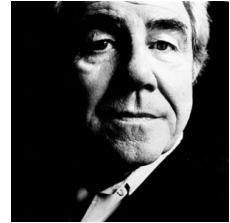


On Simulacra in *Wag the Dog*

Note: Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), when commenting as a media-theorist, was 'strategically outrageous' in his writing style; his aim was to provoke people to consider the influence of technology in reconstituting modern society and, as such, his hyperbolic style must be treated carefully.



REPRESENTATION AND SIMULATION

Utilising the semiotic theory of signs, Baudrillard contrasts two ways of understanding how signs relate to the world: 'representation' and 'simulation'.

Representation: Sign *equates* Referent

Communicative model: The sign refers to the world
(intuitive)

"Equos" (the word) *equates* Horse (the object)

Every simulation is a false representation

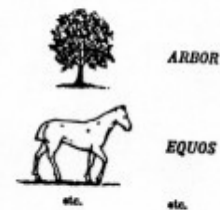
Simulation: Sign *negates* Referent

Textual model: The sign refers to other signs
(counter-intuitive)

"Equos" (the word) *negates* Horse (the object)

Every representation is always already a simulation

COURSE IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS



IMAGES AND SIMULATION



On the basis of this distinction, Baudrillard constructs his theory of the *simulacrum* (singular) or *simulacra* (plural). He achieves this by proposing the four stages of the image:

These would be the successive phases of the image:

It is the reflection of a basic reality.

It masks and perverts a basic reality.

It masks the absence of a basic reality.

It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

In the first case, the image is a good appearance: the representation is of the order of sacrament. In the second, it is an evil appearance: of the order of malefice. In the third, it plays at being an appearance: it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation.

The transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point. The first implies a theology of truth and secrecy (to which the notion of ideology still belongs). The second inaugurates an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgment to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance.

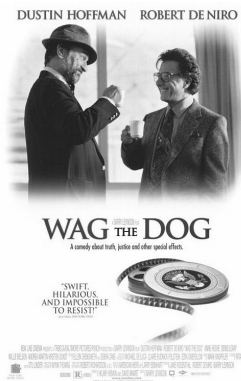
When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. This is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us: a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal, whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence.¹

¹ Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations', <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/baudrillard/baudrillard-simulacra-and-simulations.html>, Accessed 17 October 2007.

WAG THE DOG AND SIMULATION

Guiding Questions

- Does *Wag the Dog* deal with spin as a mode of 'sorcery' or 'simulation' or does it portray a transition from the former to the latter as events transpire?



- What do you make of the apparent relation between social dissimulation and 'the death of God' (keeping in mind Baudrillard's hyperbolic style)?

- How fitting is Baudrillard's description of 'nostalgia' for characterising the film's plot?