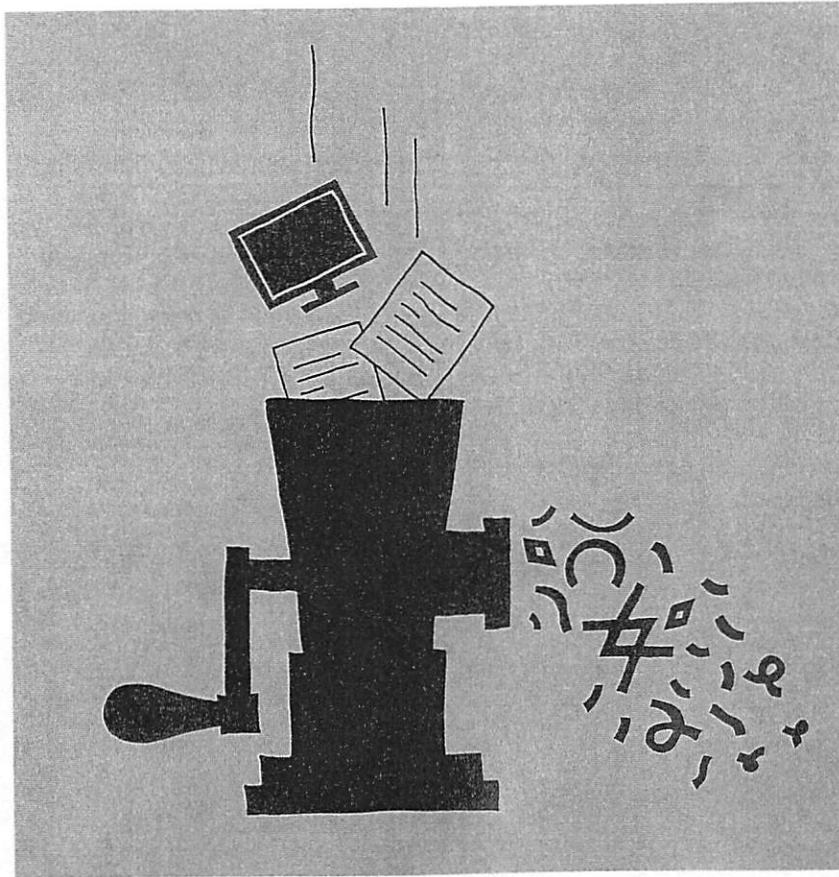


WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE THERE IS MORE AND MORE INFORMATION, AND LESS AND LESS MEANING

JEAN BAUDRILLARD (1929–2007)



IN CONTEXT

FOCUS

Simulacra

KEY DATES

c.360 BCE Greek philosopher Plato says he would banish "the imitator" from his perfect republic.

Early 1800s The Industrial Revolution begins in Europe.

1884 Friedrich Nietzsche says that we can no longer look to God to find meaning in our life, because "God is dead."

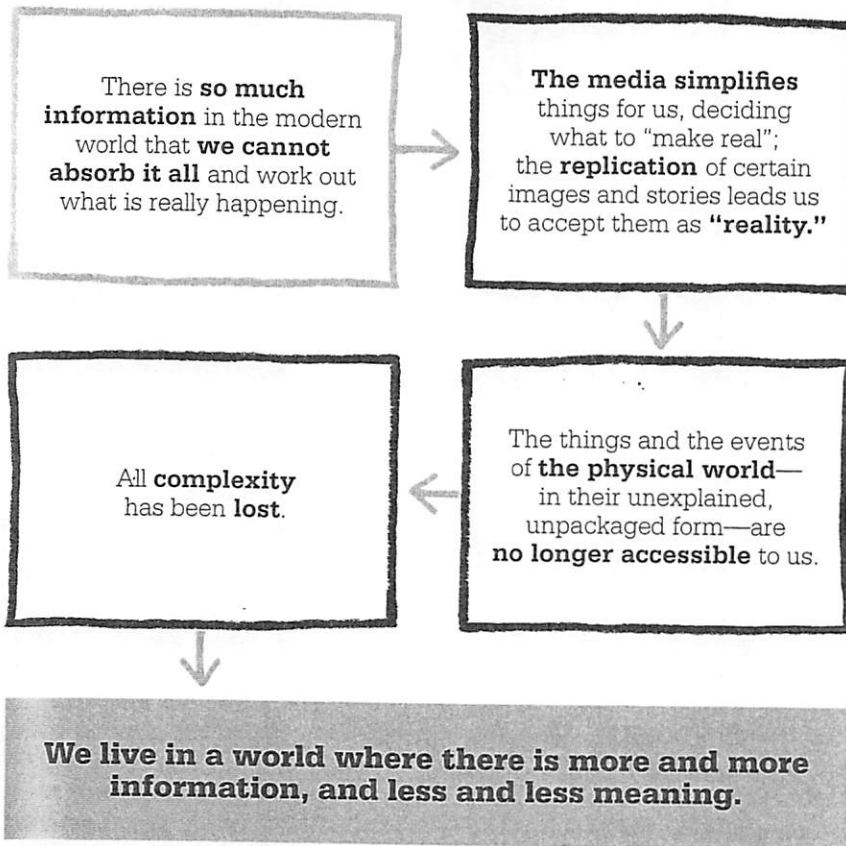
1970s Roland Barthes says signs and symbols have ideological functions that they impart to the reader with a "natural" simplicity.

1989 British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee invents the World Wide Web (www.), an Internet-based hypermedia initiative for global information sharing.

At the end of the 20th century, the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard announced that "the year 2000, in a certain way, will not take place." He claimed that the apocalypse—the end of the world as we know it—had already occurred, and in the 21st century, we "have already passed beyond the end." He believed this because, he said, there had been a perfect crime—"the murder of the real."

The only way in which we would "know" the year 2000, Baudrillard said, would be the way we now know everything: via the stream of images that are reproduced endlessly for our

See also: Henri Lefebvre 106-07 ■ Alan Bryman 126-27 ■ David Held 170-71 ■ Antonio Gramsci 178-79 ■ Herbert Marcuse 182-87



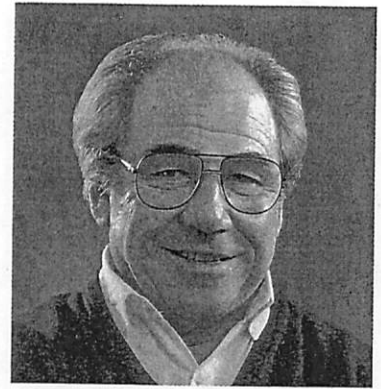
consumption by magazines, TV, newspapers, film, advertising, and websites. Reality, according to Baudrillard, is not whatever happens in the physical world (that "reality" is dead), but that which is capable of being simulated, or reproduced. In fact, he says, the real is that "which is already reproduced." During the 20th century, representation started to precede reality, rather than the other way around.

The map comes first

Baudrillard explains his position with reference to a short story by the Argentinian writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges, in which

cartographers draw up a huge map of an empire. The map's scale is 1:1, and so the map is as large as the ground it represents, and covers the physical landscape of empire completely. As the empire declines, the map gradually becomes frayed and finally ruined, leaving only a few shreds remaining.

In this allegory, the real and its copy can be easily identified; the difference between them is clear. Baudrillard maintains that this is how it used to be in the Renaissance world, when the link between a thing and its image was obvious. The image was a reflection of a profound reality, and we recognized both its »



Jean Baudrillard

Born in Reims, France, in 1929, Jean Baudrillard was the first member of his family to attend university. His parents were civil servants, but his grandparents were peasant farmers, and he claimed to have upset the status quo when he went to Paris to study, beyond school level, at the Sorbonne.

During the 1950s Baudrillard taught German in secondary schools while writing a PhD thesis under the tuition of the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In 1966, Baudrillard took up a post at the University of Paris IX teaching sociology, and later became a professor in the subject. His left-wing, radical attitude made him famous (and controversial) worldwide. He broke with Marxism in the 1970s, but remained politically active all his life. When asked "Who are you?" he replied, "What I am, I don't know. I am the simulacrum of myself."

Key works

1981 *Simulacra and Simulation*
 1983 *Fatal Strategies*
 1986 *America*
 1987 *The Ecstasy of Communication*