

INTRODUCTION: JEAN BAUDRILLARD IN THE FIN-DE-MILLENNIUM

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Jean Baudrillard is one of the most important and provocative writers of the contemporary era. His early studies of the consumer society and its system of objects provided new perspectives on everyday life in the post-World War II social order organized around the consumption, display, and use of consumer goods. His work on the political economy of the sign merged semiological and neo-Marxian perspectives to provide important insights into the power of consumption and how it was playing a crucial role in organizing contemporary societies around objects, needs, and consumption.¹ His 1970s studies of the effects of the new communication, information, and media technologies blazed new paths in contemporary social theory and challenged regnant orthodoxies. Baudrillard's claim of a radical break with modern societies was quickly appropriated into the discourse of the postmodern and he was received as the prophet of postmodernity in avant-garde theoretical circles throughout the world.

Baudrillard proclaimed the disappearance of the subject, political economy, meaning, truth, the social, and the real in contemporary social formations. This process of dramatic change and mutation, he argued, required entirely new theories and concepts to describe the rapidly evolving social processes and novelties of the present moment.² Baudrillard undertook to explore this new and original situation and to spell out the consequences for contemporary theory and practice. For some years, Baudrillard was a cutting-edge, high-tech social theorist, one of the most stimulating and provocative contemporary thinkers. As the articles collected in this reader indicate, he is a highly controversial thinker who has produced a legion of fervent supporters, as well as impassioned critics. As the century comes to an end, "Baudrillard" continues to be a password for what some consider avant-garde theory that breaks with the orthodoxies

of the past and that blazes new theoretical pathways through the mediascapes, computer networks, and information highways and byways of the present age, as we careen toward the end of a millennium into a new world (dis)order, as yet uncharted and frightening and confusing.

Confusion and fear produce the need for gurus who will explain the current disorder and who offer theoretical guidance and orientation through the morass of the present. Baudrillard has assumed such guru status and the articles in this *Critical Reader* attempt to survey a large number of areas in which his thought has evoked discussion and controversy. Unlike most commentaries on Baudrillard which celebrate or attack him in often-abstract and general terms, these studies concretely interrogate his positions in terms of specific topics, fields, and debates. The studies collected here probe Baudrillard's works for insights into the nature and novelties of contemporary society and culture, appraising his contributions according to how well he illuminates the present age, while criticizing him for limitations that fail to grasp, or that ignore and mystify, salient aspects of our current situation. Thus, the following studies take Baudrillard seriously and undertake thinking with him, against him, or both, by engaging his writings in salient contemporary topics, polemics, and problems.

Baudrillard himself is a provocateur and self-described "intellectual terrorist" who seeks to destroy modern orthodoxies and who periodically attacks those who have had the most influence upon his work, thus calling into question some of the most fashionable and influential thinkers and ideas of our era. In each case, Baudrillard replaces the positions of the past with his own often-novel positions, forcing his readers to decide if his thought is a progression beyond or regression behind established positions. Such a procedure forces us to read Baudrillard critically and, accordingly, in this introduction I shall indicate some of the ways that Baudrillard can be used to understand contemporary society and culture in the present era, while many of the following papers warn against problems and limitations in his work.

In raising the question concerning the use-value of Baudrillard, one must recognize that he himself has attacked the concepts of use-value and exchange-value, arguing that the current form of capitalism is organized around configurations of sign-value.³ For Baudrillard, people attain status and prestige according to which products they consume and display in a differential logic of consumption, in which some products have more prestige and sign-value than others, according to current tastes and fashion. In a sense, it has become Baudrillard's fate to himself become a sign of the postmodern, of the avant-garde of theoretical discourse, of the *au courant* and faddish. He is partly responsible for this fate and has himself become a sign of a particular mode of contemporary thought circulated and exploited as cultural capital by promoters who have fostered the discourse and game of the postmodern – or of Baudrillard's uniqueness and

importance.⁴ Many studies of Baudrillard have themselves skimmed the surface of Baudrillard's texts, failing to interrogate their use and abuse, or the contributions and limitations of his writings. In the following pages, I will indicate what I think is most useful in his work, while briefly noting some of their limitations. The writings in this collection will provide a variety of different perspectives on Baudrillard and I merely want to indicate here some of the ways that one can read and use Baudrillard, as well as to provide a framework for critical inquiry into his work.

EARLY WRITINGS: FROM THE SYSTEM OF OBJECTS TO THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

Jean Baudrillard was born in Reims, France in 1929. He told interviewers that his grandparents were peasants and his parents became civil servants.⁵ He also claims that he was the first member of his family to pursue an advanced education and that this led to a rupture with his parents and cultural milieu. After working hard in a French high school (Lycée), he entered the University in the 1960s, studying languages, philosophy, sociology, and other disciplines.

Baudrillard was initially a Germanist who published essays on literature in *Les temps modernes* in 1962–3 and throughout the decade he translated works of Peter Weiss and Bertolt Brecht into French, as well as a book on messianic revolutionary movements by Wilhelm Mühlmann. Opposing French and US intervention in the Algerian and Vietnamese wars, he associated himself with the French Left. Influenced by Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes, and the French situationists, Baudrillard started serious work in the field of social theory, semiology, and psychoanalysis in the 1960s and began a teaching career at Nanterre, one of the new universities established in Paris. Participating in the tumultuous events of May 1968, Baudrillard was associated with the revolutionary Left, though he would eventually break with his former comrades.

In his first three books, Baudrillard argued that the classical Marxian critique of political economy needed to be supplemented by semiological theories of the sign. He argued that the transition from the earlier stage of competitive market capitalism to the stage of monopoly capitalism required increased attention to demand management, to augmenting and steering consumption. At this stage, from around 1920 to the 1960s, the need to intensify demand supplemented concern with lowering production costs and with augmenting production. In this era, economic concentration, new production techniques, and the like, accelerated capacity for mass production and consumer capitalism focused increased attention on managing consumption and creating needs for new prestigious goods, thus producing the regime of sign-value.

The result was the now-familiar consumer society which provided the main focus of Baudrillard's early work. In this society, advertising, packaging, display, fashion, "emancipated" sexuality, mass media and culture, and the proliferation of commodities multiplied the quantity of signs and spectacles, and produced a proliferation of what Baudrillard calls "sign-value." Henceforth, Baudrillard claims, commodities are not merely to be characterized by use-value and exchange value, as in Marx's theory of the commodity, but sign-value – the expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury, power, and so on – becomes an increasingly important part of the commodity and consumption. That is, commodities were allegedly bought and displayed as much for their sign-value as their use-value, and the phenomenon of sign-value became an essential constituent of the commodity and consumption in the consumer society.

Baudrillard's early works are attempts, within the framework of critical sociology, to combine the studies of everyday life initiated by Lefebvre and the situationists with a social semiology that studies the role of signs in social life.⁶ This project, influenced by Barthes, centers on the system of objects in the consumer society (the subject of his first two books), and the interface between political economy and semiotics (the subject of his third book). As Mark Gottsdienar points out below, Baudrillard's early work was one of the first to appropriate semiology to analyze how objects are encoded with a system of signs and meanings that constitute contemporary media and consumer societies. Combining semiological studies, Marxian political economy, and sociology of the consumer society, Baudrillard began his life-long task of exploring the system of objects and signs which forms our everyday life.

In his first major work, Baudrillard argued that: "we live the time of objects: I mean that we live according to their rhythm and according to their incessant succession. It is objects which today observe our being born, which accompany our death . . . and which survive us."⁷ One of the distinguishing features of his studies of the system of objects is the refusal of a moralizing critique of the consumer society. Instead, Baudrillard carries out a descriptive and hermeneutical analysis of its system of signs and consumption. In a later reflection on his first book, Baudrillard writes:

My first book contains a critique of the object as obvious fact, substance, reality, use value. There the object was taken as sign, but as sign still heavy with meaning. In this critique two principal logics interfered with each other: a phantasmatic logic that referred principally to psychoanalysis – its identifications, projections, and the entire imaginary realm of transcendence, power and sexuality operating at the level of objects and the environment, with a privilege accorded to the house/automobile axis (immanence/transcendence); and a differential social logic that made distinctions by referring to a sociology, itself derived from anthropology (communication as the production of signs, differentiation, status and prestige).⁸

In other words, the early Baudrillard described the meanings invested in the objects of everyday life (i.e., the power accrued through identification with one's automobile when driving) and the structural system through which the objects were organized into a new modern society (i.e., the prestige or sign-value of a new sports car). Whereas his first book describes the structure and ambience of a system of objects, his second book, *La société de consommation* presents more concrete sociological analyses of the new worlds of leisure and communication in the consumer society. This book and the following *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* use semiological analysis to dissect the system of signs that produces a hierarchy of prestige and status through the differential use and display of consumer goods.

Baudrillard's early critical explorations of the system of objects and consumer society contain important contributions to contemporary social theory. His semiological optic allows one to perceive how objects are organized into a system of objects that in turn produces a system of needs which integrate individuals into the consumer society. Adding a semiological and cultural dimension to sociological theory, Baudrillard explores the life of signs in society and how what he calls sign-value produces a new world of advertising, fashion, and consumption.⁹ His "political economy of the sign" provides new perspectives on consumer needs, media communication, and social integration in contemporary consumer societies. Eschewing the sometimes abstract formalism of academic semiology, Baudrillard utilizes semiological perspectives to illuminate the objects and activities of everyday life. Yet he will soon notice a dramatic mutation occurring within contemporary societies and will accordingly shift his problematic.¹⁰

BAUDRILLARD AS PROVOCATEUR: THE END OF MODERNITY

Baudrillard's first three works can be read in the framework of a neo-Marxian critique of capitalist societies. One could read Baudrillard's emphasis on consumption as a supplement to Marx's analysis of production, and his focus on culture and signs as an important supplement to classical Marxian political economy, that adds a cultural and semiological dimension to the Marxian project. But in his 1973 provocation, *The Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard carries out a systematic attack on classical Marxism, claiming that Marxism is but a mirror of bourgeois society, placing production at the center of life, thus naturalizing the capitalist organization of society.

Baudrillard argues that Marxism, first, does not adequately illuminate premodern societies which were organized around symbolic exchange and not production. He also argues that Marxism does not radically enough

critique capitalist societies and calls for a sharper break. At this stage, Baudrillard turns to anthropological perspectives on premodern societies for hints of more emancipatory alternatives. Yet it is important to note that this critique of Marxism was taken from the Left, arguing that Marxism did not provide a radical enough critique or alternative to contemporary productivist societies, capitalist and communist. Baudrillard, like many of his generation, was disillusioned with the organized communist Left after the failures of the tumultuous struggles in France during May 1968 to provide more radical social change. He was also reacting against the emerging hegemony of a structuralist Marxist theory, promoted by Althusser and others, that appeared dogmatic, reductionist, and excessively orthodox. Hence, Baudrillard and others of his generation began searching for more radical critical positions.

The Mirror of Production (1973) and his next book *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), a major text which has only recently been translated,¹¹ are attempts to provide ultra-radical perspectives that overcome the limitations of an economistic Marxist tradition. This ultra-leftist phase of Baudrillard's itinerary would be short-lived, however, though in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard produces one of his most important and dramatic provocations. The text opens with a Preface that condenses Baudrillard's attempt to provide a radically different approach to society and culture. Building on Bataille's principle of excess and expenditure, Mauss's concept of the gift, and Jarry's pataphysical desire to exterminate meaning, Baudrillard champions "symbolic exchange" and attacks Marx, Freud, and academic semiology and sociology. Baudrillard argues that in Bataille's claim that expenditure and excess is connected with sovereignty, Mauss's descriptions of the social prestige of gift-giving in premodern society, Jarry's theater, and Saussure's anagrams, there is a break with the logic of capitalist exchange and production, or the production of meaning in linguistic exchange. These cases of "symbolic exchange," Baudrillard believes, breaks with the logic of production and describe excessive and subversive behavior that provides alternatives to the capitalist logic of production and exchange.

Against the organizing principles of modern and postmodern society (i.e., production and simulation), Baudrillard contrasts the logic of symbolic exchange, as an alternative organizing principle of society. Against modern demands to produce value and meaning, Baudrillard calls for their extermination and annihilation, providing, as examples, Mauss's gift-exchange, Saussure's anagrams, and Freud's concept of the death drive. In all of these instances, there is a rupture with the logic of exchange (of goods, meanings, and libidinal energies) and thus escape from the logic of production, capitalism, rationality, and meaning. Baudrillard's paradoxical logic of symbolic exchange can be explained as expression of a desire to liberate himself from modern positions and to seek a revolutionary position outside

of modern society. Against modern values, Baudrillard advocates their annihilation and extermination.

Baudrillard also distinguishes between the logic of production and utility that organized modern societies and the logic of simulation that he believes is the organizing principle of postmodern societies, postulating a rupture between modern and postmodern societies as great as the break between modern and premodern ones. He follows classical social theory in postulating a major divide between premodern societies, that he sees as organized around symbolic exchange, and modern ones organized around production. In theorizing the epochal postmodern rupture with modernity, Baudrillard declares the "end of political economy" and the end of an era in which production was the organizing principle of society. This modern epoch was the era of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, in which workers were exploited by capital and provided a revolutionary force of upheaval. Baudrillard, however, declared the end of political economy and thus the end of the Marxist problematic and of modernity itself:

The end of labor. The end of production. The end of political economy.

The end of the dialectic signifier/signified which permitted an accumulation of knowledge and of meaning, and of a linear syntagm of cumulative discourse. The end simultaneously of the dialectic of exchange value/use value which alone previously made possible capital accumulation and social production. The end of linear discourse. The end of linear merchandising. The end of the classic era of the sign. The end of the era of production."¹²

The discourse of "the end" signifies his announcing a postmodern break or rupture in history. We are now, Baudrillard claims, in a new era of simulation in which social reproduction (information processing, communication, knowledge industries, etc.) replaces production as the organizing principle of society. In this era, labor is no longer a force of production but is itself a "sign among signs" (p. 23). Labor is not primarily productive in this situation but is a sign of one's social position, way of life, and mode of servitude. Wages too bear no rational relation to one's work and what one produces but relate to one's place within the system (pp. 36ff.). But, crucially, political economy is no longer the foundation, the social determinant, or even a structural "reality" in which other phenomena can be interpreted and explained (pp. 53ff.). Instead we live in a "hyperreality" of simulations in which images, spectacles, and the play of signs replace the logic of production and class conflict as key constituents of contemporary societies.

From now on, capital and political economy disappear from Baudrillard's story, or return in radically new forms. Henceforth, signs and codes proliferate and produce other signs and new sign machines in ever-expanding and spiralling cycles. Technology thus replaces capital in this story and

semiurgy, the proliferation of images, information, signs, overshadows production. His postmodern turn is thus connected to a form of technological determinism and a rejection of political economy as a useful explanatory principle – a move that many of the studies in this volume criticize (i.e., Gottdiener, Best, Sawchuk, Schoonmaker, etc.).

Symbolic Exchange and Death thus articulates the principle of a fundamental rupture between modern and postmodern societies and marks Baudrillard's departure from the problematic of modern social theory. For Baudrillard, modern societies are organized around the production and consumption of commodities, while postmodern societies are organized around simulation and the play of images and signs, denoting a situation in which codes, models, and signs are the organizing principles of a new social order where simulation rules. 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 logic 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.

Baudrillard's postmodern world is also one of radical *implosion* 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. For Baudrillard, in the society of simulation, economics, politics, culture, sexuality, and the social all implode into each other, such that economics is fundamentally constituted by culture, politics, and other spheres, while art, once a sphere of potential difference and opposition, is absorbed into the economic and political and 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 focused.

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. 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 casual mechanisms and logic 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. In this universe, subjectivities are fragmented and lost, and a new terrain of experience appears that allegedly renders previous social theories and politics obsolete and irrelevant. Thus, Baudrillard's categories of simulation, implosion, and hyperreality combine to create a new postmodern condition that requires entirely new modes of social theory and politics to chart and respond to the novelties of the contemporary era.

Baudrillard's style and writing strategies are also implosive, combining material from strikingly different fields, studded with examples from the mass media and popular culture in a new mode of postmodern theory that effaces all disciplinary boundaries. His writing attempts to itself simulate the new conditions, capturing their novelties through inventive use of language and theory. Such radical questioning of contemporary theory and the need for new theoretical strategies are thus legitimated by Baudrillard by the radicality of changes in the current era.

For instance, Baudrillard claims that modernity operates with a logic of representation in which ideas represent reality and truth, concepts which are key postulates of modern theory. A postmodern society explodes this epistemology by creating a situation in which subjects lose contact with the real and themselves fragment and dissolve. This situation portends the end of modern theory which operated with a subject-object dialectic in which the subject was supposed to represent and control the object. In the story of modern philosophy, the philosophic subject attempts to discern the nature of reality, to secure grounded knowledge, and to apply this knowledge to control and dominate the object (i.e., nature, other people, ideas, etc.). Baudrillard follows here the post-structuralist critique that thought and discourse could no longer be securely anchored in a priori or privileged structures. Reacting against the logic of representation in modern theory, French thought, especially some deconstructionists (Rorty's "strong textualists"), moved into the play of textuality, of discourse, which allegedly referred only to other texts or discourses in which "the real" or an "outside" were banished to the realm of nostalgia.

In a similar fashion, Baudrillard, a "strong simulacrist," claims that in the media and consumer society, people are caught up in the play of images, spectacles, and simulacra, that have less and less relationship to an outside, to an external "reality," to such an extent that the very concepts of the social, political, or even "reality" no longer seem to have any meaning. And the narcotized and mesmerized (some of Baudrillard's metaphors) media-saturated consciousness is in such a state of fascination with image and spectacle that the concept of meaning itself (which depends on stable boundaries, fixed structures, shared consensus) dissolves. In this alarming and novel postmodern situation, the referent, the behind and the outside, along with depth, essence, and reality all disappear, and, with their disappearance, the possibility of all potential opposition vanishes as

well. As simulations proliferate, they come to refer only to themselves: a carnival of mirrors reflecting images projected from other mirrors onto the omnipresent television screen and the screen of consciousness, which in turn refers the image to its previous storehouse of images also produced by simulatory mirrors. Caught up in the universe of simulations, the "masses," the "silent majorities," are bathed in a media massage without messages or meaning, a mass age where classes disappear, and politics is dead, as are the grand dreams of disalienation, liberation, and revolution.

Baudrillard claims that henceforth the masses seek spectacle and not meaning. They implode into a "silent majority," signifying "the end of the social."¹³ Baudrillard implies that social theory loses its very object as meanings, classes, and difference implode into a "black hole" of non-differentiation. But, as Deborah Cook points out in this volume, Baudrillard claims, at this point in his trajectory (i.e., the late 1970s and early 1980s) that refusal of meaning and participation by the masses is a form of resistance. Hovering between nostalgia and nihilism, Baudrillard at once exterminates modern ideas (i.e., the subject, meaning, truth, reality, society, socialism, etc.) and affirms a mode of symbolic exchange which appears to manifest a nostalgic desire to return to premodern cultural forms. This desperate search for a genuinely revolutionary alternative was abandoned, however, by the early 1980s. Henceforth, he develops yet more novel perspectives on the contemporary moment, vacillating between sketching out alternative modes of thought and behavior and renouncing the quest for political and social change.

Baudrillard concludes that the "catastrophe has happened," that the destruction of modernity and modern theory which he called for in the mid-1970s, has been completed by the development of society itself, that modes of modernity have disappeared and a new social situation has taken their place. Against traditional strategies of rebellion and revolution, Baudrillard thus begins to champion what he calls "fatal strategies" that push the logic of the system to the extreme in the hopes of collapse or reversal.¹⁴ I will turn to Baudrillard's latest writings shortly, but first want to engage an attempt to dissociate Baudrillard from the discourse of the postmodern.

BAUDRILLARD AND THE POSTMODERN GAME

In the light of Baudrillard's powerful sketch of a new postmodern condition, one must therefore reject Mike Gane's futile attempt to separate Baudrillard from the discourse of the postmodern. In his two books on Baudrillard and in introductions to a collection of Baudrillard's interviews and the translation of *Symbolic Exchange and Death*,¹⁵ Gane argued against assimilation of Baudrillard to the problematic of the postmodern. For

instance, in his Introduction to the translation of *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Gane opens by suggesting that the text “will be decisive” in showing that Baudrillard’s position is “not postmodern.” Gane, however, never eager to demonstrate his allegations, or to carry through an interpretation, doesn’t indicate how the text establishes that Baudrillard’s position is not “postmodern,” nor does he indicate what the text shows Baudrillard’s position to be. Part of Gane’s problem, and part of the problem with the discourse of the postmodern, is that he never defines what “postmodernism” is and uses the term in a loose and ill-defined way to refer, among other things, to ruptures with modernity, to a new form of culture that breaks with modernism, and to a form of theory that breaks with modern theory – conceptual differences that need to be elucidated.¹⁶

Seen from this analytical viewpoint, Baudrillard develops a concept of postmodernity as a radical break and rupture from modernity. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, as argued, Baudrillard posits a fundamental rupture in history between modernity and postmodernity that was every bit as radical as the earlier break between modern and premodern societies. In other texts of the period, Baudrillard clearly associated himself with the concept of a postmodern rupture. His polemic *Forget Foucault* argues for the obsolescence of his French compatriot precisely on the grounds that the modern era that Foucault described so well is now over and his thought is thus obsolete. In “On Nihilism” – first delivered as a lecture in 1980 and then published in 1981 – Baudrillard describes “modernity” as “the radical destruction of appearances, the disenchantment of the world and its abandonment to the violence of interpretation and history.”¹⁷ Modernity was the era of Marx and Freud, the era in which politics, culture, and social life were interpreted as epiphenomena of the economy, or everything was interpreted in terms of desire or the unconsciousness. These “hermeneutics of suspicion” employed depth models to demystify reality, to show the underlying realities behind appearances, the factors that constituted the facts.

The “revolution” of modernity was thus a revolution of meaning grounded in the secure moorings of the dialectics of history, the economy, or desire. Baudrillard scorns this universe and claims to be part of a “second revolution, that of the 20th century, of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. Whoever lives by meaning dies by meaning” (pp. 38–9). The postmodern world is devoid of meaning; it is a universe of nihilism where theories float in a void, unanchored in any secure harbor or moorings. Meaning requires depth, a hidden dimension, an unseen yet stable and fixed substratum or foundation; in the postmodern world, however, everything is visible, explicit, and transparent, but highly unstable. The postmodern scene exhibits signs of dead meaning and frozen forms mutating into new combinations and permutations of the same.

In this accelerating proliferation of signs and forms, there is an always-accelerating implosion and inertia, characterized by growth beyond limits, turning in on itself. The secret of cancer: "Revenge of excretion on growth, revenge of speed in inertia" (p. 39).

Acceleration of inertia, the implosion of meaning in the media; the implosion of the social in the mass; the implosion of the mass in a black hole of nihilism and meaninglessness – such is the Baudrillardian postmodern vision. Fascinated by this void and inertia, Baudrillard privileges the scene of nihilism over the phantasy of meaning arguing that – and this is as good an expression of his postmodern position as any:

If being nihilist is to privilege this point of inertia and the analysis of this irreversibility of systems to the point of no return, then I am a nihilist.

If being nihilist is to be obsessed with the mode of disappearance, and no longer with the mode of production, then I am a nihilist. Disappearance, aphanisis, implosion, Fury of the *Verschwindens* (p. 39).

Baudrillard's nihilism is without joy, without energy, without hope for a better future: "No, melancholy is the fundamental tonality of functional systems, of the present systems of simulation, programming and information. Melancholy is the quality inherent in the mode of disappearance of meaning, in the mode of volatilization of meaning in operational systems" (p. 39). In fact, Baudrillard's postmodern mind-set exhibits a contradictory amalgam of emotions and responses ranging from despair and melancholy, to vertigo and giddiness, to nostalgia and laughter. Analysis of the "mode of disappearance" constitutes a rather original contribution to contemporary social theory and indeed Baudrillard has been true to this impulse to describe without illusions or regret what is disappearing in our society and culture. Indeed, Baudrillard concludes "On Nihilism" by linking his theory with "intellectual terrorism":

If being nihilist is to take, to the unendurable limit of the hegemonic systems, this radical act of derision and violence, this challenge which the system is summoned to respond to by its own death, then I am a terrorist and a nihilist in theory as others are through arms. Theoretical violence, not truth, is the sole expedient remaining to us.

But this is a utopia. For it would be admirable to be a nihilist, if radicality still existed – as it would be admirable to be a terrorist if death, including that of the terrorist, still had meaning.

But this is where things become insoluble. For opposed to this nihilism of radicality is the system's own, the nihilism of neutralization. The system itself is also nihilist, in the sense that it has the power to reverse everything in indifferenciation, including that which denies it (p. 39).

Baudrillard's analysis of a postmodern break is also evident in his popular 1983 essay "The Ecstasy of Communication." In this revealing article, he describes both the rupture between his former analysis of modern objects and the new postmodern condition, as well as the "spirals" taken in his own theoretical itinerary. In the system of objects analyzed in his early writings (see discussion above), the subject lived in a "scene" and a "mirror," existing in the eyes of others and through its objects. "But today," Baudrillard declares, "the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and a network" (p. 126). Henceforth, the subject becomes a "term in a terminal," dissolved in the networks of media and communications. No longer, he claims, do individuals project themselves into their objects, but command, operate, and interface with a functional network of communications. "No more expenditure, consumption, performance, but instead regulation, well-tempered functionality, solidarity among all the elements of the same system, control and global management of an ensemble (p. 127).

Using the discourse of "no more" and "no longer" to describe a "decisive mutation of objects and of the environment in the modern era," Baudrillard thus describes a postmodern rupture. As postmodern theorist, Baudrillard deploys a range of theoretical discourses and perspectives to illuminate the mutation of objects and situations in the contemporary scene. From the mid-1970s to early 1980s, he drew heavily on the discourse of cybernetics and provided cybernetic models of the new postmodern situation. This discourse is heavily saturated with scientific metaphors (i.e., black holes, fractals, DNA, and computer terminology) and presents the perspective of a high-tech, cybernetic theory on the contemporary scene. Many of his concepts from this period are extremely illuminating – as articles by Schoonmaker, Tseelon, Der Derian, Sawchuk, and others in this reader demonstrate – though he tends to exaggerate the novelty of the present and many of his analyses are misleading and fanciful, as many authors in this volume argue.

In general, I would maintain that Baudrillard exaggerates the break between the modern and the postmodern, takes future possibilities as existing realities, and provides a futuristic perspective on the present, much like the tradition of dystopic science fiction, ranging from Huxley to some versions of cyberpunk. Indeed, I prefer to read Baudrillard's work as a science fiction, which anticipates the future by exaggerating present tendencies and thus provides early warnings about what might happen if present trends continue. It is not an accident that Baudrillard is an *aviciendo* of science fiction, who has himself influenced a large number of contemporary science fiction writers.

Thus, it is useful to read Baudrillard's maps as preceding the territory, as futuristic mappings of the (soon to arrive?) present from the vantage point of a possible future. Hence, in my reading, Baudrillard's simulations

theory does not really represent reality as much as simulate what is to come, or what might come to pass if present trends continue and accelerate. But Baudrillard often insists that the future is already here, that we are already living in the brave new world of an already present future. Sometimes he describes this future and our present as "postmodern," yet he also continues to employ the discourse of the modern to describe the present scene.

Thus, Gane is completely wrong to claim that Baudrillard's problematic should not be interpreted as concerned with the postmodern.¹⁸ To be sure, in an interview with Gane, Baudrillard claimed that he himself has "nothing to do with postmodernism," a quote that Gane provoked and quotes incessantly.¹⁹ Obviously, Baudrillard wished to distance himself from the problematic of Lyotard, Jameson, Kroker, and others who were assimilating and promoting the discourse of the postmodern and to proclaim the uniqueness of his own perspectives, independent of any school or tendency. As we shall see, Baudrillard became increasingly idiosyncratic; thus he is quite right to distance himself from some other contemporary versions of postmodern theory. Yet in some texts of the 1980s he himself used the discourse of the postmodern to describe his own works; his texts indeed postulated a rupture with modernity, and he was legitimately seen as a major theorist of the postmodern. Becoming tired or disillusioned with this discourse game, however, Baudrillard began moving away from it into other discourses, which, arguably, were also connected in intricate ways to the problematic of the postmodern.

FROM PATAPHYSICS TO METAPHYSICS AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE OBJECT

In 1979, Baudrillard published *Seduction*, a curious text that represented a major shift in his thought. Whereas in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* he sketched out ultra-revolutionary perspectives as a radical alternative, taking symbolic exchange as a radical otherness to the production of goods, meanings, and value in modern societies, he now valorizes seduction as his alternative to production and communicative interaction. Seduction, however, does not undermine, subvert, or transform existing social relations or institutions, but is a soft alternative, a play with appearances, and a game with feminism, that provoked a sharp critical response, as Keith Goshorn's article in this reader shows.²⁰

Baudrillard's concept of seduction is highly technical and involves games with signs rather than the activity of male seduction of women (though this seems to be included in Baudrillard's concept). Baudrillard opposes seduction as an aristocratic "order of sign and ritual" to the bourgeois ideal of production and he valorizes artifice, appearance, play, and challenge against the deadly serious labor of production. Baudrillard interprets

seduction primarily as a ritual and game with its own rules, charms, snares, and lures. His writing regresses at this point into a neo-aristocratic aestheticism dedicated to idiosyncratic modes of thought and writing, which introduce a new set of categories – reversibility, the challenge, the duel, – that move Baudrillard's thought toward a form of aristocratic aestheticism and metaphysics.

Baudrillard's new metaphysical speculations are evident in *Fatal Strategies*, another turning point in his itinerary. This text presented a bizarre metaphysical scenario concerning the triumph of objects over subjects within the obscene proliferation of an object world so completely out of control that it surpasses all attempts to understand, conceptualize, and control it. His scenario concerns the proliferation and growing supremacy of objects over subjects and the eventual triumph of the object. In a discussion of "Ecstasy and Inertia," Baudrillard discusses how objects and events in contemporary society are continually surpassing themselves, growing and expanding in power. The "ecstasy" of objects is their proliferation and expansion to the Nth degree, to the superlative; ecstasy as going outside of or beyond oneself: the beautiful as more beautiful than the beautiful in fashion, the real more real than the real in television, sex more sexual than the sex in pornography. Ecstasy is thus the form of obscenity (fully explicit, nothing hidden) and of the hyperreality described by Baudrillard earlier taken to a higher level, redoubled and intensified. His vision of contemporary society exhibits a careening of growth and excrecence (*croissance et excroissance*), expanding and excreting ever more goods, services, information, messages, or demands – surpassing all rational ends and boundaries in a spiral of uncontrolled growth and replication.

Yet the growth, acceleration, and proliferation have reached such extremes, Baudrillard suggests, that the ecstasy of excrecence is accompanied by inertia. For, as the society is saturated to the limit, it implodes and winds down into inertia and entropy. This process presents a catastrophe for the subject, for not only does the acceleration and proliferation of the object world intensify the aleatory dimension of chance and non-determination, but the objects themselves take over in a "cool" catastrophe for the exhausted subject whose fascination with the play of objects turns to apathy, stupification, and an entropic inertia.

In retrospect, the growing power of the world of objects over the subject has been Baudrillard's theme from the beginning, thus pointing to an underlying continuity in his project. In his early writings, he explored the ways that commodities were fascinating individuals in the consumer society and the ways that the world of goods was assuming new and more value through the agency of sign value and the code – which were part of the world of things, the system of objects. His polemics against Marxism were fuelled by the belief that sign value and the code were more fundamental than such traditional elements of political economy as exchange

value, use value, production, and so on in constituting contemporary society. Then, reflections on the media entered the forefront of his thought: the TV object was at the center of the home in Baudrillard's earlier thinking and the media, simulations, hyperreality, and implosion eventually came to obliterate distinctions between private and public, inside and outside, media and reality. Henceforth, everything was public, transparent, ecstatic and hyperreal in the object world which was gaining in fascination and seductiveness as the years went by.

And so ultimately the subject, the darling of modern philosophy, is defeated in Baudrillard's metaphysical scenario and the object triumphs, a stunning end to the dialectic of subject and object which had been the framework of modern philosophy. The object is thus the subject's fatality and Baudrillard's "fatal strategies" are simply an obscure call to imitate strategies and ruses of objects. In "banal strategies," "the subject believes itself to always be more clever than the object, whereas in the other [fatal strategies] the object is always supposed to be more shrewd, more cynical, more brilliant than the subject."²¹ Previously, in banal strategies, the subject believed itself to be more masterful and sovereign than the object. A fatal strategy, by contrast, recognizes the supremacy of the object and therefore takes the side of the object and attempts to reproduce its strategies, ruses, and rules.

In *Fatal Strategies* and his other recent writings, Baudrillard seems to be taking social theory into the realm of metaphysics, but it is a specific type of metaphysics deeply inspired by the pataphysics developed by Alfred Jarry. For Jarry:

pataphysics is the science of the realm beyond metaphysics It will study the laws which govern exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, it will describe a universe which one can see – must see perhaps – instead of the traditional one Definition: pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.²²

Like the universe in Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, *The Gestures and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll* and other literary texts – as well as in Jarry's more theoretical explications of pataphysics – Baudrillard's is a totally absurd universe where objects rule in mysterious ways, and people and events are governed by absurd and ultimately unknowable interconnections and predestination (the French playwright Eugene Ionesco is another good source of entry to this universe). Baudrillard's pataphysics follow Jarry in inventing a version of the universe in line with the fantasies, hallucinations, and projections of its creator. Like Jarry's pataphysics, Baudrillard's universe is ruled by surprise, reversal, hallucination, blasphemy, obscenity, and a desire to shock and outrage.

Thus, in view of the growing supremacy of the object, Baudrillard wants us to abandon the subject and to side with the object. Pataphysics aside, it seems that Baudrillard is trying to end the philosophy of subjectivity that has controlled French thought since Descartes by going over completely to the other side. Descartes' *malin genie*, his evil genius, was a ruse of the subject which tried to seduce him into accepting what was not clear and distinct, but over which he was ultimately able to prevail. Baudrillard's evil genius is the object itself which is much more malign than the merely epistemological deceptions of the subject faced by Descartes and which constitutes a fatal destiny for us that demands the end of the philosophy of subjectivity. Henceforth, for Baudrillard, we live in the era of the reign of the object.

During the 1990s, Baudrillard has published *The Transparency of Evil* and *La fin d'une illusion*, which continue his excursions into the metaphysics of the object and defeat of the subject. Collecting occasional papers during the period, the books continue to postulate a break or rupture within history that conceptualizes the space of a postmodern *coupure*, though Baudrillard rarely uses the discourse of the postmodern himself. He also published a second collection of his notebooks, *Cool Memories II* (1990), and a book that claimed that the Gulf war never happened, *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu* (1991), a text discussed by Der Derian and Bogard in this collection.²³

These texts continue the fragmentary style and use of short essays, aphorisms, stories, and aperçus, that Baudrillard began deploying in the 1980s and often repeat some of the same ideas and stories. They contain few new ideas or perspectives, but are often entertaining. And so, we come, to another use-value of Baudrillard: humor and amusement. It is often simply amusing to read Baudrillard. Baudrillard – pataphysician at twenty – remains so and perhaps one should not take him all that seriously.²⁴ Or, rather, while one can read him as deadly serious, one can also read him ironically, as a grand joke on social theory and cultural criticism. One can thus either read Baudrillard as a form of science fiction and pataphysics or a form of serious social theory and cultural metaphysics. It is undecidable what Baudrillard's texts really are and it is sometimes useful to read him as making genuine and important contributions to social theory, while at other times one can enjoy the irony, cynicism, humor, and pataphysical metaphysics. Baudrillard himself, it seems, wants it both ways and thus opens the way for either a serious or a non-serious reading.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

It would be a mistake, however, to reduce Baudrillard to pataphysics, or to a merely aesthetic irritation to social theory,²⁵ for his themes are some

of the most serious, frightening, and important issues that we are now confronting. As noted, sometimes Baudrillard writes as if he is revealing the "real" conditions of our times, is articulating fundamental changes and novelties, and he is celebrated by some of his enthusiasts as a high-tech avant-garde thinker who is confronting salient, if disturbing, realities of our time.

On this reading, Baudrillard is *the* theorist of the fin-de-millennium who produces sign-posts to the new era of postmodernity and is an important guide to the new era. Yet in view of his exaggeration of the alleged break with modernity, whether to read Baudrillard's work as science fiction or social theory, as pataphysics or metaphysics, is undecidable. Baudrillard obviously wants to have it both ways with social theorists thinking that he provides salient perspectives on contemporary social realities, that Baudrillard reveals what is really happening, that he tells it like it is. And yet more cynical anti-sociologists are encouraged to enjoy Baudrillard's fictions, his experimental discourse, his games, and his play. Likewise, he sometimes encourages cultural metaphysicians to read his work as serious reflections on the realities of our time, while winking a pataphysical aside at those skeptical of such undertakings. Thus, it is undecidable whether Baudrillard is best read as science fiction and pataphysics or as social theory.

Likewise, it is undecidable whether his work should be read under the sign of truth or fiction. Curiously, Baudrillard's most recent works respond to some of the criticisms of his earlier texts, but in an often-ambiguous way that makes concessions and then proceeds to replicate his earlier positions. For example, in a 1992 lecture delivered at Essex University published in May 1993, Baudrillard says that his reflections on America are "basically a *fiction*" and he admits that his "point of view will therefore be that of a wild amateurism and a sort of cultural metaphysics," because he is not qualified to talk "about the economic, political or juridical aspects of America."²⁶ Yet he then repeats many of the questionable allegations about the United States and adds some new zingers. Baudrillard will thus no doubt continue to provoke controversy and debate and for this reason critical reception of his thought is essential.

IN THIS READER

In my first publication on Baudrillard in 1987, I called for the necessity of reading Baudrillard critically in the light of the emulation and celebration of his ideas by his many devotees in an uncritical fashion.²⁷ Since then, the critical discourse on Baudrillard has proliferated dramatically, though many of the critiques are one-dimensional dismissals of his work that have refused to seriously confront his challenges and provocations. The articles collected here, however, undertake serious critiques that enter into the

heart of his problematic, think specific phenomena with Baudrillard, and then criticize him for his limitations and blindspots. Moreover, much of the voluminous literature on Baudrillard either celebrates or damns him, often in extremely general ways.

The contributors to this volume, however, appraise Baudrillard's work in terms of specific areas and topics of concern, and point out both the strengths and limitations of his thought in relation to specific topics and problems. Mark Gottdiener analyzes Baudrillard's early attempts to merge Marxism and semiology in his late 1960s and early 1970s writings. Steven Best defends Debord's neo-Marxism against Baudrillard and critically examines some of the key concepts of Baudrillard's postmodern theory, while showing that the later Debord ends up by adopting Baudrillardian positions. Mark Poster, by contrast, lays out Baudrillard's critique and challenges to the Marxian theory and defends Baudrillard against Habermas's version of critical theory.

A series of studies then examines the relevance of Baudrillard's theories in examining important contemporary disciplines and topics. Kim Sawchuk shows how Baudrillard's concepts can be used to illuminate the phenomena of marketing and telecommunications, probing both the contributions and limitations of his work. Likewise, Efrat Tseelon examines Baudrillard's contributions to the study of fashion and signification, while Jonathan and Margarete Epstein indicate Baudrillard's contribution to a neo-formalist sociological theory of the media, a project anticipated by Simmel's sociology and McLuhan's media theory. Deborah Cook in turn provides a critical look at the analyses of media reception by Baudrillard and John Fiske, who has been a prolific and influential player in the booming field of cultural studies. Sara Schoonmaker criticizes Baudrillard's analyses of contemporary capitalism via concrete studies of electronic data transmission and political debates over its regulation. While noting the importance of Baudrillard's focus on computers and information, Schoonmaker argues that Baudrillard's theory leaves out crucial components of the contemporary form of global capitalism. Defending Baudrillard's concept of simulation, James Der Derian argues for the usefulness of Baudrillard's theory in analyzing contemporary forms of military technology and the technological/military forms of global capitalism.

Baudrillard has also deeply influenced contemporary cultural production and Timothy Luke examines Baudrillard's contributions to analysis of contemporary art and presents critical perspectives on his notions of aesthetic production and cultural politics. Nicholas Zurbrugg examines Baudrillard's interventions in the debates over modernism and postmodernism, arguing that Baudrillard's own textual productions are deeply informed by high modernism. Zurbrugg demonstrates some of the ways that Baudrillard combines modern and postmodern strategies and is best interpreted as somewhere between the modern and the postmodern.

A concluding set of essays reflect on the entirety of Baudrillard's work and influence, with focus on specific themes. Keith Goshorn analyzes Baudrillard's feminist provocations and attempts to indicate some of the ways that Baudrillard's thought can be productive for feminist theory, as well as to indicate some of the areas where Baudrillard's work would benefit from appropriation of feminist insights. Gary Genosko interrogates the theatricality of Baudrillard's literary productions and the drama of objects in his later works, which Genosko sees as playing out some of the themes of Artaud and other contemporary dramatists. William Bogard provides a set of philosophical/sociological reflections on Baudrillard's musings on history, time, and the end, defending Baudrillard against some of his critics.²⁸

Together, these essays point to some areas in which Baudrillard's thought has proved to be of use in the contemporary era. Baudrillard is a highly controversial figure who excels in provocation. Influenced by modernist movements like Dada and pataphysics, Baudrillard loves to shock and outrage. Some of his antics are highly amusing and provide a level of entertainment rarely found in social theory and criticism. Some of his provocations are silly and offensive, and thus he has evoked a strong critical reaction. Consequently, a reader on Baudrillard must necessarily be a *critical reader* to distinguish the useless from the worthless, the valuable from the foolish, the important from the unimportant elements of Baudrillard's work. As we approach the end of the century, and perhaps the end of a millennium of human history (i.e., modernity), we need new theories to help us make sense of the dramatic and frightening changes that we are undergoing. Baudrillard can help us with this enterprise and thus he is of use in developing new theories and politics for the contemporary era. He can also be an obstacle and cul-de-sac, so we need to learn to read Baudrillard critically in order to appropriate his insights and avoid his limitations.

Notes

- 1 Baudrillard's early works include *Le système des objets* (Paris: Denoel-Gonthier, 1968); *La société de consommation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); and *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972; translated as *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981). For an overview of Baudrillard's theoretical and political trajectory, see Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Cambridge and Stanford: Polity Press and Stanford University Press, 1989). In this Introduction, I draw on my previous work, but will focus on the use-value of Baudrillard's writings, whereas previously I have often emphasized its limitations, especially of the later work.
- 2 These important works that articulate a postmodern turn in contemporary

society include *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976; translated as *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, London: Sage, 1993); *L'effet Beauvoir: Implosion et dissuasion* (Paris: Galilée, 1977); translated in *October*, 20 (Spring 1982), pp. 3–13; *Oublier Foucault* (Paris: Galilée, 1977); translated as *Forget Foucault* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1987); *A l'ombre des majorités silencieuses, ou La fin du social* (Fontenay-Sous-Bois: Cahiers d'Utopie, 1978); translated as *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); *De la séduction* (Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1979); translated as *Seduction* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1990); *Simulacres et simulation*, Paris: Galilée, 1981); *Les stratégies fatales*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1983, translated as *Fatal Strategies* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990); "The Ecstasy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed., Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 126–34; and *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

- 3 See, especially, Baudrillard, *Critique*.
- 4 On cultural entrepreneurs and the promotion of the postmodern, see Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), pp. viiff, passim. On the competing discourses of the postmodern, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (London and New York: Macmillan Press and Guilford Press, 1991). Arthur Kroker and his associates have probably done the most to exploit Baudrillard as the key to the new postmodern universe, while Mike Gane has sought to dissociate Baudrillard from this problematic, allowing Gane to present himself as the true interpreter of Baudrillard's secrets and mana. I shall challenge Gane's readings of Baudrillard in this introduction.
- 5 Jean Baudrillard, *Baudrillard Live*, ed. Mike Gane (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 19.
- 6 See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962); *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968); *System of Fashion* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red Press, 1970); and Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). Steven Best's article in this collection explains the basic conceptions of Debord and the situationists and their critique of everyday life.
- 7 Baudrillard, *Système des objets*, p. 18.
- 8 Baudrillard, "Ecstasy of Communication," p. 126. As we shall see below, Baudrillard will describe this modern world as one that is passing away to a new postmodern world.
- 9 Gottdiener and Tseïlon explore this phase of Baudrillard's thought and Sawchuk argues that in the postmodern world of marketing and telecommunications a new mode of social integration is coming into being.
- 10 Although there will be some dramatic shifts in Baudrillard's optic, he will continue to explore the life of objects and signs in society, thus there is a certain continuity to his work, despite some dramatic discontinuities.
- 11 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), translated by Iain Hamilton Grant, with an introduction by Mike Gane. Gane's introduction, as I shall argue below, fundamentally misrepresents this key text and thus blocks perception of its radicality and importance.

- 12 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 20 (page references that follow in the text are from the original French edition and the translations are mine).
- 13 See Baudrillard's *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*.
- 14 Baudrillard elucidates this paradoxical conception in *Fatal Strategies* (1983), a notion discussed below in the articles by Cook, Genosko, Bogard, and others.
- 15 Gane's "books" are not really books at all, but series of fragments that poorly summarize his master's works, obsessively attack Baudrillard's critics, and fail to provide any innovative or illuminating perspectives of his own on Baudrillard. Baudrillard. *Critical and Fatal Strategies* (London: Routledge, 1991), the first of his texts on Baudrillard, claims to provide "essential background and context," but does so in terms of banal summaries of other players in the French theory scene, with no really illuminating analysis of Baudrillard's relation to these theories, or of his theoretical and political context. Gane then offers some highly tendentious readings of Baudrillard's relation to postmodernism, Marxism, and feminism, which are probably incomprehensible to those who are unfamiliar with Baudrillard's texts, and without establishing any positions of his own. Next, Gane offers banal summaries of some of Baudrillard's texts, omitting sustained discussion of his key text, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the exposition of which takes up much of Gane's next "book," *Baudrillard's Bestiary* (London: Routledge, 1991). The follow-up claims it will be an "essential guide to Baudrillard as a cultural critic," but merely provides more trite and opaque summaries of Baudrillard's social analysis, with no useful interpretive theses, few original insights, and little focus on Baudrillard as a cultural critic.
- 16 In previous work, I argued for the need to distinguish different family concepts in the discourse of the postmodern, distinguishing between: (1) modernity and postmodernity as historical epochs; (2) modernism and postmodernism as forms of art; and (3) modern and postmodern theory as two opposed modes of theoretical discourse and practice. See my article, "Postmodernism as Social Theory: Some Problems and Challenges," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 5, 2-3 (June 1988) 240-69, and Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*. Of course, these terms are often interrelated in specific postmodern theorists and artists, but one should be able to at least make such analytical distinctions to avoid the muddle, evident in Gane, in which "postmodernism" refers to everything and nothing.
- 17 Baudrillard, "On Nihilism," *On the Beach*, 6 (Spring 1984) 38. Subsequent page references in text.
- 18 Gane claims that my interpretation of Baudrillard as a theorist of the postmodern rests on one minor article and two interviews, whereas I am claiming that such major works as *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, *Forget Foucault*, "The Beauborg Effect," *In the Shadows of the Silent Majorities*, *Simulations et simulacra*, "Ecstasy of Communications," and other writings articulate a break between modern and postmodern epochs. While Baudrillard himself rarely adopted the discourse of the postmodern to explain this break, he did on occasion, and in any case his texts articulate a postmodern break, describe the disappearance of modernity and the modern, and systematically deploy the discourse of the "no longer" and "no more." Later, Baudrillard

would distance himself from the game of postmodernism, but can legitimately be interpreted as a theorist of the postmodern, and I would argue that much of his importance derives from precisely that problematic – as do some significant limitations and problems in his thought.

- 19 See Gane, *Baudrillard*, pp. 46, 47, and passim.
- 20 Baudrillard's celebration of seduction, his essentializing of differences between the masculine and the feminine, and his attacks on feminism and other progressive ideologies are close to the positions of Camille Paglia, though there are also obvious differences, such as Paglia's more naturalistic celebration of sexuality; see *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1992).
- 21 *Les stratégies fatales*, pp. 259–60.
- 22 Alfred Jarry, "What is Pataphysics?," in *Evergreen Review*, 13 (May-June 1960) 131ff. See also Jarry, *The Ubu Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1969).
- 23 Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1993 [1990]); *Cool Memories II* (Paris: Galilée, 1990); *La guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu* (Paris: Galilée, 1991); and *La fin d'une illusion* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).
- 24 In *Cool Memories II*, Baudrillard describes himself as "pataphysician at twenty – situationist at thirty – utopian at forty – transversal at fifty – viral and metaleptic at sixty – that's my history" (p. 131).
- 25 This position was hinted at in Gane's first book *Baudrillard. Critical and Fatal Strategies* where Gane occasionally presents Baudrillard as an "artist" interested in the poetics of social forms, but – consistent with his minimalist anti-hermeneutics – Gane never really works this position out.
- 26 Jean Baudrillard, "Hyperreal America," *Economy and Society*, 22, 2 (May 1993) 243–52.
- 27 See Douglas Kellner, "Baudrillard, Semiurgy, and Death," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, IV (1987) 124–46.
- 28 I would like to thank the contributors to this volume for responding in productive ways to the criticisms that I offered, often through several drafts. Special thanks to Jon and Margarete Epstein for providing computer-generated illustrations to the book. And thanks to Sheila Dallas for superb copy-editing and to Simon Prosser for helping to formulate the conception of the book and to advance the text smoothly through the production process.