

Coulter, Gerry. *Jean Baudrillard: from the Ocean to the desert or the Poetics of Radicality*. New Smyrna Beach, Florida, Intertheory Press. 2012. pp, 190.

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In the digital times, events occur first in screen and after in reality. The boundaries between fiction and reality have been blurred. When one delves into Baudrillard's legacy, it common to see a pioneer who alerted about "an enigmatic and intelligible world" that only makes understandable by the lens of the media. Unlike Weber or Sombart, who envisaged an "iron-cage" foreclosed to the advance of logic, Baudrillard opted to see the world from a poetic-view. Based on the premise that theory may be equaled to fiction, his books focused on a fresh literary interpretation to transcend the limitations of science. Mistakenly, some scholars have precluded that Baudrillard was the philosopher of non-sense, obscuring the meaning of events to the extent of claiming polemic assertions as "the Gulf war did not take place". At some extent, his argument has been misunderstood during decades.

In this vein, Professor Gerry Coulter, who has devoted considerable time and efforts in deciphering the studies of Baudrillard about terrorism, literature, philosophy and aesthetics over years, presents a new striking and useful book for all those concerned in the post-structuralism. Throughout this text, Coulter not only examines painstakingly those errors and prejudices on Baudrillard's thought, but also the main discussions that today remain open. At an overview, to understand the thread that connects Baudrillard's studies, it is important not to lose the sight the concept of reversibility. Originally coined by Greek philosophers, reversibility connotes the possibility to weaken the foundations of system by means of its own functioning. An example of this is the great global empires, whose strongholds and success undermined their own stability. In other terms, Coulter writes "reversibility is (ironically) a strong antidote to determinism and linear theories of progress. In our time (the time since Barthesian structuralism became pregnant with post-structuralism), reversibility has replaced dialectics" (p. 7). As the previous argument given, poets emerge from the ambiguity that

comes after success. These points are brilliantly described in first and second chapters.

On the third chapter, Coulter develops conceptual bridge to describe post-structuralism, putting R. Barthes and J. Baudrillard in dialogue. One of the troubling aspects of post-structuralism is that it destabilizes the horizons of certainness and solid knowledge. Both scholars, Coulter adds, contributed to understand further on the meaning of emptiness as other philosophers do not. In sharp opposition to the whole philosophy that proclaimed the world is predestined by knowledge, Baudrillard acknowledged that the spirit of ongoing uncertainty was rather determined by the language. Since any interpretation is open and subject to the meaning, any word signifies something different depending on the reader. Nonetheless, both philosophers share commonalities but substantial discrepancies respecting to the writing. While Barthes saw the writing is a limited position to the being simply because I exist beyond what I can write, Baudrillard preferred to take the road of poetic. Even he argued that intellectuals, in a pejorative way, devoted efforts to legitimate the "empire of meaning". Condemned to deconstruct its own are, any text disturbs the conscience but intellectuals are not enthroned to speak in the name of others.

This raises a more than entangled question, what is the truth?. In his life, Baudrillard struggled to develop an all-encompassing conceptual framework that helps people understanding the acceleration of history, the transformation of past-time in present history. Therefore, he compared the war-one terror declared by Bush or the ever increasing disasters as the movie, minority report, where "precogs" facilitate to police the arrests before the crime to be committed. While Barthes employs the term terror of meaning, Baudrillard admits that irony is based on the terrorism of meaning because it makes the system working against itself, as an autoimmune virus. Fiction, like theory gives the meaning to our mind to appreciate the world, fiction precedes every what we may perceive and feel. Therefore, the truth is not circumscribed to previous verification, but what results from the reversible side of thought. This means that if any system is explained by the construction of concepts (theory), its hidden side is nothing (the heart of the system). As this explanation is given, truth rests on the enigmatic

nature of the world. Recognizing that “nothing can be said about the world,” Baudrillard is convinced that appearances have replaced the meaning, in a type of vertigo of interpretations.

The violence of interpretation lies in the impossibility to separate the reasons from effects in the events as the media portrays. News about natural disasters produced by global warming effects is equaled to terrorism and quakes without any kind of distinction. Not only the system of meaning has been altered by capitalism and the media, but upended. His destabilization of what truth is, leads us to think in the following axiom, “*Western rationality has always been based, as regards discourse, upon the criteria of truth and falsehood. However, in consumer society, the neo-language of advertising lies beyond truth and falsehood where it increases in codes and models rather than actual reference or veracity*” (p. 26). How may we understand this?

Following this, Coulter deciphers the dichotomy considering that if Baudrillard’s axiom is right, the “absence of truth” reveals two things. On one hand, we are unable to find it, on another, the truth remains covert to the human beings because it is enrooted in the fiction, and beyond human access, fiction may not be empirically verified. To put this in bluntly, the truth is as the fish that bites its own tail. From irony to critique, his texts would go around the world defying previously-stereotyped beliefs and stable knowledge. If we have some certainness about how World Trade center happened, Baudrillard will destroy our perceptual frames, even admitting this event never existed in reality. Once again, as professor Coulter said, he is not the philosopher of non-sense but his methods help us uncovering our “veil of ignorance”, our prejudices enrooted in the mechanic turn of mind. To cut the long story short, something necessary in a book review, section one is dedicated to the complexities of the world, perception and the concept of reversibility. Section two, that range from chapter 7 to 10 denotes special interests by analyzing the question and limitations of Marx respecting to the otherness. This issue requires attention because it reveals the influence of post Marxian legacy in Baudrillard as well as his view respecting to pseudo-reality and alienation. Part three, complementary, is referred to the pervasive role of cinema in producing images and how that images impacts in the social imaginary anticipating to the future events. Last

but not least, chapter 14 represents a synthesis of the entire book, exhibiting the metaphor of desert. Baudrillard not only loved the desert because it showed a vast openness to new experiences but symbolizes the illusion of the real, once there we are more familiar than theory anticipates the factual world. May we learn the lesson from Auschwitz or any other moral disaster?, or how may read the events of 9/11?.

Baudrillard said that West is debating itself in a quandary between real and its double, the simulation. However, we live in a moment where the real is framed by the principle of simulation. Since the real cannot override the copy, the hyper-real substitutes the real, at the same time the acceleration of images emptied the pastime. What today we may learn from disasters comes from cinema and the film-industry. In view of this argument, disasters as are often commoditized and sold by the media are not real events, but pseudo-events. The visual technology in the digital times has not only changed the perceptual horizons accelerating the time and space but created the end of resiliency as known today. This striking point represents a fertile ground in potential research in the fields of disasters and risk-management. In this valuable book, Professor Coulter gives as a credible snapshot based on his vast experience in Baudrillard’s studies, a platform to stimulate a critical discussion about the role played by the mass-media in the coverage of disasters. Without a clear diagnosis of reasons that ushered communities to a state of emergency, it is impossible to conduct success plans of risk-mitigation. Even, any attempt to reduce risks in the real, will create new unplanned risks (principle of reversibility). Secondly, the attacks perpetrated against the World Trade Center represent the success of the individual being, over the world of cloning. WTC or twin towers are alike, as cloned from the same model. Any suicide exhibits the last individual effort of self-annihilation in the world of hyper-reality. Like buildings, news are copied and distributed to a broader audience, which is pressed to live in an eternal present. If causes and effects are blurred in the same setting, one disaster will set the pace to the other undermining our capacity to learn of tragedies. Aside from the polemic he waked up, this is exactly the most important legacy of Baudrillard, which has been ignored by specialized literature to-date.