Reflections on Modernity and Postmodernity in McLuhan and Baudrillard[1]

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In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan emerged as a guru of the emergent electronic media culture. His book Understanding Media (1964) was celebrated as providing key insights into the role of the media in contemporary society and McLuhan became one of the most discussed and debated theorists of the time. During the 1980s, Jean Baudrillard was promoted in certain circles as the new McLuhan, as the most advanced theorist of the media and society in the so-called postmodern era. His analysis of a new, postmodern society rests on a key assumption that the media, simulations, and what he calls "cyberblitz" constitute a new realm of experience and a new stage of history and type of society.

Both McLuhan and Baudrillard provide provocative theses on the role of the media and new technology in constituting the contemporary world. They provide important and influential models of the media as all-powerful and autonomous social forces that produce a wide range of effects. In this study, I first explicate McLuhan's media theory and how it can be deployed to produce analyses of modernity and postmodernity that connect McLuhan's work with Baudrillard. I then explore how McLuhan's media theory shaped Baudrillard's theory and the similarities and differences in their work. I lay out what I consider the important contributions of their work, but am also concerned to delineate the political implications of their media theory and to point to alternative theoretical and political perspectives on the media and the contemporary moment.

McLuhan, Modernity, and Postmodernity

Marshall McLuhan was acclaimed in the 1960s and 1970s as one of the most influential media theorists of our time and is once again becoming widely discussed and debated in the computer era. His 1960s writings dramatized the importance of television and electronic broadcasting and entertainment media on contemporary society.[2] The eventual decline of influence of McLuhan's work perhaps resulted in part from his exaggeration of the role of television and electronic culture in effecting a break from the print era and producing a new electronic age. Yet McLuhan in retrospect anticipated the rise and importance of computer culture and the dramatic emergence and effects of personal computers and the Internet that provide even more substance to McLuhan's claim that contemporary society is undergoing a fundamental rupture with the past.

Indeed, McLuhan can be read in the light of classical social theory as a major theorist of modernity, with an original and penetrating analysis of the origins, nature, and trajectory of the modern world. Furthermore, he can be read in retrospect as a major anticipator of theories of a postmodern break, of a rupture with modernity, of leaving behind the previous print-industrial-urban-mechanical era and entering a new postmodern society with novel forms of culture and society. McLuhan's work proposes that a major new medium of communication changes the ratio of the senses, the patterns of everyday life, modes of social interaction and communication, and many other aspects of social and individual life that are often not perceived.

"Understanding media," for McLuhan therefore requires understanding the form of the media and its structural effects on the psyche, culture, and social life. McLuhan offers an entire vision of culture and history based on analyses of transitions within stages of history unfolding from one dominant medium of communication to another. He describes the move from an oral culture based on the spoken word to print culture generated by the written word to electronic culture produced by electronic media of communication. Oral culture is highly participatory and involves all the senses. It corresponds for McLuhan to "tribal culture" with fixed roles, relatively stable and unchanging values and institutions, and a highly integrated culture and social order. This stage, roughly extending from premodern times to the Renaissance, is followed by print culture that is based on the written word and is codified in the book.

With the development of the printing press and wide-spread dissemination of the book and print media, a whole new "Gutenberg Galaxy" of cultural forms emerged characterized by detached individualism and the values of logic, rationality, and argumentation; linear modes of thought and social organization; the mechanization of labor and assembly lines; centralized social and economic organization; nationalism and a system of competitive nation states; and highly specialized and fragmented culture.

In McLuhan's thematics, print culture is succeeded by electronic culture and technology. For McLuhan, this era exhibits a new tribalism and play of all the senses in a "global village" where individuals all over the world experience the same events and spectacles and come to share a new media and global consciousness and experience. Fragmentation and alienation of the individual is allegedly overcome in the new tribal culture as individuals deeply participate in media forms and events, generating a new sensibility beyond the abstract individualism and rationalism of the earlier era and the nationalism and xenophobia's of the modern era.

McLuhan's analyses of print technology, newspapers, books, roads, modern industry and mechanization, war, and other modern technologies and phenomena all illuminate the constitution of the modern world and provide new insights into modernity. His description of specific technologies and how they produced the modern era and anticipation of how new emergent electronic technologies are fashioning a new postmodern era are often highly illuminating. McLuhan, like Baudrillard, Jameson, and other theorists of the postmodern presents an ideal type analysis in which modernity is marked by linearity, differentiation, explosion, centralization, homogenization, hierarchy, fragmentation, and individualism. Postmodernity, by contrast, is marked by implosion or dedifferentiation, decentralization, tribalism, synasthesia, and a new media and computer culture that would be called cyberspace and which would be theorized by Baudrillard and other postmodern theorists.[3] McLuhan opens Understanding Media writing:

> After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man -— the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be

collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media (UM 3-4).

For McLuhan, the modern era is characterized by an "explosion" of technologies, cities, states and empires, cultural forms, specialization, forms of transportation and communication, and, of course, media. The beginning and generating force of the process was produced by the book and technology of the printing press that made possible individualism with individual subjects reading books silently and cultivating their own subjectivity, as opposed to the rote collectivism of medieval education and religious ceremonies. The book gave rise to national cultures and literatures, breaking with the hegemony of Latin, and the new national states used print technology to generate propaganda and ideology, linear modes of accounting and writing, and the rational organization of production bound up with the rise of capitalism.

In UM, McLuhan presents brilliant insights into specific cultural phenomena and particular media, such as his insight that the linear nature of print technology helped bring about a differentiation of poetry, song, rhetoric, prose, and news at the beginning of the modern era that in turn helped generate societal differentiation, specialized jobs, the modern university, and fragmentation and divisions within culture and society (UM 175). McLuhan notes (UM 81ff) that print technology and the written word was the first mass technology, the first teaching machine, and helped generate modern education, culture, and society. Compared to the Chinese ideogram or Medieval illustrated handwritten manuscripts, the book and print technology was highly abstract, linear, and homogenized, helping produce distinctive Western and modern modes of thought.

For McLuhan, "printing from movable types was the first mechanization of a complex handicraft and the archetype of all subsequent mechanization" and helped generate the capitalist mode of production (UM, 170ff). In addition, "typography ended parochialism and tribalism, psychically and socially, both in space and time" (UM 170), by enabling and exchange of ideas and cosmopolitanism. Typography made possible detachment and non-involvement, producing rational abstraction and critique, but also fragmentation and specialization (UM 173). Further "correct" spelling, behavior, and thought is a result of mechanization and the linear organization of experience, knowledge, and work, producing a need to be clear and precise (UM 175). Religion too shifted from ritual and literary to proclaiming and assimilating the Word with the mass production of the Bible. Supplementing McLuhan, one might note that Descartes reproduces this structural necessity of typography technology in his grounding of philosophy in "clear and distinct ideas," an orderly progression of thought, and abstract and rational concepts, thus giving rise to a distinctive form of modern Western philosophy.

In McLuhan's thematic, the rise of new media are not an addition, or supplement, to previous media and forms of culture, but an explosive force that competes with other media. McLuhan uses the metaphor of war to describe the process through which print replaced the oral tradition of learning and education, displacing rhetoric for the new regime of reading and writing. Yet while McLuhan provides brilliant insights into the role of the media within modernity and how the media function as key constituents of culture and society, it is probably his notion of a rupture with modernity and advent of a new postmodern era, signaled in the passages in UM on pages 3 and 4 quoted above, that constitute his most important and provocative insight. I suggested that McLuhan is indeed perhaps more important and relevant today as the theorist of a new mode of culture and history in the contemporary era because television could not really bear the burden of constituting a break the transition to a new historical era that he postulated. TV was obviously a crucially important media and had tremendous effects, some of which are not yet apparent, but arguably did not create an entire new culture, sensibility, way of seeing, relating, communicating, and so on (although I would imagine that it had much more significant effects than most people were aware.

Hence, McLuhan arguably exaggerated the role of TV and other forms of electronic communication in the 1960s which could not legitimate his claim that we were moving into a new electronic culture, a new stage of history, and a decisive rupture with the past. More harshly, one could argue that McLuhan's categories were not that useful for theorizing the complexity of television and its imbrication in the economy, politics, and social life. McLuhan's claim that TV was an extension of the central nervous system was opaque and vague; his media hot and cool distinction did not always work well and were hotly contested; his disregard for content short-circuited detailed reading and critique of media content; and his failure to theorize the place of television within the corporate economy was a blind spot. Although one could find insights into all of these thematics in McLuhan, his concepts often blocked developing a critical theory of television that theorized its relations to the economy, state, social institutions, and culture.[4]

But reading McLuhan anew in the context of the computer era enables him to be seen as a prophet of the cyberspace and valuable for anticipating the revolutionary effects of the new computer culture, for providing concepts that help us grasp the enormity of the transition, for focusing attention on how important new media can be, and for helping us understand the transformation going on.[5] In UM (80) he writes:

> Our new electric technology that that extends our sense and nerves in a global embrace has large implications for the future of language. Electric technology does not need words any more than the digital computer needs numbers. Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever. Such a state of collective awareness may have been the preverbal condition of men. Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the 'Tower of Babel' by which men sought to scale the highest heavens. Today computers hold out the promises of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to by-pass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson. The condition of 'weightlessness,' that biologists say promises a physical immortality, may be paralleled by the condition of speechlessness that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace.

This remarkable passages anticipates the revolutionary effects of the digitization of culture and the new languages of computerization. It points to the rise of artificial intelligence and even the fantasies of immortality through virtualization and cloning that Baudrillard would critically engage time and again. It provides an audacious vision of how computer culture might produce new forms of universal consciousness and global understanding and harmony, exaggerated claims that have been rightly polemicized against but which point to the enormous potential as well as current impact of the computerization of the world.

I will suspend further critique of McLuhan until the end of my discussion of Baudrillard. To set up the encounter between the two: McLuhan presents media and technology as major forces of history and no one has provided more penetrating insights into media and technology and their roles in modern Western society and culture and the transition to a new postmodern era. Indeed, McLuhan not only provides brilliant insights into specific media -– the printing press, electric lights, cars, airplanes, highways, radio, television, and so on --, but has important general insights into the media, Western modernity, and the broad patterns of historical change in the modern era, as well as insight into the force of new information and communication technology in the passage to a new stage of culture and history. Baudrillard would take up McLuhan's emphasis on the form of the media, his insight into the centrality of media in the contemporary era, his vision of stages of history, his analysis of the emergence of electronic media as the constituent force of a new stage of history, and particular concepts like implosion, as well as McLuhan's method of probes, explorations, fragments, and a mosaic shotgun approach that illustrate general theses and specific phenomenon under investigation.

Baudrillard's Postmodern Media Theory

In 1967, Baudrillard wrote a review of Marshall McLuhan's Understanding Media in which he claimed that McLuhan's dictum that the "medium is the message" is "the very formula of alienation in a technical society," and he criticized McLuhan for naturalizing that alienation.[6] At this time, he shared the neo-Marxian critique of McLuhan as a technological reductionist and determinist. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, McLuhan's formula that "the medium is the message" eventually became the guiding principle of his own thought.

Baudrillard begins developing his theory of the media in an article "Requiem for the Media" in Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (1972). The title is somewhat ironic for Baudrillard is really only beginning to develop theoretical perspectives in which the media will play crucial roles in constituting a new postmodernity. Thus Baudrillard is writing a requiem here for a Marxist theory of the media arguing: "McLuhan has said, with his usual Canadian-Texan brutalness, that Marx, the spiritual contemporary of the steam engine and railroads, was already obsolete in his lifetime with the appearance of the telegraph. In his candid fashion, he is saying that Marx, in his materialist analysis of production, had virtually circumscribed productive forces as a privileged domain from which language, signs and communication in general found themselves excluded" (CPES, p. 164).

Baudrillard's critique of Marx here begins a radical interrogation of and eventual break with Marxism that would culminate in The Mirror of Production (1973). Baudrillard begins distancing himself from Marxism in "Requiem for the Media," and in particular attacks Marx's alleged economic reductionism, or "productivism," and the alleged inability of the Marxian theory to conceptualize language, signs, and communication (Habermas at the time was developing a parallel position within Critical Theory).[7]

As an example of the failure of Marxian categories to provide an adequate theory of the media, Baudrillard criticizes the German activist and writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger's media theory and his attempts to develop a socialist strategy for the media.[8] Baudrillard dismisses this effort as a typical Marxian attempt to liberate productive forces from the fetters of productive relations that fails to see that in their very form the mass media of communication "are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non communication -- this is what characterizes them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response, and thus of a responsibility (not a psychological or moral responsibility, but a personal, mutual correlation in exchange).... they are what always prevents response, making all processes of exchange impossible (except in the various forms of response simulation, themselves integrated in the transmission process, thus leaving the unilateral nature of the communication intact). This is the real abstraction of the media. And the system of social control and power is rooted in it" (CPES, pp. 169-170).

It is curious that Baudrillard, interpreted by many of his followers as an avant-garde, postmodern media theorist, manifests in this passage both technophobia and a nostalgia for face-to-face conversation which he privileges (as authentic communication) over degraded and abstract media communication). Such a position creates a binary dichotomy between "good" face-to-face communication and "bad" media communication, and occludes the fact that interpersonal communication can be just as manipulative, distorted, reified, and so on, as media communication (as Ionesco and Habermas, among others, were aware). Denouncing the media tout court in a Baudrillardian fashion rules out in advance the possibility of "responsible" or "emancipatory" media communication, and indeed Baudrillard frequently argues that there can be no good use of media.

Thus Baudrillard presents a rather extreme variant of a negative model of the media that sees mass media and culture simply as instruments of domination, manipulation, and social control in which radical intervention and radical media or cultural politics are impossible. He shares a certain theoretical terrain on theories of the media with the Frankfurt school, many Althusserians and other French radicals, and those who see electronic media, broadcasting, and mass culture simply as a terrain of pure domination.[9] Hence, Baudrillard's generally negative and dismissive attitude toward the media could be contrasted with McLuhan's more "neutral" stance. Yet following McLuhan's analysis of the centrality of television in contemporary culture, Baudrillard noted how the "TV Object" was becoming the center of the household and was serving an essential "proof function" that the owner was a genuine member of the consumer society (CPES, pp. 53ff.). The accelerating role of the media in contemporary society becomes for Baudrillard equivalent to THE FALL into the postmodern society of simulations from the modern universe of production. Modernity for Baudrillard is the era of production characterized by the rise of industrial capitalism and the hegemony of the bourgeoisie while postmodern society is an era of simulation dominated by signs, codes, and models. Modernity thus centered on the production of things -- commodities and products -- while postmodernity in his optic is characterized by radical semiurgy, by a proliferation of signs, spectacle, information, and new media.

Furthermore, following McLuhan, Baudrillard interprets modernity as a process of explosion of commodification, mechanization, technology, and market relations, while postmodern society is the site of an implosion of all boundaries, regions, and distinctions between high and low culture, appearance and reality, and just about every other binary opposition maintained by traditional philosophy and social theory. Furthermore, while modernity could be characterized as a process of increasing differentiation of spheres of life (Max Weber as interpreted by Habermas),[10] postmodernity could be interpreted as a process of de-differentiation and attendant implosion.

The rise of the broadcast media, especially television, is an important constituent of postmodernity for Baudrillard, along with the rapid dissemination of signs and simulacra in every realm of social and everyday life. By the late 1970s, Baudrillard interprets the media as key simulation machines which reproduce images, signs, and codes, constituting an autonomous realm of (hyper)reality that plays a key role in everyday life and the obliteration of the social. “Simulation” for Baudrillard denotes a situation in which codes, models, and signs are the organizing forms of a new social order where simulation rules.[11] In the society of simulation, identities are constructed by the appropriation of images, and codes and models determine how individuals perceive themselves and relate to other people. Economics, politics, social life, and culture are all governed by the mode of simulation, whereby codes and models determine how goods are consumed and used, politics unfold, culture is produced and consumed, and everyday life is lived.

In addition, his postmodern universe is one of hyperreality in which entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the scenes of banal everyday life, as well as the codes and models that structure social interaction. The realm of the hyperreal (i.e. media simulations of reality, Disneyland and amusement parks, malls and consumer fantasylands, TV sports, and other excursions into ideal worlds) is more real than real, whereby the models, images, and codes of the hyperreal come to control thought and behavior. Yet determination itself is aleatory in a non-linear world where it is impossible to chart causal mechanisms in a situation in which individuals are confronted with an overwhelming flux of images, codes, and models, any of which may shape an individual's thought or behavior.

In this postmodern world, individuals flee from the "desert of the real" for the ecstasies of hyperreality and the new realm of computer, media, and technological experience. Baudrillard's analyses of simulations and hyperreality constitute his major contributions to social theory and media critique. During an era when movie actors and toxic Texans simulate politics and charlatans simulate TV-religion, the category of simulation provides an essential instrument of radical social critique, while the concept of hyperreality is also an extremely useful instrument of social analysis for a media, cybernetic, and information society.

Baudrillard's analyses point to a significant reversal of the relation between representation and reality. Previously, the media were believed to mirror, reflect, or represent reality, whereas now the media are coming to constitute a hyperreality, a new media reality -- "more real than real" -- where "the real" is subordinate to representation leading to an ultimate dissolving of the real. Interestingly, the concept of reversal is also a major notion in McLuhan’s theoretical arsenal that Baudrillard makes his own. For McLuhan, in a discussion of “Reversal of the Overheated Medium,” “the stepping-up of speed from the mechanical to the instant electric form reverses explosion into implosion” (UM 35). This is, of course, the very formula that Baudrillard adopts to describe the contemporary situation of the implosion of culture in the media.

In his article "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," Baudrillard claims that the proliferation of signs and information in the media obliterates meaning through neutralizing and dissolving all content -- a process which leads both to a collapse of meaning and the destruction of distinctions between media and reality. In a society supposedly saturated with media messages, information and meaning "implode," collapsing into meaningless "noise," pure effect without content or meaning. Thus, for Baudrillard: "information is directly destructive of meaning and signification, or neutralizes it. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media.... Information devours its own contents; it devours communication and the social.... information dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy" (SSM, pp. 96-100).

Baudrillard thus follows McLuhan in making "implosion" a key constituent of contemporary postmodern society, in which social classes, genders, political differences, and once autonomous realms of society and culture collapse into each other, erasing previously defined boundaries and differences. In Baudrillard's society of simulation, the realms of economics, politics, culture, sexuality, and the social all implode into each other. In this implosive mix, economics is fundamentally shaped by culture, politics, and other spheres, while art, once a sphere of potential difference and opposition, is absorbed into the economic and political, while sexuality is everywhere. In this situation, differences between individuals and groups implode in a rapidly mutating dissolution of the social and the previous boundaries and structures upon which social theory had once articulated and critically interpreted.

Like McLuhan's stages of history, Baudrillard offers an analysis of the stages of simulacra. In a study of "Simulacra and Science Fiction," Baudrillard offers a summary of his theory, delineated in detail and with copious examples in Simulations:

> Three orders of simulacra:
>
> Simulacra that are natural, naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit, that are harmonious, optimistic, and that aim for the restitution or the ideal institution of nature made in God's image;
>
> Simulacra that are productive, productivist, founded in energy, forces, its materialization by the machine and in the whole system of production—a Promethean aim of a continuous globalization and expansion, of an indefinite liberation of energy (desire belongs to the utopias related to this order of simulacra);
>
> Simulacra of simulation, founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game—total operationality, hyperreality, aim of total control (S&S 121).

Baudrillard's first stage relates to McLuhan's premodern society where words corresponded to things and there was a natural harmony between individuals, culture, and the world. The second stage refers to modernity and the production of a society in which there was a proliferation of commodities, images, and ideas, expanded globally, producing conflicts of ideas and culture, with debates over relations between concepts and the world, theory and reality. In the third stage of simulation, there is an operational order, like McLuhan's global system, that is functional and operational, with a hyperreal computer and media system that seamlessly forms a realm of simulation that models everyday life and eventually absorbs its energy, power, and control. In this stage, the media overpower everyday life and unlike McLuhan's more beneficent vision, create information overload, meaninglessness, and the collapse of distinctions between the virtual and the real.

Baudrillard presents a vision of the media as a black hole of signs and information which absorb all contents into cybernetic noise which no longer communicates meaningful messages in a process of implosion where all content implodes into form. While McLuhan claims to present a "neutral" portrayal of the media in contemporary society, which was read by some as a celebration, Baudrillard has a more negative optic on the media. Yet Baudrillard eventually adopts a key postulate of McLuhan's media theory as his own, claiming that:

> the medium is the message signifies not only the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no longer media in the literal sense of the term (I am talking above all about the electronic mass media) -- that is to say, a power mediating between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another -- neither in content nor in form. Strictly speaking this is what implosion signifies: the absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuit between poles of every differential system of meaning, the effacement of terms and of distinct oppositions, and thus that of the medium and the real. Hence the impossibility of any mediation, of any dialectical intervention between the two or from one to the other, circularity of all media effects. Hence the impossibility of a sense (meaning), in the literal sense of a unilateral vector which leads from one pole to another. This critical -- but original -- situation must be thought through to the very end; it is the only one we are left with. It is useless to dream of a revolution through content or through form, since the medium and the real are now in a single nebulous state whose truth is undecipherable (SSM, pp. 102-103).

Baudrillard argues that the media and "reality" implode such that it is impossible to distinguish between media representations and the "reality" which they supposedly represent. He also suggests that the media intensify massification by producing mass audiences and massification of ideas and experience. On the other hand, he claims that the masses absorb all media content, neutralize, or even resist, meaning, and demand and obtain more spectacle and entertainment, thus further eroding the boundary between media and "the real." In this sense, the media implode into the masses to an extent that it is unknowable what effects the media have on the masses and how the masses process the media.

Consequently, on this view, the media pander to the masses, reproducing their taste, their interest in spectacle and entertainment, their fantasies and way of life, producing an implosion between mass consciousness and media phantasmagoria. In this way, Baudrillard short-circuits the manipulation theory that sees media manipulation imposed from above producing mass consciousness, yet he seems to share the contempt for the masses in standard manipulation theory claiming that they want nothing more than spectacle, diversion, entertainment and escape, and are incapable of, or uninterested in, producing meaning.

For Baudrillard, since the media and the masses liquidate meaning, it is meaningless to carry out ideological critiques of media messages since the "medium is the message" in the sense that media communication has no significant referents except its own images and noise which ceaselessly refer back and forth to other media images and spectacles. In On Seduction (1979), Baudrillard utilizes McLuhan's distinction between "hot" and "cool" media to describe the ways that media devour information and exterminate meaning. According to Baudrillard, the media take "hot" events like sports, wars, political turmoil, catastrophes, and so on and transform them into "cool" media events, which he interprets as altogether another kind of phenomena and experience. Concerning the difference between a televised and attended sports event, Baudrillard writes: "Do not believe that it is a matter of the same game: one is hot, the other is cool -- one is a contest where affect, challenge, mise en scene, and spectacle are present, whereas the other is tactile, modulated (visions in flash-back, replays, close-ups or overhead views, various angles, etc.): a televised sports event is above all a televised event, just as Holocaust or the Vietnam war are televised events of which one can hardly make distinctions" (SED, p. 217).

For Baudrillard, eventually, all the dominant media become "cool," erasing McLuhan's (problematical) distinction between hot and cool media. That is, for Baudrillard all the media of information and communication neutralize meaning and involve the audience in a flat, one-dimensional media experience which he defines in terms of a passive absorption of images, or a resistance of meaning, rather than the active processing or production of meaning. The electronic media therefore on this account have nothing to do with myth, image, history, or the construction of meaning (or ideology). Television is interpreted instead as a media "which suggests nothing, which magnetises, which is only a screen, or is rather a miniaturized terminal which in fact is found immediately in your head -- you are the screen and the television is watching you. Television transistorizes all neurons and operates as a magnetic tape -- a tape not an image" (SED, p. 220).

Baudrillard, McLuhan and the Ecstasy of Communication

We see here how Baudrillard out-McLuhans McLuhan in interpreting television, and all other media, primarily as machines which produce primarily technological effects in which content and messages, or social uses, are deemed irrelevant and unimportant. We also see how, like McLuhan, he anthropomorphizes the media ("the television is watching you"), a form of technological mysticism (or mystification) as extreme as McLuhan. Like McLuhan, Baudrillard also globalizes media effects making the media demiurges of a new type of society and new type of experience.

Baudrillard practices as well McLuhan's method of probes and mosaic constellations of images and concepts that take on an experimental and provisional nature. Consequently, whereas he sets forth theoretically articulated theses about the media in "Requiem," in his studies of simulations and later writings he tends to cluster images, concepts, and descriptive analyses, within which media often play a key role, rather than systematically articulating a well-defined theoretical position, thus adopting a key McLuhanite literary strategy.

Like McLuhan, Baudrillard’s work is implosive, breaking disciplinary boundaries and bringing together material from a variety of disciplines. Over the decades, Baudrillard's style in some ways is more and more McLuhanesque, deploying short essays to provide constellations of ideas, images, stories, quotations, and references to contemporary events to capture the novelty and significance of contemporary events. Like McLuhan, Baudrillard likes to shock and be irrelevant, developing witty puns, paradoxes, and provocations to stir up his readers. Baudrillard sees the "symbolic" as the only refuge of critical thought and only source of alternatives to the operational world of postmodernity, while McLuhan sees artists as the "antennae" of society, with their work constituting "distant early warning" (DEW) systems that provide forecasts of coming events and register changes in society and culture, with art providing counter-environments that provide insight into the contemporary era (UM 65ff).

Yet, in terms of their specific perspectives on the media, we might contrast McLuhan's ecumenical Catholicism with Baudrillard's somewhat puritanical Protestantism.[12] McLuhan fantasized a new type of global community and even a new universal (media) consciousness and experience through the dissemination of a global media system, the global village. McLuhan also believed that the media could overcome alienation produced by the abstract rationality of book culture that was being replaced by a new synaesthesia and harmonizing of the mind and body, the senses and technologies. Baudrillard, by contrast, sees the media as external demigods, or idols of the mind -- to continue the Protestant metaphor --, which seduce and fascinate the subject and which enter subjectivity to produce a reified consciousness and privatized and fragmented life-style (Sartre's seriality).

Thus while McLuhan ascribes a generally benign social destiny to the media, for Baudrillard the function of TV and mass media is to prevent response, to isolate and privatize individuals, and to trap them into a universe of simulacra where it is impossible to distinguish between the spectacle and the real, and where individuals come to prefer spectacle over "reality" (which both loses interest for the masses and its privileged status in philosophy and social theory).

The mass media are instruments for Baudrillard of a "cold seduction" whose narcissistic charm consists of a manipulative self-seduction in which spectators enjoy the play of lights, shadows, dots, and events in our own mind as we change channels or media and plug into the variety of networks -- media, computer, information -- that surround us and that allow us to become modulators and controllers of an overwhelming panoply of sights, sounds, information, and events. In this sense, all media have a chilling effect (which is why Baudrillard allows McLuhan's "cool" to become downright "cold") that freeze individuals into functioning as terminals of media and communication networks who become involved as part and parcel of the very apparatus of communication. The subject, then, becomes transformed into an object as part of a nexus of information and communication networks.

The interiorization of media transmissions within the screen of our mind obliterates, for Baudrillard, the distinction between public and private, interior and exterior space -- both of which are replaced by media space. Here Baudrillard inverts McLuhan's thesis concerning the media as extensions of the human, as exteriorizations of human powers, and argues instead that humans internalize media and thus becomes terminals within media systems -- a new theoretical anti-humanism that might amuse Louis Althusser. The eye and the brain, on this model, replaces both the other sense organs and the hand as key instruments of human practice, as information processing replaces human practice and techne and poesis alike.

In "The Ecstasy of Communication" Baudrillard describes the media as instruments of obscenity, transparency, and ecstasy -- in special sense of these terms.[13] He claims that in the postmodern mediascape, the domestic scene -- or the private sphere per se -- with its rules, rituals, and privacy is exteriorized, or made explicit and transparent, "in a sort of obscenity where the most intimate processes of our life become the virtual feeding ground of the media (the Loud family in the United States,[14] the innumerable slices of peasant or patriarchal life on French television). Inversely, the entire universe comes to unfold arbitrarily on your domestic screen (all the useless information that comes to you from the entire world, like a microscopic pornography of the universe, useless, excessive, just like the sexual close-up in a porno film): all this explodes the scene formerly preserved by the minimal separation of public and private, the scene that was played out in a restricted space" (p. 130).

In addition, the spectacles of the consumer society and the dramas of the public sphere are also being replaced by media events that replace public life and scenes with a screen that shows us everything instantaneously and without scruple or hesitation: "Obscenity begins precisely when there is no more spectacle, no more scene, when all becomes transparence and immediate visibility, when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication" (p. 130). The ecstasy of communication: everything is explicit, ecstatic (out of or beyond itself), and obscene in its transparency, detail, and visibility: "It is no longer the traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure; on the contrary, it is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible-than-visible. It is the obscenity of what no longer has any secret, of what dissolves completely in information and communication" (p. 131). One thinks here of such 1980s US media obscenity concerning the trials and tribulations of Gary Hart and Donna Rice, of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, of Ron and Nancy Reagans' cancer operations and astrology games, or the sleazy business deals of his associates, and the dirty transactions of Iran/Contra, -- all of which have been exposed to the glaring scrutiny of the media in which what used to be private, hidden, and invisible suddenly becomes (almost) fully explicit and visible.

The 1990s saw an intensification of the ecstasy of communication with the Clinton sex scandals that displayed intimate details of his private life, the O.J. Simpson trial that depicted the minutiae of his tormented relation with his murdered wife Nicole, and countless other revelations of private affairs of the powerful and infamous in an increasingly tabloid infotainment culture.[15] In the “ecstasy of communication,” everything becomes transparent, and there are no more secrets, scenes, privacy, depth or hidden meaning. Instead a promiscuity of information and communication unfolds in which the media circulate and disseminate a teeming network of cool, seductive and fascinating sights and sounds to be played on one's own screen and terminal. With the disappearance of exciting scenes (in the home, in the public sphere), passion evaporates in personal and social relations, yet a new fascination emerges ("the scene excites us, the obscene fascinates us") with the very universe of media and communication. In this universe we enter a new form of subjectivity where we become saturated with information, images, events, and ecstasies. Without defense or distance, we become "a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence" (p. 133). In the media society, the era of interiority, subjectivity, meaning, privacy, and the inner life is over; a new era of obscenity, fascination, vertigo, instantaneity, transparency and overexposure begins: Welcome to the postmodern world!

In his post1980 writings, Baudrillard continues to call attention to McLuhan as the great media theorist of our epoch and continues to subscribe to the positions that I explicated above, though occasionally he goes even further in denying that the media are producers of meaning, or that the media content or apparatus is important. In Baudrillard's later writings, the "information society" produces noise and an acceleration of meaninglessness, implosion flips into a new realm of virtuality, and reality itself disappears in my Baudrillard calls the "perfect crime." Baudrillard continues to see the media, and especially television and computers, as producing a proliferation of information that erases meaning and further eroding distinctions between the media and the real.[16] What, then, does Baudrillard contribute to our understanding of the media in the contemporary moment and what problems are there with his perspectives?

Limitations of McLuhan's and Baudrillard's Media Theory

Undoubtedly, the media are playing an ever greater role in our personal and social lives, and have dramatically transformed the contemporary economy, polity, and society in ways that we are only now becoming aware of. Living within a great transformation, perhaps as significant as the transformation from feudalism to industrial capitalism, we are engaged in a process of dramatic mutation, which theorists are barely beginning to understand, as global societies enter the emergent world of media saturation, computerization, proliferating technologies, and novel discourses. Baudrillard's contribution lies in his calling attention to these novelties and transformations and providing original and innovative concepts and theories to understand them.

Yet in many ways Baudrillard follows McLuhan in envisioning the centrality of the media and technology in contemporary society and in some ways their theories share certain insight and blindness. While both brilliantly see the power and importance of new media and the impact of the very forms of media in terms of profoundly altering life, there are questions concerning whether their theories provide adequate concepts to analyze the complex interactions between media, culture, and society today. In this section, I suggest that Baudrillard's media theory is vitiated by <u>three subordinations</u> which undermine its theoretical and political usefulness and which raise questions as well about the status of his version of postmodern social theory. I argue that the limitations in Baudrillard's theory can be related to his uncritical assumption of certain positions within McLuhan's and that therefore earlier critiques of McLuhan can accurately and usefully be applied to Baudrillard. This critique will suggest that indeed Baudrillard is a "new McLuhan" who has repackaged McLuhan into new postmodern cultural capital.[17]

First, in what might be called a <u>formalist subordination</u>, Baudrillard, like McLuhan, privileges the form of media technology over what might be called the media apparatus, and thus subordinates content, meaning, and the use of media to its purely formal structure and effects. Baudrillard -- much more so than McLuhan who at least gives some media history and analysis of the media environment -- tends to abstract media form and effects from the media environment and thus erases political economy, media production, and media environment (i.e. society as large) from his theory. Against abstracting media form and effects from context, the use and effects of media should be carefully examined and evaluated in terms of specific contexts. Distinctions between context and use, form and content, media and reality, all dissolve, however, in Baudrillard's one-dimensional theory where global theses and glib pronouncements replace careful analysis and critique.

Baudrillard might retort that it is the media themselves which abstract from the concreteness of everyday, social, and political life and provide abstract simulacra of actual events which themselves become more real than "the real," that they supposedly represent. Yet even if this is so, media analysis should attempt to recontextualize media images and simulacra rather than merely focusing on the surface of media form. Furthermore, instead of operating with a model of (formal) media effects, it is preferable to operate with a dialectical perspective which posits multiple roles and functions to television and other media.

Another problem is that Baudrillard's formalism vitates the project of ideology critique, and against his claims that media content are irrelevant and unimportant, one should see the importance of grasping the dialectic of form and content in media communication, seeing how media forms constitute content and how content is always formed or structured, while forms themselves can be ideological, as when the situation comedy form of conflict/resolution projects an ideological vision which shows all problems easily capable of being resolved within the existing society, or when action-adventure series formats of violent conflict as the essence of reality project a conservative view of human life as a battleground where only the fittest survive and prosper.[18] For a dialectical theory of the media, television would have multiple functions (and potential decodings) where sometimes the ideological effects may be predominant while at other times a medium like television functions as mere noise or through the merely formal effects which Baudrillard puts at the center of his analysis.

Consequently, there is no real theory or practice of cultural interpretation in Baudrillard's media (increasingly anti-)theory, which also emanates an anti-hermeneutical bias that denies the importance of content and is against interpretation.[19] This brings us to a second subordination in Baudrillard's theory in which a more dialectical position is subordinated to <u>media essentialism and technological determinism</u>. For -- according to Baudrillard -- it is the technology of, say, television that determines its effects (one-way transmission, semiurgy, implosion, extermination of meaning and the social) rather than any particular content or message (i.e. for both Baudrillard and McLuhan "the media is the message"), or its construction or use within specific social systems. For Baudrillard, media technology and semiurgy are the demiurges of media practices and effects, separated from their uses by specific economic and political interests, individuals and groups, and the social systems within which they function. Baudrillard thus abstracts media from social systems and essentializes media technology as dominant social forces. Yet against Baudrillard, one could argue that capital continues to be a primary determinant of media form and content in neo-capitalist societies just as state socialism helps determine the form, nature, and effects of technologies in certain state socialist societies.

Baudrillard, like McLuhan, often makes essentializing distinctions between media like television or film, ascribing a particular essence to one, and an opposed essence to the other. Yet it seems highly problematical to reduce apparatuses as complex, contradictory, and many-sided as television (or film or any mass medium) to its formal properties and effects, or to a technological essence. It is therefore preferable, for theories of media in the capitalist societies, to see the media as syntheses of technology and capital, as technologies which serve specific interests and which have specific political and economic effects (rather than merely technological ones). It is also preferable to see the dialectic between media and society in specific historical conjunctures, to see how social content, trends, and imperatives help constitute the media which in turn influence social developments and help constitute social reality.

For Baudrillard, by contrast, the media today simply constitute a simulated, hyperreal, and obscene (in his technical sense) world(view), and a dialectic of media and society is shortcircuited in a new version of technological determinism. The political implications of this analysis are that constituting alternative media, or alternative uses or forms of existing media, is useless or worse because media in their very essence for him militate against emancipatory politics or any project of social transformation. Such cynical views, however, primarily benefit conservative forces who presently control the media in their own interests -- a point to which I shall soon return.

Thirdly, there is a subordination of cultural interpretation and politics in Baudrillard to what might very loosely be called "theory" -- thus constituting a theoricist subordination in Baudrillard. In other words, just as Louis Althusser subordinated concrete empirical and historical analysis to what he called "theoretical practice" -- and thus was criticized for "theoreticism," -- Baudrillard also rarely engages in close analysis or readings of media texts, and instead simply engages in abstract theoretical ruminations. Here, his arm-chair or TV screen theorizing might be compared with Foucault's or Virilio's archival theorizing, or to more detailed and systematic media theory and critique, much to, I'm afraid, Baudrillard's detriment.

Baudrillard also rigorously avoids the messy but important terrain of cultural and media politics. There is nothing concerning alternative media practices, for instance, in his theorizing, which he seems to rule out in advance because on his view all media are mere producers of noise, non-communication, the extermination of meaning, implosion, and so on. In "Requiem for the Media," Baudrillard explicitly argues that all mass media communication falls prey to "mass mediatization," that is "the imposition of models": "In fact, the essential Medium is the Model. What is mediatized is not what comes off the daily press, out of the tube, or on the radio: it is what is reinterpreted by the sign form, articulated into models, and administered by the code (just as the commodity is not what is produced industrially, but what is mediatized by the exchange value system of abstraction)" (CPES, pp. 175-176).

All "subversive communication," then, for Baudrillard has to surpass the codes and models of media communication -- and thus of the mass media themselves which invariably translate all contents and messages into their codes. Consequently, not only general elections but general strikes have "become a schematic reducing agent" (CPES, p. 176). In this (original) situation: "The real revolutionary media during May {1968} were the walls and their speech, the silk-screen posters and the hand-painted notices, the street where speech began and was exchanged -everything that was an immediate inscription, given and returned, spoken and answered, mobile in the same space and time, reciprocal and antagonistic. The street is, in this sense, the alternative and subversive form of the mass media, since it isn't, like the latter, an objectified support for answerless messages, a transmission system at a distance. It is the frayed space of the symbolic exchange of speech -- ephemeral, mortal: a speech that is not reflected on the Platonic screen of the media. Institutionalized by reproduction, reduced to a spectacle, this speech is expiring" (CPES, pp. 176-177).

In this text, Baudrillard conflates all previously revolutionary strategies and models of "subversive communication" to "schematic reducing agents" and manifests here once again a nostalgia for direct, unmediated, and reciprocal speech ("symbolic exchange") which is denied in the media society. Haunted by a disappearing metaphysics of presence, Baudrillard valorizes immediate communication over mediated communication thus forgetting that all communication is mediated (through language, through signs, through codes, etc.). Furthermore, he romanticizes a certain form of communication (speech in the streets) as the only genuinely subversive or revolutionary communication and media. Consistently with this theory, he thus calls for a (neo-Luddite) "deconstruction" of the media "as systems of non-communication," and thus for the "liquidation of the existing functional and technical structure of the media" (CPES, p. 177).

Against Baudrillard's utopia of immediate speech -- which he himself abandons in his 1980s writings--, I would defend the project of structural and technical refunctioning of the media as suggested earlier by Brecht, Benjamin, and Enzensberger. Baudrillard, by contrast, not only attacks all forms of media communication as non-revolutionary, but eventually, by the late 1970s, he surrenders his commitment to revolutionary theory and drops the notion of revolutionary communication or subversive cultural practices altogether. Moreover, Baudrillard becomes a bit testy and even nasty in his later writing when considering alternative media. In a symptomatic passage in "The Ecstasy of Communication," Baudrillard writes:

> the promiscuity {note the moralizing coding here -- D.K.} that reigns over the communication networks is one of superficial saturation, of an incessant solicitation, of an extermination of interstitial and protective spaces. I pick up my telephone receiver and it's all there; the whole marginal network catches and harasses me with the insupportable good faith of everything that wants and claims to communicate. Free radio: it speaks, it sings, it expresses itself. Very well, it is the sympathetic obscenity of its content. In terms a little different for each medium, this is the result: a space, that of the FM band, is found to be saturated,... Speech is free perhaps, but I am less free than before: I no longer succeed in knowing what I want, the space is so saturated, the pressure so great from all who want to make themselves heard.
>
> I fall into the negative ecstasy of the radio ("Ecstasy," pp. 131-132).

Against this snide and glib put-down of alternative media, I would argue that alternative television, radio, film, and now Internet movements provide possibilities of another type of media with different forms, content, goals, and effects from mainstream media.[20] A radical media project would thus attempt to transform both the form and the content of the media, as well as their organization and social functions. In a genuinely democratic society, mass media would be part of a communal public sphere and alternative media would be made accessible to all groups and individuals who wished to participate in media communication. This would presuppose dramatic expansion of media access and thus of media systems which would require more channels, technology, and a social commitment to democratic communication.

To preserve its autonomy, alternative television systems could be state funded but not controlled -- much like television in several European countries, while public access television and community radio could provide more local programming. Eventually, all of this will be available on the Internet which proliferates the possibilities for alternative media tremendously. An alternative media system would provide the possibility for oppositional, counterhegemonic subcultures and groups to produce programs expressing their own views, oppositions, and struggles that resist the massification, homogenization, and passivity that Baudrillard and others attribute to the media. Alternative media allow marginal and oppositional voices to contest the view of the world, values, and life-styles of the mainstream, and make possible the circulation and growth of alternative subcultures and communities. Baudrillard's theoreticism, however, eschews cultural practice and becomes more and more divorced from the political struggles and issues of the day -- though the question of Baudrillard's politics would take another long and very tortured paper to deal with. Reflecting briefly on Baudrillard's media theory leads me to conclude that his media theory is rather impoverished qua media theory and reproduces the limitations of McLuhan's media theory: formalism, technological determinism, and essentialism. John Fekete's critique of McLuhan might profitably be applied to Baudrillard, as might some of the other criticisms of McLuhan once in fashion which may need to be recycled a second time for the new McLuhan(cy). The theory of autonomous media also return with Baudrillard; thus the critiques of autonomous technology can usefully and relevantly be applied to Baudrillard, and, more generally to certain forms of postmodern social theory.[21]

While both McLuhan and Baudrillard are important in calling attention to the power of the media in contemporary society, the question arises as to whether an implosive theory that collapses the boundaries of previous social theory is in a position to carefully and rigorously work out the complex relations and contradictions between the media, economy, state, culture and society. McLuhan and Baudrillard thus challenge us to develop critical theories of the media that build on their insights and overcome their limitations. McLuhan and Baudrillard are extremely valuable in calling attention to the centrality of the media in contemporary society and provide important insights tools to further advance our understanding media but more work remains to be done.

Notes

[1] This study draws on an article "Resurrecting McLuhan? Jean Baudrillard and the Academy of Postmodernism," in Communication for and against Democracy, edited by Marc Raboy and Peter A Bruck (Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books, 1989), 131-146, and my book Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond (Cambridge, UK and Palo Alto: Stanford University Press and Polity Press, 1989). I am grateful to Arthur Kroker for penetrating critical remarks on an earlier version of this text, to Steve Best for incisive critiques of several versions of the text, to Peter Bruck who proposed expansion of the political implications of my critique, and to Rhonda Hammer who provided useful comments for editing the revised text. In this study, I shall use the following abbreviations in the text for Baudrillard's work:

> CPES=Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1978); SSM=In the Shadows of the Silent Majorities (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); SIM= Simulations (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); SED=De la seduction (Paris: Galilee, 1979); and S&S Simulacra and Simulations Ann Arbor: The

University of Michigan Press.

[2] See Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: McGraw-Hill 1964; reprint MIT Press, 1994 [hereafter UM]).

[3]On the different analyses of postmodernity and the postmodern turn, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations. London and New York: MacMillan and Guilford Press, 1991; The Postmodern Turn. New York: Guilford Press, 1997; and The Postmodern Adventure. New York: Guilford Press, 2001.

[4] For my own attempts to theorize television, see the texts cited below in Notes 13, 15, 26, and 17.

[5] In his book McLuhan and Baudrillard. The Masters of Implosion (New York and London, Routledge: 1999), Gary Genosko writes: "I consider the McLuhan renaissance to be a result of postmodern theory and the enormously influential role played by French social and cultural theory as it has been, and continues to be, translated into English and disseminated across and beyond the disciplines" (p. 3). I would argue instead that it is the force and significance of computer culture and the ways that McLuhan's concepts articulate its significance and effects that account for the renewed interest in McLuhan. There is, moreover, overlap between computer culture and the theorizing of postmodern theory, as Mark Poster and Sherry Turkle have noted. See Mark Poster, The Second Media Age (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995) and Sherry Turkle, Life on Screen (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995). Genosko is also off mark when he claims "McLuhan and Baudrillard are the key thinkers to whom postmodernists turn to situate their deviations from them" (p. 3) As argued in the books cited in Note 3, as well as in Poster and Turkle, there are many competing key postmodern theorists, McLuhan is often neglected in discussions of postmodern theory, and Baudrillard is often considered an extreme and ultranihilist variant. For a detailed albeit generally uncritical attempt to demonstrate McLuhan's importance for understanding digital culture, see Paul Levinson, digital mcLuhan. a guide to the information millennium (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[6] Baudrillard, Review of Understanding Media in L'Homme et la Societe, Nr. 5 (1967), pp. 227ff.

[7] See Jurgen Habermas, Theory and Practice (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), and the critique in Rick Roderick, Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

[8] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," in The Consciousness Industry New York: Seabury, 1974.

[9] For my critique of the Frankfurt school media theory, see Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

[10] See Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987.

[11] In Simulacra and Simulation," Baudrillard writes: "To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: "Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littre). Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the

reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary". Since the simulator produces "true" symptoms, is he or she ill or not? The simulator cannot be treated objectively either as ill, or as not ill." (1994a, 3).

[12] On McLuhan's catholicism, see John Fekete, "McLuhancy: Counterrevolution in Cultural Theory" (Telos 15, Spring 1973), pp. 75 123 and Arthur Kroker, Technology and the Canadian Mind (Montreal: New World Press, 1984); and Genosko 1999: 13f).

[13] Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in Hal Foster, editor, The Anti-Aesthetic (Port Washington, N.Y.: 1983). Page references from this source will be inserted in the text.

[14] The Loud family was portrayed in a 1970s US Public broadcasting System (PBS) documentary series that anticipated reality TV; during the filming of the series, one of the sons came out gay and the parents split up.

[15] For an exploration of these phenomena, see Douglas Kellner, Media Spectacle, London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

[16] On the later Baudrillard see Kellner 1989a and my entry "Jean Baudrillard" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (forthcoming 2004) at http://plato.stanford.edu/.

[17] My reading and critique of McLuhan and Baudrillard have been influenced by the work of John Fekete and Arthur Kroker (see note 11 above). While Genosko (1999) is correct that the above authors have influenced my readings of Baudrillard and McLuhan, he is dead wrong in arguing that I claim that "semiurgy" and "television" are "evil" (pp. 67f). Rather, I have always seen the media as a contested terrain and unlike Baudrillard who sees no good use of the media, I have been involved in the alternative media movement for decades and even had a public access TV show in Austin, Texas, for 18 years. In the passages discussed by Genosko, I am explicating Baudrillard's position, not indicating my own. Interestingly, in the light of the primacy of the concept of "evil" in the later Baudrillard, one could argue that Baudrillard himself does ascribe demonic force and power to the media that he puts on the side of "evil." I would myself avoid such moralistic concepts unless I was describing the Bush administration. On Baudrillard and philosophy, see my entry (forthcoming 2004) in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html.

[18] For further elaboration, see Douglas Kellner, "TV, Ideology and Emancipatory Popular Culture," Socialist Review 42 (Nov-Dec 1979), pp. 13-53 and "Television Images, Codes, and Messages," Televisions, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1980), pp. 2-19.

[19]See Steven Best and Douglas Kellner "(Re)Watching Television: Notes Toward a Political Criticism," Diacritics (Summer 1987), pp. 97-113 for elaboration of the project of developing a political hermeneutics against postmodernist (mostly formalist and anti-hermeneutical) modes of criticism.

[20] This argument is elaborated in Douglas Kellner, "Public Access Television: Alternative Views," Radical Science Journal 16, Making Waves (1985), pp. 79-92; Television and the Crisis of Democracy. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1990; "Globalization, Technopolitics, and Revolution" (2003) in John Foran, ed. The Future of Revolutions. Rethinking Radical Change in the Age of Globalization. London: Zed Books: 180-194; Steve Best and Douglas Kellner,

"Watching Television: The Limitations of Post-Modernism," Science as Culture 4, (1988), 44-70; and Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, “Virtually Democratic: Online Communities and Internet Activism” in Community in the Digital Age: philosophy and Practiced, edited by Andrew Feenberg and Darin Barney. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefied: 183-200.

[21] See Fekete, op. cit., and Langdon Winner, Autonomous Technology (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1977).