the global level begin.

Given that Jean Baudrillard had already described the environment of uncertainty and the phenomenon of non-existent war in which people are led to believe, I decided to conduct my research from the perspective of global security and to compare it with Baudrillard's research. I ended up with evidence that today's immediate temporary threat (ITT) can be weaponized. The manipulation of temporal threats is not done spontaneously and selectively but in a controlled and organized way, as a tried-and-true strategic system. The pandemic and military conflict examples can fully demonstrate how this system works. The changes observed in the global security system prompted the writing of this article, and I, in turn, have shared with you the results of my own research without "cutting corners and unnecessarily smoothing over political and social angles."

(Feb 17, 2022)



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THERE IS NO REMEDY FOR THIS EXTREME SITUATION, AND WAR IS CERTAINLY NOT A SOLUTION, SINCE IT MERELY OFFERS A REHASH OF THE PAST, WITH THE SAME DELUGE OF MILITARY FORCES, BOGUS INFORMATION, SENSELESS BOMBARDMENT, EMOTIVE AND DECEITFUL LANGUAGE, TECHNOLOGICAL DEPLOYMENT AND BRAINWASHING. LIKE THE GULF WAR: A NON-EVENT, AN EVENT THAT DOES NOT REALLY TAKE PLACE.

Jean Baudrillard





Baudrillard: Theorist of Alienation

Andrew McLaverty-Robinson

Academic writer, political theorist, and activist

Interview

3

Baudrillard Now: *How easy it was for you to look into/to understand the philosophy and sociology of Baudrillard? What kind of approach did you use for it?*

Andy Robinson: I would say first of all that people will challenge me on whether I've understood Baudrillard right. I've been told that I exaggerate the Marxist-influenced aspects and neglect the Nietzschean aspects, and that I use him too easily with other theorists such as Deleuze or Wallerstein. And also, I didn't understand Baudrillard right away.

Basically the way I understood Baudrillard was to build up my confidence with

critical theory first. I first started reading difficult theory books in my BA and MA period. At first I was out of my depth with people like Baudrillard, Althusser, Sartre. But the more theory I studied, the better I got at understanding it. Because with Continental authors, they tend to all lean on each other a lot, but not put in definitions or citations like the English-speakers do. But they leave all these little markers which someone with theoretical literacy so to speak, can pick up and use to decipher them. So for example, Baudrillard uses this word "symbolic" a lot, and it's not in an everyday sense and it's not identical



with words or images. If someone just picks up “Cool Memories” or the Gulf War book, with no experience of theory, they’ll be perplexed by this concept. But if one knows a bit of Freud, a bit of Lacan, a bit of semiotics, straight away it starts to make sense. Not because Baudrillard is using the word exactly the way Saussure or Freud or Lacan does, but he’s carrying over part of the conceptual range and then specifying his own concept relative to these others.

The second thing I did, was start with introductions - short books and chapters, things like the illustrated For Beginners/Introducing series (I wasn’t online back then, but today I’d use Stanford Encyclopedia and Wikipedia, and the lecture notes people put online). Often I found it better to cover a lot of introductions to different theories first, before diving into the original texts. Because that way, I have more of the reference-points.

Also, I’ve read a lot of stuff that’s similar to Baudrillard but in much simpler language. Situationist texts like *Revolution in Everyday Life*, the Spectacular Times series, *The Revolutionary Pleasure of Thinking for Yourself*, and works by or based on Wilhelm Reich, such as Maurice Brinton’s *The Irrational in Politics*. And I came to Baudrillard already primed to relate his work to these traditions, to see how he takes forward these approaches but also turns aside at key points. I’d also already encountered structuralism and Lacanian theory before attempting Baudrillard seriously. And I think Baudrillard is a lot easier to understand with these reference-points.

The fourth thing to remember here is, Baudrillard’s early work is a lot more straightforward than his later work. His later work is better known so a lot of people start there. I was lucky because I read some of the earlier works first, for topical reasons.

And I use the early works as a Rosetta Stone for the later works. If you know Marxist theory then *Consumer Society* and *Mirror of Production* are not really difficult texts. And once one understands the idea of consumption as a compulsive puritanical regime offering status-rewards instead of pleasure, the later stuff on simulation and the code becomes easier. Similarly, *Mirror of Production* shows very clearly how simulation both is and isn’t alienation, how it’s a similar concept but subtly different. This helps one avoid certain pitfalls - for example, imagining simulation means something like *The Matrix*, or that Baudrillard is denying that anyone died in the war that “did not take place”, or appending Baudrillard to the usual Anglo-American view of what “postmodernists” think.

This way of approaching Baudrillard also has its limits. I don’t know how much I’m missing because I don’t have the reference-points, or whether I’d see something different if I re-read the same text today. For instance, I came to Nietzsche somewhat later and I still have not studied Bataille or Levi-Strauss in any detail. I only read Mauss long after the Baudrillard columns were written. And the tracing-back is endless, because Nietzsche or Reich or Saussure also formulated their ideas drawing on, or in implicit dialogue with, earlier theories or those of contemporaries.

Baudrillard Now: In your view, do you think it is possible to look at Baudrillard’s philosophy in terms of a certain model, to ensemble a certain system/model out of different blocks?

Andy Robinson: Well, it isn’t necessarily a single system, because Baudrillard’s views change over time to some extent - he becomes less Marxist, more nihilistic. But I’d basically specify four different blocks, which each hold together as a set of theo-



ries and to some extent a reader can accept each of them independently of the others.

The first module might be a view of “the code” or “simulation” or “consumer society” as a social system - a theory of political economy so to speak. Baudrillard’s code is quite like capitalism in Marx, but with subtle differences. Baudrillard basically picks up the Marxist model and tweaks it until it looks quite different. The system’s based on reproduction, not production. There’s stages of society, but they aren’t a teleological progression, actually they’re a worsening (from original abundance to imposed scarcity). It’s primarily a system of capture, of bringing what’s outside it inside and thereby neutralising it. It no longer provides use-values so much as sign-values, or signs of status. The really radical exclusion is the suppression of direct relationships and subsistence, not the exploitation of workers. “The social” - society or community - can’t be counterposed to the code because it’s been so thoroughly dismantled or turned into part of the code. A lot of social events are also read through the second module, the return of the repressed. Those are the big differences. Otherwise, Baudrillard’s “code” can just be picked up and substituted for capitalism or modernity in any of the various theories using these concepts.

The second block would be the cluster of ideas around symbolic exchange and death. I guess we could call these Baudrillard’s theoretical psychology or his intersubjective sociology. Baudrillard thinks there’s a kind of natural or non-alienated condition which was characterised by cyclical relations - things being given or exchanged back and forth. Everything was reversible, and this sustained a certain kind of balance. It involves a periodic return to a state of fusion, a liminal state in Turn-

er’s sense. I want to add that this is not a vision of Eden, aspects of it are very dark. But certain problems of modern society are absent in this condition. Endless accumulation, meaningless reproduction, separative thought, the blockage of pleasure. Modernity, or capitalism, breaks this cycle. It tries to block reversibility and to reproduce itself eternally. It suppresses symbolic exchange. In doing this, it cuts off the sources of life and meaning. Modern subjectivity comes from this process of separation, and the identification of people with signs. But what’s repressed keeps returning - in a typical Freudian way. So we can insert the concept of symbolic exchange where we’d usually put desire or the Lacanian Real. The system is a kind of one-way violence without consequences. If it’s reversed, it collapses.

Death is an important part of symbolic exchange, a form of reversibility. This is based on his interpretation of indigenous approaches - ideas of cyclical death and rebirth, the symbolising of death through rituals. Baudrillard was very critical of the way death is treated today - the hiding away of death, the segregation of the elderly, the desire to prolong life instead of having meaningful lives. It’s because symbolic exchange is repressed that death has to be feared, fled from, and denied. And the dead, who are socially present to indigenous people according to Baudrillard, are the first group to be excluded, the model for all the other exclusions such as imprisonment, racism and so on. I can guess how he’d respond to the current situation - and it would be much like Agamben, Vaneigem, and Sanguinetti have responded. Back in 2012 I wrote: “The more the system runs from death, the more it places everyone in solitude, facing their own death.” This was paraphrasing Baudrillard, and he’s talking



about alienation, loss of meaning in general. I had no idea how literally that would turn out to be true. Baudrillard talks about a 'lockup and control system', a generalised social lockdown which tries to pre-empt any real event from happening outside its control, leaving nothing to chance. This is based on algorithmic models. He says this is like putting people in a coffin to prevent them from dying. It is a kind of living death. And he says that people are now exterminated, not out of malice, but because they are statistically indifferent. That's what happens with all the deaths caused by the lockdown, which most people do not count as a case against it. At one point Baudrillard says that the disasters avoided at a systemic level instead happen 'at ground level', in everyday life, in the pre-

reality" - everything's on the surface, depths are absent or invisible. This is why nothing has symbolic force - there isn't the gap or the unknown element to inspire it.

Baudrillard is actually ahead of his time in seeing this mode of power already in the 1970s-80s (though of course the theories underlying it have been around a lot longer). Of course, this has gone a lot further now - social media, social credit systems, information management and so on. But the whole field of management today is saturated with cybernetic thinking - the public health models we're seeing at the moment for instance, which try to socially manipulate transmission vectors using signalling, not all of which is honest. They start out as algorithmic models which are then copied in reality. In this latest stage

Hyperreality is reality generated from models, or simulated by models. It implies "too much reality" - everything's on the surface, depths are absent or invisible.

carity of each individual life. That's what's happening now, in the impact in terms of suicides, the informal sector poor, homeless people, refugees, prisons and so on.

A third block would be the cluster around the concepts of code, simulation, and hyperreality, as theories of the functioning of micropolitics (which is slightly different from their use to designate an aggregate, a system). The code, or hyperreality, is Baudrillard's name for cybernetic systems of power. The code works through information, feedback, nudges, signalling, and so on. It's also very much binarising - it has to split everything into two values, a zero and a one, rather than dealing with processes and complexities. Hyperreality is reality generated from models, or simulated by models. It implies "too much

(roughly, neoliberalism or postmodernity), the system has stopped referring to anything outside itself. Reality becomes something pre-programmed. People are treated as if they are nodes in the system, computer terminals receiving code.

Simulation is a system of signs which only relate to other signs, or of objects which are generated from signs (such as Disneyland). There isn't a central master controlling everything, but there isn't dispersed power either. The matrix of the code is the site of power. People are encouraged to identify with their image. Real conflicts are pre-empted through false choices between equivalent adversaries. Messages stop being communication or information. They become circular - the system constantly referring back to itself. Reality



is overridden by appearance. Instead of telling people to conform to a norm, the system treats people as if they are *already* identical with the norm. Simulations lack emotional intensity and immanent becoming. They feel meaningless and lifeless. The situation is implosive. The system loses its symbolic force and seems pointless or excessive. It starts to collapse in on itself, to implode. It collapses because its signs lose meaning. They need to refer to something outside them to have meaning, but the system increasingly captures, destroys or delinks from anything outside it.

Then finally, there's Baudrillard's theory of implosion and resistance - basically the applied politics of his approach. I think this is detachable from the others - someone can go along with his view of the system and simulation and symbolic exchange, and not adopt this element, though of course it's rooted in the triumph of simulation and reproduction, over production. This idea of implosion is Baudrillard's alternative to revolution ("explosion"). The system is surviving mainly by devouring past meanings at an ever greater speed. It also tries to reinject a sense of reality and meaning, including by playing at crisis. And it blackmails people by making them dependent, or "programming" them to self-destruct if it implodes. Basically it threatens to take the whole world with it if it collapses. The system is trying to avoid implosion. To do this, it needs injections of meaning. Trying to fight the system, as much as trying to reform it, actually gives it meaning and helps it survive.

The system can be undermined through 'symbolic disorder' which reintroduces symbolic exchange. This can mean reintroducing death, which is higher than the code and can overthrow it. Every death which isn't a programmed death - murders, suicides, random deaths - is now subver-

sive. Things should be pushed to their limit to bring about their collapse. But mostly, we need to not be fascinated by the death-throes of the system. We should just leave it to die, and rebuild exchange in terms of direct communication without mediation by the code. This is why Baudrillard is almost enthusiastic about disasters and terror attacks (I guess the current [COVID-19] crisis would be a disaster) - they aren't events with objectives and goals and solidarity, they shatter meaning and break the deterrence of reality, the capture of reality by the code - primarily through the way they spread in the media, their social effects. Disasters are a kind of subjectless subversion, an excess of reality that pushes the collapse of meaning through to its completion, because people are fascinated by its images in the media. So 9/11 was a suicide of the system. You know, we are hearing these terms now, people talking about lockdowns as economic suicide, the system killing itself in a state of panic. As I said in my column, I'm a bit sceptical of Baudrillard's view of politics - he seems to confuse system collapse with progressive change. Though, his theory reminds me a bit of Sing Chew's "dark ages" theory in world systems analysis which despite the name is really quite progressive.

Baudrillard theorises a kind of diffuse resistance by an objectified quasi-actor he calls the "masses". The masses are a kind of residue, a homogeneous human and mental flux produced by the impact of the code on humans. They don't resist in the usual sense, but they corrode the system because they deny it the meaning it wants. Their inertia, passivity, mirroring, silence, and black-hole qualities of the masses contribute to the implosion of the system.

People are also encouraged to re-form band-like societies within the ruins of society. We should reject the seductive



power of the system, its claim to have value, and instead reconstruct our own everyday spaces as re-enchanted, “sacred” spaces. One of his examples of this, is the way urban youths recreate public spaces as spaces of meaning by tagging them with graffiti. Baudrillard also encourages what he calls seduction - the creation of signs which point nowhere. This seems to be a way of recreating the sense that something is there below the surface or behind the image, thus setting in motion a type of desire. It might be an illusion, there isn't really anything there, but the act of seduction is important in generating a sense of meaning and a sense that things are connected, a link to the liminal zone where everything is one. Baudrillard has a view of sexuality which I find very strange. He

passionately commit to the conflict, and fight out an unpredictable scenario. The Gulf War simulated war down to its deaths and destruction, but lacked these vital elements. It happened outside symbolic exchange. America fought impersonally, without passionate commitment, without recognising the enemy as an agent, and with as little risk as possible. Iraq tried to fight symbolically, but the two sides never met on the same symbolic terrain.

So, we have these four clusters - the theory of political economy, the micro-sociology and psychology, the micropolitics or theory of power, and the political strategies or theories of collapse. They interlink a lot - some more than others. For instance, the fourth cluster depends completely on the other three, it makes little sense

The way early Baudrillard talks about fashion is rather typical of how the later Baudrillard treats individual psychology

values antagonism, duelling wills, a kind of manipulation as part of the process. There's also an authoritarian element to Baudrillard's theory - an idea of restoring definite rules which give a sense of destiny and meaning.

Baudrillard's main criticism of the political left of his day is that they were still trying to fight on the terrain of production. Since the system is now reproduction, this means they are buying into the myths which sustain the system. They're also trying to leverage the social against capital, but the social is now just an effect of the code. I think this is what's going on with the Gulf War essays as well. It's not so much that the Gulf War didn't happen as that it's not really a war. For Baudrillard, a real war is a conflict between real adversaries which recognise each other as such,

without it, and the political economy and micropolitics are closely tied. But we often see parts of the theory being taken up without the others. For instance, we see a lot of the post-autonomists, people like Negri and Berardi, picking up a lot of Baudrillard's political economy and sometimes some of his micropolitics, but ignoring the micro-sociology and the applied politics. Whereas people who are interested in using Baudrillard for cultural critique or in the arts will often use the micro-sociology and the micropolitics, but ignore the political economy and the applied politics.

Baudrillard Now: *If you were to classify Baudrillard's books into categories, what would they be? (for instance, JB looked into the problematics of an "individual", "society" etc.)*



Andy Robinson: In English there are about forty books, but some of these are collections of shorter pieces. I would say that we can divide his work into major theoretical works in two stages, sociological or applied works, and fragmentary or 'pataphysical works.

The theoretical works can be divided into earlier and later. The early stuff appeared in French from 1968 to 1973, though some of these works were translated much later and appeared alongside or after the later works. The early stage consists of *System of Objects*, *Consumer Society*, *Mirror of Production*, and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. These works resonate closely with the spirit of 1968 and the libertarian neo-Marxisms of the period. There's then no more theoretical monographs until the 1990s, when we start to see works like *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and *Simulacra and Simulation*. These are more concerned with the code and have moved further from a neo-Marxist position.

The third category of works are those I'd call sociological or applied works. They are either thematic treatments of particular topics or quasi-journalistic interventions on contemporary events. Texts like the Gulf War and 9/11 texts, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* and most of *Fatal Strategies* belong to this category. In Baudrillard's work, the division between theory and sociology is very blurry, because by this time the theoretical works mixed up theoretical and occasional pieces - lots of the pieces in *Simulacra and Simulation* belong to the sociological category as well.

Finally, there's works like the various *Cool Memories* volumes and *America*, which are deliberately fragmentary and don't put forward clear arguments. I think these are interventions designed as a kind of performance art, similar to 'pataphys-

ics, dadaism, Situationism. He's trying to perform what elsewhere he describes - for example, the disappearance of meaning.

Baudrillard Now: *Do you think that Baudrillard's photography could be a reflection of his philosophy, his thinking? If he has a certain pattern and regularity, what does it look like?*

Andy Robinson: You know, I work more with politics than art, and my abilities in art criticism are somewhat limited. I didn't even know Baudrillard had published photography until you asked this question. But looking through the images now, there's clear thematic overlaps with his written work. Knowing his theory, I can interpret a lot of the images through it, though I doubt I'd arrive at these readings otherwise.

There's several photographs of graffiti for example, which Baudrillard valued as a form of resistance, a return of symbolic exchange. *Quai de Seine* for example is an image of graffiti in a scenario of urban decay, but one which also has signs of life re-emerging - there's weeds growing from the ground, and an old rusted lorry has been repurposed as a graffiti canvas. It's a familiar aesthetic, very similar to anarchist spaces the world over.

Other photographs deal with disappearance or blurring, or images which are mirrored or doubled. *Saint Clément* for example, we have a submerged rusted car, though the viewer might think at first glance that it's a reflection. We're dealing here with death, disappearance, reversibility; perhaps also with implosion and involution, or even with the decay of Fordism. A few of the photographs also have a Surrealist vibe - reality disappearing into dreams or phantasy.

Another strange thing is how he titles so many of his works after cities. As if the one





moment is meant to be a metonym for the entire city, and by extension, modern life. He's conceiving an entire city in terms of its remainders - something he advocates as a "fatal" strategy, a strategy which destroys meaning.

It's interesting that Baudrillard's photography is quite concrete, realistic in some ways, emotive or expressionist in others. It's very different from Simulationist art, which was inspired by a particular reading of Baudrillard in the 1980s, and from so-called postmodern art in general. Simulationism is more abstract, and more like pop art, there's lots of abstract shapes and lots of obviously artificial imagery. I think Simulationism models what Baudrillard describes the code as doing - which is not at all what Baudrillard's photographs are doing. And maybe this has to do with what goes missing in Anglophone readings of Baudrillard: often there's a failure to see that Baudrillard is actually really, really critical of the code. He's really hostile to it, like a Marxist is hostile to capitalism. Whereas he's often read as just describing reality or even celebrating simulation as a way of breaking down essentialism.

I also find it interesting that he's chosen photography, which is more dependent on an observed "reality" than (say) painting or sculpture or movies or game design. They mostly don't seem to be staged photographs, though clearly a lot of work has gone into the angles and the framing and so on. He's pushing at the limits of the genre, making images that sometimes at first sight don't look realistic. I think he uses photography to show how reality is becoming art-like, fictive. He gives us real images which look surreal because of the colours or lighting or things being reflected. *Alentejo* for instance, I think the first reaction is that it's something

unreal. It's a pair of tree trunks, but they're catching light in a way which makes them not instantly recognisable. But also, he's nearly always focusing on the hopeful, on the return of symbolic exchange. There's almost a re-enchantment of everyday life going on in his photography - something quite hippy in a way.

Baudrillard Now: What did Baudrillard achieve during his lifetime, in your view?

Andy Robinson: I see each theorist as producing in effect a machine of thought, a body of concepts and a problem-field which is specifically their own. Each of these machines is like a lens, and reality looks different depending which lens we look through. (This is pretty much Deleuze's view of the role of philosophy by the way). Baudrillard is one of the most important theorists because he provides a theoretical machine which is both genuinely original - it isn't an outgrowth of everyday "common sense" or a re-tweaking of an established theory - and also joins the dots between a lot of things which otherwise don't make much sense.

Like all the poststructuralists he was a child of 1968, he was working at first around that time and giving expression to the forces at work then. There is so much creativity in that period - not just in France - and I think it came from the opening to a new world, the beginnings of something else. Unfortunately it was never completed, the revolutionary wave was repressed or recuperated, and so in all the theories of that time, there is a lot of potential which has never been realised. There's lots of new bodies of theory - Baudrillard's is one of them - which lay out a different schema of how to think about the world, a schema which can be extended and applied as a research agenda and also as an experimen-



tal agenda for producing alternatives. So with Baudrillard, we have a research agenda on things like, the relationship between consumers and products, the way desire is channelled, whether consumerism should be seen as hedonistic or as puritanical conformity - things which really haven't been followed-up. And we have an implicit politics of resistance, a political question basically of how to reactivate symbolic exchange and reversibility, how to strategically reverse the one-way processes emerging from the system.

Given that the new project was effectively cut-off midway through, the effects fall short of the potential. But still, Baudrillard has left us with works which give a glimmer of the life-force of that time, and - crucially - he also carried on interpreting later events from something like the '68 point of view. He shows some reasons why cybernetic power doesn't work very well, why it feels empty and meaningless and doesn't give pleasure, and he shows us some of the dynamics as to why events like terror attacks cause such panic and disruption.

Baudrillard Now: *What are the intricacies and difficulties in understanding the philosophical parts of Baudrillard's works?*

Andy Robinson: I think Baudrillard is quite typical of French theorists in that he uses a lot of technical terms which he doesn't define. Some of these are lifted from other critical theorists and ideas which would have been common knowledge in France in 1971 or 1992 or whenever, but maybe are less widely known elsewhere, or today. He rarely says where he gets them from - that's again quite typical - and he also draws concepts from his own earlier work without telling the reader he's doing it. In his later work he also starts to "perform" his theory a lot more, to use a style

which is deliberately a bit obscure for aesthetic or strategic reasons. Then there's the problem that he's a provocateur, a troll if you like. He says things in eye-catching or controversial ways to attract attention. So he got a lot of flak for example for the Gulf War essays, and for things he's written about feminism, which is basically just people biting the bait he dangled. At the same time, this style can make it difficult to know which of his arguments to take seriously.

Another difficulty is that there is a context of common reference, things taken as common knowledge, which again is local to his time and place. People who read French theory in other languages, don't always realise that philosophy is taught at high-school in France, it's part of the school leaving exams, and theorists back then would often teach philosophy in schools at the start of their career. So dropping in references to Plato, Rousseau, Husserl, Hegel is not at all unusual. We might compare it to Americans mentioning the Constitution or US history, or British people mentioning Shakespeare. Psychoanalysis was the dominant approach to psychology in France, and I think more people were in therapy there than in Anglophone countries too. So again - there was a kind of Psychoanalysis 101 that people who read theory would already know - a bit the way people today understand pop-psychology terms like triggers, boundaries and so on. And Marxism also was very visible, partly because the French Communist Party was a big political player, they'd played a huge role in the wartime anti-Nazi resistance and were getting millions of votes. So we have these people coming up in the 60s who knew philosophy, psychoanalysis and Marxism almost as part of their common knowledge so to speak. And the problems this raises are, they are using this termi-



nology and assuming the reader knows it, and they are using this terminology and it's hard to tell whether they're endorsing it or just using what's familiar.

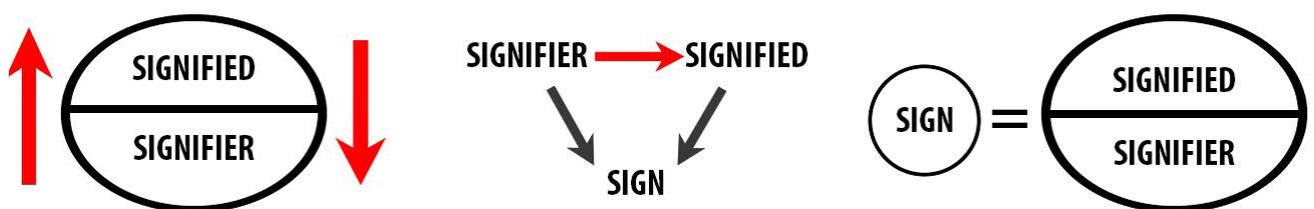
As a new reader, I've found that earlier readers' receptions of thinkers like Baudrillard sometimes pose as much of a barrier as an aid. I've previously said how important introductions are. But at the same time, the particular selections and misreadings made by early scholars - especially if they're reproduced across the field - can put up a screen in front of the original text. Not only does this make the introductions unreliable, it also affects what readers will get from the original texts. They will see what they've been primed to see. I'd single out in particular the tendency to read ideas forged in very radical conditions in France in the 1970s through the concerns of more established academics in more conservative places and times; the tendency to turn all poststructuralists into clones or Derrida or to read them through the frame of what poststructuralism has become as a doctrine in Anglophone universities; the tendency to quote-mine and name-drop, and then to associate theorists with whoever happens to have used them this way. People need to be aware that they're often getting a particular line on poststructuralists from the Anglophone literature - it's written by people who are well to the right of the scholars they're writing about, who are much more interested in culture and much less in politics, and who are inclined

to see in every theorist a repetition of their own pet peeves about "the subject" and "modernity". Alternatively, it's written by philosophical realists, Marxists and others who dismiss the theory out of hand and don't bother to read it very carefully.

It's impossible to encounter a text without bringing some previous baggage along - the meanings of words and so on. But it's important to encounter Baudrillard on his own terms, in terms of how the problem-field, the conceptual machinery work within his texts. For example, just because he's difficult doesn't mean he's talking nonsense. He doesn't think that everything's just signs or that reality is just imaginary. Just because he's critical of established left practices, doesn't mean he's in line with later forms of "new" politics either. He's against the whole logic of the code; he isn't trying to strategically manoeuvre within it, which I'd take to be the normal stance in Anglophone poststructuralism. He has a critique of the sociometric individual, but he isn't doing the kind of critique of "the subject" which is standard today.

Baudrillard Now: JB describes the symbolic system in his works (signs), if you drew it, to explain the relationship of a human and signs, what would that scheme look like?

Andy Robinson: Well, he's starting with the structuralist model of signs, which there's a lot of images for already. And it's usually drawn in one of these ways:



With symbolic exchange, what we get is a kind of reversibility which is the opposite of this, all the elements in a sense fuse into one another in a continuum, so we might represent this as a mosaic of images.



Baudrillard Now: *It is known that Jean Baudrillard studied psychoanalysis and worked with texts of Lacan, Freud and others but he himself did not establish a school of psychology. If he would have, what do you think, what would be the subject of that school of psychology?*

Andy Robinson: The first thing to say here, is that Baudrillard is actually rather critical of psychology as a discipline. Because psychology is about knowing, understanding, people who are different from the norm and bringing them inside the regime of knowledge, or even reconditioning them to be “normal”. And for Baudrillard this is part of the colonising operation of the code, the way it absorbs and neuters its “outside” and destroys meaning. Baudrillard is somewhat nihilistic, so he might not necessarily want to encourage “healthy” individuals at all.

He says that psychology and psychoanalysis are invented to paper over a crack in the system. The system requires that everyone be rational subjects. Psychology is invented because so-called mad people aren't rational subjects. It thus has a dual role. On the one hand, it subverts the code because it has to recognise that one of its key axioms is untrue. But on the other, it offers representations of the “mad” and

thus brings them back within the order of rational knowledge. The more successful it is, the more life which escapes the system is brought into the sphere of simulation, and contained.

He also has criticisms of therapies as packaged, simulated versions of real relations. Therapy is the functional isolation of the social. For example, touch therapy is an alienated version of people touching each other in everyday life. This capture - the rendering of something as a packaged commodity or a transferrable skill or a type of formalised knowledge - is by implication part of the problem. It extends the reach of the code. The implication here is, Baudrillard would rather we just mutually supported each other rather than rely on therapy. Go to a friend who will listen, instead of a counsellor. Go hug a friend, instead of going for a massage. Which sounds a bit like the ecological or post-developmental critique of therapy, the ideas of someone like Bruce Levine or Ivan Illich for example. Except I'm not sure Baudrillard would say these things, because it's not clear whether he thinks we can rebuild what we've lost or put ourselves outside the code so to speak. If we read him as saying that we're stuck in the code, that the only way to resist is to contribute to its implosion from inside, then he comes closer to the approach taken by materialist-Marxist psychologists like David Smail and Mark Fisher - a kind of paring-back of psychology based on a sense that most problems are social.

Baudrillard's also very interested in how things work at the level of desire. For example, he's critical of people who just attack the fashion industry as silly or meaningless. He's interested in *why* people take part in the system. And he thinks there's a particular fascination, a type of



ecstasy involved - in the sense of an experience of excess. This kind of ecstasy or fascination or vertigo tends to replace passion and pleasure as the main motivation in life. He is ambivalent about this - on the one hand it's part of the code, it expresses a lack of symbolic exchange, but on the other, it also carries some symbolic force, it's disruptive in a way. In this sense he's very much working in a psychoanalytic tradition, primarily Lacanian or post-Lacanian, but cross-read with Nietzsche, Mauss and Bataille as well. Like a lot of the post-Lacans, he doesn't like the ego, he wants to escape from "phallic" or "ego" power into a domain of the free play of desire. This places him midway between the true Lacanians and the Freudo-Marxists (Castoriadis, Marcuse, Reich, Fromm, Vaneigem, etc.).

And actually, the way early Baudrillard talks about fashion is rather typical of how the later Baudrillard treats individual psychology. Early Baudrillard was expecting an imminent revolution or system collapse. He takes an almost ultra-left position - the system is about to collapse, the various band-aids are exhausted, the masses see through them, so why bother? And it's almost as if he tries to keep this up, even when the revolution never comes. Later Baudrillard generally avoids criticising "the masses" - the passive, mediated people living in hyperreality. Quite often, he looks for ways in which apparently conformist actions actually disrupt the code or provide a kind of vanishing point - as if the masses were unconsciously trying to destroy it. So the people who are watching sports when they "should be" protesting about repression for example - they're actually the real radicals because they've seen that politics doesn't matter any more (obviously he's also trolling the left by saying things like this). He has a lot of

contempt for people trying to intervene using "the social", such as psychologists. He sees them as part of what's wrong with the left. Actually the masses themselves are more subversive, they already see through the illusions which the left falls for. I find this one of the less convincing aspects of his theory; it seems like he wants to keep up his early optimism even in the face of the defeats of the 1980s. So he carries on inventing stories as to how the masses are still undermining the system. And if the masses are undermining the system, if they're more authentically radical than the left and the therapists, why would we want to change them? Actually any attempt to raise their consciousness, make them less depressed or panicky or sheeplike might be a ruse of the system to keep faking meaning, to capture what escapes it. There's an element of this to Baudrillard's thought I think.

But let's say we're interested in psychology, and we're convinced psychology is useful, and we want to use Baudrillard to develop psychology - that raises different questions. First we need to decide where Baudrillard would fit into the range of psychological theories. Psychology is divided between approaches which are mostly quantitative and based on control - behaviourism, cognitivism, cybernetics, neuropsychology, biomedical psychiatry - and those which are qualitative and focused on the mind and meanings - various schools arising from psychoanalysis, phenomenology and existentialism (there's also various traditional and alternative therapies, some of which imitate medical science, others are qualitative). In my mind there's no doubt, the qualitative approaches are the radical approaches and the best fit with any kind of radical or progressive politics; at least any kind of broadly libertarian progressive politics. But today a



lot of radical and left-wing people have been trained in the control-based methods (usually through being in therapy or through self-help) and have thus internalised a basically conservative, authoritarian view of the mind - ideas like “conditioning”, positive thinking, “behaviour change” induced through cybernetic nudging, the idea that thoughts cause emotions and that people should try to stop unpleasant emotions by suppressing the corresponding thoughts, or people should avoid recognising catastrophe because looking reality in the face will make them less functional. An entire arsenal of thought-control most often enacted by each person upon their own thoughts and feelings, to the system’s benefit, but also to their own benefit in

The explosion of new perspectives was concentrated in the psychoanalytic and existentialist clusters. In France, there was a revolution going on within psychoanalysis, the Lacanians with their structuralist-influenced reading of Freud challenging the older, rather encrusted psychoanalysis based on stages of development and ego-psychology. Lacan had a high-profile public seminar series and Baudrillard probably attended those; they became a gathering-point for the radical intellectuals of the time. I think he was also getting ideas from the Situationists, who were Freudo-Marxists of a sort. Although Baudrillard didn’t formulate a psychology of his own, there were a lot of new approaches that emerged from the same milieu. To

There isn't really an ideal of the subject in Baudrillard - but there's something like a theory of human nature or a social ontology, in that people should live in societies with symbolic exchange and we're alienated and immiserated if we don't.

a purely pecuniary sense, in the sense of keeping functioning, being exploitable, and not falling foul of the system. And the radical approaches are doing the opposite, they’re saying let’s look at the repressed stuff, at why people feel certain things and how things become meaningful in a subjective way. Psychoanalysis is very weak in Britain. But it’s still a major tendency in countries like France, and it was pretty much hegemonic in western Europe in the 1960s. So a French radical writing in the 1960s-70s would automatically default to psychoanalysis as the go-to approach to psychology.

As I’ve mentioned already, the 1960s-70s were a period of great theoretical creativity, and psychology is no exception.

take a few examples, there’s schizoanalysis, which was formulated mainly by Guattari, and is a desire-focused development of psychoanalysis; anti-psychiatry, developed in Britain by Laing and his colleagues; the SPK in Germany, who treated psychological symptoms as a revolutionary force; Somatherapy, a radical body therapy developed in Brazil based on the Reichean branch of psychoanalysis; bioenergetics, another post-Reichean approach which combines psychoanalysis with bodywork; ecotherapy, which focuses on disalienation through connection to nature; and Gestalt therapy, developed by the existentialist-anarchist Paul Goodman. Then there’s liberation psychology, which started with Fanon, and other approaches with a psy-



chological background, like Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Hakim Bey's immediatism, Italian militant inquiry, Situationist methods like psychogeography.

Any of these would arguably be a good fit with Baudrillard's theories. One might for example frame Somatherapy or bioenergetics as a rediscovery of the embodied forces suppressed by the code, or the SPK or anti-psychiatry as an instance of implosion based on the collapse of meaning. Lowen - the founder of bioenergetics - talks about people being alienated in their image and the struggle for power and status in a way which reminds me of Baudrillard. Baudrillard's piece analysing Zhuangzi's butcher - basically encouraging a Daoist view - resonates a lot with ecotherapy and rewilding. There's some overlap with Jungian therapies as well, because of the idea of re-enchantment. So basically, any innovative therapy from the 60s and 70s, coming from a left or anarchic position, will have some overlaps with Baudrillard.

There isn't really an ideal of the subject in Baudrillard - but there's something like a theory of human nature or a social ontology, in that people should live in societies with symbolic exchange and we're alienated and immiserated if we don't. So we can think about therapies which try to excavate or recreate the kind of personality which lives in such a society. He's opposed to the sociometric individual - to people living as if they're nodes in the cybernetic machine, constantly responding to the nudges and demands of other nodes. The difficulty in deriving a psychology from this is that Baudrillard locates the problem sociologically: people become sociometric individuals through the stage of capitalism we've reached.

Baudrillard seeks a return of symbolic exchange, reversibility, reciprocity, gift

economy, etc. In principle a Baudrillardian therapist might experiment with techniques to restore or excavate a capacity for these kinds of relations. People might for example try to find meaning in their lives through forming relationships which aren't mediated by the code. Or they might work on fear of death by visualising it as cyclical. There might be a focus on weakening ego-control and separation from the body, encouraging disinhibition and spontaneity. Maybe there are methods to recreate the distance and concealment which Baudrillard thinks are needed for the imaginary to work. People could work on being more "seductive", on holding something back from display, keeping parts of their lives unseen.

It would be interesting to see what such techniques would look like. Though, I don't see them taking off as a mainstream therapy at all. For one thing, it may be that the problems caused by a society of simulation cannot be solved through therapy, because the blockage is systemic, social. The opportunities just aren't there to rebuild symbolic exchange. For another, a person who "healed" through a Baudrillardian path would be ill-suited to live in the world of the code. They'd probably be so resistant as to be unable to function inside the code. Such techniques would only work within a wider context of reconfiguring life - in a commune for example, or as part of an autonomous social movement where people are also using alternative economics and so on, or in a revolutionary situation.

Baudrillard Now: Thank you very much, Andy Robinson!





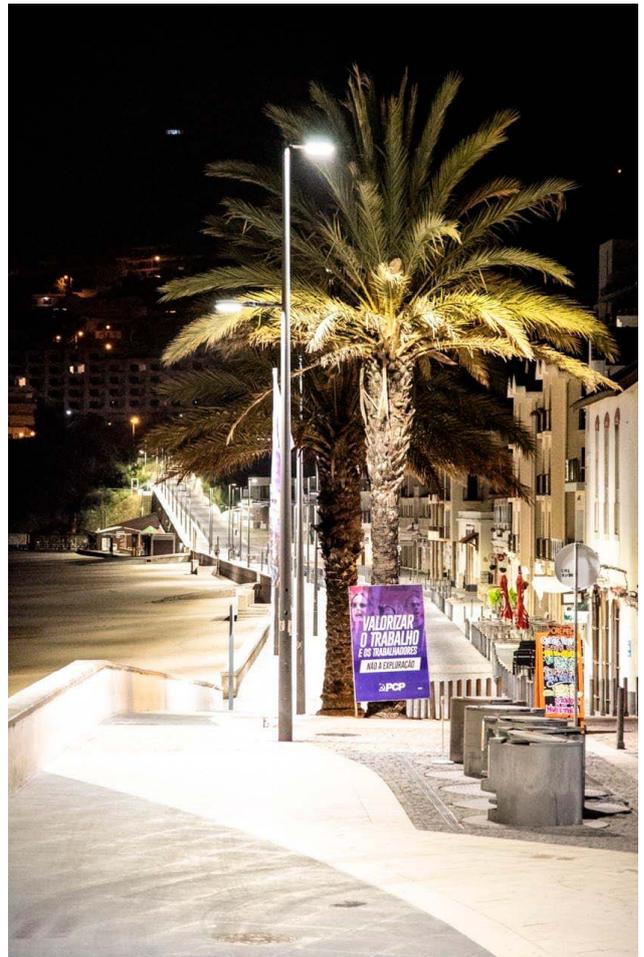
Jean Baudrillard

Portrait by Patrick John Killian

Baudrillard Now Editorial sincerely thanks Patrick John Killian for the portrait of Jean Baudrillard



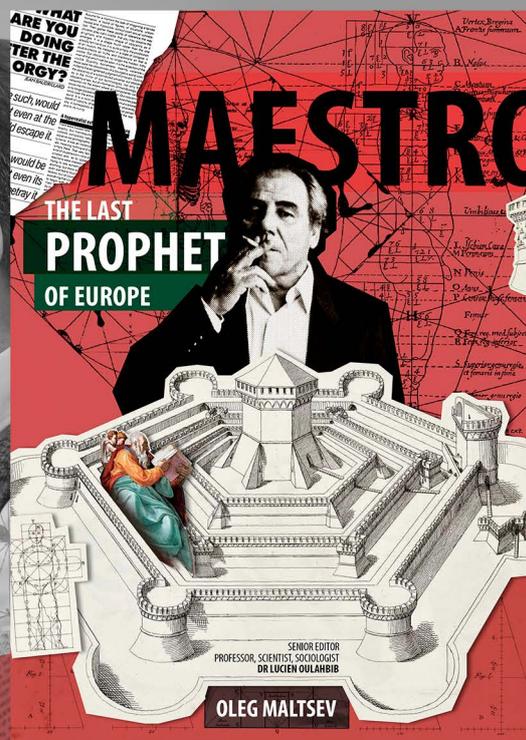
Photography in the “style of Baudrillard” by Oleg Maltsev.
Photos belong to the Expedition Journal.



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THE GENIUS OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD

THROUGH THE EYES OF DR. OLEG MALTSEV



The genius of Jean Baudrillard through the eyes of Oleg Maltsev

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Review of *Maestro. The Last Prophet of Europe*

4

Jean Baudrillard, doubtless, has been one of the greatest minds of the 20th century. His legacy sheds light on the modern social sciences alerting on the problems and challenges posed by society. Global capitalism, as well as the culture of simulacra, threatens to efface the individual identity whilst transforming human reciprocity into a type of exchangeable commodity. As stated, he is resisted and applauded by his colleagues. For some reason, his caustic critique against modern sociology as well as his deep analysis has been some of the factors that led some voices to deride Baudrillard. What is more important, Baudrillard discusses critically

to what extent global modernism (as we know it today) effaces the concept of history and the real. Elegantly written by Oleg Maltsev (with a translation of Kanykei Tursunbaeva) *Jean Baudrillard. Maestro: The Last Prophet of Europe* situates as an interesting line of investigation that not only traces back to the main core of Baudrillard's argumentation but also lays the foundations towards a new understanding of his genius. The book is structured in 16 chapters which so to speak can be read separately. Anyway, each chapter keeps a similar common-thread argument oriented to explain why Baudrillard is present even to date. In the

introductory chapter, the author exposes his interests, main goals to write this book as well as centering efforts in deciphering Baudrillard's studies.

Baudrillard, without any doubt, is the philosopher who interrogates directly the status quo. Not only does he defies (enhances) the classic concept of alienation in Marxism, but also proposes something new. The western market economies have successfully expanded whilst threatening to destroy the meaning of production itself. Having said this, as Professor Maltsev puts it, Baudrillard is not strictly limited to analyzing capitalism but to introducing an all-encompassing theory of the man. Whereas capitalism only speaks of the inevitable interplay

second to ninth chapters. The second part (formed by the rest of the book) discusses the notion of radical anthropology. As a good ethnographer, Baudrillard intersects Freudian psychoanalysis with the radical analysis of Nietzsche. At a closer look, he is strongly interested to describe the philosophy of the discipline, not echoing Foucault, but on the principle of reversibility. At the time some construction is growing, it is self-destroying. The concept of reversibility occupies a central position in Baudrillard's mind and of course, gives a fresh insight to scrutinize one of the paradoxical situations of sociology today. Science does not explain anything, as he eloquently observes, science is simply designed to confirm the circularity

Elegantly written by Oleg Maltsev "Maestro. The Last Prophet of Europe" situates as an interesting line of investigation that not only traces back to the main core of Baudrillard's argumentation but also lays the foundations towards a new understanding of his genius.

between models of productions, mankind reflects the concept of divinity. As Baudrillard explains, the problem of the people is the people themselves. The notion of the real mutates radically simply because science cannot distinguish good from bad knowledge. Here is where the concept of hyperreal surfaces.

The book can be read in two parts, the first one adapted to introduces readers to the Baudrillard studies which means his preliminary insights associated with the concept of hyper-real, the epistemological crisis of science more interested in protecting the interests of the global stakeholders than in understanding reality, and the re-construction for a new method in social science. This part includes from

of capital, which means the possibility for organizing efficiently information to resolve problems of the market. In this vein, it is safe to say education never questions the ideological disposition of the ruling elite but accepts them as business as usual. This leads to holding in several parts of his text, America and Western civilization not only are irrational but also illiterate. We are formatted to read some pages but at the time we do it, we do not stop in the punctuation. Whilst remembering the great tragedies that whipped mankind in former centuries, we forget them.

It is important not to lose sight of fact that scientists do not blame persons or responsible persons for what happens, in the name of objectivity, scientists

replicate the conditions of phenomenon demonstrating the issue as a whole. Lay-people are blamed (questioned) by the elite, leaving their trust in scientific indicators. Science explains the world whilst legitimating politics. Last but not least, Baudrillard contradicts Beck's society of risk simply because risks are social construes that opens the doors to the future. In the future, nothing happens as it is imagined. An economy based on risk seems to be an economy mainly marked by the simulacra, and the pseudo-events. This reminds the film *Minority Report* where police supported by Precogs visualize future crimes before they are committed. As result potential criminals are arrested earlier the crime is perpetrated. This is like the pseudo-events ultimately work. Science marks the way of events that never happen. This leads Baudrillard to hold the polemic thesis "the gulf did not take place". Most certainly, Baudrillard may be equated and put in dialogue with other great minds such as Jacques Ellul, Paul Virilio, Zlavoj Zizek and Jacques Ranciere.

At least for this review, the present book which entitles *Maestro: The Last Prophet of Europe*, well-written by Oleg Maltsev exhibits an accurate analysis of Baudrillard's approaches as well as the large dimension of his legacy. A must-read book highly recommended for social scientists, writers, and laypeople interested in the contradictions of modernity and politics.





Hyperstitional Peach Trees

Alexzander Mazey

Author, Content Specialist at Public Pressure

5

'Hyperstitions are not representations, neither disinformation nor mythology. Hype, hyping, hyperpropagation belongs to a strain of time-warp cybernetic fiction that cannot be judged true or false because it makes itself real.'

'...where demonic currents prowl, where fictions make themselves real. Hyperstition.'

Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU)

Pete Travis' cinematic adaptation of a 2000 AD comic, *'Dredd'* (2012), begins audio-visually, the low hum of a lighting fixture juxtaposed with the desert forming horizontally, the megastructures of this new world rising from a level plane. The film begins exterior to the city with the audio hinting towards an interiority,

almost as if there is no separation between the cursed earth and the seamless megacity which forms its back drop, its structures emerging through a kind of scorched evaporation. 'In a catastrophic future,' the film's description reads, 'the remaining population is crowded into megacities, where all-powerful and ultraviolet cops

are hunting for terrorists.’ This – communicated by the prologue – is America as ‘the irradiated wasteland’ where everything which lies outside the city is desert, ‘the cursed earth.’ The sardonicism of Dredd’s universe was always located in not what laid inside the dry aesthetics of the wasteland – which was deemed cursed – but rather what the wasteland mirrored, which is to say, ‘a cursed city, stretching from Boston to Washington DC. An unbroken concrete landscape, eight-hundred million people living in the ruin of the old world.’

Was this old world – the world which we presumably occupy today – not also a world living in the ruin of a dead and dying Referentialism? Nonetheless, what is presented through these visions of the *retrofuture* other than the hyperstitional structuration of techno-authoritarianism, accelerated inequality, and all societies’ metastases living on in a desert of its own making? The desert operating as the quintessential landscape ‘*where fictions make themselves real.*’

‘Mega Blocks, Mega Highways, Mega-City One.’ Everything made mega and indistinguishable from one another, as if the franchised dreams of supersized meals went architectural, watched over by the panopticon of a drone-cam’s live feed. ‘Convulsing, choking, breaking under its own weight.’ Explained through Dredd’s voice over and the accompanying montage of moving images appearing seldom different from contemporary efforts at *real-life* documentation. ‘Citizens in fear of the street, the gun, the gang.’ Dredd (Karl Urban) continues, ‘only one thing fighting for order in the chaos, the men and women of the Hall of Justice – juries, executioners, judges.’ Is this not the perfect representation of policing today, an ordained authority which seeks judgement after the execution, and seldom

before it, a world where notions of justice are rendered thoroughly transparent *and therefore beyond any critical theory?*

Following the opening soliloquy, we observe Dredd driving a motorcycle of some *Akiraian* description through a motorway underpass littered with the debris of the megacity, all the associated visuals of acceleration tracking across concrete walls dissevered by fluorescent lighting. The opening scene recalls to mind the conclusion of Wong Kar-wai’s ‘*Fallen Angels*’ (1995), the loose-sequel to the Hong Kong New Wave director’s ‘*Chunking Express*’ (1994), two films which told the story of a city and its character. If Wong Kar-wai’s two films were ultimately about revealing the intimate loneliness at the heart of urban living, then Pete Travis’ ‘*Dredd*’ should be considered a film that exposes its ultraviolence.

Following the prologue, a bird’s eye view of Mega-City One is displayed, and later superseded by the drone’s eye view in a clever exposé of the city’s contrived artificiality; the bird, once standing as a natural species within a world of comprehensive biodiversity, and once representing the sublimity of flight, and all the ambitions of human engineering, finds its sign incorporated into this *new* semiotics as a gizmo of surveillance capitalism. There is an uncanniness to mimicking a bird in flight, finding emphasis in the technologically-achieved ‘control drone’, which in turn reveals the inherent creepiness of a surveillance capitalism which attempts to naturalise itself. The surveillance system at the ‘Hall of Justice’, presumably ‘control central’, locates three perpetrators, all of whom Judge Dredd considers ‘under the influence of narcotics.’ From inside the speeding vehicle, one of the perpetrators is seen inhaling ‘Slo-Mo’, considered here as the street drug antithesis of metham-

phetamines. (It would seem platitudinal to even briefly mention how certain narcotics reveal something about the cultures that come to abuse them.) A gunfight ensues between traffic, where the vehicle inevitably crashes, with two of the perpetrators killed in the resulting collision with a concrete bollard. A surviving perpetrator flees the scene, and enters into a shopping mall environment. Dredd follows on foot.

The aesthetic outlay of the mall is one of any post-industrial environment, complete with a 'Hottie House' (hotdog) advertisement and fluorescent signage offering, among other things, 'fast shoe repairs'. Such iconography sits between the liminality of the *non-place*, (defined by anthropologist, Marc Augé), and the subsequent drug store and food courts that lend themselves to Baudrillardian analysis. The perpetrator, finding himself at the dead end of a level-one food court, takes a service-industry worker hostage.

"Let's talk." Dredd insists. "Release the hostage unharmed and I guarantee you a sentence of life in an Iso-Cube without parole."

"Life without parole?" The perpetrator asks. "That's the deal you're offering?"

"Only if you comply." The Judge recalls a litany of crimes, multiple homicides, and so on. "If you do not comply, the sentence is death."

Pressing the gun ever-closer to the service-industry worker's head, the perpetrator addresses the Judge's profound lack of negotiatory leverage. The fundamental mistake terrorists make in hostage situations can be found in the exact value the terrorist ascribes onto the hostage on behalf of the negotiating authority which actually perceives the hostage with little to no value whatsoever. It would not be hyperbolic to suggest that authority perceives hostages as if caught in the stasis

of the statistically already dead. Even so, if the terrorist – or perpetrator in this instance – murders the victim(s), they also come to sacrifice themselves to the authority, and therefore justify the presence of the authority to begin with. 'This is what terrorism is occupied with as well [...]', writes Baudrillard in '*Simulacra and Simulation*', 'making real, palpable violence surface in opposition to the invisible violence of security.' In addition, a policing authority solely concerned with justifying itself will almost never serve the intended purpose of protecting citizens. Instead, such conceptions of authority will only come to seek validation; this is without even addressing the logic of tying authority to systems of capital which themselves require metastatic growth. Perhaps the irony of this scene comes from the perpetrator himself operating as the prospector of human value in a world without it.

"Here's the deal." The perpetrator stipulates. "You let me walk – or I blow her [...] brains out."

The trick to negotiation is to perceive all value at the point of an absolute zero. The film intervenes as a point of interest since Judge Dredd – doing exactly this – offers a synthesis between the acknowledged nihilism of authority and an unwavering conviction towards it regardless. Following the conclusion of this negotiation, Dredd fires an incendiary 'hotshot' from his pistol which lands in the mouth of the perpetrator, whose head becomes consumed by all the visual delights of combustion. The surviving service-industry worker, embodying not the Stockholm syndrome for the perpetrator but the syndrome exhibited towards authority, responds with gratitude.

Dredd is then recalled to the Hall of Justice where he is introduced to new recruit and psychic adept, Rookie Anderson

(Olivia Thirlby). Through reading Dredd's presence, Anderson is able to psychically reveal the cohabitation of authorities' two defining characteristics, which is to say, 'Anger and Control'.

"But there's something else." Anderson specifies. "Something behind the control, something almost..." The rookie is ordered to desist in her psychic evaluation by the commanding officer – and what lies beneath Dredd's composure is left undiscovered. It is suggested that Dredd harbours the additional anxiety that lies behind all authority, which is to also say, a compartmentalised sense of doubt in the laws it claims to uphold.

Ma-Ma's judgement is to have the dealers skinned alive and thrown from the highest balcony of the Peach Trees mega complex. Two things are revealed here; firstly, the abject brutality of this world, and secondly, the shifting power dynamics of Peach Trees as governed by such violence. This offers an additional parallel to the contemporary, perhaps, which is obviously far more brutal beyond even the stylized nature of cinema, whilst also emphasising the dynamics of our existing society as becoming increasingly governed by a similar violence. (Were the mythologies of society, which is to also say civilization, not always concerned with violence?)

There is an uncanniness to mimicking a bird in flight, finding emphasis in the technologically-achieved 'control drone', which in turn reveals the inherent creepiness of a surveillance capitalism which attempts to naturalise itself.

The scene cuts to an establishing shot revealing one of the concrete megastructures of the new world named – with pastel-pink, neon lettering – 'Peach Trees', a building operating as simulacra in a world with, presumably, neither peaches nor trees. This precession towards hyper-reality is emphasised by the following interior scene of key antagonist, Ma-Ma (Lena Headey), using Slo-Mo in a bath tub, the water aestheticized beyond good and evil, its qualities heightened by the hyper-glistening textures of retracted time, all of the powers of cinema embodied into a synthetic drug. Ma-Ma, the kingpin of narcotic smuggling operations in Peach Trees is then summoned by her gang – (known throughout the film as the 'Ma-Ma Clan') – to exact a sentence of punishment onto three drug dealers caught selling dope on the clan's turf.

It is perhaps the purpose of today's cinema to ground abstract violence through materialising its physicality, reproducing violence through choreographed routines, the orchestrated gun-fu of 'John Wick' (2014), etc. What we always have with the spectacle of screened violence is the return of violence to a point of lost Referentialism, as if violence today still draws equal parts blood and sweat and physicality, as if extreme violence manifests not in theoretical terms, in trade embargoes and government policy that starve children, for example, but in the very visual display of skinned bodies in the street. Notice how it is usually the physical violence conducted between impoverished citizens that must be policed by authority and never that violence which exists beyond it.

Nonetheless, there is a truth to violence in moral terms, a sanctimony that evap-

orates with increments of power. This is the problem with revolutionary praxis that received precisely what it asked for, especially within Marxian terms which must perpetually exist beneath political hegemony (in today's world, at least) to function as a critical and necessarily ordained perspective. Capitalism is no longer driven by hegemonic interpretations of power, the dynamics of the oppressor and the oppressed class (since one can today occupy both positionalities), or even the desire for more power *which it long ago totalised in its entirety*, but by the desire to preserve its reality, its *realism*. In this way, the mythology and intelligence of capitalism, for example, is no longer concerned with total acquisition, but with *survival and legacy*. It could be said that capitalist hyperreality has removed the threat to its survival precisely through the simulation of empowerment and inclusivity, its boastful claims of having raised the most people out of poverty in all of history. (At what expense?) Nonetheless, it is the demonstrable reality that systems of structuration create conditions in which the system always wins. By regulating citizens to Peach Trees, for example, where the majority of fruit that grows is rotten, we observe reality producing the exact socio-economic factors necessary for the required systems of authority and governance to justify themselves. The three drug dealers are inevitably skinned alive and thrown from the building in a brutal display of violence which in turn justifies the otherwise 'invisible violence of security.' From here on in, it would seem the 'palpable' violence enacted by Dredd, which is to say the law enforcement officer, will be considered entirely justified.

"Twelve serious crimes reported every minute, seventeen thousand per day." He tells Anderson. "We can respond to around

six percent."

"Which six percent?" Anderson asks.

"Your show, rookie. You tell me."

Of course, it is all a show driven by the justification for authority, the crimes made terrestrial through the presentation of statistics. Even so, the two Judges inevitably make their way to Peach Trees, having received an inbound report of three homicides in the vicinity, which we already know will be the three drug dealers, skinned alive and displayed in the domestic megacomplex for all to see. It is later revealed that Ma-Ma's 'trademark is violence', which is only an embodiment of the violence that surrounds her; she is, in this way, perhaps the personification of Peach Trees itself.

"How did she get away with it?" Rookie Anderson asks the medical attendant.

"Do you know how often we get a Judge in Peach Trees?" He replies.

The three victims are registered to apartments on level thirty-nine. Anderson proposes striking the gang's base of operations on that level. Here, the scene cuts to two teenagers purchasing narcotics from various gangsters in an apartment complex. The hyperrealism of cinema is again realised through the subsequent gun battle between gangsters and Judges, which is presented to the audience through the psychotropic lens of Slo-Mo, the bloodshed of bullet wounds and rippling flesh exposed beyond even their natural temporal arrangement. This is synthetic violence which has aestheticized the processes of time, the visuals themselves rendered post-human through the Hollywood colloquialism we know today as 'bullet time.' The power of cinema, and recorded image in general, can be found precisely in the spectatorship and subsequent aestheticization of those things which lie outside of *real time*.

Arresting the surviving criminals, Anderson uses her psychic abilities to distinguish one of them as the man responsible for the flayed victims displayed in the Peach Trees' atrium. Anderson is ninety-nine percent sure she has arrested the individual responsible for the murders.

"Can't execute a perp on ninety-nine percent." Dredd insists, deciding to take the gang member in for interrogation, something witnessed by Ma-Ma's surveillance lackey and former pimp, whose eyes have been gouged-out (by Ma-Ma) and replaced by some kind of technological-ly-achieved, optical lenses. Ma-Ma is then informed about the Judges hitting their 'distribution point'. There is a sardonicism to be found in drug dealing and its shared language of capitalism. Nonetheless, Ma-Ma initially believes this is merely the Judges 'showing their faces, reminding the citizens they exist.' Her comment can be read as a criticism of the authorities' sign-value, perhaps, transcending the products of consumption to encompass organisations themselves. The suggestion here is that the authority Judges wield is that of empty simulation. The peculiarity of the character, Judge Dredd, we will come to learn, can be located in how he tries to materialise as the personification (the conduit) of the simulation, represented by his often-quoted phrase – 'I am the Law.'

"No, Ma." The gang's lieutenant responds. "They picked up Kay." There is a shared anxiety that this gang member, Kay (Wood Harris), will be broken by the Hall of Justice's interrogation techniques, thus revealing the gang's plans towards widespread Slo-Mo distribution across Mega-City One. In order to prevent the Judges leaving with Kay, the Ma-Ma Clan manipulate the city's bureaucratic structures, and through the combination of

brute violence and social engineering are able to initiate a 'Def-Con Systems Test', which seals the entirety of Peach Trees with a concrete and steel blast-shielding.

"No one in or out until the Judges are dead." Ma-Ma reveals to the citizens, speaking over the mega structure's tannoy system, which she has also leveraged access. Ironically, the security system intended to safeguard civilians is used against them. The way Ma-Ma's co-opted authority over Peach Trees so successfully manipulates the defence structures of sector control, whereby the perceived authority and ordained authority also become indistinguishable from one another, highlights the problems inherent in any structural bureaucracy which demands constant and unwavering obedience. As a result of the 'Def-Con Systems Test', the Judges are unable to escape. With communications blocked by the blast-shielding, Dredd is unable to contact the Hall of Justice. What follows is essentially a generic action film where these two Judges fight their way to the top level of Peach Trees in order to end Ma-Ma's reign; restoring the ordained reality of authority and justice, which is – we soon come to see – highly contrived. Nothing is really accomplished by the end of the film other than the continuation of what existed prior, which is to say, a world governed by that 'invisible' violence. What's interesting about these representations, however, is the way they reveal how power, authority, and control, function not within fixed, hegemonic states, but as something elusive; *as the substance between things*. Structural authority is not necessarily what we should today aim our critical lens towards, (since structural authority long ago made itself transparent to criticism), but instead, we should perhaps consider the ontological conditions that propagate such conceptions of authority, asking what

authority would look like if it operated from the *outside*.

The nihilists of this world, which is to say *all of us* who remain complicit – and will always remain complicit – especially within disavowal, insist on the negation of an outside only because it frees us from either the hard-work of ontological reimagining, the ‘poetic reversal’ in thoroughly Baudrillardian terms, or because we are a species no longer capable of such things. As the light of imagination grows as monotonous as the cliché, the collective conscious, left picturing the predator in the darkness – (since imagination was always a neurobiological reality concerned with threat perception) – seeks to end imagination through diminishment. Imagination is no longer of any use; it is best to irradiate the imaginative faculty in the eyes of a dead and dying species, which in turn might irradiate the fears of what’s left to come from the fatal ontologies left to us.

As the two Judges escape the atrium, they move from one non-place to another, from an atrium to a stairway, to a lobby, and so on. Something I have committed to elsewhere is the idea of the *non-place* as concealing (and therefore revealing) the absence of all exteriority, with the whole contemporary landscape rendered impersonal and unbroken. Even those spaces we consider intimate and personal have long ago been rendered transparent, impressed upon and enveloped by the *ambience* of the non-place. Nonetheless, hiding in one of these non-places – a corridor – the Judges and their suspect, Kay, who they have decided to neither execute nor ‘cut loose’, attempt to avoid Ma-Ma’s clan. Anderson uses her psychic powers to sense a citizen on the other side of an apartment door, convincing the occupant to let them inside thus avoiding the oncoming party of gun

wielding reactionaries. In order to get the Judges off her level, and therefore remove the threat of danger their authority poses to her neighbours and loved ones, the resident informs the Judges about a service elevator that whilst appearing out-of-order is actually functioning.

Having taken the service elevator, Ma-Ma’s lackey picks up the two Judges on surveillance camera as they exit onto level seventy-six. Instead of having the gang on levels sixty through to eighty converge on the Judges’ position, Ma-Ma chooses to have the Judges sealed onto floor seventy-six, since the override gives her access to the whole of the mega complex’s security systems. Floor seventy-six is presented as a leaking, damp, almost subterranean environment, defined by the *mise en scène* of decay as if the Judges are themselves approaching the corruption that rots the fruit of Peach Trees. Dredd blasts the surveillance camera with his pistol – but it’s too late. The two Judges and their suspect are inevitably sealed within the floor’s corridor by retractable, cast-iron doors. Dredd instructs Anderson to take the prisoner and retreat to a more advantageous location, whilst he resumes down the corridor. An interesting transaction subsequently takes place between Kay and Anderson, where, waiting for the gang’s advance, the prisoner tests the limits of Anderson’s psychic abilities by ‘picturing a violent sexual liaison between the two...’

We inevitably arrive at a question worth considering, what do we mean by actually existing violence in the world today? Power develops as those things which elude definition. Perhaps it will become vital to consider how Referentialism’s turn towards relativity renders violence with the power of such elusiveness. One thing we can say philosophically, at least,

is that violence is not simply the hyperreal stylization (reduction) we find in cinema. It is certainly not this reductive image of Ma-Ma with a high-calibre minigun on floor seventy-six of Peach Trees, firing indiscriminately in the hopes of eliminating this new challenge to her authority. It is perhaps easy to confuse violence with desperation, which is so often the case, and seems platitudinal to mention here.

Prior to Dredd's phallogocentric encounter with Ma-Ma's potent miniguns, however, we should briefly mention the cinematic shot beginning at Dredd's legs, rising towards his leather-clad buttocks, embodying all of the fetishistic avowal of authority and domination. There is an undeniably revealing (arguably propagandistic) flair to Dredd's sex appeal, offering a representation of the law that is libidinally charged. Who benefits from the propagandistic structuration of a libidinally charged authority? There was once a time we could ask these questions: who do the propagandists work for and what do they want? Where are they and where did they go? The answers inform their own reality – too obvious to be true, perhaps? (Through processes of metastatic feedback, propaganda requires the propagandised participant who perpetuate its images through engagement; perhaps we are all propagandists of the hyperreal now. Furthermore, it is today impossible to distinguish between corporate and state propaganda – propaganda and the propagandised, in addition – since one point of reference long ago disappeared into the other. It is without consequence to know which one remains and yet one might still trace a dissolution in this illusory dichotomy through the manufacturing of consent now generated by self-perpetuating systems that lie outside of those all too obvious notions of political hegemony.)

High-calibre bullets soon ricochet through floor seventy-six, aimed with every intention of murdering the Judges in a spectacular display designed to solidify Mama's authority over Peach Trees. As with all power struggles, however, civilians are murdered indiscriminately as an end result. Dredd rushes back to Anderson and her captive, where they escape the onslaught, exiting through a blown-out wall. We are now exterior to the mega complex, where we see day turned to night, snow falling from the sky and diminishing above a concrete plateau high above Mega-City One.

From this vantage point, Dredd is able to resume communications with central control and call for back up. The city emerges before them as backdrop, appearing as any futuristic megapolis complete with all the cinematic tropes of neon artificiality, all the transaesthetic of human engineering rendered beautiful against the darkness. The night sky offers a sense of the film's temporal arrangement, in addition, time passing within the narrative, whilst also providing as a juxtaposition to the interior of Peach Trees governed by perpetual twilight, neither night nor day. This striking cohabitation of temporal arrangements calls into question the artificiality of time itself; a major theme of the film, partially portrayed through the effects of the synthetic drug, Slo-Mo – as the obvious example – alongside the film's themes of *time and survival*. Anderson walks out along the plateau, observing the city by night with an almost awestruck response captured through Olivia Thirlby's reaction, a close-up shot of her face, and so on, whilst Karl Urban renders Dredd with a sense of vulnerability.

"Back up is on its way." Control central informs them. "Just stay alive."

Back inside the ruin of floor seventy-six, Ma-Ma's lackeys search through the debris, looking for what remains of the Judges. Dredd soon emerges from the smoke, throwing one of Ma-Ma's lieutenants from the balcony in his own form of display killing. Ma-Ma looks on from the opposite balcony, unsure of how to proceed from here. The camera pans away in rapid motion with Ma-Ma's image gradually lessened, reflecting her diminishing power over Peach Trees. Dredd retreats to a side room, and begins beating Kay through interrogation. The prisoner remains uncooperative. Anderson perceives a change in Dredd's disposition here, going from a 'by the books' enforcement officer to someone determined to survive. Anderson soon steps in, using her psychic powers to extract the desired information from Kay's mind.

"Peach Trees," it turns out, "is the manufacturing base for all of the Slo-Mo in Mega-City One – Ma-Ma's controlling production and distribution across the whole city." With back up on the way and Ma-Ma now guilty of multiple charges of homicide, and two counts of the attempted murder of a Judge, Dredd decides to implement an offensive strategy. However, an altercation occurs where Kay is able to turn a gun onto Anderson, and take her hostage, escaping with his prisoner via elevator to the top floor of Peach Trees. Ma-Ma is unimpressed by Kay's small victory here since all of the chaos has resulted from his capture. Even so, Ma-Ma's plan is to now kill the Judges and make it look like a regular 'bust that went wrong'.

"No torture. No Raping. No Skinning. Just a bunch of bullets to the head and chest." She instructs. "Do you understand me?"

As these plans are set into motion, Dredd patches himself into the Peach Trees

tannoy system using a public terminal interface; a trap designed to alert Ma-Ma to his location.

"Mama's not the law." He informs the residents of Peach Trees. "I'm the law." What better realisation of the film's narrative tension than this utterance incorporating both the power play dynamics between protagonist/antagonist and Dredd's iconic catchphrase? The Judge proceeds to list Ma-Ma's crimes; a "common criminal guilty of murder, guilty of the manufacture and distribution of the narcotic known as Slo-Mo, and as of now," he concludes, "under sentence of death." Dredd is then revealed by Ma-Ma's surveillance lackey to be communicating from a terminal only ten levels below. Gang members are ordered to surround the terminal, which they later fire upon. We then observe Dredd on the opposite balcony, looking down onto the surrounded terminal booth. He equips his weapon with an incendiary payload and fires it across the wide expanse, igniting those gang members sent to execute him. The flames are mirrored in the Judge's helmet with all the metaphorical parallels of biblical hellfire.

"How [...] we going to stop this guy?" Kay asks.

"Call 911." Mama replies, with perhaps the most ironically placed line in the film, highlighting the innate contradictions of power, an ordained authority that can only ever be truly overcome by its own representation. There is a similar humour to be found in Franz Kafka's novel, *The Castle*, which also – coincidentally – includes a character, known as, 'K', a land surveyor (and theoretical hostage) whose agency is tied inexplicitly to the bureaucracy of the *elusive* castle officials whose authority exists through the presence of its absence. Ironically, the absence of authority must be restored to the *castle*-esque, Peach

Trees, precisely through calling 911, since it is the absent, elusive authority 911 represents that first allowed Ma-Ma's transgression from the law. (There is an eeriness to Kafka's work precisely in the way both the presentation and realisation of ordained authority remains unfinished – this aids the reading of *'The Castle'* as a religious novel concerned with the *absent* authority of God.) Nonetheless, through summoning the law, Ma-Ma opens the way to the internal contradictions of authority's presence (she accelerates the contradictions), since we come to see the authority of Mega-City One as thoroughly corrupted and corruptible.

intentions (through psychic abilities), and she dispatches the Judge accordingly.

"What's the price of a Judge these days?" Dredd calls out to the remaining Judges sent to kill him.

"Million." Judge Lex responds from the Slo-Mo laboratory, moving in to flank Dredd's position.

"Doesn't sound like much. To betray the law. To betray the city."

"Save that [...] for the rookies. Twenty years I've been on the streets to know what Mega-City One is Dredd – it's a [...] meat grinder." Lex recalls. "People go in one end and meat comes out the other. All we do is turn the handle." What purpose does this

It is today ubiquitous that 'Myth,' as Baudrillard once wrote in 'Simulacra and Simulation', 'chased from the real by the violence of history, finds refuge in cinema.'

Four additional Judges are summoned to Peach Trees, all of whom are revealed to be this world's equivalent of a corrupt authority. In many ways, it is never ordained authority which the criminal fears, but rather the face of its corrupted form, which is to also say, the more truthful representation. These four Judges are prepared to deal with Dredd – and therefore restore the absent presence of the law – for the price of 'one million credits'. Here, the problem of tying authority to the logic of capital is revealed in its crudest form (bribery) since the conduits of the law still serve credit (currency), regardless of the law. Whilst Dredd is left to deal with a three-man squad of corrupt Judges, Anderson manufactures her escape from the Ma-Ma clan, later running into the fourth Judge sent to kill her. Anderson is nonetheless able to detect the Judge's true

'meat' serve if not the fatal ontologies that must always be fed; 'the handle', in thoroughly Žižekian terms perceivable, here, as ideology proper since, as Slavoj Žižek dictates in *'The Pervert's Guide To Ideology'*, it is precisely when we think ourselves free of ideology that we have, in fact, entered into it.

Throwing off the veneer of sanctimony and justice, Lex believes himself to be free from the shackles of some utopian idealism from which Dredd so painfully clings. From this perspective we can see exactly how the cynical authority governing Mega-City One operates, and it is this wound that inflicts Dredd the most, finding fruition in the single bullet which enters him from behind. Nonetheless, Anderson soon arrives, releasing her own burst into the back of Lex; bullets which Lex too, did not expect from a rookie

still driven by the same idealism Lex had just dismissed. Having successfully dealt with the squad of corrupt Judges, Dredd carries out a basic field dressing of his bullet wound, and both Anderson and Dredd prepare themselves to face Ma-Ma. Acquiring the passcode to her chambers, the Judges proceed to clear out the remnants of Ma-Ma's clan, before facing her together. As Ma-Ma raises hands in sign of surrender, it is revealed she has equipped herself with a dead switch.

"This entire level is rigged with enough high-explosives to take out the top fifty stories." She reveals. "If they go, the rest go to... my heart stops beating, the building blows, everyone in it – ash." Once again, the criminal makes the fatal mistake of all hostage take overs.

"This is not a negotiation." Dredd informs her. "The sentence is death." The Judge fires a precision shot, neutralizing the target – but not killing the criminal outright. Dredd approaches, taking Ma-Ma by the hair, applying her with the same narcotic she had readily supplied to the citizens of Mega-City One. "Citizen Ma-Ma. Your crimes include multiple homicide and the manufacture and distribution of narcotics – how do you plead?" She inhales the Slo-Mo. "Defense noted."

The shutdown initiative is lifted, and Peach Trees opens to a new day, breathes a new light; but not before Dredd concludes with Ma-Ma's execution, throwing her from the top window in ordained authorities' own form of display killing which has, with perverse parallels, come to define the policing authority of present conditions, regulated to that Baudrillardian 'equilibrium of terror in which humans are imprisoned.'

Subsequently high on the effects of Slo-Mo, we observe Ma-Ma gradually falling from the highest level of Peach Trees, dethroned by Dredd's profound sense of authority. It is a visually compelling scene with the criminal's fractured authority finding metaphorical alignment with the fracturing of glass that surrounds her. Ma-Ma nonetheless plummets through the debris and smoke of the Peach Trees mega complex, where she lands, inevitably (wasn't this always inevitable from the film's outset?) upon the atrium floor. Unable to transmit a signal through two-hundred floors of concrete and steel, the dead switch fails to activate the rigged explosives.

In many ways, this penultimate scene mimics Lucifer's fall from grace, the smoke of Peach Trees like billowing clouds between the floors of a closed-circuit reality, Ma-Ma's arms outstretched like melting wings, all the mythological iconography of Icarus flying too close to the sun. It is today ubiquitous that 'Myth,' as Baudrillard once wrote in *'Simulacra and Simulation'*, 'chased from the real by the violence of history, finds refuge in cinema.'

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**MAN HAS BECOME LESS RATIONAL
THAN HIS OWN OBJECTS,
WHICH NOW RUN AHEAD OF HIM,
SO TO SPEAK, ORGANIZING HIS
SURROUNDINGS AND THUS
APPROPRIATING HIS ACTIONS.**

Jean Baudrillard



With Jean Baudrillard in Paris

Nina Zivancevic

Poet, writer, translator, scholar, performer, curator and art critic.

Interview

6

Jean Baudrillard is in John Lechte's book of "50 contemporary key-thinkers". His analyses of the processes of seduction, consumerism in society and potential downfall of our civilization caused by the disappearance of humanism have become legendary. Baudrillard has recently devoted his time to photography and has been successful at it as well. We find him after the opening of his show at La Maison de la Photographie in Paris.

Nina Zivancevic: *Let us start from the present moment – what are you working on right now, at the present moment?*

Jean Baudrillard: Well, there are still residues of the writing I started some time ago, "Cool Memories", there is also a book I am working on with an architect Jean Nouvelle, then I am working on a script for a film "Password", but these are not real books. "The Impossible changes" was the

last book I really worked on and then, I've been trying to reconstruct certain material after that book but it is not easy to go back, that is to reconstruct material from the past and especially from the seminar that I conducted with my students. I am also interested now in the subject of photography.

Nina Zivancevic: *When does it start – your love for the photography?*

Jean Baudrillard: Well, it is a belated interest in my life, it has started perhaps 10 or 15 years ago, but I did not have precise projects with it – well, there was an Object, not a project, and when there's an object it always attracts my attention. I have always been fascinated by the images... a Japanese had offered me a camera and I started playing with it, than I was caught by that game, but I am far from being a professional. Then, once you exhibited something, that creates the whole new situation, the whole notion of spontaneity and pleasure disappears, as there is this "big show" that you have to prepare for, then you are obliged to sell something, and oops! The institution is already there! So the question arises is can I count on the production of something that was initially just a pleasure to me. At any rate, as far as photography is concerned it is not something marginal for me any longer, it turned into something else. I started doing it in order to take a break from writing, but little by little I started speaking about it, even writing about it, so now these are two activities given to me. I've undergone some sort of metamorphosis, I employ some sort of theory in creating images themselves – these two processes have nothing to do with each other – taking photos and writing about them but they come together in the end.

Nina Zivancevic: *Has this process had anything to do with your trips to the U.S. and the primarily visual culture of that country?*

Jean Baudrillard: Yes, it's had, a lot. Some time ago I had published a book called "America" with a friend, which was meant to have images as well, but finally I decided to keep only text in it. But it is true that my photography is connected to my trips, above all, to my trips to the U.S.

And then, there are my "notebooks" (Cool Memories) which are also related to the same period as the photos – to the 1980s and 1990s. I feel I exhausted these memories now, I exhausted my interest to keep going in that direction, as I also travel more to Latin America now and less to the U.S. I am still writing my notebooks but I don't get the same inspiration like I did before, there isn't the same breath of freshness. So, the notebooks have changes but at the same time my photos changed as well – in the beginning those were exclusively the photos from the journeys, and if you take a look at my current show you will notice that the subject changed. It is not so much that these new photos are all that intimate, but they belong to the universe which is closer to me – there are portraits, etc.

Nina Zivancevic: *How did it come that you started putting fragments together that will be known later as "Cool Memories"?*

Jean Baudrillard: Oh, all this really started happening when I was visiting the desert for the first time in the 1980s. I started the trip from New Orleans and I visited all the great deserts of Texas, and I wrote there 15 pages or something like that, then I continued with this completely new mode of writing. First of all, there was this idea of the mirage in the desert, simulacra, desert became a metaphor in itself, metaphor for landscapes, events, situations...I enlarged this idea of geography, so New York City became the desert as well, some sort of empty background for the events, for a certain radicality which is neither culture nor nature. At any rate, there was no certain project with these fragments and I gave myself a date, which is the year 2000 when I wanted to stop with the "Memories". I continued to write down the notes but these are notes which

will serve me for more theoretical projects.

Nina Zivancevic: *I liked in particular your “Fatal Strategies” as I find your writing there theoretical but at the same time quite lyrical.*

Jean Baudrillard: Yes, I agree, the book has certain qualities which were not, unfortunately recognized in France but rather elsewhere.

Nina Zivancevic: *Yes, it is a strange phenomenon that your work has first gained a certain resonance abroad: an American has written preface for your French edition of “The Consumer’s Society”. Then, on the other hand, one of your*

became somewhat stagnant – there is not exactly an intellectual field to operate within. It has been devoured by technical activities and computer science, and finally by certain ideology. Or, if you like, by certain anti-ideology; there is not even the field of personal rivalries but rather a consensus of critiques that try to destroy radically what has been done before, so we talk about things like “death of a subject”, etc., but it is important to notice that there was SOMETHING, a certain body of things to be destroyed. Nowadays, there is even nothing to destroy, there isn’t even a certain negativity to destroy as everything

I’ve undergone some sort of metamorphosis, I employ some sort of theory in creating images themselves – these two processes have nothing to do with each other – taking photos and writing about them but they come together in the end.

favorite subjects has been the difference between European and American societies; you yourself, somewhat like Foucault and Derrida have often lectured in the U.S. Why have all of you gone outside of France to gain certain visibility?

Jean Baudrillard: Well, it was not a strategy – neither “fatal” nor banal, I was interested in going elsewhere to gain certain experiences. I don’t even see myself as a teacher, I avoid Universities for that matter – I certainly did not go there to “enlighten” people so to speak, for me it was a great period of traveling, but I found myself at the universities – which have been the places of experiment to me, places where I could test some of my theories which I had been developing. They are more like a mirror to me, a certain laboratory where one can experiment with given ideas. It is true though that at the French universities, after the 60s and the 70s, the situation

was eaten up by the work of media, by the newspapers and things do not even have time to exist, they are immediately performed, acted out, or they disappear as soon as they appear. There is a sort of revisionism, settling the accounts of historical facts, yes, we are in fact in the era of revisionism, certain devitalisation or lobotomization, which upsets me a lot. In fact, I have always felt lonely here, I have worked alone, except for the glorious years of the 60s and the 70s when there were many reviews and magazines where one was able to publish his ideas. Today the situation is quite different – one is either institutionalized, or finds one’s little hole, or joins mediatization to promote his own career. But great singular events we don’t have any longer. Whether we’ll be able to change things or not, I don’t know, because everything goes through the process of “acting out things” or computerization.

Nina Zivancevic: *Well, one does not even have to be Heidegger to understand that is very difficult to penetrate the communication wall imposed on us by certain machines.*

Jean Baudrillard: Yes, in fact, what we have now is a sort of mental machinery which produces a sort of “black out” of the negative thought and critique and we could even claim the presence of a certain retrospective of devalorisation and disqualification of thinking. This is not something only intellectual, it is also very political, this attempt at revising the events and rehabilitating them. We hear every so often people complaining about revisionism and fundamentalism in different societies, but WE ARE living in such society, in a very conformist society of the one-dimensional thinking, and I see clearly now, that there are things I cannot even discuss, it is not even possible to find words to describe the deficiencies. There is a prevailing way of thinking which is not even intellectual, it is political and you cannot do anything against it, so all of a sudden, I fell into a category of an imposter, a reactionary, a sexist if you like...I was condemned, well, not officially, but I noticed the negative attitude of people from the “Liberation” newspaper, for instance...

Nina Zivancevic: *Well, I detected a certain negative sentiment towards the people of the left, they condemned Sartre as well...*

Jean Baudrillard: Yes, they are trying now to settle the accounts. There is an intellectual climate more pleasant and of a better nature in Brazil, Japan, in Italy and even in England – than here in France. I believe that France is a country that exhausted its intellectual ‘capital’, although

people collectively live here with a certain reputation that has been here for centuries so we believe that our thought is the best but that’s not true at all, and we even know it. So, I am living a funny reality – on one hand I live here and I don’t participate in an interesting reality and then I go abroad and live reality of people who admire French thought but the one which is definitively over. So we find a certain intellectual difference between the countries which comes perhaps from the difference imposed by the different time-tables between the continents.

Nina Zivancevic: *To get back to new mythologies: you have written that a washing machine is a sign of commodity, but what is the case with the computer – and the whole notion of Internet – do you see it as a commodity as well, or as an object which has changed qualitatively our society?*

Jean Baudrillard: I personally have no interest in it as I am not using its memory, files, etc. But I would agree that there is something in it that escapes our simple notion of an object and commodity with the computer. Even when I was using the notion of “washing machine” I was not simply concerned with its function, I treated it at the level of signs which changes the notion of a machine as a banal, technical object. With the computer though and virtual reality that goes with it, I think there is a real mutation, the universe of the virtual is another dimension, I don’t know whether it is the fourth dimension, but it is a dimension which erases other dimensions – dimensions of the real, of its representation and the one of its discourse. I have abandoned in this case the discourse which is critical and ironic, and negative – it is not even worth asking a

question: what is it? It is there, it exists and it means that we will have an ever growing computerisation.

Nina Zivancevic: *How is it going to change human relationships? Are we aware of such influence?*

Jean Baudrillard: To a great extent, I can imagine, however, to me, it is an easy way of solving the problem. We are able to create a universe which moves into all directions where we can recreate for ourselves multiple identities, a universe where we'd navigate with the derivative all the time..Well, for me, all that interests me is really gone, but I cannot make a cult of the "lost object" and live in a nostalgic past, but it is true that – the distance, the glance and seduction, everything that symbolizes human relationship, finally, relationship that we have towards ourselves, everything is relativized by this sort of "communication". It is true, on one hand that we have certain immersion – the screen is not a mirror, that's for sure, but with the screen we do not get a certain distance which is necessary for judgment. We get immersed in it and we have an impression that we can do what we want with it.

Nina Zivancevic: *The problem with the computer – and here I'm referring first to the decision of the French national education to introduce it as an obligatory equipment soon to replace the teacher – the problem is that it does not provide nuances, only yes and no, black and white answers.*

Jean Baudrillard: Oh, yes, as it is digitalized it is a binary product, with yes and no types of answers, it is a selective mode of thinking and the danger exists in such mode...but to me the difference between the artificial intelligence and a human thought is exclusive, so that amalgame which creates a situation in which a brain

becomes a metaphor for the computer, that thing: "I think the way the computer thinks", and in return, "the computer itself thinks instead of my brain" is really zero to me and the moment when we can even speak of a certain "plot" against ... (laughter). No, but there is a real danger in all this, and we should ask a question: what is there behind all this? Anthropologically speaking, in terms of society which seeks an economic answer, that we can find an answer, but anthropologically, what do people want behind this phenomenon? At times, it is a certain mode of disappearance...

Nina Zivancevic: *Is it a certain decadence of thinking?*

Jean Baudrillard: Well not to be too philosophical about it, but we can still use the term – there is no transcendence in it, that's clear, so the world becomes completely operational, where we can do everything we want. So, there is this loss of transcendence which is a colossal event, we are, in fact, in the real beginning of this process and we don't know what will become of new generations because the old ones have always worked with this notion of transcendence in one way or the other, but the new ones...I see they are taking it as a sort of game, well, we can take it that way, for sure, but it is a game where we can select things, but the game is not only that – there are rules of the game, which is something else. Game is a sort of a duel, with rules, it is a ceremony which is very powerful, and computer is not a game in that sense of the term – there is not a rival, the other is not there, there is no alternity, so there is not a game at the highest level of that term – I am not sure what we have here...Is it a performance, perhaps? But the prospective with all this is that it will represent a total substitute for all mental

mechanisms and for the natural world as it will clone it.

Nina Zivancevic: *So, you don't see in the computer a possibility for a game the way Huizinga or Roger Callois perceived of it?*

Jean Baudrillard: Oh no, it's surely not that type of game – even if we take the categories that Callois presented – first, representation – mimicry, then the agon – challenge, then vertigo, then alea – chance or a dice: if we take each of these categories and analyze them according to the virtual standards and we would see that the virtual does not have in itself any of those, so, it is a sort of parody of all these categories.. But, we have already mentioned all this ... and I don't know what can we do with all this? What can we do?

and I spoke about it when I was discussing seduction and obscenity, but this all brings now a certain negative aspect to things... I would rather here remember Heidegger's question which he asked: if we were to go to the boundary of technology, to the very end of technology, should we find there a constellation of secrets? So, let us hope to find this positive answer in there, as there is a possibility of a vision which is optimistic in all this. If there are computers, artificial intelligence next to us, if the machines are doing things for us, then it can also happen that we remain alone with thought as such, that is, if there is still a hope that some thinking remains with us, then this thinking will be radicalized and in that – and the notion of game as a form of chance enters here – I see a real

... so that amalgam which creates a situation in which a brain becomes a metaphor for the computer, that thing: "I think the way the computer thinks", and in return, "the computer itself thinks instead of my brain" is really zero to me ...

Nina Zivancevic: *Is there a possibility to train new generations to think, to develop their own modes of thinking independent from virtual categories?*

Jean Baudrillard: I don't think there is any hope at all. If you think about the education the way it was some time ago, it had some value system, and with virtual reality there is no value system, there is no problem of freedom any longer – that used to be an important problem – but now we do not have it at all, so we have rather the disappearance of the term of the problem as such. And this is the final solution, which has quite a big and mortal resonance. But, I always keep the idea of reversibility of things, that something can be changed

chance for existence of thought as such, an extreme, radical thought. But, watch out – there is a fat chance that thinking does not remain with us altogether, and that is a problem, like it is with every form of cloning – there is a possibility that a man as species disappears.

Nina Zivancevic: *Does this form of possible disappearance of thought have anything to do with the general decline of thought in the 20th century, as Gianni Vattimo has defined it, as a sort of "weakening of thought", thus with the "weak thought" of our age?*

Jean Baudrillard: I don't know... I think that for Vattimo "weak thought" was just a different thought, a different way of

thinking. Well, there is also Deleuze and his thinking – well, I do not know if that is more of a certain system of “delocalization” of thinking, or the branching of the same global system where we find ourselves in the fragmentation or fracture of thinking systems. Do we find the same order or disorder of a unified set of thoughts? I have an impression that we are undergoing a certain metamorphosis of the same global system...

Nina Zivancevic: *You have mentioned in “Perfect Crime” that we have small illusions which comfort us. Could we consider these as remedies, or a possible answer to the previous problem?*

Jean Baudrillard: Yes, at any rate everyone in the world creates his own defense mechanism, so we can also make ourselves appear weak and say, “it’s tactics”, or “it is a strategy” – it is perhaps fatal as well, but surely it exists...

Nina Zivancevic: *Can you elaborate a bit on human greed – greed for money, then greed to dominate the economic market. We have big problems nowadays such as “mad cows”, that is, problem with food, ecological problems, etc. In order to improve our society at this moment, should one start considering the problem of “ethics” in its ancient term of the word, the way ancient Greeks had it, or something else?*

Jean Baudrillard: I don’t think that ethics has a big chance, as far as biology or genetics committees are concerned – we are trying to find a certain norm on how to operate. Here we are “beyond good and evil” and not in Nietzschean terms, but rather “out of” good and evil, as we cannot even discriminate nowadays between human and inhuman and where is the demarcation line between the two which would allow us to form a system of values. No, I

do not think that we can have it, despite all the efforts to get back to a certain internal system of values, there is no such system. There is not even an esthetic judgment, art has the same problem there... well, we have found ourselves in such situation where the system of the opposition has been erased, and the differentiation between the good and the bad, true and false, – all this has been erased, by the intellectual criticism which has gone far beyond this value system, and then the differentiation was also erased by technology, by technical operations which do not recognize this kind of thing altogether. There is a contradiction in all this though – the more a problem becomes inaccessible to ethics or a judgment, the more it will demand the interaction of ethics, as in case of violence for instance – the more violence we have, the more we would need an intervention of the theory of human rights. Human rights have become nowadays a product of commodity, a product of an international consumerism, if I could put it this way. All this escapes critical thinking now, in order for us to have ethics, first we have to have critical thinking. As to the “mad cow”, we have entered into a ‘viral’ phase, so we have entered the virus, which is logical to me, because the information itself is a virus! So, “mad cow” is just a symptom of a larger problem – perhaps what we have here is the revenge of the animal – at any rate, it takes the same form of virus as there is a chain-reaction to this phenomenon, etc... And in this case, what could we ‘oppose’ to this one? We cannot ‘fracture’ it or fragment it, we cannot oppose to it a certain thinking which would take us to transcendence, here we have a real virus, we are in a total immanence without any solution... Actually, perhaps not everything is lost even here, as there are things which always

escape certain rules of the game and then invent their own rules for themselves, but these rules certainly do not have universal value. At any rate, it seems to me that at this point it is not the universal that would help us fight the world, it is the singular – if we find certain singular forms – might they be the events, or certain forms of writing, or certain forms of resistance which we find everywhere in the world of politics, in certain ethnic groups, linguistic communities etc., we can count on them. Everything that resists certain networks, and their absolute power – therefore, everything that resists being placed within the network and which creates its own rules of the game can possibly survive – presently we are living in that system of deregularization where there are no rules and no game. So, singularity is that other mode of existence and, in a certain way, it develops itself at the same time when the mondialization of network is taking place, and luckily, singularity starts developing resistance to this power, strong resistance which is sometimes completely irrational or violent, but is quite strong. One could call it even the “Strength of Evil”, but it is vital and it exists.

Nina Zivancevic: *As you have mentioned “Evil”, in your “Fatal Strategies” you said something like “Stupidity is victorious in every sense – it is even the principle of Evil”. “Evil” here is capitalized. What is evil for you in scientific and philosophical term and could it be defined? It would be preposterous to call machines evil, wouldn’t it?*

Jean Baudrillard: It is hard to define it – in any case it is something that resists the idea of good, the idea of goodness of human being etc. Before, it was placed as a moral problem to us, good vs. Evil, but today we have it in a new form – which is the idea of “total, radical good”. Nowadays

everything has to be saved, everyone has to conform perfectly to everything, to act out goodness. We are forbidden to have a bad experience, an accident or death or negativity. And once we purged things from evil, we are likely to have catastrophes. I certainly do not glorify it but rather see it an autonomous power which is reducible.

Nina Zivancevic: *Wouldn’t you say that people nowadays perform even some sort of coquetry with evil – when they display tragic and negative images in advertising, etc?*

Jean Baudrillard: Yes, there is a certain strategy in it, but the problem is that evil became converted into something else – it is in fact a power which should not have been converted into misfortune (“mal” vs. “malheur”) and *that* shouldn’t have happened. We have a culture of misfortune nowadays where people are supposed to deal with their proper misfortune, but they are forbidden to encounter evil, as evil is supposed to disappear – according to them. And this I find to be a certain degradation, even in moral terms, this convergion of evil into misfortune. I see it degrading also in terms of economy it becomes scary – you are unfortunate, thus you are a victim and someone has to give you money. It is a bit like the Jews and Shoah – today I’ve read that they are going to condemn slavery as crime against humanity: so, we should have certain rehabilitation of the black people who can ask for money – for the damages caused to them for all these centuries of slavery. It appears delirious to me. Absolute good is also unbearable, this salvation of absolute good. Because evil exists here as well, and if we don’t acknowledge it, that is if we ‘liberate’ good and prevent existence of evil, we will end up detesting ourselves and finally we will produce a sort of violent ab-reaction to the ideal condition that we produced our-

selves. I'll be a Manichean here: there is a power of evil which exists and is real, but which does not dependant on the power of good, or at least we should restore both powers, of both of them. At any rate we should not exterminate evil, this action is as negative as the physical extermination, it is something extremely dangerous. But today we hear that "everything should be saved", everything should be whitened off, and even treated in retrospective – all the crimes annulled and cleared out. I see danger in this process. At any rate one has to react to an excess of every information, be it good or bad, it is vital to react. In the

easily, without apparent problems, and so does art, that is, it does not invent some other scene (and perhaps it cannot do it any longer), at any rate, it does not create illusion in the highest sense of that term, so it becomes some sort of a "ready-made", an object transposed by itself, it is a sort of complacent redoubling in itself, so it lacks a certain distance necessary not only for criticism but for its own existence – it cannot find any other sense but the one of its own reality. So, it lives in the debris, in the residue of culture which is not great to begin with. But what remains there is still that impuls to make it, and that is vital, to

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end we end up in a culture which sometimes believes in reality and effectiveness of things and in its essence is a radical negation to life. So this situation will grow in the following manner – the society will grow "better and better" and on the other hand it will grow worse because of it. So, how can one believe in ethics with all this?

Nina Zivancevic: *You mentioned once that "art does not produce anything today but the magic of its own disappearance". If so – where do our needs to create it and, still appreciate it – come from?*

Jean Baudrillard: Well, I am hesitant to answer this question as I've participated myself, quite paradoxically, in the plott called contemporary art. However, I believe that there is a certain complicity between the contemporary art and contemporary situation as we have it today ; the situation itself gets realized, lived out

have that illusion that one should make it, and there is still that idea of art which we consume, the idea of that "ready made" object which we consume, and then, there is, as usual, that political scene which tries to conserve a fictional idea that art exists at the will of politics, which is not true of course, but it exists. Then also, generally speaking art serves as an alibi – and here I don't imply the existence of the individuals who create it – but its own general structure, it is something which only renews the hyperreality of things, it is something hyperreal on its own, and then, as such, it enters the market and follows an affluent cycle, not the one of the economic market though, but the flow of esthetic values. I do not know what could there be, perhaps beyond these esthetic values? Art knows that it is an illusion anyways, and it is conscious of having this illusion of the world

so if we view it like this, it could be treated as a singularity, as an independent singular form in the world, not only a system of values but a form. What I see in contemporary art is a certain disappearance of the state of deception, but it is not a problem, something nominal, and we don't have even means for discussing it. As soon as we start discussing this problem the artists become angry, they cannot accept it, their reaction is very strong. We live perhaps in the world burdened with political, moral and esthetic demands so we don't have means to put this discussion in its place and if we enter such situation of discussing things that are impossible to discuss we enter the realm of perpetual neurosis. It is the moral neurosis although we got rid of moral in the first place.

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Stucco Angel

Jean Baudrillard

7

If the very paths
soluble even before
the absence of wind
on the water where
they hunt, and where
the animals they hunt
resemble them
the amorous spider
immobile
in the direction of the wind
so fructifying
like an iced cider
in the sensual space
of a cellar – for
coolness is a
passion and your hands are
alive and slender like
birds of passage –
or multiplied
by the falling night and
steamed by the ground, or

exonerated by the sun, and
cast in nonchalance
to the ground – but
to another verticality
than that
of walls – to the image
of others, not of the self, and
in unreality of others
if need be, but outside of
ourselves, always, toward
the reconciliation of
centrifugal forces taken
in the absurdity of landscape
what then?
We laugh through the oral
rent on the threshold of
de-motion, for the Medusas
of the notion are
the will paralysed by
the ruse of broken lines.

A bird, is she or
deer dress
or clover smoke
or doll of medlar fruit
or like a wild cat
imaginary with a piercing cry
in the perfect darkness
the föhn or the violent wind
less far and brief
but far as if it were yesterday
clearer
from the animality of a new book
the unmown grass
any day
by the clouds of pink stucco
and soft psychological penetration
white mass
without audience
then the red and green dawn
that doesn't conduct noise
separates us

you run right ahead
secret sign of solicitude
and so everywhere one wants to be
present before having
arrived when it is others
who speak but
one has not yet finished with
real hair
real hands
the very evidence
A bird, is she or
deer dress
or clover smoke
or doll of medlar fruit
it is her
unlyrical and surreptitious
less far and brief, but far
as if it were yesterday
it is her of whom
I would never have had the idea
on my own.

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