

Book Reviews

new books in film, philosophy, & cultural studies

Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*. Trans. Chris Turner. Oxford: Berg, 2005. ISBN: 1845203348 (paperback). CDN \$18.20

Reviewed by Lindsay Steenberg

French theorist Jean Baudrillard wrote *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact* three years after September 11th. That “rupturing event” and its metaphysical imaginings lie at the heart of his latest book. Fragmented into several sections and sub-chapters that could function independently, this work recalls a significant number of the central Baudrillardian theoretical concepts, such as simulacra and virtual reality and also the key Baudrillard-inspired film tie-in, *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), through only briefly and as a “(non)event.” Written in Baudrillard’s characteristic style, *The Intelligence of Evil* offers poetic theoretical musings, pop-scientific metaphors, and bold radical statements.

The purpose of *The Intelligence of Evil* is to bring evil back into the world, or at least revise its reputation. That is not to say that Baudrillard endorses violence, but rather that his fundamental assumption sees evil as part of form rather than content. Evil shows through good. Evil is God’s mistress, while Good is his estranged wife. Coming to an understanding *with* evil is the only way to challenge the world order and the hegemonic power of Integrated Reality (a parasitic combination of the virtual and the real).

Baudrillard’s theoretics engage with the theological not only as a religious force but also as a system of (Western) thought. Science, to Baudrillard, is as much a theological construct as religion. The belief in the real and faith in the virtual function in a similar systematic way. Our view of the real, the hegemony of global power, and the role of the media link Baudrillard to wider debates on theology and the political. In considering *The Intelligence of Evil* in light of the theological debates, I will distill the book down to four terms: reality, the virtual, terrorism, and the (non) event.

Reality, or rather Integrated Reality, dominates Baudrillard’s world. It is symptomatic of globalization and the Western ideology of humanitarianism. It offers ultimate happiness through complete disclosure. We are happy because we know and receive everything we want. However, in obtaining everything we desire, meaning is lost and we remain unfulfilled. We are in a world of excess: too many banal details, too much access to information, and too much emphasis on happiness as the ultimate goal of human life. These “easy solutions” to the problem of globalization, virtualization, and the dominance of the real trap us. If reality is the new deity then it is over-exposed, like a celebrity to whom popular culture has become indifferent.

The Virtual, to Baudrillard, is not the enemy of the real. He claims that “it is in the Virtual that we have the ultimate predator and plunderer of reality, secreted by reality itself as a kind of self-destructive viral agent” (27). Baudrillard vehemently insists that the virtual is complicit in the contemporary world’s obsession with reality. This combination of dominance with subversiveness, each exerting an undeniable force, is part of a dual movement and a quality of reversibility that Baudrillard proposes in order to address the political situation in the world. He sees terrorism as serving a similar function to that of virtual reality. It is a destructive contagion that threatens the world order. However, Baudrillard considers terrorism, like evil, as a formal element – not necessarily as a violent act perpetrated by a partisan political group. This confusion of radical formal and theoretical terms with their violent referents can be disorienting for the reader. It seems, however, that this disorientation is part of Baudrillard’s agenda.

We are also disoriented by the status of terrorism, not only in Baudrillard’s work but in general. Is it evil as Baudrillard sees evil? Is it the only way to combat American manifest destiny? Can a terrorist act be a rupturing event with constructive benefits? Or is it purely misguided violent destruction? Perhaps it is, like everything (including death), a (non) event: something for which there is no distance between image and actuality, in which they become interchangeable. As a (non) event, terrorism would lose all meaning and only bolster the world order, thereby accomplishing the exact opposite of its goal. Baudrillard uses the example of the Iraq war. He claims that its event status is compromised by the nature of the press coverage and our consumption of its images/representations. As he says, the war in Iraq is not “like a film; it is a film” (124). It becomes a non-event. September 11th, on the other hand, is an event as well as a terrorist act. It was a direct assault on America and a convulsion inside Integral Reality. Terrorism, according to Baudrillard, is “both the ‘event-moment’ and the image-feedback” (164). It belongs to the image and to the virtual (a film produced with the aid of CGI special effects), and it belongs to the political (as an attack on America by Islamic splinter groups that disrupts the ordering of the world). Terrorism has also become synonymous with evil in US culture (i.e., the Axis of Evil). This last point is just the misconception Baudrillard’s book seeks to resist.

While Baudrillard’s hypotheses on evil are presented in a tradition of theological and metaphysical debates, his theories of contemporary terrorist politics have a more emotional connection to context. It is one thing to deal with the philosophies of St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, safely sequestered in the past, but quite another to take on the status of September 11th. Dealing with terrorism as form

(as does The Intelligence of Evil) must necessarily lose some specificity and focus on human casualties. This represents one of the most interesting debates circulating around Baudrillard's recent work: could he be advocating terrorism as a solution? However, presenting terrorism as a political solution does not consider the reversibility so crucial to Baudrillard. He points out the irony of terrorism in Integral Reality: it has become the key justification for the American culture of prophylactic terror. Baudrillard believes that the U.S. is inflicting terrorism on its population through its efforts to prevent foreign terrorist attacks.

Much of The Intelligence of Evil is occupied with discussing currents in media and politics with an emphasis on evil and its relation to terrorism and September 11th. Baudrillard calls for a convulsion in reality through which we can see evil underneath good and disrupt the Western world order. Even though the "reality-fundamentalists", as Baudrillard calls them, will struggle to absorb the dual movements and radical jumps proposed by The Intelligence of Evil, they will ultimately discover that Baudrillard's "theory-fiction" is both disturbing and disrupting to a unified view of (virtual) reality. ☺

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Fredric Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions. London: Verso, 2005. ISBN: 1844670333 (hardcover). CDN \$32.34

Reviewed by R. Colin Tait

For anyone familiar with the sensation of reading Fredric Jameson's work, one is often confronted with the impression that, had the author more time to elaborate his claims, the secrets of the universe and the proper method to interpret them would make themselves clear to the reader. As a result, Jameson's essays often end with a question to be answered, further work to be done on the topic, or several different directions for the reader to pursue in the future. Moreover, those who have read beyond the author's most famous (and notorious) work, Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1992), are always confronted with the consistency of his system, and the manner in which each new work fills in another piece of a greater comprehensive theory.

With this in mind, Jameson's new full-length study Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions, presents us with the best of the Marxist critic, as the book not only offers a comprehensive collection of his disparate essays on the topic of Utopia, but absorbs them into a larger whole with a new, 290-page (re)introduction. While Jameson's work, though consistent in its assertions, has often relegated the central concept of Utopia and its role within Marxist discourse to the background, here it is given its proper due within Jameson's larger methodological *oeuvre*. In this manner, Jameson continues the theory that he began in his earliest book, Marxism and Form, through his own elaboration on the tradition of analysis in The Political Unconscious and finally within the rubric of film studies with the essays, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and "Conspiracy as Totality."

What is at stake, and what Utopia presents for Jameson, is an opportunity within the Marxist framework

to imagine a different version of the world. As a result, Jameson follows Theodor Adorno's theories of negative dialectics in order to assert that the Utopian imagination must first be rendered in its negative capacity in order to structure an alternate view of the present world. This new work, found in Archaeologies, follows the Jamesonian dictum to "always historicize" in order to trace the genealogy of Utopian fiction throughout history and assess its role. By investigating the roots of the traditions of Utopian fiction, the author makes extremely interesting connections, particularly in relation to Thomas More's original novel, which is often (incorrectly) referenced by its critics as the sole desire of the Utopian imagination and often used to counter theorists' assertions. What Jameson proposes, as he traces the history of the concept, is that Utopian fictions must be placed in their proper historical contexts, effectively countering the criticism that (liberal) Utopian visions always refer back to More's, but rather that More's vision reflects the historical raw materials of the moment of its emergence. Jameson links this impulse to the imaginative content of present-day science fiction writing, where the logic of his argument is extended to futuristic material (which is never to be perceived as *the* vision of the future but *a* vision which is entirely dependent on the raw materials of the moment from which it emerges).

Jameson states that the Utopian imagination must therefore counter the well-nigh universal effects of late and globalized capital and still perform through its negative capacity to present an alternative model to whatever system it attempts to counter. Among these visions, Jameson includes the practical desires for full employment (147), which can stand as an image of both "spatial" and "social differentiation" (15). In this manner, the construction of a Utopia becomes a "chimerical exercise" of hobby-like construction (35), where a version of the material conditions of the reality from which it stems, becomes a breeding ground for new (and perhaps productive) alternate visions of the world.

It is finally by defining and recasting the Utopian novel (and its extension in Sci-Fi) as a proper genre that Jameson can reassert the usefulness of such a category for the purposes of the Marxist historicist enterprise by claiming that,

The desire called Utopia must be concrete and ongoing, without being defeatist or incapacitating; it might therefore be better to follow an aesthetic paradigm and to assert that not only the production of the unresolvable contradiction is the fundamental process, but that we must imagine some form of gratification inherent in this very confrontation with pessimism (84).

In other words, Jameson echoes his earliest statements in his critical enterprise of uncovering and deciphering the traces of the absence of Utopia within the framework of the literary imagination. This further elaboration not only completes another essential portion of Jameson's works, but also allows the author to continue to assert his ongoing relevance as a gatekeeper of Marxist cultural study, whose ongoing project includes expanding the methodology of its practical application. ☺

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Kenneth Reinhard, Eric L. Santner, Slavoj Zizek. The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. ISBN: 0226707393 (paperback). CDN \$21.76

Reviewed by Christine Evans

The familiar and universally unpleasant Biblical injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself is, as Freud stresses in Civilization and its Discontents, a surprising and bewildering maxim. "Why would we do it?" Freud asks. "What good will it do us?... My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection... If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way..." (1). This injunction, taken up by philosophers, theologians, psychoanalysts, and political scientists alike, is problematized apropos of its apparent simplicity. But who (or what) is a neighbour? Is it the person on the other side of the flimsy apartment wall or symbolically-erected garden fence who, by virtue of his unwelcome proximity, can never please me (he is either too loud or suspiciously quiet, cannot train his dog properly, or does everything so perfectly that I despise him)? Or is 'neighbour' simply a universal signifier for everyone around us, such that our parents, friends, and lovers come to equally occupy this identity? Biblically, however, the principle of unconditional and infinite compassion is intended to be directed towards the total stranger whom we do not know and indeed may never encounter – in short, unlimited love for he whom we have the least reason to love.

These paradoxes of love, familiarity, and identity/collectivity are undertaken by Kenneth Reinhard, Eric Santner, and Slavoj Zizek in the three separate essays which comprise the text. However, of concern to the authors is not merely the question of neighbour-love and its (im)possibility, but its reflection in our social construction of ethical behaviour (the neighbour as the other *par excellence*), as well as its extension into the political realm. Although the respective authors each contribute a unique methodology and focus of inquiry (Reinhard primarily concerns himself with political applications of clinical psychoanalysis, Santner emphasizes accounts of the 'we' apropos of Rosenzweig, Badiou, and Pauline love, and Zizek posits a contra-Levinasian position which opposes love and justice), the consistent aim of their efforts yields a cogent text which ultimately showcases a collaborative spirit. The Neighbor is not as explicitly 'conversational' in its collaboration as 2000's Contingency, Hegemony, Universality (a written dialogue between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Zizek), but it nonetheless appears as a collective, cohesive effort dedicated to the detailed interrogation of a chronically underwritten (psychoanalytic) topic.

The unhappy reality of co-authoring a book with Slavoj Zizek (or even appearing alongside him in an edited volume), is the fact that one's contribution is often overshadowed by Zizek's enthusiastic, joyfully haphazard, and bombastic treatise. Essays appearing with Zizek's work often given the uncomfortable impression of dejectedly laying the groundwork for Zizek's grand Lacanian finale, but the independently persuasiveness and theoretical rigor of Reinhard and Santner's essays in The Neighbor elevate them beyond standard Zizekian padding. Indeed, Santner's contribution ("Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor") is the volume's standout work; imbued of

Santner's characteristically dazzling but historically-situated brand of scholarship, Santner's balance of high philosophy, Lacanian appendices, theology, and the historicist (contextualized) intervention, results in a methodical, balanced, and focused contribution.

Santner asserts that we can focus our neighbourly investment outwards, acceding to its effects not only on our own psyches but also on the necessary change experienced by the loved neighbour. What does love *do* to the neighbour? Contrary to the universalism of neighbour-love espoused by Alain Badiou in Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism, Santner argues that Paul's reduction of all biblical commandments to the single injunction, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', is an entirely "objectal" maxim, since it

directs our minds, indeed our entire being, toward that which is most objectlike, most thinglike about the other, the dense and resistant materiality of his or her drive destiny (125).

Divine love truly 'excepts' us from this bind of forever objectifying/being objectified by the neighbour (and, by extension, succumbing to one's finite existence), in the sense that it transcends all representation; such love must not be tied to a particular object in order to 'exist'. Santner, *qua* Rosenzweig, concludes that it is precisely this "fantasy of exception" which defines *secularity*, and that monotheism exists as a therapeutic rejoined to this state of exception. As such, "we don't... need God for the sake of divine things but for the sake of proper attentiveness to secular things" (*Ibid*).

Zizek's contribution, provocatively titled "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence", complements Santner's therapeutic and reactionary monotheism by interrogating the notion of post-secularity via the route of the Law. As we have come to expect from Zizek, a significant portion of "Neighbors and Other Monsters" is a contextualized reprint of an earlier essay, "Odradek as a Political Category." Although the Odradek fragment is certainly a more comfortable fit with the theme of the volume than some of Zizek's other attempts at harvesting portions of his own work, the strength of the essay is largely indebted to its placement after Reinhard and Santner's contributions. These earlier pieces, rather than merely setting the stage for Zizek's 'ultimate' (and, as other edited volumes have often tacitly suggested, 'ultimately correct'), rigorously supplement it with clinical-political (Reinhard) and theological-philosophical (Santner) context.

Finally, a text dedicated entirely to a Lacanian investigation of the neighbour within a focused framework (i.e., its theological origins and political manifestations) is a welcome addition to the psychoanalytic canon. While the paradoxes associated with loving one's neighbour as oneself are frequently mentioned in psychoanalytic scholarship, they often index another psychic symptom while themselves remaining uninterrogated. The concentration afforded to the neighbour in this text, as well as its varied but balanced dissemination across three methodologically-distinct examinations, identifies The Neighbor as a necessary but long-overdue investigation of a contentious subject. ©

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