

TRIBUNE

Baudrillard is not dead, he just disappeared

By Sylvère Lotringer, philosopher, professor emeritus at Columbia University and founder of Semiotext(e) - June 14, 2017 at 18:36



Jean Baudrillard, in 2001. family archives



Contrary to the great conceptual machines, the philosopher, who died ten years ago, knew how to grasp the widespread voluntary servitude at work in a Western world that was all the more murderous because it became transparent, like 11 September.

Ten years since Jean Baudrillard left us, and yet his presence has become even stronger, to the point that one may wonder whether the century itself has not become Baudrillardian. Baudrillard, a Germanist, a frequent reader of Nietzsche and Georges Bataille, made his classes by dismantling the great conceptual machines - Marx and Freud, Saussure and Marcel Mauss - and taking them backwards. He has thus demonstrated that the use value of Marx is only a fantasy of exchange value. As a result, Marx's theory of surplus value collapsed. There was

nothing natural in capital, everything was value-sign. This was the case for the consumer society, where signs replace products before they simulate themselves. The first, in *Simulacres and simulations* (Galileo editions, 1981), Baudrillard had gone back to the matrix of exchange structures and had made the hypothesis that reality itself was only an artifact, a simulation without an original. The real thing was not dead, it had simply disappeared. Baudrillard did not yet suspect that the virtual would give him reason. He had revealed that the copies now had no original, the original itself being no more than a copy. Overnight, he had become famous in the American artistic world, without being understood. He had revealed that the copies now had no original, the original itself being no more than a copy. Overnight, he had become famous in the American artistic world, without being understood. He had revealed that the copies now had no original, the original itself being no more than a copy. Overnight, he had become famous in the American artistic world, without being understood.

In the company of Marshall McLuhan and his friend Paul Virilio, Baudrillard was the great theorist of an electronic environment increasingly taken as the spider in his own web. In 1990, in his *Cool Memories II*, he summarized his own trajectory: "*Pataphysicist at 20, situationist at 30, utopian at 40, transversal at 50, viral and metaleptic at 60 - all my history.*" Like the situationists, Baudrillard had only contempt for "culture" and its media avatars, of which he had by force become the most lucid and jubilant analyst.

In a world where differences are disappearing, Baudrillard has succeeded in preserving his own indifference, cultivating the philosophical void in the hope that real events would eventually succeed. For a philosopher who was said to be pessimistic and detached from everything, there are few who, as much as he, have stuck to the event with equal force. And when the sudden event broke out - not the failed act of the year 2000, but the successful act of September 11, 2001 - it had proved the only one able to recognize it for what it was. His superb *Requiem for the Twin Towers* had been equal to the event, extending it in his disruptive power instead of burying him under vain comments. Baudrillard has ensured that this unprecedented gesture absorbs everything that preceded it, Or what could follow, like a neutron bomb exploding on a world scale without leaving "historical" traces behind him. Only an unattached philosopher like himself had been able to capture strategies of this caliber. Pataphysicist of the first hour, he did not cease until his death to carry a bomb - the world - in his gidouille.

Baudrillard seized Western society after the orgy, after liberation in all areas (sexual, political, aesthetic, etc.) turned against her. Become transparent, the world only appears more murderous. But the victim must be willing. Now domination has given way to a generalized voluntary servitude, which is self-exploitation: "*Each of us has become a self-subjugated, enslaved system, having invested all its freedom in the crazy will to draw the*" As Alfred Jarry did, Baudrillard never ceased pushing everything to a paroxysm, conscious that the closer a system is to perfection, the more it destroys itself.

This was already what Baudrillard reproached Michel Foucault in his pamphlet: *Oublier Foucault* (1977). Foucault had reversed the axis of power, moving from vertical to horizontal, but it was also necessary to make an effort and to defy the power of being to the end, presiding over its own dissolution. This was already beginning to happen on a larger scale, the confinement of the network succeeding prison confinement, the excess of security increasing the danger, the overproduction leading to speculation and crisis; As for the inflation of the technique, it anticipated the disappearance of the species by a sort of internal catastrophe. This catastrophe was also at work politically in the small posthumous volume where Baudrillard anticipated the radical degeneration of power and replaced it with parodic forms worthy of Father Ubu, sovereignty being delegated to the most stupid, murderous or corrupt. "*It is in times of trouble that the people vote massively for a candidate who does not ask him to think* [*the Agony of Power*, 2005]."
From Berlusconi to Putin, and from Duterte to Trump, today we find the same strategy that tends to discredit reality. The form of parody, mockery, or masquerade becomes the very principle of government. *The Agony of Power*, written by Baudrillard a year before his death, *Testifies to the end of his lucidity and his power of anticipation, not to say his vision: "The obsolescence of history opens up a space in which everything that was historical or political - including The revolutions - became "fake". All the political news, including the most violent one, is made up of these events-farces, these phantom events - fake events, ghost events - witnesses of a past history, herself."*

It may be asked whether the theory has anticipated the world at this point, or whether it is the world that has let itself, and still allows itself, to be taken by its thought. ◆