

BAUDRILLARD: COSMOLOGICALLY YOURS

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Abstract. Baudrillard's work shows that our perception of reality is not fixed but fluid, shaped by layers of memory, sensation, and thought., where subject and object continually interact. Baudrillard's idea that nothing exists fully in real-time emphasizes the fragmented nature of reality, which can only be understood through multiple perspectives. This interplay mirrors the cosmos, where galaxies drift apart, reflecting the complexity of existence. Like a Moebius ribbon, our understanding loops between what is real and how we interpret it, rejecting simple, reductive views of the world.

Keywords: Baudrillard, memory, sensation, cosmology

MOEBIUS RIBBON RATHER THAN *TROMPE L'OEIL*

When *the arc* of your thought (this immersion in the world) encounters a sovereign "real" outside it - for example, *me* who runs before your eyes in the form of letters and words - your arc first stretches itself, and as far as possible, towards its own source of propulsion: yourself¹. In order to launch itself as a *jet of* meaning - a supposedly sharp, "pointed" javelin - a searching head aiming at me in these words as an *object* becomes the *subject* of study if the points of your sensations as they rise up like pirate tethers bring out, like a photo negative, an "ob". What is caught, grasped, crystallised: stopping the 'jet' (object) me in these words, subject of importance, if your sensations are transformed into impressions (memories, comparisons) and, finally, into feelings or judgements (decision to act in my direction: to look at me, to speak to you at last through these words that run before your eyes, to seduce you? Already with these images that are being triggered, can't you see them?) which we

will need to consolidate or not into attention (tension), especially when I, your reality too, now turns out to be *remarkable*. As we would say in the *meteorology of moods*, thus contracting Montesquieu (the link between climate and temperament) and Pascal (the play of the endocrine system).

And now, as the subject of your attention, and no longer just an object of observation, you will have to apprehend me through as many levels and flows of *knowledge* as possible (as Oleg Maltsev did in his last book²). In this way, I - your *object of encounter* - will become your *subject*, in the sense of being constantly interwoven with symbols. Even if our “body” is mass, it is also energy ($E=MC^2$), which intersects, compresses and prints several streams of reality that are not only present but also expanding, both in my/your past and in my/your future.

The more accessible the understanding of your attention to me becomes, the more your perception sharpens and deepens as you multiply the number of points of observation, including comparisons, memories (Virginia Woolf: comparing memories of the same place after a few years) and also smells, traces, asperities, bruises of these factory walls, for example, in front of which I pass and through which I (sense) (press) whispers (Proust: these reverberate what is whispered in the city, and their waves bend the wheat in “Swann's Way”). I can make out their complaints, they are still “walled in” like pixels that give this extraordinary impression of depth, unlike a video rendering which, far from showing it, only reflects the viewer like a mirror or abreaction, whereas the point is to observe as much as possible in the object captured, which is an intersection distinct from us, though not separate. Baudrillard wrote some decisive pages on precisely these “points”: *punctum*, as Roland Barthes put it in his work on photography, or that which *grips*.

Now, what has been confused with relativism (including by this last author) seems to be the only truly “unsurpassable” legacy of Modernity, namely the logical possibility of rationally holding together several angles, and not just theologically: because the aim is to study the “total man”, as Marcel Mauss, Durkheim’s colleague

and friend, hoped³. A concept that should not be confused with Mussolini's "total state", or with the caricature of a transparent enveloping conception that seeks to make the Real an immanent copy of the Idea (or vice versa) in order to imitate the Ancients, even though this is a far cry from Plato (contrary to what the mannerists of the Renaissance or the followers of Popper think, condemning the latter to oblivion), whereas this distancing between the word and the thing (and not their separation) allows precisely a reciprocal enrichment that forms this universe of meaning in which we live.

Take, for example, this excerpt from *Le crime parfait* by Jean Baudrillard⁴:

The objective illusion is the physical fact that, in this universe, nothing coexists in real time, neither the sexes, nor the stars, nor this glass nor this table, nor myself and everything around me. Because of the dispersal and relative speed of light, all things exist only in deferred time, in an inexpressible disorder of temporalities, at an inescapable distance from each other. And so they are never truly present to each other, nor "real" to each other. (...)

This is the objective fact that you are never fully there in the moment and that full presence is only ever virtual. While it is true that at any point in time you are in this instant and not elsewhere, you are also never in that single point where the whole event is summed up. (...)

It's a good thing we don't live in real-time ourselves! What would we be in "real" time? We would identify with ourselves at every moment. A torment equivalent to that of perpetual daylight - a kind of epilepsy of presence, epilepsy of identity. (...) Yet otherness is that happy distortion without which everyone would be me simultaneously. It is the vital illusion of otherness that prevents the self from succumbing to its absolute reality. Language, too, is what ensures that not everything means something at all times, and that we escape the perpetual irradiation of meaning. This specific illusion of language, this poetic function, no longer exists in virtual or digital languages.

Let's take this *need for* "otherness" of gender and style very seriously, understanding it as a "visceral" (Baudrillardian) breath of air that rejects the oppressive exponential of technicist interchangeability, defended more and more, however, and just as much by our consumerist society as its "queer" double (which has become

resolutely hygienist to the point of haunting sex-change surgeries). This means that we need to confuse less and less the levels of reality (or angles of view). The statements that probe them rather consider that we *also* need to think of them as flows of thoughts, imaginations, plural apprehensions of perceptions and behaviours, which can in their own way enable us to reach a given otherness or level of sociability inhabited by people with the same desire for a *distinguished* connection - in the sense of allowing asperities to breathe despite the possible contaminations that are the crucibles of metamorphoses, at least if we know how to reduce them while strengthening our various immune systems.

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Hence the idea that the “chance: of encounters could also be the intersections of life “trajectories” which connect because they were, in fact, in the same “orb” of attraction/repulsion in search of “elective affinities”, as Goethe would have it, but not only because attraction can also be stabilised by repulsion or precisely the interface of otherness. Have fun, for example, asking yourself whether a particular encounter might not, in fact, be the “fruit” of your life, in the sense of going back, step by step, to what made it possible.

This is complemented by another of Baudrillard’s hypotheses (*Idem*, 86) - and, in this sense, this author appears to be truly a contemporary artist (in the sense defined above: multiplicity of angles). That is indeed hardly in the *destroy* paradigm stemming from Adorno’s pessimistic vision of “*after Auschwitz*”, which Lyotard later exacerbated by accusing the Christian West of having been the cause⁵ which underlies what Baudrillard was later criticised for when he wrote about the “conspiracy of art”⁶. But let’s take this cosmological hypothesis again:

While physicists search for the equations that would unify all energies, the galaxies continue to move away from each other at fabulous speeds. While semiotics searches for a unified theory of the linguistic field, languages and

signs continue to drift apart like galaxies, as a result of who knows what linguistic Big Bang, but still secretly inseparable. (...) If the world has a history, we can hope to lead it to its final explanation. If, on the other hand, it came into being all at once, it cannot be assigned an end (...) ⁷.

Could it not be, as regards the first cosmological point emphasised by Baudrillard, that this “remoteness” illustrates an inextricable and largely, not only mysterious but even as yet unimaginable, link between us, life and the uni/multi/verse (which I sketch out in *Être et vérité du réel humain*⁸)? Let’s explore this *illusion* further: to what (atomic) *point* does such and such a butterfly effect multiply vital expansion (there are thought to be nearly a billion species on Earth, 99% of which are still unknown⁹)? How can we grasp the energetic aspect of the myriad stellar expansions that forge our atoms (dark energy)? Is it not the double (aura or orb) of our mass (dark matter or fortuitous or constant intersection according to currents of forces/time)? On the other hand, doesn’t this mass/energy duo ($E=MC^2$) have a regenerative function at the level of the Bios through entropy/negentropy, in a way reiterating this hypothesis of the micro/macrocasm?

So this vital and stellar whole, these two sides of the same coin in the hollow of the smallest hadron and boson making up living cells, is not constantly modified (not everything would be there entirely in real-time, as Baudrillard points out) while, at the same time, being *there* in constant time (Planck’s as well) according to multiform space-time and diverse speeds or a fractal accordion combining each nano-quark or boson of each living cell with its myriad rhythms and pulses (pulsars, black holes) which, as humans, we have to refine harmoniously or just consume. This vital whole unfolds irrespective of whether it is multiplied (multiverse) or has a single origin and a fatal end. Since expanding sustentation can remain infinite as long as *there is* life. The more life is generated, the more expansive is the elasticity of its stellar substratum, in order to nourish the least of its quarks, and outside of which there would be *nothing* (in the sense that the uni/multi/verse would not flow into

another, larger space, but would indeed be “all that is”). Everything? Everything created, in any case. As for the “rest”... and its “Sum”?

But let’s not go any further into this “cosmological” tirade, which is only there as a kind of imaginary stimulus to what is said about what we would be “stardust”.

Let us observe only this: these Baudrillardian reflections, as much as what they allow us to think here, do not mean that we should oppose astrophysics and metaphysical poetry, science and consciousness. No, it is once again a question of holding together these various levels of reality so that their assembled clarity can, like a prism, both distribute the colours and not forget that they are also combined in this light that animates us. All the more so, given the advances in the sciences of matter, life, the mind and society, we are no longer in an era where analysis has to be absolutely distinct from other angles of view, on pain of losing its way. For it is now also a question of articulating them and linking them, and this “link” would be precisely the transcendental: or how to perceive *together* the questions posed by singular discoveries. Without, however, having the pretension of governing the human being to do so.

Isn’t that precisely the legacy of Baudrillard? That technological advances and explanatory comprehensives can exchange, certainly, instead of remaining merely compartmentalised, but not in order to establish and justify additional pretexts to better subjugate and re-impose a vision of the world, even if it were accurate. Because it is not enough for it to be true in the sense of being necessarily permanently integratable into our actions and gestures. It is true that this young girl has reached puberty and could therefore be subject to certain codes governing her behaviour, such as the fact of marrying her off, even without her effective consent; but should this accuracy be considered the only truth in the sense of not also considering that this young girl has not yet completed her psychological development, and this from a point of view that is not “Western” but morphologically universal?

Is this not the ultimate stumbling block between cultural relativism and universalist thinking, albeit without an imperialist

intent? Isn't it the latter that we are seeing again in the name of ecology, health and the fight against inequalities between genders, classes and ethnic groups, when everything is far more complex, far less binary and inescapably catastrophic? Isn't it this pretension to want not only to say "the right thing", but to impose once again that poses the problem, despite the resounding failures in this area?

Baudrillard's comments on the cosmos, language and the need to preserve their otherness are all worth pondering in depth to get out of the dilemma that has made us the centre of the world and, then, just another point. Our points (including our points of view) that make up our body and its orb (the soul) are no more "centre" than "periphery", but a contraction and dilation of the two ("the soul of the world"): what is pulsing or the very life that culture comes to cultivate, as recalled Leo Strauss, in a spiritual envelope or interface between "us" and "them". This forms an intricate web that matrixes the points between them, or that Moebius ribbon that so fascinated Baudrillard - an endless loop where the boundaries between opposites blur and intertwine.

NOTES

1. Me (characters), I (temperaments), actor (political: creator of networked electrified interactions), agent (social: innate/acquired skills): this *rhombic* whole or form (four angles) see my latest Opus (May 2021, L'Harmattan).
2. <https://www.baudrillard-scijournal.com/jean-baudrillard-maestro-the-last-prophet-of-europe-chapter-1/>
See also the work of Jean Baechler (1985) and Raymond Boudon (1968) on these various levels, which can be articulated rather than opposed: thus, the poet and the (meta)physicist are distinct but not separate.
3. <https://www.cairn.info/sociologie-et-anthropologie-de-marcel-mauss--9782707139580-page-97.htm>
4. Paris, Editions Galilée, 1995, 80-81.
5. See my book *Cannibal Philosophy* (2006, 2019).
6. <https://levadrouilleurbain.wordpress.com/2021/02/09/comment-jean-baudrillard-dut-se-taire-sur-l-art-contemporain-par-jean-philippe-domecq-fr/>
7. Current illustration: <https://www.nationalgeographic.fr/espace/2019/04/la-vitesse-dexpansion-de-lunivers-depasse-toutes-les-previsions>
8. 2016, L'Harmattan.
9. https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2016-05/iu-iu042716.php