Who is Jean Baudrillard?
❖ 1929-2007
❖ Trained as a sociologist and wrote prolific works on consumerism and culture in the 80s and 90s
❖ Interested in the ways that culture takes over and obliterates nature
❖ Influenced heavily by existential Marxism in France after German occupation and by Roland Barthes’ semiotics

“Precession of the Simulacra”
❖ Jorge Luis Borges’ “On Exactitude in Science”
  ➢ Story describes a map that is created so detailed it covers all the earth.
  ➢ “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth the map precedes the territory—PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA—it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map” (Baudrillard 1557)
  ➢ The simulation itself becomes more real than the thing which it originally tried to signify, like a statue of God being more like God than the actual idea of God that engendered the statue
❖ Death of God/Nature
  ➢ “This representational imaginary, which both culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographer’s mad project of an ideal coextensivity between the map and the territory, disappears with simulation—whose operation is nuclear and genetic, and no longer specular and discursive” (Baudrillard 1557)
  ➢ Creating signs destroys the thing signified.

Lucretius and Baudrillard
❖ Lucretius
  ➢ Simulacra are fine, filmy atoms that emanate from matter
  ➢ They are physical, real particles of a thing which we receive through our senses.
    ■ They “arise directly from the surface of the rerum natura like an image in near view, firmly founded in reality” (Thury 274)
  ➢ These validate and justify things that are visible and sensible
❖ Baudrillard
  ➢ Simulacra are imitations or simulations of an imaginary thing to which truth is ascribed (i.e. Nature, God, etc.)
  ➢ The real aspect of simulacra is that they are “produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these [the real] can be reproduced an indefinite number of times” (Baudrillard 1557)
  ➢ These overturn semiotics and are used to argue for the manipulation of culture through mass production

Connections
❖ Simulacra break down divinity (of entities or of concepts)
  ➢ Lucretius wants to deflate the power of the divine by suggesting the necessity of materiality; the gods are just as mortal as humans, as they themselves consist of simulacra that visit us in dreams
➢ Baudrillard laments the death of Truth/God/Nature on account of the way *simulacra* materialize intangible concepts

Bibliography


