

from the various Central American wars sponsored by the United States government.

This is clearly not a book about post-modernism. For Davis, history has not ended and a story can still be told. Nonetheless, this book is not composed as a single narrative, but is a series of smaller stories each working in its own different way. Los Angeles is clearly many different places. The final chapter – the book as a whole has no conclusion – tells the story of Fontana, 60 miles east of Los Angeles. The area was first marketed as franchise citrus and chicken farms. It was doing well when Henry J. Kaiser moved in with a steel plant to supply his wartime shipyards. The coke fumes killed off the orange trees but Kaiser Steel was a paradigm of the postwar partnership between unionized labour, government and business. Black workers were kept in the dirtiest jobs in the steel plant and the worst part of town. To enforce this, in December 1945, the KKK soaked the home of a

black activist in coal oil and set it on fire. The entire family died in agony.

In December 1983 the last fires of the steel plant itself cooled. The plant closed, a victim of under-investment, competition from the Japanese steel industry and a final sharp Reagan-era takeover bid. However, Fontana didn't become another town like Flint, Michigan. It rose from the ashes as a new community of middle-class commuters. Mind you, it took creative financing and quite a bit of effort to overcome its gritty image problem. Along with this development came the rebirth of the KKK in Fontana the same year that the steel plant closed. The 1988 Martin Luther King birthday celebrations had to be protected by 120 cops as Klansmen shouted: "Long live the Klan. Long live the white boys." ♦

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GARY GENOSKO

The Bar of Theory

**Jean Baudrillard:
From Marxism to
Postmodernism and
Beyond**
by Douglas Kellner

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989,
246 pp.

Kellner's *Baudrillard* has not been kindly received. It has come under attack in the pages of *Telos*, *Economy and Society*, and the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*. Rather than rehearsing these criticisms here, I will take a different tack.

A glance at the literature on Baudrillard published by English speaking critical theorists (some of whom take the prefix "neo-") provides insight into the ironies of Baudrillard scholarship. Aside from the illustrated Baudrillard of the art magazines and the pleasing diversions of the panic readers, the critical theory literature constitutes the major "tradition."

There are numerous papers and chapters on Baudrillard's relation to Marx. In general, there is as much banality as there is innovation with respect to the way that Baudrillard is positioned in this relation. For instance, the Marx-Debord-Baudrillard trajectory is as obvious as it is popular to repeat, while an investigation of Baudrillard's debts to Marshall McLuhan, Herbert Marcuse, Henri Lefebvre, the Arguments group, his role in the review, *Utopie*, his early translations of Peter Weiss, Bertolt Brecht and Fredrich Engels are less well known, if they are mentioned at all.

Among critical theorists, however, there is no agreement on whether or not Baudrillard has what might be called, generously or otherwise, a sense of counterpraxis, an oppositional strategy. Baudrillard's idea of hyperconformist simulation has proved to be undecidable. This undecidability can neither be reduced to the strength of Baudrillard's use of paradox, nor does it arise from the collapse of a unified critical perspective, with all of the nostalgia for the unity of the past. It is, to be sure, a situation that Kellner has chosen not to recognize. He is firm in his belief that Baudrillard offers no strategic-political alternative. While this position is not lacking in politico-textual

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audrillard has consistently argued against "semiological dandyism," even though Kellner insists on pinning this label on him.

savvy, it is one which not only refuses contextualization, and thus obscures several acts of the Baudrillard "scene," but operates on a level too abstract to appreciate the effectiveness of such notions as hyperconformity on the tactical level. Kellner makes no distinction between the strategic and the tactical, and this is the kind of omission that I will build on.

Kellner never tires of repeating that Baudrillard has no subject who might valorize itself in a given sphere, such as Michel de Certeau describes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, a work which Kellner repeatedly valorizes without interrogating its claims. For Certeau, consumption is a sphere of self-valorization, although only on the tactical level, as Kellner omits. When he comes to consider hyperconformity, Kellner refuses to afford it any strategic value and looks to Certeau for an alternative. Any operation such as Certeau's *la perruque* or "ripping off" time and materials from one's employer for personal ends, or even Baudrillard's use of Freud's Witz as a means of short-circuiting signification and establishing a potlatch of laughter and the exchange of stories and jokes (the techniques of which give pleasure in themselves), may be seen as tactical. In a way, and in spite of himself, Kellner confirms the tactical viability of several of Baudrillard's notions (given their similarity with those of Certeau) by enabling us to appreciate the ways of the tactical. With respect to hyperconformity, consider the brilliant ruse unfolded in Hirose Takashi's *Nuclear Power Plants in Tokyo*. By hyperconforming to the propaganda of the nuclear industry, Takashi's eco-peace group forced an admission of the dangers of nuclear energy from the industry by means of the convincing simulation of the



possibility of constructing nuclear power stations in downtown Tokyo. This tactical victory, based on the principle of what one might call a homolopathic exaggeration, did not pretend to put an end to the nuclear problem in Japan. Such is the local wiliness of the tactical. Kellner will make a similar mistake with respect to his use of the work of Roland Barthes.

In the critical theory tradition, semiology remains somewhat of a mystery. Such a claim might be ignored or taken as evidence of the ongoing standoff between semiology and critical theory if Baudrillard had nothing to do with semiology and Kellner did not call on the spirit of Adorno in his book on Baudrillard. No such excuses are available. In fact, one of Baudrillard's most consistent concerns has been with the continental semiological tradition. There is room for a paper on Baudrillard's Saussure, but one will not find it here.

It is evident from the beginning of Kellner's *Baudrillard* when he speaks of the "French semiologist Ferdinand de Saussure" (Saussure was Swiss and a linguist who dreamt of a science of signs) that the presentation of semiology will be, let us say, brittle. Consider Kellner's use of Barthes as a thinker who, unlike Baudril-

lard, has a multiplex theory of the code; whereas Baudrillard, thinks Kellner, has a monolithic code and relies inappropriately upon a model of language. Barthes's much commented upon glotto-centrism which arose from his inversion of Saussure's idea that linguistics would be a branch of a general science of signs (for Barthes, semiology was instead absorbed into a trans-linguistics) seems to have escaped Kellner. Barthes's brand of linguistic imperialism is thankfully confined to a minor tradition in semiotics. Once again, though, Kellner's choice of an alternative turns out to be regrettable.

Kellner thinks that Baudrillard is a semiological idealist, thus expressing his fear that everything solid melts into air when it becomes a sign. This enthusiastically misapplied chemistry takes on increasingly frosty forms as the book progresses.

In *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, Baudrillard singles out an essay by the American zoosemiotician T.A. Sebeok which he thinks contains the idea of the precession of the structural code. In spite of Sebeok's purpose, and indeed, in light of it, the code stains everything with differential value. The pretension to a universal commutability may be grounded, thinks Sebeok, in the genetic code, a kind of super code for both bio- and socio-logics. More-

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over, the genetic code may be theorized as an objective model in a phantasy of a unified semiotic field. Baudrillard thinks that this code is a reproduction machine: it is the model of models, a single irreducible metaphysical principle which provides a perfect example of operational simulation. Kellner does not overlook the obvious analogies of such an example between DNA, linguistics and social organization. These analogies, however, serve Baudrillard's purpose because they express the tyranny of the code, by which he means the system which underlies every message. In Sebeok's use of genetics, every message is coded many times over by numerous sub-codes, all of which are reducible to the code, the model of models.

Kellner is uneasy with the idea of the code and expresses concern that "one must avoid the semiotic mistake of projecting the idea of 'inscription' onto the world of nature." This is especially the case for the genetic code since, for Guattari, it functions asemiotically (it is linguistically unformed).

The code in its most general and flexible terms is a system of rules for the combination of stable sets of terms into messages (*langue* is to code as *parole* is to message; whenever there is signification, there is a code). By "the system" Baudrillard means "the code," and the logic of the code is disjunctive. In these terms, as a generalizable structural principle, the code can accommodate a range of contents. In order to see why this is the case one must first understand what makes an analysis structural. That is, a given content is brought to light in virtue of a model, a structure consisting of a formal set of elements and relations.

By reading Sebeok against himself, Baudrillard finds evidence of what Kellner seems to think is some form of fetishism on Baudrillard's part. Kellner, then, denies Baudrillard any critical distance from his examples. At the same time, and this is what makes Kellner's effort so frustrating, he has not missed the fact that the structural revolution remains for Baudrillard a repressive, reductive and reifying institution against which he sets his concept of the symbolic. This revolution neutralizes poetics, excludes ambivalence, polices anagrams and, in general, divides and conquers by means of *la barre saussurienne*, the bar of structural implication between the signifier and the signified. Baudrillard has consistently argued against "semiological dandyism," even though Kellner insists on pinning this label on him. Substantial sections of *Lechange symbolique* and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* are devoted to attacks on the disjunctive code whose structural effects are produced by the separation of terms in a form of mutual exclusion in which each term in its turn becomes the imaginary of the other.

There is also the matter of Kellner's charge of sign-fetishism. Baudrillard too has called for a critique of the signifier-fetishism of the sign-form that "Marxist

analysis has not yet mastered." He complains of both Saussure's and Emile Benveniste's idealism, of the metaphysics which drives semio-linguistics, and of the fictional separation and subsequent bridging of this so-called "gap" between the sign and the referent. Marx, that is, Harpo, thinks Baudrillard in *Lechange symbolique*, knew better than to create a gap in-between the sign and the referent only in order to fill it with the problematics of motivation: "...when Harpo Marx brandished a real sturgeon in the place of the word 'sturgeon,' here, then, in substituting the referent for the term, in abolishing their separation, he truly destroys arbitrariness and at the same time the system of representation — a poetic act *par excellence*: killing the signifier 'sturgeon' with its own referent." Baudrillard's point is that in everyday life, even linguists like Benveniste have no need of the baggage of semio-linguistics.

In short, Kellner's *Baudrillard* does not initiate us into the bar games of post-structuralism. Baudrillard's critique of the structure of the sign and of signification as fundamentally simulacral was part of a collection of practices which I call bar games — the bar in question is the one in-between the signifier and the signified and, really, any bar of difference. Bar games were standard features of the anti-semiological routine of post-structuralist critical practices in the face of the institution of interpretation called structuralism. Just as Derrida had his hinge, Lyotard his band and whirling bar, Deleuze and Guattari their weak disjunction, Baudrillard had his bars of structural implication and radical exclusion. The former may be found in his table of conversions between political economy and semiology; the latter separated the fields of value from non-value (everything that is structural as opposed to symbolic). One may be said to be a post-structuralist if one plays anti-semiological bar games. Lacan too made the bar an issue since he was, in spite of his claims of scientificity, an important player of anti-Saussurean bar games. The period from 1966 to 1976 in Paris was a time of intense play and hanging around the bar. Now, it's not that Kellner refuses to play, but rather that he hasn't noticed the games.

As the curtain begins to fall on the Baudrillard "scene," we will have time to read his work in semiotic terms, and on this basis mount a new production. In this respect, Kellner's *Baudrillard* may serve as a negative example, although as any player of bar games knows, a negative such as "-" may become, with a well-placed stroke, a "+" or a "=", bringing into play Lacan's stroking of the horizontal bar, or Pierre Klossowski's maniac of the parallel bars. I'm game, bar none. ♦

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LORENZO BUJ

The Secret Impulse

**Lipstick Traces:
A Secret History of the
20th Century**
by Greil Marcus

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989, 496 pp.



At age 45 Greil Marcus maintains that "any good punk song can sound like the greatest thing you've ever heard." The line comes from *Lipstick Traces*, a vast amplification of the themes that have obsessed him in the 80s, and a book that actually exceeds his noteworthy achievement in *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock and Roll* (1975).

Lipstick Traces is a recursive meditation on "the spirit of negation," an aberrant trans-historical force that has fueled orgies of social protest and political disgust, or, more likely, propelled avant-gardes, secret societies, restive anarchists and petty thugs with a theological axe to grind. Marcus is drawn to those moments in a cabaret, a cathedral, a lecture hall, when an individual or a small group makes an absolute gesture, carries out an act of transgression, that promises to wipe out or radically reconfigure all social facts.

The last Sex Pistols gig at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom is at the autobiographical core of the book, for that's when Marcus heard Johnny Rotten's voice bring all "the unpaid debts of history" back into play. Reflecting on that night in January 1978, the text reaches for an uplifting malevolence and swells into hyperbole, but when the narrative cuts off we assume that the intellectual aftershock must have been equally empowering, leaving Marcus with a burden and a premise for a book: in annihilating history, in denying all personality but his own, Rotten may have evaded the debilities of influence anxiety, but he was nevertheless carrying on a long-standing "conversation," one he may not have consciously understood or even been aware of.

This conversation, whose ageless documents are reduced to shattered pieces and refracted particles, is made up of bizarre congruities and stray echoes sounding