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REVIEW

Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil, or The Lucidity Pact* [2004], translated by Chris Turner (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), ISBN: 978-1-7809-3568-3

In this essay I review one of Baudrillard's last, and arguably best, books — *The Intelligence of Evil, or The Lucidity Pact* — which last year (2013) was re-published by Bloomsbury as part of their Revelations series. I begin by situating this late work within Baudrillard's voluminous and many-sided corpus. I focus on the text's two major concepts: Integral Reality and Evil.

Star to Black Hole (Baudrillard's trajectory)

The 1980s was Baudrillard's decade. He was everywhere — a jet-setter — criss-crossing the academic and cultural landscape. During the late 1960s through the early 1970s, Baudrillard settled his scores with Marcel Mauss and Marx in texts like *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and *The Mirror of Production*. The late 1970s, however, marked a turn. Baudrillard's writing increasingly distanced itself from the signposts of academic discourse. Thus began the cycle Baudrillard would later call his "theory-fictions." In 1976, he submitted his article "Forget Foucault" to the journal *Critique* (for which Foucault was at that time serving as an editor). The article was rejected, but was later published by Semiotext(e). "Forget Foucault" announced the death of critique. What is needed is not a critique of reality, but a critique of the faith in reality. To believe in reality, including most especially the reality of power, as critique does, is to succumb to what Baudrillard calls the "vital illusion" integral to the vitality of power.

In 1991 Baudrillard published three essays in *Liberation* in which he claimed that the Gulf War "was not taking place." The response by many intellectuals and the general public was outrage and indignation. But what Baudrillard meant was that the war had no place in the order of the Real for the West. The war only existed as a set of guarded reports and a stream of two-dimensional, grainy, green coloured, night-vision images made by "smart bombs" dropped by invisible "stealth" machines. The Gulf War was primarily a television show for the West. The war, like *Seinfeld*, with which it competed for viewers, was a TV show in which nothing ever really happened. Such is the essence of television shows: they take up time but not place.

By the end of the 1990s, Baudrillard's star was setting. Some saw his nadir as twenty years overdue. Baudrillard, once the oracle of simulation, now seemed a simulation of philosophy dreamed up in the heady days of High Theory. With his decline, Baudrillard ap-

peared to retrace the course charted by Marshall McLuhan: from media theorist, to media star, to collapse. But Baudrillard relished the terminal state. Black holes figure prominently in Baudrillard's later writing.

Integral Reality

At the start of the new millennium, Baudrillard was something of a spectral outsider. The once reigning superstar of cultural theory was increasingly hard-pressed to find a sympathetic ear. With 9/11, theory moved back to the Real, the world, the body, to politics, to economy, to sex, to what Baudrillard had once called "the Real's big numbers."¹ Undeterred, Baudrillard pressed on. He extended and even radicalized his simulation hypothesis.

Baudrillard proposed a new theory: Integral Reality. This theory achieves its most explicit and crystalline formulation in *The Intelligence of Evil, or The Lucidity Pact*. It was published in 2004 at a moment when the West was deep in the grip of a reality scare following the horror of September 11. Yet simulation was soon at work again in the form of The War on Terror. The enemy—terrorism—was billed as a kind of "phantom-menace" (to borrow from Star Wars). Terror is said to exist as an ever present threat—a virtual threat—that threatens to become reality at any moment. How to contain terror? This was the question faced by US (and world) policy makers. The answer was to *realize terror virtually* (for the West) by making terror both real *and* spectral. The doctrine of pre-emption generated a logically hysterical sequence: the war on terror, terrifying terror by war, making actual war to keep terror virtual. The War on Terror initiated the logic of involution, a fatal inward turning spiral, to use one of Baudrillard's favourite figures.² In this state of inward collapse, getting the proper critical distance, Baudrillard says, is impossible. The problem now is that things are too close. There is less and less distance between simulation and the real world. How can this problematic be addressed?

First, simulation cannot be addressed by looking to linguistics either as model or method for the problem of signification is not the same as that of simulation. The signifier—even a "floating signifier"—is tethered to the problem of reference, even as this floating form (fetish of poststructuralists) undermines the certainty of the referential operation. The philosophical ascent of the signifier, which Baudrillard's early work helped establish, presupposes a distance—an abyss even—between word and world. This distance enables the project of critique to continue even as it faces new (primarily linguistic) challenges. But simulation, argues Baudrillard, does not institute a relation to reality homologous to that of the relation between sign and referent. Indeed there is no "relation" and no "distance" between simulation and reality. If one wants an analogy with language, a more fitting one would be that of computer code.

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, translated by Phil Beitchman, Nicole Dufresne, Lee Hildreth, Mark Polizzotti (Cambridge: MIT Press/Semiotext(e), 2007).

² See, for example, Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, translated by Phil Beitchman, W.G.J. Nielsuchowski (Cambridge: MIT Press/Semiotext(e), 2008).

Computer code is a language, but it does not refer to anything outside itself. A computer code and the program it codes are one and the same: there is no “distance” between the two. Simulation and the world are similarly connected: the former produces, and is immanent to, the latter. It is this embedding of simulation in the very world it produces that Baudrillard calls Integral Reality.

Integral Reality is Baudrillard’s name for the realization of the world in its immediacy—without distance—through simulated means. Simulation produces and embeds itself into “reality” like a sphere of ever increasing density where nothing virtual can escape being realized. Baudrillard writes up his theory in one master formula: “Integral Reality: the irreversible movement towards the totalization of the world” (16).

Integral Reality’s inexorable march towards realization, however, is troubled by its inverted double to which Baudrillard gives the name The Dual Form. Baudrillard writes: “The Dual Form: the reversibility internal to the irreversible movement of the real” (16). The West is trapped, argues Baudrillard, in this fatal spiral, this “dual drive,” this “Great Game” (17). The Dual Form is what threatens to reverse the calculus of Integral Reality by exposing reality to its own virtuality. Baudrillard writes:

[T]he real is part of our imaginary. And realizing everything is akin to a universal fulfillment of desire. But today we are living through a turnabout that makes this universal fulfillment appear like a negative destiny—a catastrophic truth test (16).

The realization of the Virtual is the protective measure taken against the threat posed by The Dual Form, namely, that reality will be seen to be virtual. Such is the “fatal form” of the dialectic of reality and appearance in the era of Integral Reality.

Evil

What then of evil? Baudrillard’s concept of evil does not resemble what is found in the pages of theology and moral philosophy. Nor does Baudrillard’s concept of evil bear any relation to that of “misfortune”—the status to which he thinks evil has been reduced under late capital. Misfortune is a convenient substitute name for evil in (late) capitalist society for misfortune is “clear,” calculable, and “verifiable” (109). Evil by contrast is a “confused and impenetrable idea” (109). The contemporary imperative of transparency, the demand that nothing be invisible, is an edict against anything that falls beyond the regime of panoptical power. To be obscure, undocumented, off-the-grid, out of touch, out of reach, is bad form, an impoliteness, a sign of social deviance, a breach of today’s social contract. Misfortune “is the easiest solution to the impossibility of thinking evil” (109). Evil for Baudrillard is what can neither be conceptualized nor reduced to, nor exchanged for, anything: it is the master signifier of Baudrillard’s category of “impossible exchange” (116).

For Baudrillard, evil is a name for radical alterity. Evil is wholly other. It cannot accommodate the logic of reduction, exchange, transformation, or sublimation. Evil has therefore, for Baudrillard, no content as such: it can only be negatively defined as non-computability, non-accountability, radical alterity. The “axis of evil”—a group of states on

the US watch list—is, in this view, a metaphysical chimera that results from the reduction of evil to the economic and strategic imperatives of the military-industrial complex. It is a way of “containing” evil by intelligence operations. But to have “intelligence of evil” is nonsense for Baudrillard. One cannot reduce evil to anything, which includes reducing it to an “object” over which a subject has intelligence, and therefore control. Baudrillard writes, “with evil it is not a question of an object to be understood; we are dealing with a form that understands us” (124). Evil exposes the moral frailty of the human condition. Insofar as this object of evil exposes the subject of humanity, then evil has the power to reverse the subject-object relation.

The Intelligence of Evil is perhaps Baudrillard’s most rigorous and certainly one of his more complex works. But throughout the book there is an air of monastic muttering as if Baudrillard is playing the metaphysician in the fantasy land of late capital. In a remote corner, cut off from the centre of the academic industry, and no longer the lone-star outsider he was in the 1980s, Baudrillard stakes out a position both pessimistic and challenging: behind the triumphal facade of calculative reason and Integral Reality, there is nothing except evil, which is nothing more “than the world as it is and as it has been” (111).

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