



Baudrillard was deeply influenced by this new 'science' of Semiology, which sought to study the system of language and the 'life of signs within society'.

In semiotics, a sign can be interpreted subjectively, the meaning being something beyond or other than itself. This sign is therefore able to communicate information to the person reading or decoding the sign. Baudrillard builds on the Saussurian dyadic, two-part model of the sign, where the sign is seen as being composed of a signifier (signifiant)- the form that the sign takes, and the signified (signifié)- the concept it represents. Baudrillard's work on the political economy of the sign attempts to marry semiological and neo-Marxist perspectives, providing an important insight into the power of production and the behavior of consumers.

Baudrillard uses simulation in a bewildering variety of ways, but often seems to mean by it little more than a generalized realm of reproductions, images, representations and models. Baudrillard has elaborated the concept in his book *Simulations* (1981). He cites the examples of simulations as Disneyland, psychosomatic illness, America's Watergate scandal, and hijacks. Ward (1997) makes the meaning of simulation very simple:

Dictionaries link simulation to the fake, the counterfeit, and the inauthentic. Baudrillard retains these meanings to a certain extent, but pushes them considerably further, so that simulation can no longer be seen clearly as the opposite of truth. We might naturally assume that simulation either duplicates or is emitted by a pre-given real.

In this sense we might think that simulation and reality have a necessary attachment to each other. But, for Baudrillard, this connection has long since snapped, so that simulation can no longer be taken as either an imitation or distortion of reality, or as a copy of an original.

In Baudrillard's dizzying cosmos there is no firm pure reality left against which we can measure the truth or falsity of a representation, and electronic reproduction has gone so far that the notion of originality is (or ought to be) irrelevant.

Baudrillard looks at the postmodern society with the perspective of simulations which deny the existence of reality and hyper reality. Baudrillard says that "we have moved from a capitalist-productivity society to a neo-capitalist cybernetic order that aims at total control".

Though, like other postmodernists, Baudrillard is against metanarratives, he creates and constructs his own postmodern metanarratives of the phases of images or simulations. These phases or orders of simulations have perfect historical depth. In this respect, they are like metanarratives of sociological theory. He gives four phases or stages of simulations and hyper reality. These are in historical succession and described below:

The first order: The image is the reflection of reality:

In the beginning, from enlightenment to the emergence of industrial revolutions, there were simulations. Durkheim talked about collective representations, which consisted of collective conscience and repressive laws. These were found in the society which had mechanical solidarity. Such societies were primitive ones.

Baudrillard says that in their evolution of first phase or order, the simulations represented the reality of society.

There was no gap between reality and image. Originality was represented in an authentic form by the images. If there was portrait of a man, all fleshy curves were depicted. In India, the Sanskrit poet Kalidas described the image of Shakuntala with all reality of the body of a woman.

Or, in the *Pandvani* – the folk drama of the tribals of Madhya Pradesh, reality is never locked behind the imageries.

At the first order of simulations, images were not supposed to control the society. There were only pieces of art, aesthetics and recreation.

The second order: The image disguises or conceals reality:

At this stage, industrial society gets mature. It is characterized by production of the scale of Fordism. Baudrillard says that the images or simulations during their second phase of development reproduce identical objects. There is reproduction of a motor car, a refrigerator. The reproduction at this stage is the repetition of the same object. Furthermore, there is no need to counterfeit in the industrial era since the products are made on a massive scale and there is no issue of their origin or specificity. The simulations in this order misuse or corrupt the reality. There is always a place to play corrupt to the basic reality. It is the period of late modernity.

The third order: There is total absence of reality:

At this stage of society, postmodernity emerges. This society is dominated by codes, signs and images. It is the society actually controlled and dominated by simulations. In the contemporary simulation society we have demonstrable examples to show that the line between simulation and reality has been erased.

Baudrillard says that there is no way of identifying a real which exists outside of simulation, because we live in a society which is structured according to all sorts of beliefs, ideals and blueprints. In short, reality is structured according to codes. Some codes are manifested indirectly in political ways – in the drafting of bills, the creation and enforcing of law, and so on.

Some are inscribed into concrete intuitional – education, industry and prisons, for examples, others appear in less obvious ways – such as entertainment media, consumer goods, architecture and designed environments. Still more show themselves in the constant surveys, polls and questionnaires which classify the population according to their consumption patterns, income brackets, sexual orientations, and so forth.

In his book *America* (1986), Baudrillard says that simulations in this country are considered more than reality. They are, in fact, hyper-real. Simulations for American society precede the real in the sense that they produce the real social order in which all the Americans participate. And all can be said to feel the sense that they affect real people.

It is now impossible to isolate the processes of the real or to prove the real ... all hold ups and the like are now as it were simulations ... inscribed in advance in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media. Baudrillard says that even our day-to-day needs are structured by signs and images. To some extent this structuring has come to India also where a few parts of the country are near postmodernity. When we go for food shopping, we choose between designer foods, health foods, exotic foods, saline-link foods, luxury foods, natural foods, traditional foods, convenience foods and ethnic foods.

Others are 'fast foods' and 'junk foods'. Out of these foods, we choose the ones, which suit to our image. Perhaps, our image is that of the film actress Kajol or the cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar. Recently, a cosmetic manufacturing company has come out with a variety of cosmetic items which it claims are favourites for film actress, Madhuri Dixit.

These items have made Madhuri Dixit as she looks and as she is presented by the media. And, yet another image is of Sachin Tendulkar, the World Cup cricketer, whose image is sold for anything through media, ranging from biscuit to motor tyre, car, motor bikes, cold drinks, tooth paste and even gutkha. All these examples show that we respond to images thrown by the media. We are nothing more than a type.

In the third order simulations, there is total absence of reality. In the industrial society, production was dominant. It was the production which controlled the society. This has changed the neo-cybernetic capitalist society. Now, instead of production, reproduction controls the society.

Baudrillard's observations in this respects are given below:

We know that now it is on the level of reproduction (fashion, media, publicity, information and communication networks) as the level which Marx negligently called the non-essential sectors of capital... that is to say in the sphere of simulacra and of the code, that the global process of capital is founded.

Baudrillard very strongly argues that the third order simulations are the strongest means of social control in the contemporary postmodern society. He cites the examples of referendums, political polls and public opinions. In referendum, the answers are designed in advance by the questions. All the alternatives in the answers are reduced to a binary code with DNA serving as the prototype of this.

Actually, the structured answers serve to short circuit genuine discourse. The public opinion that emerges from such referenda is a simulation and is hyper-real, more real than people's beliefs. Polls represent nothing because as we have seen, the masses respond with simulated replies.

Baudrillard interprets:

We record everything, but we don't believe it, because we have become screens ourselves, and we can ask a screen to believe what it records. To simulation we reply by simulation, we have ourselves become systems of simulation.

It is this that makes good, old, critical and ironical judgment no longer possible there is no longer a universe of reference polls will never represent anything.

Baudrillard further asserts that "the distortions associated with polls are part of a broader set of distortions, which means that even with non-stop polling total uncertainty will never be lifted". Quite like political polls, public opinion is also a simulation. Public opinion polls lead respondents to reproduce what the pollsters are seeking; respondents do not produce opinions of their own.

Baudrillard says that "it is impossible to obtain a non-simulated response to a direct question, apart from merely reproducing the question ... there is total circularity in every case, those questioned always behave as the questioner imagines they will and solicits them to ... just hot air". Concluding his comments on the role of simulations as methods of social control, Baudrillard says that referenda, polls and elections are examples of soft technologies of control.

The fourth order: There is no relation to any reality:

Baudrillard argues that today the American and European societies have reached at a stage, which is "fractal, viral, or cancerous". There is an endless proliferation. Everything, from DNA to AIDS to television images, follows this pattern.

What is special about this pattern of postmodern culture is that there is end of difference. Baudrillard labels it as a "culture characterized by trans-political, transsexual, and trans-aesthetic attributes. In other words, everything is political, sexual and aesthetic, and as a result, nothing is political, sexual and aesthetic". What is worse, all these aspects of culture are interpreted by the media. Commenting on the present situation of postmodern culture as presented by Baudrillard, Ritzer (1997) writes:

Art is proliferating, but in the process it is losing its distinctive qualities, especially its capacity to negate and oppose reality. Thus, there is trans-sexuality, involving the elimination of sexual difference, our new model of sexuality. Trans-sexuality can be achieved surgically, but more importantly it can be achieved semiotically (that is, by signs). Baudrillard says that the culture makes all efforts to remove the differentiation between gender. In fact, negativity has been banished by this culture. Take the case of our country. Day in and day out the TV serials present their image of women deprived of many of the differences in gender in the realm of food habits, dress pattern, mannerism and lifestyle. There is abundance of positivity. Baudrillard says that "the lack of differentiation in sexuality and lifestyle leaves us in a world resembling the smile of a corpse in a funeral home".

Baudrillard further exemplifies his point of view and says that at the fourth order of simulation there is no relation to any reality whatever, it is its own pure simulation. Here, there is perfect hyper-reality. In this fourth order all efforts are made to negate the differences and there is jogging, weight training, aerobics, body piercing and adventure holidays for all, regardless of sex.

The fourth order is characterized by private life going public in talk shows, digital special effects, songs, ads and self-help manuals which implore you to find yourself, do it your way, express yourself, unlock the real you, and find your inner child. Ward (1997) has summarized the fourth order of simulation in a very effective way as under: Baudrillard claims that when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia is its full meaning.... We manufacture the real because of simulations. So once again we find that the real is not so much given as produced which basically means that we cannot win.

Baudrillard has discussed the simulation society with all details. "At this fourth stage of the development of simulations we are at a point where we suffer from cancer and viruses. These viruses are of social nature. Our efforts to eliminate all negativity have left us with a declining ability to defend ourselves.

We are vulnerable as the 'boy in the rubble' was to germs. Like the AIDS' patient, we are all becoming immune deficient. Because our defenses have disappeared, we are coming to be destroyed by our own antibodies, by the leukemia of the organism." Thus, to Baudrillard, "our total prophylaxis is lethal".

In the beginning of his academic career Baudrillard was heavily influenced by Marxian perspective. It is in his later part of life that he disagreed with him. In fact, he has tried to pick up the areas, which Marx had left out. For instance, Marx developed his theory on production relations. He talked about dialectical materialism, class war and alienation.

He did not consider cultural factors as vital to economic organism. Baudrillard took up the issue of consumption for his analysis. What is particular about Baudrillard is that he focuses on culture emerging from simulations, TV and other sources of media through the Marxian perspective of economic and material processes.

He argues that postmodern culture is basically rooted in economic organization. And, this leads him to conclude that the postmodern simulation society is ultimately a consumer society.

Baudrillard remains in many senses on the ground of Marxian theory, giving more weight to economic and material

processes in cultural analysis than other Marxists of this period.

Baudrillard's consumerism: Influence of Karl Marx:

Marx's analysis of industrialization and capitalism has influenced countless social scientists throughout the 20th century. It is interesting to note that a large number of postmodernists have been influenced by Marx and his ideas. Some of the Marx's ideas which have been picked up and developed by Baudrillard are discussed here. This will help us to put his consumer society in proper theoretical perspective.

With the onset of industrialism, there was a search for labour, raw material and new markets. Marx looked at this, but recognized in it a potential for improving the material comforts of people's lives. Modernity was far from all bad; it had a great capacity for improving people's standards of living. Yet, Marx also recognized that the innovations of modernity were propelled by the capitalist economic system, and he was deeply critical of this. Marx was a historical materialist. In other words, he believed that all societies in history could only be understood in the way they organized people's labour (Marx defined labour as the natural interaction of human beings with their environment). In all societies, people's lives are defined by labour.

Marx believed that labouring under capitalism in a particularly immoral way was unwanted. The basis of his critique was that, under capitalism, all aspects of culture were determined by economic forces and that the overall effect of this was dehumanization and impoverishment of creativity. Marx believed:

In order to buy what they need to live, people have to sell their power (their capacity to work) for wages. Their labour is bought and sold as a commodity: a price tag is attached to everybody. Everyone is just a means of making profit.

Marx argued that labour for exchange has never been a fair deal. The employers need workers to create wealth far in excess of their basic requirements. So, only a fraction of the working week is spent replacing the value of wages. The rest is a surplus amount of work which generates wealth for the capitalist. This is exploitation.

In a capitalist society, the goods produced by the labour have their use value taken away from them and replaced with exchange value. Under the dominance of the market, it is not what things mean or what real purpose they serve but how much they are worth. Everything becomes equivalent to money.

Money, and not face-to-face communication, now acts as the crucial social bond. Marx, in his analysis of exchange value, argues that there is a class between the needs of the workers and the capitalist system. The result of this clash is the class struggle. This will lead to revolution.

Baudrillard analyzes Marx's theory of capitalist society at two levels:

(1) The economic level: It consists of production and distribution of goods.

(2) The cultural superstructure level: It consists of arts, religion, shopping, entertainment, language and party politics.

Simulations and consumerism:

Baudrillard developed his theory of simulations and consumerism out of his dialogue with Marxism. Marx was critical of modernity and its product capitalism. He was optimistic about the victory of working class. But, painfully, it did not happen. Baudrillard, along with other left-oriented thinkers of his generation, thought that the west was not willing to overthrow the capitalist system.

In such a situation it seemed to him that Marx had to be made up-to-date. Marx had now to account for contemporary developments in information technology, consumerism, growth of the leisure industry and multinational corporations. He argued that we are now in a period of super-modernity, hypermodernity, late modernity and postmodernity. Marx needs to be souped up accordingly.

In the earlier periods of his academic life, as stated earlier, Baudrillard was very much in agreement with Marx. Among the simple societies – primitives, there was prevalence of abstract values. They had a system of symbolic exchange. The system of gift-giving, religious rituals and festivals were marked among the tribals by symbolic exchange.

This was characteristic of pre-capitalist society. But this changed, and the symbolic exchange was replaced by economic exchange. Marx considered it to be the replacement of abstract value by real values. Baudrillard, in the beginning, agreed with Marx that the expansion of capitalism had brought about fundamental social changes.

While advocating consumerism, Baudrillard in his later-day works, differs from Marx on the following points:

(1) There has been a transition from a society of production to one of reproduction. Images and information are now more important than solid commodities.

(2) The cultural superstructure has power of its own. It is not just a passive reflection of whatever happens in the economic base.

(3) Consumerism might be more important than Marx's modes and relations of production.

Baudrillard's disagreement with Marx has given a new turn to Marx's theory. Now, it has become clear that factors of political oppression are not located in any one specific group, place, or action. Nor oppression comes only through economic organization. Power is present everywhere. It soaks into everything. No wonder, we cannot rely on the workers to spontaneously unite in revolt.

Characteristics of consumer society:

At the base of consumer society, there is a substantial communication system. It is through this system that the media float a large number of signs and images. These signs and images constitute simulations. Baudrillard's thesis is that the commodities of market are nothing in themselves, they are known by the signs and therefore the consumers actually purchase the signs.