

Jean Baudrillard and Cinema: The Problems of Technology, Realism and History

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As for cinema, I am still very much in love with it, but it has reached a despairing state. [...] I like the cinema, of all the spectacles it's even the only one I do like (Baudrillard 1993a, 23-29).

Nazism, the concentration camps or Hiroshima ... did all those things really exist? The question is perhaps an intolerable one, but the interesting thing here is what makes it logically possible. And in fact what makes it possible is the media's way of replacing any event, any idea, any history with any other... (Baudrillard 1993b, 91; see also Baudrillard 2002a, 16 ff.).

I. Introduction

Jean Baudrillard refers to film and cinema hundreds of times in his writing because good cinema was very important to him. This includes his view of himself as an 'unrestrained film buff' (1987a, 28) and of the cinema as 'really the place where I relax' (1993a, 29). He told an interviewer that 'the loss of the cinema of my youth is something of a cruel loss to me' (ibid., 23). Baudrillard felt that cinema, like all of the arts, retained some its power if held in the right creative hands, despite the beating it had taken from realism and the pursuit of technology in recent years.

Like most people who deeply value good cinema Baudrillard was well aware of its mythical properties. Twice in his writings he made the point that cinema can still behave as if 'blessed with an intense imaginary... not only a screen and a visual form, but a myth' (1994a, 51; see also 1987a, 25). He said, in an optimistic tone, that 'the cinema is absolutely irreplaceable, it is our own special ceremonial... that quality of the image, of light, that quality of myth, that hasn't gone' (1993a, 30). When assessing Baudrillard's affection for cinema it is important to keep in mind that he understood it to be (at its best) a degraded form of photography. Rather than making images stronger (the popular view), Baudrillard believed that sound and movement represented dilutions of the purity of the image (1996b, 44). He held that at

its best, in the hands of a filmmaker such as Godard, cinema can still share in the 'extraordinary aura' of photography and 'recover this specific quality of the image' (1998, 98). Here, as elsewhere in his thought on cinema, Baudrillard is also concerned with the problem of simulation:

the photographic image is the purest because it simulates neither time nor movement and confines itself to the most rigorous unreality. All the other forms (cinema, video, computer generated images) are merely attenuated forms of the pure image and its rupture with the real. (2005a, 97)

He also wrote that 'the white magic of the cinema' is one of the 'twentieth century's two elements of mass fascination' (the other being 'the black magic of terrorism') (2002b, 29-30).

For Baudrillard film is important because it can be used to explore 'the insignificance of the world through the image' – as in the work of Wenders, Jarmusch, Altman, Godard, Antonioni, and Warhol (1997a, 10). Filmmakers such as these: 'have managed to retrace, through the image the insignificance of the world – that is to say, ultimately, its innocence – and to contribute to that insignificance with their images' (1998, 110). We should recognize this as very high praise from Baudrillard who is not interested in adding empirical clarity to the world as he is in emphasizing its enigmatic quality:

Here, however, lies the task of any philosophical thought: to go to the limit of hypotheses and processes, even if they are catastrophic. The only justification for thinking and writing is that it accelerates these terminal processes. Here, beyond the discourse of truth, resides the poetic and enigmatic value of thinking. For, facing a world that is unintelligible and problematic, our task is clear: we must make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic (2000, 83).¹

Baudrillard's travels in America were important to the development of his thinking on cinema because it was there where he found a 'collusion between images and life... the whole country is cinematographic... life is a traveling shot' (1987a, 27). He later told an interviewer, when discussing this aspect of America: 'that's what interests me, the telescoping together of life and cinema' (1993a, 67).² In another interview he said: '...America gives me this impression. It is there that I discover the 'matrix' of the cinema. It is there,

¹ Elsewhere Baudrillard writes: 'The absolute rule is to give back more than you were given. Never less, always more. The absolute rule of thought is to give back the world as it was given to us – unintelligible. And if possible, to render it a little more unintelligible' (1996a, 105); and 'The world was given to us as something enigmatic and unintelligible, and the task of thought is to make it, if possible, even more enigmatic and unintelligible' (2001a, 151).

² Indeed, many people, including myself, when turning on our television on the morning of September 11, 2001, wondered if we were not watching a movie. Baudrillard also refers to the way the terrorists used media to strike at our cinematic core consciousness 'in this Manhattan disaster movie' (2002b, 29).

after all, that this extraordinary myth was born, and there that it developed like a perpetual celebration' (1993a, 34). He said that American films, 'including many of the better ones, are simply illustrations of American life' (1988, 101). We should also remember that for Baudrillard America represented nothing as much as it did the future of Europe and a globalizing world. As such, cinema and the moving image represented for him the very pathways of the Americanization of the world.³

Moving beyond America cinema remained very close to the centre of Baudrillard's thought concerning the cinematic quality of life today in which we are all cast as extras:

Interface and performance: the two leitmotifs of today. ...A (non-) event like *The Matrix* [Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999] serves as a perfect example: it is the very model of a global installation, of a total world event. Not only the film, which is only an excuse to some extent, but the spin-off products, the simultaneous projection at all points of the globe and the millions of spectators themselves who are inextricably part of it. We are all, from a global and interactive point of view, actors in this total world event. (2005b, 94)

Baudrillard experienced the role of the (unpaid) extra directly as the film portrayed the cover of his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994a) hence generating discussion surrounding Baudrillard and putting him to work in engaging with it.

Aside from these insights concerning cinema, what are the main lessons we can take from Baudrillard's thought concerning film today as images are force-fed through virtual processors and onto the screens of virtuality? The first thing Baudrillard encourages us to think about (which I discuss in Section II) are the ways in which technology and an obsession with 'realism' are diminishing the quality of the cinematic image. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of his analysis here because it refers to the possible death of cinema. The second important aspect of his thought concerning cinema is that it is becoming terribly important to our understanding of history (which I discuss in Section III).

II. Wither Cinema?

For Baudrillard, cinema has been on a downward trajectory over the past century from fantastic and mythical, to realistic and hyperrealistic (1987a,

³ Baudrillard found not only the whole of America's vast space to be cinematic ('when you're there you're in a film' (1993a, 67), but also its way of life: In America 'life is cinema' (1988, 101). This relates to his understanding of the place of simulation in America, a place in which 'Disneyland... is authentic. The cinema and TV are America's reality!' (ibid., 101).

33). Through the pursuit of virtual technologies (characterized by incredible amounts of post production and the addition of computer generated imagery), Baudrillard understands some cinema to be ‘abolishing itself’ with ‘hyperreal’ technology (1994a, 47). Cinema’s relation to technology has long been one of an ‘illusion of progress’ and today the use of virtual technologies represents a further degradation of the image as did the addition of sound and colour in earlier times (1995, 49).

Baudrillard argues that the problem has deepened in recent years as films are increasingly ‘stuffed with special effects’ (2005a, 80). Cinema, he says, has ‘fallen into a kind of resentment of its own culture and its own history, lapsed into a performance game bordering on derision, it no longer believes in itself’ (1998, 110). Baudrillard finds an

extraordinary contempt on the part of film makers for their own tools and their own trade, a supreme contempt for the image itself, which is prostituted to any special effect whatsoever... the sabotaging of the image by the image professionals (1998, 111; see also 1997b, 117).

Among the films he points to here is *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989) which Baudrillard characterizes as the type of cinema that falls into a kind of ‘video indifference to itself’ (1996b, 68). Baudrillard finds an analogy for what is happening in film by looking to politics where it is the political that is sabotaged by politicians themselves (1998, 111).

For Baudrillard efforts to attain digitalized perfection of the cinematic image to be ‘wearisome’ (2002a, 178). He is not so much concerned, for example, about the amount of violence as he is the ‘mere special effects of violence... pure machinic violence which no longer has an effect on us’ (2002a, 178). In his assessment of efforts to perfect the image through digitalization Baudrillard recognized something that has alarmed many who love cinema in its earlier forms. Among filmmakers who have lost their cinematic edge with the proliferation of high-tech machinery he says is Martin Scorsese. His recent films are full, Baudrillard says: of ‘frantic and eclectic agitation’ cinema which ‘only fills the void of the image and thus adds only to our imaginary disillusion’ (1997a, 10). One thinks here of *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, 1990). The problem goes beyond Scorsese’s later films of course. As Baudrillard told an interviewer: ‘Cinema has become hyper-realist, technically sophisticated, effective (*performant*). The films... fail to incorporate any element of make believe (*l’imaginaire*)’. For Baudrillard it is as if the cinema were regressing towards infinity, towards some indefinable perfection, a formal ‘empty perfection’ (1993a, 31). Here Baudrillard stands firm against the embrace of technology in cinema in recent years. It is an analysis that fits well within his overall suspicion of technology and his ability to make us rethink our sense of ‘technological prowess’ which is in fact, he argues, only a disempowering aspect of our contemporary lives. Efforts to achieve perfect definition only move us further away from the power of illusion which is so vital to good cinema (1996a, 30). The result is a ‘pornography of the image, technical processes of illusion which remove the possibility for illusion in the radical sense’ (1997a, 8). Cinema is then not

only a product of modernity but one of its victims for Baudrillard who understands that during modernity we forgot that ‘subtraction is what gives strength, power emerges from absence’ (Ibid., 9). Such an understanding is then joined by Baudrillard to a challenge to realism based on his understanding of contemporary cinematic technologies.

Baudrillard acknowledges that some good films in recent years have taken on the important subject of the ‘growing blurring between the real and the virtual’. He thrice mentions *Minority Report* (Stephen Spielberg, 2002) in this regard in his writings (2005a, 28, 118; and 2005b, 202), as well as *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) (2005b, 202), and *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998) (2005a, 41, 92). The blurring of the real and the virtual he says is the ‘obsession of our age’ (2006, 92).

Where images are concerned Baudrillard argues that the closer we come to the absolutely real, to veracity – as in digitalization and computer generated effects – the closer we move towards banality and boredom (1994a, 46). When the image ‘approaches an absolute correspondence’ this is ‘the very definition of the hyperreal’ (1994a, 47; see also 1987a, 33). This is precisely Baudrillard’s problem with technology and its links to so called cinematic realism in recent years. Here cinema risks abolishing itself ‘in the absolute of reality, the real already long ago absorbed into cinematographic or TV hyperreality’ (1987a, 34). He says that the cinematic pretension to reality is a naïve, puritan, paranoid and terrorist vision the kind of which no other culture except our own has ever displayed toward it signs (1994a, 46-47). Baudrillard also notes that we should not underestimate the role of television in what is happening to cinema because cinema is progressively coming to resemble television, which it ‘is increasingly contaminated by’ (1994a, 51; see also 1997a, 8). When it becomes a simulacra of television,⁴ cinema becomes a kind of simulation in the second degree for Baudrillard (1987a, 21). He goes so far as to wonder if the makers of certain films were not repelled by their own work as they were in production (here he points to ‘*Barton Fink* (Joel and Ethan Cohen, 1991), *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven (1992), *Sailor and Lula* (David Lynch, 1990) etc.’).⁵ What else, he wonders could justify ‘the orgy of means and the efforts to cancel films through an excess of virtuosity, special effects... the technical harassment of images – by exhausting their effects to the point of making a sarcastic parody out of it’ (1997, 8).

Among the most offensive of the new high-tech films in Baudrillard’s view is the *Matrix* trilogy. On the *Matrix Reloaded* (Andy and Larry

⁴ Another way in which Baudrillard points out that cinema is moving closer to television is in the placement of advertising products into films which Hollywood calls ‘product placement’ and Baudrillard refers to as ‘the cinema of consumption’ (2001b, 49). Here ‘entire films have become advertising objects fired by the thrill of business, enriched like uranium, embellished with the vestiges of self management and the stereotypes of communication’ (1990, 132).

⁵ *Sailor and Lula* refers to David Lynch’s film *Wild at Heart* (1990).

Wachowski, 2003) he perceptively wrote: it ‘doesn’t have the slightest glimmer of irony, nothing that might allow viewers to turn this huge special effect around’ (2005b, 202). On the Matrix trilogy he wrote that the ‘most embarrassing part is the confusion of the problem raised by simulation with the classic Platonic treatment’ (Ibid., 202). Perhaps he said all there was to say of this technological disaster of a trilogy when he told an interviewer: ‘*The Matrix* is the kind of film about the Matrix that the Matrix itself could have produced’ (2005b, 202).

For Baudrillard we do not know the ‘real’ but merely the appearances behind which it hides (1996a, 2 ff.). The relation of appearance and illusion is central to this view in which an image is ‘bound neither to truth nor reality; it is appearance and bound to appearance’ (2005a, 91). As such, for Baudrillard, ‘we disappear behind our images’ (Ibid., 85). But as is often the case for Baudrillard a duality is at work. Not only do we face the problem of the image replacing reality but the real (our obsession with realism, especially in cinema), is making the image disappear: As he writes in impossible exchange: ‘we deplore the disappearance of the real, arguing that everything is now mediated by the image. But we forget that the image, too, disappears, overcome by reality, what is sacrificed in this operation is not so much the real as the image’ (2001a, 145).⁶

Cinema, when subjected to technological machinations and a quest for realism thus becomes a kind of over-managed and virtual enterprise such as was the televisual spectacle of the first war in the Gulf for Baudrillard: ‘the closer we supposedly approach the real, or truth, the further we draw away from them’ (1995, 49). Indeed, ‘cinema is at risk of disappearing at the hands of reality’ (2005a, 125). Nowhere however, do questions concerning our perception of reality become more problematic in Baudrillard’s thought on cinema than in his assessment of its place in relation to our understanding of history. Here we find one of the more difficult meanings of his assertion that ‘reality is [also] disappearing at the hands of cinema’ (ibid.).

III. Cinema and History

The immense majority of present day photographic, cinematic, and television images are thought to bear witness to the world...we have spontaneous confidence in their realism. We are wrong (Baudrillard 1987a, 14).

⁶ Baudrillard also points out that, in the case of the film *The China Syndrome* (James Bridges, 1979) concerning a crisis at a nuclear power station: ‘reality is anticipated by the image’ (the nuclear crisis at Three Mile Island which took place a few weeks after the film’s release (1987a, 19).

Every image is an ephemeral vanishing act... its only magic is the magic of disappearance, and the pleasures it gives are bloodless ones (Baudrillard 1990b, 67).

In our era of high-tech simulation, as we are buried ever deeper under images, efforts to give or take meaning from history, never easy, are now deeply problematic. For Baudrillard the strong lesson of contemporary simulation is that the old relationship between sign and referent have become reversed. The referent disappears into the virtual, vanishing 'into the technical programming of the image' (2005a, 96). Baudrillard says that we do not get closer to the reality of a thing or an event by burying it under layer upon layer of images. Indeed, images take us further away from the real which today is reaching a point where any firm distinction between reality and representation can tumble over the abyss of hyper-simulation. Whatever relationship the image and reality may have been said to share in historical time is now stretched beyond credulity in the age of real time media (Baudrillard 1994b, 90). Baudrillard's writing marks our passage from the ever problematic 'real' to the hyperreal where simulation engulfs the real. Here simulacra move toward the force of reality, although this is not based on any counterpart in the real world, it is experienced as being more real than any reality.

For Baudrillard 'cinema has a profound effect on our perception of people and things, and of time too' (1993a, 31). He argues that our understanding of history is increasingly divorced from the 'historical real' and that cinema plays an important role in replacing it with, at best, an 'invocation of resemblance' – a kind of hyper-resemblance (1994a, 44-45). He points to 'films whose very perfection is disquieting' in this regard such as *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (Sydney Pollack, 1975), *1900* (*Novacento*, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1976), and *All The President's Men* (Alan Pakula, 1976). History is fast becoming our 'lost referential' for Baudrillard 'our myth' in a time when the decline of strong referentials is the great event of our period – 'death pangs of the real... that open onto an age of simulation' (ibid., 43):

A whole generation of films is emerging that will be to those one knew what the android is to man: marvelous artifacts, without weakness, pleasing simulacra that lack only the imaginary, and the hallucination inherent to cinema. Most of what we see today (the best) is already of this order. *Barry Lyndon* [Stanley Kubrick, 1975] is the best example: one never did better, one will never do better in ... what? Not in evoking, not even in evoking, in simulating. All the toxic radiation has been filtered, all the ingredients are there, in precise doses, not a single error. Cool, cold pleasure, not even aesthetic in the strict sense: functional pleasure, equational pleasure, pleasure of machination. (ibid., 45-46)

Baudrillard dislikes the way some directors remove passion from history and points specifically to Kubric who ‘controls his film like a chessboard, and makes history an operational scenario’ (1987a, 32).

To stress the considerable importance of what is taking place Baudrillard moves to question the deeper meaning of negationists (those who deny the Holocaust such as France’s Robert Faurisson). Baudrillard argues that, despite the absurdity of their position, the likes of Faurisson flourish in an era characterized by multimedia saturation in real time (Baudrillard defines real time as ‘CNN, instant news, which is the exact opposite of history’ [1994b, 90]). On this difficult subject he writes:

where the holocaust-deniers are plainly absurd and wrong is when they themselves espouse realism and contest *the objective, historical reality*, of the holocaust. In historical time, the event took place and the evidence is there. But we are no longer in historical time; we are now in *real time*, and in real time there is no longer any evidence of anything whatever. The holocaust will never be verified in real time. Holocaust denial is, therefore, absurd in its own logic, but by its very absurdity it sheds light on the irruption of another dimension, paradoxically termed ‘real time’ – a dimension in which, paradoxically, objective reality disappears. [...] This is indeed the undoing or defeat of thought and critical thought – but in fact it is not *its* defeat: it is the victory of real time over the present, over the past, over any form of logical articulation of reality whatsoever. (2002a, 108-109)

As do purged and purified televisual images of war, cinema too plays an important part in the disappearance of history (1994a, 48). Our collective understanding of realities such as the holocaust disappear and are replaced by images from cinema and other media (2005a, 125). Reality, says Baudrillard, has ‘preferred to disappear behind the perfect alibi of images’ (1990b, 181). With our obsession for realism Baudrillard says that ‘the intensity of the image matches the degree of its denial of the real’ (1999, 130).

Taking the Holocaust as an example it is important to recognize that the vast majority of people recognize it and know it through images and media such as the films *Holocaust* (Titus Productions, 1978), *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), or *Schindler’s List* (Stephen Spielberg, 1993). In Baudrillard’s assessment:

the whole of our reality is filtered through the media, including tragic events of the past. This means that it is too late to verify and understand those events historically. [...] The tools required for such intelligibility have been lost. [...] What is actually occurring – collectively, confusedly, via all the trials and debates – is a transition from the historical stage to a mythical stage: the mythic – and media led – reconstruction of all these events. [...] The Heidegger affair, the Klaus Barbie trial, and so on, are just so many feeble convulsive reactions to this loss of reality – which is now our *reality*. Faurisson’s

claims are a cynical transposition of this loss of reality into the past. The statement 'It never existed' means simply that we ourselves no longer exist sufficiently even to sustain a memory, and that hallucinations are the only way we have left to feel alive. (1993b, 90-93)

Baudrillard's thought on cinema, and images generally, lead us to understand that notions of responsibility, which have been fundamental in the past, as well as the meaning of history, are disappearing (2002a, 17). Cinema thus plays an important role in our passage into a hyperreal where the very repetition of images, when it is not simply tiresome, is also convincing (1987b, 69). For Baudrillard this means that increasingly as we continue into an image saturated future, 'we shall never know whether Nazism, the concentration camps or Hiroshima were intelligible or not, our amnesia is the amnesia of images' (2002a, 17). Cinema then plays an important part in the greater contribution of all media to the creation of a time when any event, idea or history can be replaced with any view of it (1993ba, 91).

An important case of what Baudrillard describes takes place in the film *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) which won best foreign language film at the Oscars in 2007. In it we are treated to a very selective view of the Stasi (the repressive East German state police force which existed from 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989). The film shows the life of a 'good' Stasi officer who actually protects a playwright on whom he has been sent to gather evidence for prosecution. Many people have expressed deep anger at the choice of the director to use a real historical police force to tell a story that could be set in any place and time. What troubles these critics is that not one single Stasi ever did the sort of things shown in the film if for no other reason than the repressive measures of the force precluded even their own officials from acting independently. In the case of *The Lives of Others* it seems that reality has indeed 'preferred to disappear behind the perfect alibi of images' (Baudrillard, 1990b, 181)⁷. If a film like this disturbs us it is because images have become vitally important in our time. Images often stand in for reality now, their magical status possessing something of the radical illusion of the world, the fact that we do not know the real but the appearances behind which it hides (1999, 140). For example, in my university cinema class of 30 students (Winter 2009), only three had any other knowledge of the Stasi than

⁷ Two excellent criticisms of the film have been offered by Slavoj Žižek and Anna Funder. Žižek criticized the naïveté of the character of the playwright Dreyman who combined three features: personal honesty, sincere support for the regime, and intelligence. According to Žižek it was possible to combine only two of these features – never all three (Žižek, 2007). Funder (who published a book on the Stasi in 2003), noted in her review of the film for the *Guardian* that no individual Stasi operative would have had the possibility to hide information from his superiors as Wiesler did. 'The GDR spies couldn't have done it -- and wouldn't have wanted to' ... 'No Stasi man ever tried to save his victims, because it was impossible. (We'd know if one had, because the files are so comprehensive) (Funder, 2007).

this film. Baudrillard forces us to wonder why we are coming to prefer the 'exile of the virtual' to the 'catastrophe of the real' (1995, 28).

In *The Lives of Others* we have a vivid example of what Baudrillard means when he says 'the intensity of the image matches the degree of its denial of the real' (ibid., 130). Today so much of our so called 'reality' is filtered through the media, including tragic events of the past. In a time when our reality is ever more hyperreal (more real than real), we can expect films which tell stories like this one about the good Stasi man. We can expect filmmakers, who are now more powerful in their reach (if not accuracy), than the best historians, to use history like a great toy. There is not much point however in becoming angry at a filmmaker for doing what films do, playing with reality and history. Through its stunning anti-aesthetic and its otherwise weak story *The Lives Of Others* raises some of the most important issues of our time concerning images. As Baudrillard understands film it is far more than a mere screen or visual form, it can possess the power of myth, can still resemble a fantasy or a dream (1990a, 162). This insight works in multiple directions as von Donnersmarck's film shows.

IV. Conclusion

For Baudrillard there are two vitally important aspects of the cinema / reality relationship. He finds that 'a lethal transfusion' is occurring 'in which each is losing its specificity'. Cinema disappears when we are too concerned with technical perfection and realism and reality (our understanding of history for example), disappears because of the growing importance and influence of cinema (2005a, 125). The first problem portends the death of cinema – good cinema – as we have come to know it. The second is simply an intolerable circumstance which we can do little if anything about.

From Baudrillard we take two lessons: The first is that people concerned with good cinema (and in making it) will pay less attention to virtual technological realism than to the quality of the image. Recall how Krzysztof Kieślowski, in the opening scenes of *Trois Couleurs Rouge*, sends us along the wires of the underground telephone system. This is not a computer generated effect. Instead, the crew used a steady-cam, hand cranking it at three frames per second. When played back at sixteen frames per second an effect far more marvelous than any computer generated image appears on the screen. The second thing we take from Baudrillard is the idea that cinema, precisely at the time of its absorption into technology, is more important than the best written histories in terms of its reach and impact on consciousness.

Perhaps the best we can do, like Baudrillard, is to continue to love good cinema but understand that most film has reached a desperate state (1993a, 23). Cinema is not dead but with each passing year and increasing amount of it becomes less recognizable in its hyperrealization (for example as I write cinema goes are being treated to the computer generated overlay of *Fast and Furious* (Justin Lin, 2009) and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (Gavin Hood, 2009). We also gain some sense of how much virtual technology has

overtaken the traditional cinematic screen when we compare recent remakes of earlier films such as 2006's *Casino Royale* versus the 1967 original. In the remake James Bond often has more in common with a video game character than a human actor due to the proliferation of virtual stunts. Yet, despite the worst technological machinations and the daunting problems posed by the pursuit of realism, as well as the ever-problematic relationship between history and cinema, it appears that good cinema will not become extinct. It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to find.

If we take Baudrillard's *oeuvre* seriously however (where his overall philosophy meets cinema), we can find in him almost a reassuring posture. Baudrillard cites Elias Canetti who understood that we have, as a civilization, passed a point (of radicalized uncertainty), after which, we do not know with confidence what is going on (1987b, 113). In Baudrillard's terms: 'the revolution of our time is the uncertainty revolution' (1993b, 43). Cinema is playing its role, alongside of other media, in contributing to a deepening (and often seemingly intolerable) uncertainty. But as Baudrillard also leads me to ask: would we really rather live in absolute certainty, cinematic or otherwise? Are not films which operate with a sense of clear meaning also usually terrible? (I think here of politically charged documentaries and Baudrillard's observation that 'If you want the cinema to be the vector for some message, you are left with nothing except the worst films ever made' (1993a, 70). Baudrillard, ever aware of irony, offers an interesting caution against certainty as well:

Do we absolutely have to choose between meaning and non-meaning? But the point is precisely that we do not want to. The absence of meaning is no doubt intolerable, but it would be just as intolerable to see the world assume a definitive meaning (2001a, 128).

Baudrillard's core thought concerning virtuality, simulation, and the hyperreal intersects directly with film studies. As we continue to actively engage with film and philosophy and the places where they meet, Baudrillard's thought will remain important.

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