T1296
NC 0020739 X
M0058005NC

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

THE MEANING OF MEANING

An Investigation of Semiological Analysis and the Theorical Approaches of Jean Baudrillard

By Francis McKenna

Submitted to the Faculty of Art and Design
and Complimentary Studies in Candidacy for the
Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art

3rd March 1994

THE MEANING OF MEANING

An Investigation of Semiological Analysis and the Theorical Approaches of Jean Baudrillard

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following;

Gerry Walker for his invaluable help in the construction of this study, especially in the area of Communication Studies where he gave a better insight into this field in dealing with Semiological Analysis.

I am also indebted to Siobhan Mc Kenna for providing the time and energy to type this work.

CONTENTS **PAGE No.**

Introduction 1

Chapter 1

Media, the Sign and Semiology 4

1.1 A General History of Communication Studies 5

1.2 The Science of Signs, de Saussure and Meaning 13

1.3 History of Semiology 17

1.4 Semiological Analysis of Television 23

1.5 Forms of Structural Analysis
The Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic 25

1.5.1 Syntagmatic Analysis (Narrative) 26

1.5.2 Paradigmatic Analysis (Oppositions in Text) 28

1.6 Myths and Culture 29

1.7 Codes and Perception TV and the Real 30

1.8 Realism and Representation 34

Chapter 2 Jean Baudrillard

Simulation, Implosion and Media 38

2.1 Influences: The 1960's and the "Semiological Revolution" 40

2.2 The System of Signs in the Consumer Society 44

2.3 Simulations & the Historical Stages of Simulacra 47

2.4 Simulation (Codes) 51

2.5 Baudrillard Signs & the Mass Media 52

2.6 Information & the Implosion of Meaning 54

2.7 Hyper-Reality, the Sign and Information 57

2.8 The Deviation of the Sign 59

Conclusion 63

References 69

Bibliography 71

i INTRODUCTION

This is a study of "meaning" or more specifically it is a study where I shall evaluate and critically appraise those theoretical works which relate directly toward the construction of meaning within the field of communication.

Over the last 160 years we have made great studies in the development of new technologies that both extend and complement our intellectual capabilities. In fact, vast and far reaching lines of communication and instantaneous access to resources of information and knowledge now compromise a technological environment that is as natural to us now as the biosphere within which we live. (The usage of technology holds serious social implication). We have long entered the Information Age, an era in which many believe our welfare is enhanced and our survival dependant (both economic and cultural) on the use of information through the use of electrically powered telecommunications and information processing machines.

My interest lies with the television - the grand communicator which sprays us with the comedy shows, the soap operas, the news broadcasts, drama, advertisements and so on. (It can easily be said: All which comes from the screen is - information).

This is a study of the theoretical inner workings of television through which I shall venture below the surface of familiarity which makes it so inescapably invisible despite its constant presence.

In order to do this, we must first look at television as a communication device, as an information machine - whose messages are shot at us in the form of images and sound.

ii The aim of Chapter 1 is to show how different theorists stretching from the fields of Structural Linguists to Semiology to communication studies, have tackled the question of how we make meaning.

iii Chapter 2. Later I shall explore the writings of Jean Baudrillard, the French sociologist and critical theorist assessing his work which deals specifically with the television medium, meaning and the social.

CHAPTER 1 (Inner Workings)

MEDIA, THE SIGN AND SEMIOLOGY

1.1 A GENERAL HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Between World War I and World War II 1919 - 1939 there was a broad consensus from nearly all research perspectives - that the mass media exercised a powerful and persuasive influence upon those subjected to it. The basis of this view was through the observation of the creation of Mass Audiences - which came about because of many factors. Firstly, in the social context, it was believed that "urbanization" and industrialization had created a society that was rootless, unstable, alienated and hence - was inherently susceptible to manipulation by the mass media.

A very specific historical image also came to dominate this belief during that time. The breakdown of European societies under the assault of economic depression, and moreso fascism, in which, the propaganda media played a key role.

It was believed at this time that the mass media in its various forms, had brainwashed people during the First World War and had engineered the rise of fascism in Europe between the wars.

Another factor which led to this consensus was the rise of new technologies, such as, the press but moreso film, radio and the cinema.

All of these factors together encouraged a relatively uncomplicated view of the mass media - as all powerful propaganda agencies which influenced an impressionable and defenceless public.

However, during the late 1940's to the 1950's and 1960's a re-evaluation of earlier beliefs came about and the impact of the mass media gave rise to a new academic doctrine,namely, that the mass media have only a very limited influence upon people.

It was in the 1960's after the great surge of interest among the newer medium of television, that many within a wide range of academic disciplines began taking its social and indeed its psychological implications seriously.

Many believed that television affected the behaviour, beliefs and opinions of those who were subjected to it.

Since the 1960's, up to the present, serious attempts have been made in order to find how much of an effect violence in the mass media was and is having upon the individual, in our media based society. A great emphasis has been placed upon the common piece of furniture - the television. The 1960's will probably be regarded by social historians as a decade of violence and social restlessness - the time of urban riots, increasing rates of violent crime and collective protests against matters such as, the Vietnam War, pollution and institutional racism.

At this time many observers of society could not resist in making the logical connection between violence as seen and portrayed in the media and violence in the real world as being "interactive".

Although communication research scholars have not reached a full understanding of the impact the mass media are having upon the psychological, moral, economic, political, creative, cultural and educational aspects of our lives, they have begun to accumulate a base of research findings that will and have aided our understandings of these issues.

What seems highly significant today is the vast amount of time where one consumes all the mass media. In 1982, Jeremy Tunstall estimated, for example, that the average British adult spends 75 hours every week with television, radio, newspapers and magazines. This figure not only indicates the extent to which the experience of most of us is saturated by the media, no matter how resistant we take ourselves to be to their influence, it also draws attention to the complexity with which media interact with one another and integrate themselves into the pattern of our daily lives.

It is not simply the time we spend engaged with the media which makes them significant, but more, the fact that the media are important shapers of our perceptions, beliefs and ideas.

The mass media have been called "Consciousness Industries" which provide not simply information about the world, but more importantly ways of seeing and understanding it.

According to Stuart Hall in "Mass Communication and Society" (1977);

> "the mass media are more responsible for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes.... This is the first of the great cultural functions of the modern media : the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge". (1)
>
> Hall; 1977: p xx

It is not only what information or messages that are shown that are important, but more specifically what must be recognised, is the impending "truth" of the representation of those images given to us.

The reality of television is immediate, but we witness events rather than experience them. The mind and body are separated just as we, the viewers of television are separated in our own homes watching in private isolation. This is domestic consumption which allows the information industry to penetrate into the furthest recesses or our lives.

Martin Amis in his book "Money" hits the proverbial nail right on the head.

> "Television is working on us. Film is. We're not sure how yet. We wait and count the symptoms. There's a realism problem, we all know that. television is real, some people think. And where does that leave reality?."(2)
>
> Amis;1985:p361

The critic Angela Zobbie has said of television.

> "It is no longer possible to talk about the image and reality, media and society."

"Each has become so deeply intertwined it is difficult to draw the line between the two." (3)

McRobbie; 1986: p 56

These statements pose very important questions about the nature of television as an integral and exceedingly important aspect of our Western civilization, both culturally and socially.

Questions have arisen about television, about its potency, about its immediate effects, influence and persuasive ability, about the power it yields. In the film "Jubilee", Derek Jarman satirises the power of the media in the form of Cardinal Borgoa Ginz.

"You wanna know my story, Babe, its easy. This is the generation who forgot how to lead their lives. They were so busy watching my endless movies. Its power, Babe. Power. I don't create it, I own it. I sucked and sucked and sucked."

> The Media became their only reality and I owned the world of flickering shadows. BBC, TUC, ATY, ABC, ATV, CIA, CBA, NFT, MGM, KGB, CofE. You name it - I bought them all, and rearranged the alphabet."(4)
>
> Jarman; 1984:p170

Many scholars, artists and academics within the sociological framework have posed many questions about the persuasive and influential capabilities of television. However, those involved in the fields of Semiology and a branch of communication studies have produced models and views which respond to the following questions.

How is meaning produced from a given text?.

How does television seem so real?.

What is the representative quality or truth of representation of television.

1.2 THE SCIENCE OF SIGNS, de SAUSSURE AND MEANING

American concern with mass communication has tended to focus on a model of communication which stresses the relationship between the individuals involved in the act of communicating. In this tradition the communication process is conceived of as a relationship between the sender of messages and the receiver of messages. (Where the mass communication process merely converts the receiver from being on to being many individuals). The attention of researchers was directed at the psychological tendencies of the producers of mass media messages and the effects of the message on the members of the audience.

John Fiske has called this the "Process School", for it sees communication primarily as the transmission of messages. Referring to this school he states;

> "It is concerned with how senders and receivers encode and decode, with how transmitters use the channels and media of communication."

"It sees communication as a process by which one person affects the behaviour or state of mind of another." (5)

Fiske; 1989:p2

However, within the study of communication there is another school whose primary concern is with how messages or texts interact with people in order to produce meanings. For this school, the study of communication is the study of text and culture. Its method of study is called **Semiotics**, which in itself has merged into other schools, including linguistics, structuralism and many of the arts subjects. This school tends to address itself to the actual works or texts of communication rather than the process or act of communicating.

Semiology is another word for this same science, which media studies has adopted, and currently each is used by different authorities with much the same meaning.

The central concerns of semiology/ semiotics may be simply stated as the relationship between a sign and its meaning and the way signs are combined into codes.

This is where my interest lies, for it is through this, the use of semiological analysis and technique that one may probe any be given text to find out how meaning is made by us.

All models of meaning share a broadly familiar form for each is concerned with three elements which must be involved in some way in the study of meaning. These are, the **SIGN**, that to which it refers and the users of the sign.

Ferdinand de Saussure, who is commonly regarded as the European father of semiology was, in 1915, the first to elaborate upon the concept.

SIGN = SIGNIFIER + SIGNIFIED

Semiology has since been applied, with interesting results, to television, film, theatre, medicine, architecture, zoology, and a host of other areas that involve or are concerned with communication and the transfer of information. In fact, some semiologists, who perhaps go a little too far, suggest that everything can be analysed semiologically. They perceive it as the key that unlocks the meaning of all things great and small.

To quote Jonathan Culler;

> "The notion that linguistics might be useful in studying other cultural phenomena is based on two fundamental insights: first, that social and cultural phenomena are not simply material objects or events but objects and events with meaning, and hence signs and second, that they do not have essences but are defined by a network of relations." (6)
>
> Culler; 1976:p 14

Signs and relations are the fundamental tools of semiology. They are used to find what the meaning is within a given "text", the text being that which is being studied, be it a television programme or a painting.

1.3 HISTORY OF SEMIOLOGY

Although an interest in signs and the way they communicate has a long history (medieval philosophers, John Locke and others have shown interest), modern semiological interest can be said to have begun with two men, namely, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles Saunders Pierce (1839-1914).

Saussure's book "Course in General Linguistics", which was first published after his death in 1915 suggests the possibilities of semiological analysis. His division of the sign into the two components, the signifier and the signified coupled with his suggestion that the relationship between them is arbitrary, were of crucial importance for the development of semiology. A further explanation of these "elements" of the science will be given later.

From this point of departure and that of Pierce (who focused on 3 aspects of signs, their iconic, indexical and symbolic dimensions), a movement was born and henceforth semiological analysis has spread all over the globe.

Important work was done in Prague and Russia early in the twentieth century, and semiology is now well established in France and Italy. It is here that Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco and many others are doing important theoretical as well as applied work. However, there are also outposts of progress in England, the United States and to a lesser degree many other countries.

The essential breakthrough of semiology is to take linguistics, the scientific study of language, as a model and apply the linguistic concept of this sign to other phenomena - texts - and not just to language itself. In semiological analysis an arbitrary and temporary separation of content and form is made and attention is focused on the system of signs that makes up a text. Therefore, anything, a meal for example, is seen not as boiled potatoes, salad, T-bone steak and custard and apple-pie, but rather as a sign system conveying meanings related to matters such as status, taste, sophistication, nationality and so on.

Henceforth, I shall use the word "text" in replacement of the television programme.

According to Saussure's theoretical concept, a sign is something that consists of a signifier and a signified, where the signifier is the "physical form", such as a sound or an image. In contrast, the signified is the "mental concept", which in a sense is always man-made. (The concept is in its turn an apprehension of external reality). Therefore, it can be seen that the sign relates to reality only through the concepts of the people who use it.

The sign for Saussure consisted of a physical object and a meaning, that is, the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the signs image as we perceive it, eg, the marks on a page; an image; a sound; where the signified is the mental concept to which the physical signifier refers. According to Saussure, this mental concept is broadly common to all members of the same culture who share the same language. (This aspect was further advanced by the anthropological studies of Levi-Strauss, which shall be explained later).

Saussure's theory of the sign may be shown in pictional form as below.

PLATE 1

SIGN	
SIGNIFIER Sound / Image	SIGNIFIED Mental Concept

John Fiske refers to a sign as;

> "something physical, perceivable by our senses; it refers to something other than itself; and it depends upon a recognition by its users that it is a sign."(7)
>
> Fiske;1989:p44

One of the most important elements in Saussure's theory of the sign lies in the relationship between the signfier and the

signified which he promotes as being strictly arbitrary, unmotivated and un-natural. Meaning that there is no logical connection between a word a word (the signifier) and the concept (the signified) which that word relates to. This promotes the view that there are "no natural" links between language and the world.

It must also be stressed at this point that there can be no signifier distinct from a signified and neither of these can exist outside the construct we call a sign. All three elements of this construct are determined by our culture and are in themselves, in some sense man-made. This operation shall be furthered on later).

Saussure believed that previous theories of language problematized relations between language and reality, words and things. However, on his theory, meaning was determined not be referring language to the world but through the differences within the system of language.

Here, Saussure offers another crucial insight, that concepts have meaning because of internal relations and that the basic relationship between them is oppositional.

Thus any binary/polar opposition comes to mind here, where "rich" does not mean anything unless there is "poor", or "happy" unless there is "sad".

> "Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but relatively by the relations with the other terms of the system.(8)
>
> Saussure;1966:p117

This hold easily enough for language and indeed for any text looked upon where it can be seen that nothing has meaning in itself, only in differential relations between signifieds.

Whereas previous approaches to linguistics, theorized language, in historical terms or diachronically and as a collection of distinct words; Saussure argued that language should be studied as a synchronic structure; as a system whose individual parts function relationally within the system of language.

Semiology was primarily conceived as a science which would study the system of language. However, Saussure later proposed that it should be extended to social systems of signification, to "study the life of signs within society". Jean Baudrillard, of whose work I shall discuss in Chapter 2 was one of many who took on this Semiological challenge in order to understand the system of signs within society.

1.4 SEMIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION

In applying semiology to television it makes sense primarily to concern ourselves with aspects of the medium that function as signs, as distinguished from carrying signs. From this angle what is most interesting about television are the kinds of camera shots employed in the medium.

The list overleaf shows the more important kinds of shots which function as signifiers, defines them and suggests what is signified by each shot.

PLATE 2

Signifier (shot)	Definition	Signified (meaning)
close-up	face only	intimacy
medium shot	most of body	personal relationship
long shot	setting and characters	context, scope, public distance
full shot	full body of person	social relationship

Camera Work and Editing Techniques

pan down	camera looks down	power, authority
pan up	camera looks up	smallness, weakness
zoom in	camera moves in	observation, focus

Semiological Analysis

fade in	image appears on blank screen	beginning
fade out	image screen goes blank	ending
cut	switch from one image to another	simultaneity, excitement
wipe	image wiped off screen	imposed conclusion

The above material shows a kind of grammar of television as far as shots, camera work and editing techniques are concerned. We all learn the meaning of these phenomena as we watch television and they help us to understand what is going on in a given programme. There are other matters, such as, the use of colour, sound effects, lighting techniques and music and so on, which are important here for all of these are signifiers that help us interpret and hence understand what we see on television.

1.5 FORMS OF STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: THE PARADIGMATIC AND SYNTAGMATIC

Another legacy form Ferninand de Saussure is his use of the terms Diachronic and Synchronic as different ways or forms of analysing the structure or underlying form of the text by finding and looking at those elements which contribute to the generation of meaning. As he uses the terms, "synchronic" means analytical and "diachronic" means historical. Therefore, a synchronic study of a text looks at the

relationships that exist among its elements, whereas a diachronic study looks at the way the narrative evolves.

Berger has another way of putting this, "a synchronic analysis of a text looks for the pattern of paired oppositions buried in the text (the paradigmatic oppositions) while a diachronic analysis forces upon the chain of events (the syntagmatic structure) that forms the narrative."

1.5.1 SYNTAGMATIC ANALYSIS (NARRATIVE)

When one analyses a text in a diachronic sense one looks at the syntagmatic structure of the text, or more precisely the structure of the narrative.

Narrative is an important feature in a text for not only does it move the "story" along, it also provides meaning. Narrative and language are the two main cultural processes which are shared by all societies and like language, narrative is a basic way of making sense of our experience of the real. Given that narrative is

a fundamental cultural process it is not surprising that television is predominantly narrational in its mode. (All types of programmes shown on the television are narrational in one sense or another, drama and soaps obviously, but also, the news, documentaries, advertisements and quiz shows, etc).

Narrative, it is believed, works as a sense-making mechanism, primarily through the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions and it is through these dimensions within the narrative that we may understand how any text or television programme works. Realism, is another important attribute of a text or television programmes. It may add to its authenticity, but also, the use of realism through the television programme shows and presents them as an unmediated picture of external reality.

1.5.2 PARADIGMATIC ANALYSES (OPPOSITIONS IN TEXT)

A paradigmatic analysis differs from a syntagmatic analysis in the sense that here we can see the text primarily as containing sets of binary oppositional elements which are within the narrative of the text or in the text itself.

The paradigmatic analysis of a text involves searching for a hidden pattern of oppositions that are buried in it which generate meaning.

The reason a search is made for the binary/polar oppositions is because meaning is based upon establishing relationships - in the true Saussurean sense - where the most important relationship in the production of meaning, in language, is that of opposition.

> "In language there are only differences."
>
> Saussure;1966

Jonathon Culler (1975:15) has said;

> "Structuralists have generally taken the binary oppositions as a fundamental operation of the human mind basic to the production of meaning."(9)
>
> Culler; 1975:p 15

Therefore in all texts (whether narrative or not) there is some kind a of systematic and inter-related set of oppositions that can be extracted and studied.

Claude Levi-Strauss, the distinguished French anthropologist, suggests that the syntagmatic analysis of a text gives the text manifest meaning where this structure involves what happens in the text where the paradigmatic approach of looking at a text is concerned with what the characters in the "mean".

1.6 MYTHS AND CULTURE

Levi-Strauss is interested in the way narratives are organised or structured and how their organisation generates meaning, and has

done a great deal of work on myths and kinship systems. He believes there are fundamental units of myths which he calls "mythemes" which combine in certain ways to give messages.

Myths are important, for not only do they function as deeds for the cultures, the groups, that tell and believe them but also because they are keys to the ways in which the human mind works. Levi-Strauss believes that myths give coded messages from cultures down to individuals where the task of the analyst - is to discover these hidden messages by understanding the code itself.

1.7 CODES AND PERCEPTION: TELEVISION AND THE REAL

As we grow up in society and hence within the culture of that society, we each learn the codes of that culture, which themselves are highly complex patterns of associations. These codes, which are man-made, are structures in our minds which affect the way we interpret signs and symbols which are found in the media and the way we live. From this angle, we can see that

cultures are codification systems that play an important role in our lives. This means that in being part of a society, one relates to its culture which in essence, means that we are taught a number of codes. We are all "taught" codes or a collection of rules that tell us what to do in all conceivable situations and when television in involved we come to understand what certain things mean through the use of codes.

A code depends upon the agreement of its users, and most codes are dynamic systems which continually evolve to meet the changing needs and practices of their users.

The relationship between codes and television is important for obviously we carry over our codes, rules and understanding about life over to media productions, such as, television programmes and shows.

This leads us directly to the relationship between the "real" and the "realness of television". There are many ways that television seems so real to us while watching it and this I propose is because of codes and realism.

The thin line between where real life ends and where television begins is not as clearly drawn as it may appear to be at first sight.

Fiske and Hartley puts this down to codes;

> "This boundary is blurred because the way we watch television and the way we perceive reality are fundamentally similar, in that, both are determined by conventions or codes."
>
> "Reality is itself a complex system of signs interpreted by members of the culture in exactly the same way as are films or television programmes..."
>
> "Television is a more conventional medium than art-film in the sense that its codes relate more closely to the normal codes of perception. It is this that gives it its positions of cultural centrality, and that makes the boundary between television and reality difficult to define." (10)
>
> Fiske & Hartley;1992:pp65-66

Television is a realistic medium (in the form of images and sounds, programmes and advertisements, etc), not because it reproduces our own reality but because it reproduces the dominant sense or our reality. We can therefore without hesitance call television and essentially realistic medium because of its ability to carry a socially convincing sense of the real. Television presents itself as an unmediated picture of external reality and the most obvious aspect of this view is expressed in the metaphorical views of the transparency fallacy or the Mirror Theory. On these views, television is seen as a transparent window or mirror through which "reality" can be seen or is reflected at us.

Though quite basic and insufficient in the explanation of how television "works" in giving us representations of the world, many still hold these beliefs. However, these views do hold some validity from the view that they both assume that it is our reality and not a reality that is shown. In other words, it is admitted that reality is the product of the people, us, and not a universal object that we merely observe from the outside.

1.8 REALISM AND REPRESENTATION

Realism has been defined by a number of people in different ways, for its use on television, and the implications of its use on different levels.

Ian Watt (1957) tends to define realism by its content where he traces its origins to the rise of the novel in the 17th and 18th centuries, believing that it developed alongside empiricism, individualism, humanism and the bourgeoisie.

For Watt, 1957

> "Realism depends on the belief in an objective reality that can be accurately experienced by the human senses: this reality is made up of an infinity of unique objects, people, places and actions." (11)
>
> Fiske;1987:p 21

Critics such as Fever (1983), and Heath and Skirrow (1977) have identified as one of the defining characteristics of television its "nowness" as it is sensed almost always as being

"live". It has been observed that film presents itself as a record of what has happened, whereas television presents itself as a relay of what is happening "now".

This shows that the item taken to perform an action on television (usually drama or sitcoms with little post-production editing) coincides precisely with the time taken to perform it in real life.

This absence of editorial intervention adds subtly to the sense of realism in the sense that the camera is merely recording what happened and to the sense of liveness, that it is happening now.

It can be seen that realism does not just reproduce reality it makes sense of it.

In Fiskes' terms;

> "The essence of realism is that it produces reality in such a form as to make it easily understandable. It does this primarily by ensuring that all links between its elements are clear

> and logical, that the narrative follows the basic laws of cause and effect, and that every element is there for the purpose of helping to make sense: nothing is extraneous or accidental." (12)
>
> Fiske;1987:p24

It is usually assumed that realism is typically narrative in form, an assumption that is propounded by Roland Barthes (1975) in "Mythologies", who implies that realism is <u>always</u> narrational. Even a photograph or realistic painting is a frozen moment in a narrative where understanding it involves reconstructing the narrative on either side of the moment presented to us.

Realistic narrative, as I have discussed earlier, is the dominant mode of representation on television. However, according to Watt (1957) this mode of representation was initially developed through the novel and film.

Realism seems to demand of us that before we can be entertained by a television programme, say a comedy or drama, we must first concede that the

mode in which the fictional story is presented and is not constructed, but instead is merely the natural representation of the way things are.

In fact, certain critics have argued that realism, by projecting back into nature what amounts to a customary way of representing reality, that the convention and reality itself are indistinguishable which has an individual effect on the people in the audience.

This leads me onto the theory of the "Simulacra" and "Simulations" as constructed and defined by Jean Baudrillard; where through his radical theories of the media and society we find that "representations" may not be as they seem.

CHAPTER 2

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

SIMULATIONS, IMPLOSION AND THE MEDIA

Jean Baudrillard has become one of the most fashionable and controversial writers in Europe today and over the last two and a half decades he has made a series of major contributions to the analysis of modern society and culture. It can easily be seen the Baudrillard is sliding toward centre stage of the cultural scene in many circles, for in a number of post-modern journals he is being proclaimed as a fundamental challenge to our orthodoxies and conventional wisdom in Marxism, psychoanalysis, philosophy, semiology, anthropology, sociology and other disciplines.

During the past 20 years Baudrillard has produced an imposing and impressive body of work. He has opened up new lines of thought and discourse, while at the same time, putting in question many of the Marxian, Freudian and structuralist positions which certainly characterise the previous era of radical social theory.

It would prove somewhat unnecessary primarily to critically appraise Baudrillard's theoretical writings for indeed it seems that here is neither the time nor place. However great importance must be placed as to where his

opinions and sentiments come from within previous theoretical context in view of those aspects of life which he chooses to analyse and comment.

2.1 INFLUENCES: THE 1960's and the SEMIOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

Jean Baudrillard's thinking and writing were deeply influenced by a certain style of radicalism that appeared in France in the 1960's. The 1960's rebellions against the established society included revolts against the disciplines, methods, theories, styles and discourses of the university intellectual establishment. 1960's radicals both attacked conventional wisdom and sought new cultural and political theories and discourses, and Baudrillard was part of this movement.

The events of the 1960's led to a new positive appropriation of Marxism which has since emerged as a dominant critical discourse. In addition, to these events new architecture, commodities and expressions of the consumer society, ubiquitous television and mass media were transforming French life, as with nearly everywhere else in the "Western World". All of these together seemed to have ushered in a dramatically new social order. Some refer to this as "the technological society" (Ellul), "the post-industrial society" (Aron & Touraine) and "the society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord).

At this time new theories of language and culture were being developed to analyse various forms of discourse and culture. These theories ranged from Levi-Strauss structural anthropology to the theories of textuality and deconstruction which were advanced by Jaques Derrida.

The new structuralist and semiological theories focused attention on language and representation as well as the importance of discourses, images, codes and culture in everyday life.

In particular, the new theories of representation and signification broke with conventional views of the relationship between language and reality. The work of Ferninand de Saussure, more than anyone else has produced a great ripple effect into many of the academic disciplines including communication and media studies, structuralism, deconstruction, philosophy and anthropology. His accounts of the systems of signs in language and hence in texts cannot be ignored for his model of signification (SIGN = SIGNIFIER + SIGNIFIED) is of a great importance to the work of Baudrillard. As we shall see Baudrillard appropriates semiological techniques for his own ends were later he alters the theory of the sign and then eventually eradicates it (from the stuctural position) altogether.

However, within the study of communication and media Saussure's theories, as I have shown, have been assigned to the analysis of the media, especially television, where one may read and interpret the signs within the given text; in order to see how the "individual" makes sense of meaning from that which we are shown.

Baudrillard was deeply influenced by the "semiological revolution" in the 1960's which articulated the importance of signification, representation and systems of signs in social and domestic life. This semiological turn forced his generation to rethink relationships between language and other systems of representation, language, power and social reality.

Also, French theorists began taking seriously, for the first time, phenomena from everyday life which had previously been neglected. In fact, Henri Lefebvre, Baudrillard's sociology teacher, had been calling since the 1940's for a critique of everyday life, toward theorization of the conditions, problems and possibilities for change within everyday life.

Saussure's developments in creating the distinctions between language and reality and his proposition that semiology be extended to social systems are eminent, for these developments were part of a process of questioning the fundamental aspects of language and thought which later (from the 1960's on) contributed to the reconstruction of many disciplines.

2.2 THE SYSTEM OF SIGNS IN THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

In his earlier work, Baudrillard appropriated Saussure's semiological theory of the sign, where he conceptualizes it and applies it for his analysis of the system of commodities. Here Baudrillard can see society as organised around consumption and the display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige, identity and standing.

According to Baudrillard, in this system, the more prestigious ones commodities, such as, houses, cars, clothes, etc., then the higher is ones standing in the realm of SIGN VALUE. Thus, just as words take on meaning according to their status, in the system of language, so sign value takes on meaning according to their place in a differential system of prestige and status.

For Baudrillard, the crucial feature of the consumer society is the proliferation of commodity signs, through which commodities take on ever new and ever greater significance. Baudrillard's belief, marks, that it is not the fact that one owns or has the commodities,

objects or possessions (signifiers) - but more what these objects mean or signify, - prestige, status, etc., (signifieds) within the social framework which is governed itself by signs.

In his collection of essays, "For a Critique for the Political Economy of the sign" 1972, Baudrillard directly appropriates Saussure's theory of language for his analysis of the System of Commodities. Hence joining the semiological revolution which was interpreting all aspects of social life as a system of signs.

To a large extent Baudrillard's work consists in rethinking radical social theory and politics in light of new developments and realisations in the consumer, media, information and technological society. By 1976 with the book "Symbolic Exchange and Death" he had moved beyond his early critique of political economy and the system of commodities, almost away from them altogether, into his new world of critical theory. It is here that he promotes his views of the media and other manifestations in society by the constant growth or proliferation of signs.

New forms of technological determinism become central themes in Baudrillard's mid to late 1970's work. Some of which have been collected in "Simulations" and "In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities". In these texts, the masses (audiences), "the silent majorities", as he refers to them passively consume commodities, television, sports, politics, information and so on to such an extent that traditional politics and class struggle become obsolete.

2.3 SIMULATIONS AND THE HISTORICAL STAGES OF SIMULACRA

In Baudrillard's new universe, SIMULACRA and SIMULATIONS play such a key role in social life that previous boundaries and categories of social theory for him, dissolve altogether. In fact, all distinctions between appearance and reality, surface and depth, life and art, subject and object collapse into an integrated and self reproducing universe of simulacra which are controlled by simulation models and codes.

The initial sketch of this new social situation is found in "The Orders of Simulacra" which has been collected in "Simulations" (1983). In this study Baudrillard gives a historical sketch as to where and how the simulacra come into existence as the main modes of representation in society today. On the authority of Baudrillard, Simulacra are reproductions of objects or events while the orders of simulacra form various stages, or orders of appearance between simulacra and the real.

A further understanding of simulation is necessary for here from Baudrillard's point of view we may see where the modes of representation have changed eventually leading us to the present day where signs and codes themselves as he believes have come to constitute the real.

In the "Orders of Simulacra" in the book Simulations (1983), Baudrillard places his theory of simulacra into an historical context, as quoted;

(i) "Counterfeit - is the dominant scheme of the "classical" period from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution.

(ii) Production - is the dominant scheme of the industrial era.

(iii) Simulation - is the reigning scheme of the current phase that is controlled by the code."

In this historical sketch. Baudrillard claims that modernity broke with fixed feudal medieval hierarchy of signs and social position by the introduction of an artificial artifice, (stucco, theatre, fashion, baroque art, political

democracy) over natural signs, which thereby exploded fixed medieval hierarchies and order (Simulations: pp 83-92).

(1) In the "feudal era", a fixed social order established a hierarchy of signs of class,rank and social position. Therefore, during this era one could easily read from an individuals clothes and appearance his or her social rank and status. Baudrillard suggests that the inherent goal of the order of simulacra is to produce a flexible and controllable system of order and power.

> "The counterfeit is working, so far, only on substance and form, not yet on relations and structures."(13)
>
> Baudrillard;1983:p91

(ii) The second order of simulacra appeared during the Industrial Revolution, when infinite reproducibility was introduced into the world in the form of the industrial simulacrum or series (Simulations pp 96). At this time production became mechanised and turned out series of mass objects - exact replicas, which were infinitely

produced and reproduced by assembly line processes which eventually led to automation.

> "the machine is mans equivalent and annexes him to itself in the unity of its operational process. This is the difference between a simulacrum of the first order and one of the second."(14)
>
> Baudrillard; 1983:p93

Baudrillard sees the industrial order as ruled by the "commercial law of value" or of equivalent exchange and no longer by the "natural law of value" which governed the first order.

All serial objects of reproduction are equivalent, and their worth is marked by their market value, while reproducibility becomes the fundamental logic and code of society.

(iii) Yet today, Baudrillard claims "we are in the third order simulacra; no longer that of the counterfeit of an original as the first order, nor that of the pure series as in the second" (Simulations: pp 100-101).

This is the stage of "simulation proper" - which is the end result of the long historical process of simulation in which simulation models come to constitute the world and overtake and finally, according to himself, "devour" representation.

2.4 SIMULATIONS (CODES)

In "Simulations", Baudrillard presents this theory by means of "loose" analogies between language, genetics and social organisation.

He says here that just as language contains codes and models; that structure how we communicate, and just as our cells contain genetic codes, DNA; that structure how we experience and behave, then so too does society itself contain codes and models of social organisation and control which structure the environment and everyday life.

That is, urban, architectural and transportation models structure, within certain limits how cities, houses and their infrastructure are organised and used and these in turn are governed by the logic of the

simulation model. For example, within the suburban household there may be interior design manuals, exercise videos, childcare books, sex manuals and tapes, cookbooks and magazine, newspapers and broadcast media; these all provide models that structure various activities within everyday life. However, Baudrillard refuses to elaborate upon his theory of the code and leaves us in the dark as to how it exists and where it originates.

Though these "models" may indeed "structure" our lives, it is Baudrillards persistence in constructing concepts which deal with the significance of the electronic mass media which is central to this study of meaning.

2.5 BAUDRILLARD SIGNS AND THE MASS MEDIA

It is to Baudrillard's analysis of mass media and new techniques that I shall now turn to. For among his most provocative writings are his reflections on the role of the media in the constitution of the Post Modern World.

He gives us models of the mass media as all-powerful, distinct, social forces that produce a wide range of effects. It is among these "effects" on everyday life and "meaning" itself that I shall focus attention.

In a study "Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign" (1972), Baudrillard noted how "the television object" was becoming the centre of the household which, "serves as essential proof function that the owner is a genuine member of the consumer society." (p55)

Whereas modernity centred on the production of things, commodities and products, he sees Post Modernity as characterised by a **Proliferation of Signs.**

He interprets Modernity as a process of explosion, of commodification, mechanism, technology and market relations. In contrast, he views the **Post Modern Society** as the site of an **Implosion** of all boundaries, regions and distinctions between high and low culture, appearance and reality (surface and depth) and

nearly all binary opposites maintained by traditional philosophy and social theory.

2.6 INFORMATION AND THE IMPLOSION OF MEANING

The rise of television is an important aspect of Post Modernity for Baudrillard. In "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media", he claims that the proliferation of signs and information in the media actually **obliterate** meaning through neutralizing and dissolving all content. This is a process which leads to both a collapse of meaning and the destruction of distinctions between media and reality.

In the society which is saturated with media messages he believes that information and meaning "implode" into meaningless noise, leaving us with pure effect without content or meaning.

Thus Baudrillard claims;

> "Information is directly destructive of meaning and signification, or neutralizes it. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving and dissuasive action of information, the media and mass media..... Information

> devours its own contents: it devours communication and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy"(15)
>
> Baudrillard;1983:pp96-100

Baudrillard uses here a model of the media as a "black hole" of signs and information that absorbs all content into "cybernetic noise" which in itself no longer communicates meaningful messages. (Cybernetics being the science of systems of control and communications in animals and machines).

He is describing here a process in which all content, all meaning, actually implodes into form.

Baudrillard uses Marshall McLuhans cybernetic concept of "implosion" to further his designs of the mass media (especially television) where the message is "lost", where meaning does not exist and cannot exist because of the proliferation of signs and information which is directed at us.

He pushes this abstraction further by claiming that the audience, "the silent majorities", the masses, actually absorb "all media content" and that through this they neutralize or even resist meaning.

He believes that the masses demand and obtain more spectacle and entertainment-thus eroding the boundary between "media" and "the real". (This in itself is another important aspect of Baudrillard's beliefs which I shall investigate later.

Therefore on Baudrillard's view of the media we see that meaning does not exist because all content within the media implodes into form and it is here that we see him adopting McLuhan's media theory - "the medium is the message". However, he takes this theory as his own in claiming that;

> "the medium is the message signifies not only the end of the message but also the end of the medium. There are no longer media in the literal sense of the term...that is to say, a power

mediating between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another, neither in content nor in form... this is what implosion signifies: the absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuit between poles of every differential system of meaning..."(16)

Baudrillard;1983:pp102-3

Thus in Baudrillards world there exists a "short circuit" in meaning which itself is the cause of the implosion concept, which derives from the shear volume of information produced through mass media and or course, the proliferation of signs.

2.8 HYPER-REALITY, THE SIGN AND INFORMATION

For Baudrillard, "hyper-reality" plays a key role in his understanding of society which is directly influenced by the media in all its forms. The hyper-real for him is not the unreal, but the more than real - the "realler than real". On his theory, the very definition of the real has become, "that which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction" and the hyper-real is

"that which is already reproduced". (Simulations 1983)

Baudrillard believes that today, we live in a "hyper-reality" of simulations in which images, spectacles and the play of signs replace the logic of production and class conflict as key constituents of contemporary capitalist societies. Modernity for Baudrillard is the era of production governed by the industrial bourgeoisie. However, the era of simulations by contract, is an era of information and signs which are governed by models and codes. (However, he does not enlighten the reader in elaborating or explaining "the code").

In the Post Modern era, Baudrillard sees the model or code as structuring social reality where there is a corrosive effect between the model and the real.

Baudrillard claims that in the contemporary world the boundary between representation and reality implodes (again using M McLuhan's concept) and that as a result the very experience and ground of "the real" disappears.

Here the distinctions between object and representation, thing and idea, are no longer valid. In their place Baudrillard fathoms a strange new world out of models, simulacra, which have no referent or ground in any "reality" except their own.

In "Simulacra and Simulations" (1981), Baudrillards is concerned with "hyper-reality" which to him consists of a world of **SELF-REFERENTIAL SIGNS.** It is in "Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign" that his most provocative views may be read.

2.9 DEVIATION OF THE SIGN

In "Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign" (1981) Baudrillard attempted to develop a radical theory of language which led to his departure from Marxism. It is here that one may see Baudrillard, as a theorist, at his best in the "deconstruction" of Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism.

In Saussure's theory of the sign we saw (see Chapter 1.2) how the signifier or word is distinguished from both the signified (mental concept) and the referent. Saussure marvels at

the arbitrariness of the relation between the signifier and the signified and shows how one "value" of the sign is constituted by structural relations with other signs.

Baudrillard, however, reverses this strategy by undermining the formalism of the theory of the sign.

Mark Poster describes what Baudrillard has done to the sign, within Baudrillard's universe.

> "In the late Twentieth Century, signs become completely separated from their referents, resulting in a structure that resembles the signal: signifiers act like traffic lights, emitting meanings to which there is no linguistic response. The composite organisation of such signifiers is termed - the code - by Baudrillard. A concept he never adequately defines. The code operates by extracting signifieds from the social, redeploying them in the media as "floating signifiers."(17)
>
> Baudrillard; 1988

Under Baudrillard's theory of Implosion, one can see not how meaning is generated but how meaning is eradicated through the incessant flow of information through the mass media.

In this view we can see how the "masses" the audiences, are central to his theory. Yet, the concept of "implosion" deals not only with meaning but also with representation to the extent that signs no longer refer to anything other than themselves in his system of commodities and the social and information.

Central to Baudrillard's concern is the moulding together of all binary oppositions maintained by traditional social theory where the boundary between representation and reality implode.

Whereas in the previous stage of the philosophy of language (Saussure's structuralism) words referred to objects and things and representations were believed to refer to a "real", this era of thought and discourse has come to an end as Baudrillard states;

"The structural dimension gains autonomy; to the exclusion of the referential dimension... Gone are the referential of production, signification, affect, substance, history, ie, the whole equation of real contents that still gave the sign weight by anchoring it with a kind of carrying capacity, of gravity - in short, its form as representative equivalent."(18)

Baudrillard;1988;p125

Therefore, Baudrillard is "promoting" the belief that times have changed with information as one of the direct causes of this. Through his new form of "Semiology" (dealing with signs, meaning and the referential) the very ground of the real has disappeared, as signs refer only to themselves, relationally, and to nothing else.

One can see in Baudrillard's universe that the sign, as an order or "form" representation, and as an analytical tool in "detecting" meaning, a reversal of sorts has taken place.

CONCLUSION

There can be little doubt that in the 1990's we are in a new generation of communications technology and that much of this is centred on new forms and indeed new ways of looking at television as both medium and text.

At the same time we are in a very contentious and confused situation about the institutions and social process of all communications, in dealing with information itself, through the form of messages projected at us.

At the beginning of this century the Swiss Linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, devised the lexicon of signification. This lexicon derives from the extra-ordinarily innovative work of Saussure, whose theoretical work on human language, in the early years of the present century, lies behind all of modern structuralism. Saussure analysed the sign into its two components- the signifier and the signified; through which we are given the ability to analyse "texts". In the case of the spoken language a signifier is any meaningful sound which is uttered or heard; in the case of the written language it is a meaningful mark inscribed on a

page. Whereas in the case of television, it is the manner in which the camera operates along with post production and editing techniques (see Plate 1).

In the case of the "televisual text" it is not only post production techniques which contribute to how we understand the ordered whole- for the structure of the text is more complex than at first may seem.

To revert back to the linguistic level; what Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes have done is to advance the claims of the signifier above those of the signified. The signifier is what we can be sure of, it is material and physical - the signified, on the other hand, is seen as an open question. (For example, the same signifier is sure to have different signifieds for two different people occupying a differently defined semantic space because of the dissimilarity of individual experience: and again the same signifier will have different signifieds for the same person at different times).

However, it is Baudrillard's contribution toward the comprehension of, not only the process

of the generation of meaning, but also his intervention in the order and organisation of signs in the world which is more than interesting, extremely provocative and somewhat enraging.

Not only does Baudrillard, somewhat dubiously toy with the semiological theory of the sign, he does so in such a "style" which has been compared as a blend between that of Marshall McLuhan and Freidrich Neitzsche: wide ranging in content and being generally negative and pessimistic, while in the process glorifying his work and himself almost to celebrity status.

Baudrillard is truly a Post Modern writer in the way that he laughs at the pretensions of modernity and its now obsolete political economy, philosophy, politics, sexuality and culture, while mocking its exhibition and discourses.

His theories spiral into a fascination with signs which leads him to embrace certain privileged forms of sign culture and to reject others, that is, meaning, truth, the social, power and so on. However, in doing so he has given us a new way of looking at meaning and

representation, and indeed the role, of the sign in the theoretical world and that of everyday life.

Baudrillards reflections of the implosion of meaning and hyper-reality are extreme post modern concepts for not only is he extremely pessimistic, he offers us no solutions believing that they do not and can not exist.

In his theories of - implosion - we can see how information is directly destructive of meaning in and through the use of the mass media and information. However, in these works (see Sections 2.6 and 2.7) we can see that Baudrillard rarely engages in close analysis or readings of media text and instead simply engages in rather abstract ruminations.

His theorising holds nothing concerning alternative media practices, indeed, he appears to rule them out in advance. This is because he views all media as mere producers of noise, non-communication, the extermination of meaning, implosion and so on.

Undoublty, the media are playing an ever greater role in our personal and social lives, and have dramatically transformed our economy and society, in ways we are only now just becoming aware of. Living within a process of dramatic mutation, a process in which we are barely beginning to understand, as we enter a new world of media saturation, computerization, new technologies and new discourses.

Baudrillard's contribution lies in his calling attention to these novelties and transformaitons and providing new concepts and theories to understand them.

Yet doubts remain as to whether the media are having quite the impact that Baudrillard says they are and whether his theories provide adequate concepts for analysing the complex interactions between media, culture and society today.

REFERENCES

(1) Hall, S; Mass Communication in Society;1977: p

(2) Amis,M; Money; A Suicide Note;1985: p361

(3) McRobbie, A; Post Modern and Popular Culture;1986: p 56

(4) Jarman, D; Dancing Lodge;1984:p170

(5) Fiske,J;Introduction to Communication Studies; 1989: p2

(6) Culler, J; Saussure;1976:p 14

(7) Fiske;J;Introduction to Communication Studies; 1989:p44

(8) de Saussure,F; A Course in General Linguistics;1966:p117

(9) Culler,J; Saussure;1975:p15

(10) Fiske & Hartley;Reading Television; 1987:1992:p65

(11) Fiske, J; TV Culture; 1987: p21

(12) Fiske; TV Culture; 1987: p24

(13) Baudrillard,J;Simulations ;1983:p91

(14) Baudrillard,J;Simulations ; 1983:p93

(15) Baudrillard,J;In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities;1983:pp96-100

(16) Baudrillard,J;In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities;1983:pp102-3

(17) Baudrillard,J; Selected Writings;1988: Introduction by M Poster.

(18) Baudrillard,J;Selected Writings;1988;p125

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amis, Martin Money; a Suicide Note
(London;Penguin, 1985)

Berger Media Analysis Techniques
(LONDON, SAGE PUBLICATIONS 1991)

Barthes, Roland Mythologies
(London:Paradin,1973)

Baudrillard, Jean SELECTED WRITINGS
edited by Mark Porter
(Oxford: Policy Press and Stanford University Press, 1988)

Baudrillard, Jean Simulations
(New York: Semiotext(e), 1983)

Baudrillard, Jean For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign
(St.Louis:Telos, 1981)

Baudrillard, Jean In the Shadow of the Silent Majority
(New York: Semiotext (e), 1983)

Curran, G.M and Wollacott (Eds) Mass Communication and Society
(London: Arnold, 1977)

Deitch, Jeffrey Post-Human
(Amsterdam: Idea Books, 1993)

Eco, Umberto Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the TV Message
(Working Papers in Cultural Studies,No.3, pp103-121, 1972)

Fiske, John Television Culture
(London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1987)

Fiske, John & Hartley, John Reading Television
(London: Routledge, 1988)

Fiske, John Introduction to Communication Studies
(London:Routledge, 1989)

Guiraud, Paul Semiology
(London: Routledge, 1975)

Hanks, Terence Structuralism and Semiotics
(London: Routledge, 1989)

Hewison, Robert Future Tense
(London: Methuen, 1990)

McLuhan, Marshall Understanding Media
(New York, 1964)

de Saussure,F A Course in General Linguistics
(New York:McGraw/Hill:1966/ orig.1916)

Silverstone, Robert The Message of Television
(London: Heinemann educational Books, 1981)

Sturrock, John Strucutralism and Since - From Levi-Strauss to Derrida
(Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1988)

Williams, Robert Televison, Technology adn Cultural Form
(London:Routledge, 1990)