

Beyond Baudrillard: A Critical Intersection between Semiotics and Materialism

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Abstract : Nowadays, to restore the deconstructive power of semiotics implies a critical analysis of neoliberal ideology, and, even more critically, a confrontation with materialist perspective. The theoretical path of Jean Baudrillard is crucial to understand the ambivalence of this intersection. A semiotic critique of Baudrillard's work, through tools of both structuralism and interpretative semiotics, has the aim to give materialism a new consistent semiotic approach and vice-versa. According to Baudrillard, the commodity form is characterized by the same abstract and systemic logic of the sign-form, in which the production of the signified (use-value) is a mere ideological mean for the reproduction of the signifiers-chain (exchange-value). Nevertheless, this parallelism is broken by the author himself: if the use-value is deconstructed in its relative logic, the signified and the referent, both as discrete and positive elements, are collapsed on the same plane at the shadows of the signified forms. These divergent considerations lead Baudrillard to the same crucial point: the dismissal of the material world, replaced by the hyperreality as reproduction of a semiotic (genetic) Code. The stress on the concept of form, as an epistemological and semiotic tool to analyse the construction of values in the consumer society, has led to the Code as its ontological drift. In other words, Baudrillard seems to enclose consumer society (and reality) in this immanent and self-fetishized world of signs—an ideological perspective that mystifies the gravity of the material relationships between Northern-Western World and Third World. The notion of Encyclopaedia by Umberto Eco is the key to overturn the relationship of immanence/transcendence between the Code and the economic political of the sign, by understanding the former as an ideological plane within the encyclopedia itself. Therefore, rather than building semiotic (hyper)realities, semiotics has to deal with materialism in terms of material relationships of power which are mystified and reproduced through such ideological ontologies of signs.

Keywords : Baudrillard, Code, Eco, Encyclopaedia, epistemology vs. ontology, semiotics vs. materialism

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