

Total Screen: How Baudrillard Anticipated Trump

by Pepe Escobar via gail - Counterpunch *Thursday, Mar 9 2017, 8:21am*

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Well, an entertaining and hilarious piece Pepe; stomping around our post-modern world like a drunken elephant becomes you. I think you have found your real calling. Well done and much appreciated as a break from the morbidity of actual reality, as opposed to Baudrillard's re-presentation of himself as an indigo coloured spectacles maker.

"Drunken Nietzsche" indeed, I'm not sure he even indulged, he was too busy going nuts though he contributed much to our latest mis-understanding of subjectivity taken to insane extremes, let's see which of them gets it right in the 'END'. Though I favour Nietzsche, he lived his last thesis as mental implosion, now that's integrity!

It was, indeed, a Trumpquake. And the sequel was a given; the whole world, transfixed, in real time, 24/7, hanging on every word, tirade, feeding frenzy oozing from the swamp and its various flesh-eating monsters and manmade pathogens, deep state-related or otherwise.

The Trump presidency is the ultimate larger-than-life - for many the only - show on earth. It's open to debate whether the vicious civil war currently in effect between Team Trump and powerful deep state factions enmeshed with the neocon/neoliberalcon galaxy is just shadowplay; or whether this is the real deal underlining the eventual crash and burn of the American Empire.

That's all too predictable, when a reality TV star becomes president. When "post-truth" pseudo and/or non-events on screen 24/7 make a mockery of "reality." When the screen determines the perception of truth; if an "event" is not on show, it never happened.

The "post-truth" battle happens - where else - on a vortex of digital screens. And that's why US corporate media is freaking out. Because now there are no limits to how much it can suppress/repress/digress; what ideas are "appropriate" to be discussed; and what taboos cannot be broken, as debating the pernicious effects of neoliberalism, globalism or the industrial-military-intelligence-security complex.

And what a pity that the neo-Gibbon who could track this Decline and Fall to perfection - in fact did it, decades in advance, died 10 years ago, on March 6, 2007.

What to do after the orgy?

Since 1970, when he published *The Consumer Society*, the West's Deconstructor-in-Chief Jean Baudrillard had been nothing but consistent. After he identified marketing as the supreme ideology and shopping as the new moral standard/modern concept of happiness, we have come to understand ourselves primarily as reified prisoners in *The System of Objects* (another one of his classics), duly alienated by a non-stop demented deluge of merchandise.

In 1990, in *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard went one up, stressing how after the 1970s, everything had been liberated: "It was a total orgy of the real, the rational, the sexual, the critical." So, he asked with a pure dadaist/surrealist sense of humor, what is to be done "after the orgy"?

He was like a drunken Nietzsche figuring out the death of God – all over again. Our only way forward was to “simulate” non-stop, to repeat every instance of “liberation” over and over again, a pallid, vacuous redundancy empty of meaning. T. S. Eliot’s *Hollow Men* marching to a Kraftwerk beat.

Then, when vacuous neo-Hegelians announced the “end of history” after the wrap-up of the USSR, heralding the Forever Rule of Western liberal democracy, he smashed the dream as a mere “illusion of the end.”

Across the go-go 1980s, everyone, from the incipient anti-globalization Left to slightly anarchist alter-globalizers, from soft John Stuart Mill progressives to dejected neo-Marxists had to resort to their portable Baudrillard to understand the tentacles of the ego-driven, ego-corroded consumer medusa, spreading a toxic virus that kills any possibility of empathy and communitarian spirit.

By the time he published *America*, in 1986, Baudrillard was already deep into conceptualizing the ultimate game of post-modernity; Total Sign, Total Image, Total Media, Total Culture Industry all enmeshed in a “hyper-real” web of “real simulacra.” He coined the concept of reality TV even before reality TV existed. In the process, alongside Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and Lyotard, he became a Guns n Roses-level intellectual superstar across elite US universities.

From David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* to the *Matrix* trilogy, and all the way to *Westworld*, here’s to our Baudrillardian world under complete control, simultaneously transparent (everything is so glitteringly visible) and totally opaque (everything that matters is veiled), where what’s on show is never what it seems (or, to quote *Twin Peaks*, a totally Baudrillard series, “the owls are not what they seem”).

All aboard the total simulacrum

Dead before the Obama era, Baudrillard could not have possibly deconstructed Obama’s “invisible” kill list or the pathological demonization of Russia and Iran. But he did have imperial sideways encounters with both Daddy Bush and Dubya.

On the 1991 Gulf War, he wrote it never happened: no battles; no dead bodies; “asexual, surgical”; a “no-war”; just videogame-style abstract scenes (it would have been another story had he had access to “highway of death” footage, the US Army engaged in target practice on thousands of fleeing, unarmed Iraqi soldiers).

On 9/11, he wrote a landmark essay, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (which I read, startled, in Peshawar) not justifying it, but demonstrating how maximum power had to eventually elicit maximum destructive, although asymmetrical, counter-power. 9/11 was the ultimate Total Screen event.

Baudrillard would have been mightily intrigued by reality TV master Trump – as well as the current post-truth civil war.

He would have analyzed how Trump went over virtually the whole Beltway establishment, corporate media included, to get elected, using his trademark version of Total Screen. He would have seen that Trump is far from an American Macbeth sowing Hobbesian chaos. And he would have reveled in a vicious sociopolitical American war played in real time on the Total Screen.

What to do after the orgy? Revel in the Baudrillard index, put together by the International Journal of Baudrillard Studies (IJBS), and welcome to the Total Simulacrum Trump era.

Copyright applies *but then what really applies in a post-modern world?*

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/03/09/total-screen-how-baudrillard-anticipated-trump/>

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