

**Entry on Jean Baudrillard by Douglas Kellner (<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>)**

While Baudrillard was trained as a Germanist and translated Germany literary works including Brecht and Peter Weiss, he has not really engaged in literary criticism or theorized literature as a specific cultural form. Baudrillard became renowned for his theorizations of developments in contemporary society, including development of the consumer society, media and technology, cyberspace and the information society, and biotechnology that he claimed had produced a postmodern rupture with modern culture and society. While modern societies for Baudrillard were organized around production and political economy, postmodern societies were organized around technology and generated new forms of culture, experience and subjectivities.

Baudrillard's work is highly literary and especially since the 1980s he has produced an increasingly literary mode of thought and writing. Baudrillard frequently cites his favorite writers and in his earlier works, Georges Bataille was a privileged source (though Baudrillard appeared to be more influenced by Bataille's theoretical writings than his literary ones). During his postmodern period, there were frequent references to Juan Luis Borges, J.G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick and science fiction as a genre. For Baudrillard, the world was becoming increasingly fictionalized and the great SF writers anticipated the radical changes brought about by science and technology. Borges developed a genre of creating alternative literary worlds that Baudrillard adapted to present the alterity and novelty of the contemporary world.

In The Fatal Strategies and succeeding writings, Baudrillard seems to be taking theory into the realm of metaphysics, but it is a specific type of metaphysics deeply inspired by the pataphysics developed by Alfred Jarry, as "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.... (Jarry 1967: 131).

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). Like Jarry's pataphysics, Baudrillard's universe is ruled by surprise, reversal, hallucination, blasphemy, obscenity, and a desire to shock and outrage.

In his increasingly literary and philosophical writings from the 1980s to the present, Baudrillard develops what he terms "theory fiction," or what he also calls "simulation theory" and "anticipatory theory." Such "theory" intends to simulate, grasp, and anticipate historical events, that he believes are continually outstripping all contemporary theory. The current situation, he claims, is more fantastic than the most fanciful science fiction, or theoretical projections of a futurist society. Thus, theory can only attempt to grasp the present on the run and try to anticipate the future.

While in his earlier work, Baudrillard identified with the revolutionary left and supported the May 1968 student movement in France, he became increasingly nihilistic and apolitical in his

later work. This post-1980s work arguably 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 cyberpunk. Baudrillard's post-1970s work can thus be read as science fiction that anticipates the future by exaggerating present tendencies, and provides early warnings about what might happen if present trends continue. It is not an accident that Baudrillard is an aficionado of science fiction, who has himself influenced a large number of contemporary science fiction writers, for much of his best work challenges the imagination, much as good literature.

### Selected Bibliography

Kellner 1989 and 1994;

Baudrillard, Simulations; In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities; America; Cool Memories; Fatal Strategies. New York: Semiotext(e); Symbolic Exchange and Death; The Transparency of Evil; The Illusion of the End. Oxford: Polity Press.