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The Question of Reality: the Relationship Between the Real and the Unreal in Baudrillard and Morin

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Abstract

Jean Baudrillard and Edgar Morin were both fascinated by the question of the 'reality of reality' in the contemporary world, where the domination of media, technics and technology has substantially reconfigured mankind's relationship with reality. The substantial difference between the two positions is that Baudrillard in the endless dialectic between the real and the unreal disrupts both, without the possibility of their ever being caught in their essence, while in Morin the two are an integral part of each other and it isn't possible for humans to escape the contradiction of a life that is both real and unreal, in constant exchange between reality and imaginary. For Baudrillard, the task of thought is to expose a reality that is fundamentally illusory, and it must do so through a series of provocative propositions that force reality to reveal itself as illusion. For Morin, social phenomena, even unexpected events in the social system, must be designed with specific attention to their symbolic, mythological aspect, which is a constituent part of social communication with respect to the phenomenon itself. Aspects generally confined within the irrational lie must have their space as an object of study, in order to increase awareness of the continued contamination and of the indissolubility of the epistemological couple reality-unreality.

Keywords: reality, Baudrillard, Morin.

1. Introduction

Jean Baudrillard and Edgar Morin were linked by a friendship that was born late in their lives but that as solid. Both knew the works and writings of the other, even if their personal connection exceeded their professional one.

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They were both fascinated by the question of the 'reality of reality' in the contemporary world, where the domination of media, technics and technology has substantially reconfigured mankind's relationship with reality. This essay compares the conception of reality and the relation imaginary-reality between the two authors; the comparison is constructed through the analysis of some selected works, deemed worthy of the heuristic purpose of the text. A review of the critical literature on the two authors by Italian, French and English-speaking scholars is also useful to the purpose of this essay.

As Morin has often said, the theme of the 'reality of reality' has certainly been of great interest to philosophers since ancient times and in different cultures, both Western as Oriental. In Western societies, the study of how the human brain works and the important discoveries of contemporary physics have also convinced science, traditionally positivist and rationalistic, of the fact that the reality we perceive has a far more complex and dark side, and also that perception is always the result of a 'mental representation' which reconstructs the external *stimuli* within the mind of the subject.

The substantial difference between the two positions is expressed by Morin in his homage *Pour Baudrillard* (Baudrillard, L'Yvonnet 2008: 55-58): Baudrillard in the endless dialectic between the real and the unreal disrupts both, without the possibility of their ever being caught in their essence, while in Morin the two are an integral part of each other and it isn't possible for humans to escape the contradiction of a life that is both real and unreal, in constant exchange between reality and imaginary. In the era of globalization, Baudrillard finds the end of the real-imaginary dichotomy in favor of the pervasiveness of what he calls the *simulacra*: they lie beyond the traditional difference between what is and what appears, entirely turning the question of reality into the question of simulation. According to Morin, instead the question of reality must be addressed by taking into account its substantial complexity, and the real-imaginary dichotomy is considered depleted in favor of their substantial complementarity, even consubstantiality. To understand these two perspectives, it is therefore necessary to analyze the concepts of reality, imagination, simulation and complexity in the thought of the two authors, with a focus on reality and imaginary in media that both Baudrillard and Morin contributed to study: the former focusing mainly on television, the latter on cinema studies.

For Baudrillard, the 'false' virtual reality built by the media and technology has acquired such pervasive power that it has become the only reality considered 'true': thus the height of unreality has become the height of reality. If 'dissimulation' leaves intact the principle of reality, *simulation* questions the very difference between 'true' and 'false', between what is real and what is imaginary: so the substances of what we consider to be the truth,

the referent and the 'objective' cause, all disappear. Simulation is based on the principle of the death of the referent, and the sign (as well as the image) become the radical negation of any reference to a supposed reality. For Baudrillard, the image is a pure simulacrum: when the real no longer exists, the era of nostalgia for the real opens up, where the products that mimic the real multiply, seeking to reproduce the effects of reality.

Instead, Morin argues that the role of the imaginary is so important in human experience as to make it 'more real than reality'. In contrast to concepts such as Lacan's, that distinguish between the symbolic and the imaginary, Morin believes that the imaginary must be a much broader category, which encompasses a multitude of different forms, from nocturnal dreams to daydreams: the notion of the 'real' does not exist if we do not feed the imagination. If we look at a form of reality, for example through microphysics, we see only particles, a fleshless reality. Human perceptions of reality always contain a tiny margin of hallucination, i.e., the imaginary. Imagination finds a place even in the perception of the most concrete acts, while hallucination is experienced as something real, not as something imaginary, by the subject who is hallucinating.

2. The symbolic from simulation to imaginary

The first point that needs to be addressed in the outlook of the two authors is the theme of the *symbolic*. To understand Baudrillard's position, speech starts from his idea of 'reversibility' as a widespread form of destruction of the reality principle, to arrive at the metaphor of 'denied death' as well as the possibility of real 'existence' being denied. Baudrillard offers two interesting examples: the DNA model and the great production of 'reality effects' that is Disneyland. For Morin, the themes of death and cinema are key factors for understanding his theory of complexity, according to which representation and the imaginary are integral and even primary elements of man's relationship with reality.

For Baudrillard, the paramount form of the symbolic in contemporary society is *reversibility* (Baudrillard, 1976: 7-9), which cancels the reality principle and its substantial differentiation of the real from the unreal, true from false. In all spheres of contemporary society there is a dramatic cancellation of the linearity of time and of logical language, which becomes a mysterious anagram: it is a progressive transposition of life in death. Baudrillard affirms that reversibility is a principle of widespread *destruction*: the traditional principle of reality is thus absorbed into an indetermination principle, and reality is transformed into a *hyper-reality* of *simulation*. This process also affects the

fundamental sphere of economic policy, where capital is no longer the basis of market dynamics and where symbolic exchange value has completely replaced the use value of commodities. Economic policy has met the same fate as did the concept of 'Nature', living in a state that Baudrillard calls 'second eternity', because its fundamental elements have become illusory simulacra of material reality. Thus a first level, that of reality, passes through a second level, that of simulacra, to become a third level, which is the one inhabited by contemporary man: hyper-reality. Baudrillard essentially explores a theoretical explanation the 'paradoxical' statute of reality: this is constituted basically as a *simulation effect*. Reality renews itself in a process of *representation* and contemporary *dissolution* of its meaning. Reality itself is solely a *reality effect*, produced by mental processes which create it as such. Through thinking human subject produces systems of signs and values founded on 'principle of simulation'; reality is thus vilified by produced signs: it has been defined as Baudrillard's attempt to rethink reality through an 'homicide' of referencing and representation accomplished by the systems of signs (Butler 1999).

The extreme example of the logic of contemporary simulacra is the binary code of the digital system, whose 'prophet' is, for Baudrillard, the DNA model. Life is represented as the random combination of a code, just as a code is the basis of the language of cybernetics. So social control is embodied in forecasting and simulating system codes of models. Society is changing from a productivist capitalist order to an order of neo-capitalist cybernetics. From an anthropological point of view, *death* becomes the key to social control (Baudrillard, 1976): when death was socially removed, having lost the harmonious relationship it had with life, the power structure took control of life by means of the threat of death. The evolutionary image of mankind, which goes from life to death, is a model of our modern culture, as well as the image of death as a result of a hostile will. And this denial of death, as Baudrillard argues, reappears everywhere as the ghost of the absolute predictability of widespread simulation. A culture of machines is confused with a culture of death. The computer becomes a miniature death to which man submits in the hope of surviving; the big media systems are the final act of man's crystallized death.

To describe the relationship between the hyper-real and the imaginary, Baudrillard takes as an example Disneyland (Baudrillard, 1981: 24-28), which owes its success to its imaginary world full of illusions and phantoms. But above all Disneyland owes its success to the faithful reproduction of contemporary America. The American people pass from the extreme solitude of the entrance parking lot to the huge crowd in miniature which comprises Disneyland's fantasy world, and artificial words in general, with an atmosphere of warmth and tenderness. But the fundamental issue is that Disneyland, as a

fictional world, disguises the fact that all of America is today a large hyper-real world just like it, or in Baudrillard's terms, a simulacrum of the third order, which exists to mask the existence of an imaginary mirror of reality, while society is pervaded by the hyper-real. The power structure is forced to produce *the effects of reality* to maintain its strength, concealing the fact that there is still a substantial difference between reality and illusion, while a hyper-real simulation is the only possible experience. Reality no longer subsists.

Baudrillard's long perspective could be synthesized through the concept of 'deconstructing of presence': simulation system radicalizes itself towards self-dissolution in a 'leukemia' dynamic; symbolic expresses its failure as antagonistic and opposition force to a radicalized condition (Gane, 2000). Symbolic as extermination emphasizes codex and simulacra over a 'non-existing reality'; the looking for a meaning is meaningless. Symbolic opposes any possibility for value attribution, in relation, in language, towards objects: symbolic opposes itself to valuation as an act of continuous reversibility therefore as dissolution of reality and imaginary (Carmagnola, 2009).

More than twenty years before Baudrillard's essay, Morin wrote *L'homme et la mort* (1951), making several updates over the years, to enrich and integrate the text. The work is an anthropological study of death, ranging from archaic conceptions to the crisis of modern civilization. Morin describes his reflection as consisting of two basic themes of death: death as 'rebirth' and death as 'double', the mythical metaphors of fundamental biotic processes, related to the survival of the species and the path of universal reproduction through self-replication. Myths are also fundamental to humans, serving to metabolize the great trauma of death. For Morin, human experience is made up of symbolic and imaginary processes, which mediate the relationship between mankind and the world.

Morin was fascinated early on by the fundamental value of representation for human experience (Morin, 1956), affirming that the only reality in which mankind finds actual safety is that of *representation*, or images, which however is precisely the reality that humans label as 'non-reality'. The human brain receives impulses through representations produced by sensory receptors and nerve networks, which are in turn represented by means of waves or corpuscle images, which turn them into representations. All perceived reality passes through images, which refer to an unknown reality. According to Morin, *cinema*, as a representation of a representation, an image of an image, invites us to reflect on the relationship between reality and imagination, enabling us to understand that images are 'the radical and simultaneous constitutive act of the real and the imaginary'. The author thus finds the need to create a paradigm, such as his *theory of complexity*, which postulates the complex unity and complementarity of the real and the imaginary: cinema is a metaphor of

this complex unity, with its being both art and industry, both a social and an aesthetic phenomenon, modern and stereotypical, and both archaic and archetypal. In film genres, for example, there are certain archetypes that cover a big range of the imaginary, such as the lone avenger, who establishes order where there is crime or chaos. It is the archetype of the founding of social order through the struggle between good and evil, and within these archetypes there may be stereotyped characters: criminals, bandits, executioners. The characters are often stereotyped, but as part of a great model that frames a profound meaning.

The theme of the double is already present in Morin's *L'homme et la mort* (1951), and in his reflection on cinema (1956) he defines the double as an essential structure of consciousness, both a visible *presence* and an *absence* of something. The image is configured as simultaneously subjective and objective, to the extreme of objectivity-subjectivity, which is *hallucination*. At the meeting point of extreme objectivity and extreme subjectivity lies the image-spectrum, found in reflections, shadows, dreams, as well as in the arts and religions. Ultimately, the double seems to be the only universal human myth. What is extraordinary about photography and later 'motion pictures' is the technique of reproducing the physical-chemical structure of things, reconnecting their 'genes' in reproducing a mental image and the 'genes' of the myth of the double as a human universal, collecting all the emotional implications that man has given to his 'double', his 'shadows'. Cinema in its nascent state, with the Lumière brothers, became a variant of the myth of immortality: it was the moment, Morin says, when cinema as reproduction became cinema as fiction, or the imaginary, to reach that realm in which desires, aspirations, anxieties and fears take the shape of dreams, myths, beliefs and all fictions. The imaginary is the magical practice by which the human mind gives solidity to its dreams. It is the common area of the image-double and imagination. And so the viewer completes his anthropological journey that takes him from the image, the magical vision, the feeling (through his emotional involvement) to the perception, the idea, the narrative discourse. From imaginary to reality, and vice versa.

Morin's epistemology and anthropology studies alongside with his works on imaginary have led him to the 'paradigm of complexity' (Abdelmalek 2010). According to this paradigm, human identity is constructed and substantiated by three basic factors: species, individual, and society inextricably intertwined in a deep eco-systemic interdependence. Is thus necessary to make consistent the various dimensions of human knowledge: physics, biology, mythology, social studies, history, economy (Bianchi, 2001; Pasqualini, 2007). Another fundamental Morin's trinity is that of reason, affectivity and impulse: human being is the *homo complexus*, who is

continuously imbued by reality and imaginary. Mythical thinking and rational thinking need to each other to exist: *logos* need *mitos* and the latter needs former's coherence and narrative. The concept of consubstantiality of reality and imaginary overcomes Baudrillard's representation of reality as hyper-reality. In Morin's view imaginary is integral part of social construction of reality: the human being relates to reality through a complex process of representation, nourished by the imaginary.

3. The simulacrum and the complexity of reality

From these issues it emerges that both authors have undertaken to build a reference paradigm to amend the interpretation of man's relationship with reality. While Baudrillard's paradigm rotates around his notion of the simulacrum, that Morin's turns on the concept of complexity. In both authors, the notion of reality is revolutionized: in Baudrillard, we find the murder of reality at the hands of the simulacrum, which produces a hyper-reality like that of Virtual Reality; in Morin reality is made complex through the idea of the 'uni-duality' of the real and the imaginary, and he makes an interesting reflection on the process of knowledge.

For Baudrillard, simulacra have always existed in Western social history from the fifteenth century to the present. He identifies three great orders of simulacra: the first order, which covers the dominant classic pattern from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution, is that of *counterfeit*; the second order, dominant in the industrial age, is that of *production*; the third order, dominant in our current era, is that of *simulation* (Baudrillard, 1976: 77). Examples of the first form of simulacra can be observed in the Renaissance arts, with their desire to imitate nature in the plastic arts, the novel and even in cartographic representations of geography. The simulacrum of the first order provide copies of reality: images are clear representations of reality and recognized as mere illusion. The first-order simulacrum never abolishes the difference between what is real and what is unreal. On the other hand, production is the simulacrum born in the Industrial Revolution, the modern period, and its imitative character is increasingly advanced and accurate in the serial production of copies which makes them indistinguishable from each other: copies are now identical in all respects to their reference model. Therefore at this stage the copy threatens to replace the original. The second-order simulacra therefore create copies so similar to their originals that the boundaries between reality and representation are blurred, indistinguishable in the mass-produced proliferation of copies. Nevertheless, the simulacra of

second order still allow access to the real, as opposed to the simulacra of the third order.

In the contemporary era, simulation no longer refers to a substance, a territory; it is no longer simulation of something that exists in reality (Baudrillard, 1981: 10). Through simulated models, a hyper-reality is generated, which has no origin in reality or real substance. To use Baudrillard's metaphor, the territory does not precede the map, but it is rather the map that precedes the territory, indeed the map *generates* the territory: *the simulacrum generates reality*, or better *hyper-reality*. Simulation is opposed to representation. Representation is based on the idea of an equivalence between the sign and its referent, between sign and reality, while simulation denies the sign as a value and 'kills' every reference to reality. The turning point of our era, according to Baudrillard, is that the image has become the simulation of nothing, i.e., the image is a pure simulacrum. It is no longer possible to separate the false from the true, because there is no longer any reference to real substances. Thus what dominates is a 'nostalgia for the real', the search for a lost authenticity, which is characteristic of contemporary society.

Baudrillard thus tells the story of a perfect crime, the murder of reality (Baudrillard, 1995). If one of the great classical philosophical issues was the question of why there is 'something rather than nothing', now the big question is why there is 'nothing rather than something'. We wonder how far hyper-reality will go in its effort to become perfectly real, more real than reality, before it succumbs to the blows of total simulation. Through science and technology, objects seduce man via the illusion of power that he projects onto them, to the point of capturing him with the illusion of hyper-reality, which works according to the mysterious rules of indifference and nothingness. Baudrillard's hypothesis is that the world is 'a radical illusion': since this condition is unbearable for humans, simulation is used to disabuse them, giving them the perception of living in a very real world, that of Virtual Reality. Behind Artificial Intelligence, behind the high-tech prosthesis, behind the biological clones and virtual images mankind disappears: reality disappears in a simulated hyper-reality and mankind surrenders to the same state of total immunity to the ills of the world that automata have. And just as we don't know what to do with the work force in the information age, we don't know what to do with human 'defects' in the age of perfection of clones, and we no longer know what to do with reality in the era of hyper-reality. Now man finds himself in a state of widespread indifference: distracted, irresponsible, absent himself, he activates a mental screen of indifference, which is the same screen of indifference of the images of the New World Order.

Already in his early 1950's work, Morin launched the foundations of his theory for which he would become world-famous: the paradigm of *complexity*

(Fortin, 2005; Wells, 2012). By underlining the deep interdependence between life and death and conceiving of man as a triad Individual-Society-Species, he pointed out the anthropological question of death in order to shed light on the link between anthropology, cosmology and the biological perspective. After Morin developed and expanded this idea, abandoning what he himself called an anthropological 'euphoria' that seemed to place individuals in a higher position than the species and society, it would lead him to that beautiful image of man as a transitory being, but also as the custodian and actor of a 'biotic destiny' halfway 'between the indefinite and the infinite'. Morin points out the need to create a paradigm, such as the one that will formulate his theory of complexity, which makes it possible to conceive the complex unity and complementarity of the real and the imaginary: cinema helps to conceptualize this complex unit because it is both art and industry, both a social and an aesthetic phenomenon, modern, stereotypical and together archaic and archetypal.

Between 1977 and 2004, Morin published a colossal work entitled *La Méthode*, in six volumes, the third of which, 'La connaissance de la connaissance', was published in 1986. Already in the interesting general introduction, he recalls that belief in the universality of reason hides a process of affirmation of Western rationalization as a criterion of truth, while today we are faced with the need to recognize the impossibility of absolute truth. Any knowledge process takes place within a culture that has produced, stored and transmitted in language, logic, knowledge, the criteria of truth. Knowledge is a multidimensional process. The current state of knowledge in Western culture suffers deeply from hyper-specialisation, which appears as something obvious and natural, but it causes us to lose sight of the complexity of phenomena, which therefore are 'mutilated'. Moreover, we create a totally unexpected paradox that links the progress of knowledge with the inability to control the consequences of progress itself, the so-called evils of modernity, such as overpopulation, pollution and global warming, environmental degradation, the inexorable growth of inequality in the world, the nuclear threat. This is why it is increasingly necessary to establish the process of knowledge as an object of knowledge itself: i.e., comprehension of the bio-anthropo-socio-cultural conditions of the emergence of knowledge, as well as its areas of influence.

Morin goes on to say that squarely in the path of this problematic nature of the knowledge process lies the complex 'uni-duality' of the real and the imaginary. Man perceives reality through representations made in the form of mental images, the perception of external reality identified as a mental image. At the level of memory, and generally of all the images evoked in the absence of a referent, external reality is duplicated and becomes a ghost of itself. Morin's cornerstone reflection is the recognition that there is no intrinsic

difference between the result of the perceptual mental image and the images produced by memories or dreams: all are products of the processes of mental representation.

Throughout its history, humanity has produced perceptual images and mythic images through an interaction between real and imaginary worlds. These two worlds seem antagonistic but they are deeply complementary, feeding each other in a constant interaction with the experience that man has of the world and of himself. The two epistemological approaches of *explication* and *comprehension*, both tested during the great debate on the method of historical and social sciences, are interrelated and dialogically complementary. Comprehension, which proceeds by analogies and images, is essential for all forms of knowledge, including scientific knowledge. We see them in operation, says Morin, in the two main forms of thought: symbolic/mythical/magical thought and empirical/logical/rational thought. They are modes of knowledge and action that in ancient times were part of a 'uni-duality' but that in the Western culture, at least since Newton, have become radically disjoined. While reason and science have been used to regiment and control humanity, they have also been constantly and secretly intertwined with mythical thinking. It is a product of what Morin defines as the 'Arkhe-Esprit', namely mind that corresponds to the forces and the forms of the brain where spiritual activity takes place, in which the two forms of thought have not yet been separated, where the universal archetypes are produced. Thus Morin adds another segment to the elaboration of his 'complex epistemology', an epistemology that can only be an open process.

In more than forty years of scientific work, Morin attempted to span the gap in knowledge between the two 'families' of natural sciences and human and social sciences: he described human history as a species history and society and everyday life within the context of a 'planetary ecology' (Manghi, 2009). In Morin's view, all living creatures have a dignity as subject and human condition is framed within an ecological perspective, interacting with other subjects. Planetary society is self-eco-organized. Global problems require global solutions and human beings are bounded by the impossibility of dominating reality and being a global 'destiny community'. Morin's complexity becomes a discourse on 'limits and within limits' (Pasqualini, 2007).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York, Baudrillard and Morin reflected together on the issue of violence in the world, in their only co-authored book, and their joint reflection provides an excellent opportunity to compare their two important perspectives on the connections between fiction and reality (Baudrillard, Morin, 2003). For Baudrillard, the terrorist attack on the towers revealed how the entire world order is a pure invention, given the extreme fragility of the 'real' before the immense power of symbolic violence.

Morin instead underlined how that modern paradigm of infinite progress is increasingly exhausted before its dramatic contradictions and concluded his discourse with the optimistic concession that the new era might also bring about some great positive change, even if at present such an eventuality seems highly unlikely...

To understand the symbolic meaning of the destruction of the Twin Towers, Baudrillard begins with a historical overview of their architectural and symbolic significance. If at birth the Towers were more representative of the capitalist competition than other Manhattan buildings, which 'vied' with each other in height, from 1973, with the construction of the World Trade Center, their architectural aesthetics and symbolic meaning changed, switching to an architectural style that referred to the internet society and the monopoly market. The two towers, identical, closed in themselves, symbolized a system that seemed in keeping with the clones of an unchangeable genetic code, without any reference to a hypothetical 'original'.

The destruction of the towers, said Baudrillard, thus seemed to advocate the destruction of the system they represented. If the violence of the global order could be expressed through architecture, violent protest to this order also involved the destruction of that very architecture. Baudrillard found in the architectural symmetry of the Towers a perfect example of cloning that 'kills' their shape and arouses the desire to return to the kind of asymmetry that was manifested in the terrorist attacks, which occurred just a few minutes apart from each other. The attack on the Towers was therefore the symbolic event par excellence, demonstrating the fragility of the world order of liberalism and financial power. The collapse of the Towers as a result of the impact of the planes, argued Baudrillard, symbolically represented the entire system, with that excessively heavy symbolic weight committing 'suicide' by physically collapsing on itself.

The disastrous end of a symbolic world has been repeatedly advanced by American cinema, testifying to the fact that disaster has been an ever-present ghost in the American consciousness. Both the event and the image can be found in the destruction of the Twin Towers. Usually, in the normal media regime images take the place of events as a kind of 'proxy' event. In a sense, the image is a kind of violence done to the event, which is experienced only through the image given to it by the media. In the September 11th terrorist attacks, however, there was an overlap between the image and the event, with the image becoming the event-as-image. This image-event of the attack on the Towers combined the two great elements of that fascinate twentieth century mass society: the 'white' magic of cinema and the 'black' magic of terrorism. It is the breakdown of symbolic violence through death.

For Baudrillard, the system represents the true cancer, and terrorism is only a metastasis of the system itself. Terrorism grows hand in hand with the system, as the intrinsic counterpart of its imperialism. The risk of terrorist acts thus increases an imbalance already inherent in the world order, and the security policies that are put in place, ostensibly to combat terrorism, are in reality a covert strategy for control of the State all over the world. If the dream of terrorism is certainly utopian, it manifests how the 'world order' is entirely a fake, unreal invention. The tactic of the terrorist model is to provoke an 'excess of reality', by showing how the violence of the system will backfire against itself, producing a symbolic (prohibited) violence which heralds its own death. The real power of the system can do nothing against the symbolic power of the death of people in the system as symbols. It is the global system itself that has created the 'singular' resistance within it: terrorism is an extreme, violent singularity that forces a reaction to 'change the rules of the game'. The symbolic violence of terror supersedes traditional violence as a mirror of the global power and its arrogance.

Morin began his reflection on the violence of the world with an excursus on the history of globalization, which he prefers to call 'planetarization'. After describing how it originates from the conquest of the Americas, and how it has passed through the period of colonization, he reflects on the crucial changes since 1990. With the end of the Soviet Union and the State economy, the 'liberal State market' spread worldwide and the market economy invaded all spheres of human existence, with the explosion of the mass media making possible the instant dissemination of information all over the world. The two constituent elements of globalization are technical and economic, spreading the living standards of the Western world uniformly on a global scale. But at the same time, says Morin, internal opposition has also become widespread, in an attempt to preserve cultural identities and to overturn the very idea that lies at the base of the whole process of modernization: the infinite faith in progress, revealing the ambiguity of all the components of progress, science, technology, commerce and industry. The 9/11 events were a shock for the whole world, showing that there is a worldwide terrorist network fighting against the hegemony of the West. And against this 'reality' traditional war is useless, because terrorism has no state. What is needed, says Morin, is a 'world politics' that addresses fundamental issues.

One of the key issues, says Morin, is to abandon the notion of 'development'. We should not forget that while it is believed that economic and technical development brings with it human and social development, in the so-called 'developed' countries there is a large psychological and moral underdevelopment. Western universalism considers itself as a bearer of universal human interest, and its economic and technical values ignore

anything that cannot be calculated or measured, neglecting much of the knowledge wisdom of traditional societies. All the achievements of Western scientific and technical progress have also produced, as a consequence, the destructive potential to annihilate the entire biosphere. Progress also brings with it discomfort and destruction: this is why, Morin says, there is now a need to change direction, to imagine a new beginning. One of the key issues is to work out mutual understanding among human beings and a 'common citizenship' that makes us citizens of what Morin calls the 'earth-homeland', in a 'community of destiny' that makes us citizens of the globe. Our common destiny is dictated by the reality of the planetary era and the deadly threats that we face: what is lacking is a consciousness of this. Morals, education or the great universalist religions are no longer sufficient. Nowadays we must have faith that the improbable, the unexpected can happen within our world-system, which hangs on the verge of apocalypse, but we must also create the conditions for the improbable to happen. It's time to allow what seems 'unreal' to become real.

4. Concluding reflections: the mission of thought

In conclusion, it is useful to reflect on what, for Baudrillard and Morin, is the role that thought can have in man's relationship with the world in which he lives. If Baudrillard says that thought has mainly a role of radical unveiling, for Morin the complexity of the real must be retrieved by reuniting traditional dichotomies such as that between the real and the imaginary.

For Baudrillard the mission of thought is a radical one (Baudrillard, 1995). It must constitute itself as a sort of game with reality, just as seduction is a game with desire, and only the radical separation between 'thought' and 'reality' keeps it in a condition of productive tension. It certainly has not always been so: there was once a fruitful conjunction between ideas and reality in the period of the Enlightenment and modernity, but this relationship has now been destroyed under the aegis of widespread simulation, the empowerment of the virtual now 'free' from the real and completely self-referential. Now thought must break away from the real, just as at the dawn of modernity it had to break free from religious superstition. Unlike critical thinking, which is based on the belief that reality is something objective, *radical thinking*, says Baudrillard, is founded on the belief that reality is an illusion. It starts from the assumption that facts are not real, that the state is in fact an illusion. All claims of thought that rely on a certain 'loyalty' to the real are thus a form of hallucination. Language becomes an 'event' of the ironic

transfiguration of reality, and the mission of thought is precisely to retrieve the fundamental illusion of world and language.

The task of thought is to expose a reality that is fundamentally illusory, and it must do so through a series of provocative propositions that force reality to reveal itself as illusion. We live in a reality that seems adaptable to any situation, theory, or interpretation. It has lost the fundamental distance between thought and reality that guaranteed their productive tension. Another aspect that has been stolen, according to Baudrillard, is indifference: when everything refers to everything, when everything is indistinguishable, thought loses the distinction of being indifferent, because reality is indifferent as well. Radical thought is foreign to any idea of real objectivity, that can be deciphered. It uses an anagrammatic language that understands how meaning is itself an illusion: by demonstrating the infinite illusion of sense, thought demonstrates the infinite illusion of reality, the essence of reality as 'impostor'. The absolute rule is to make the world even more unintelligible than we have been given to understand.

The mission of thought is, according to Baudrillard, the construction of a narrative strategy; a *theory-fiction* as an extreme attempt to rethink reality, which is irreversibly transposed to the simulacra statute of total dissolution of referencing and representation. This is the only possibility for reality to be value-endowed and to operate in a significant and performing way. This process is also illusionary but the fatal strategy of Baudrillard underlines, through writing, the paradoxical power of sign-simulacra, as a 'residual' force. Previously critical thinking could deal with ideologies as 'illusions' and fetish to an effective principle of reality; nowadays reality itself is virtualized becoming a self-evident fetish. The only possibility for a critical thinking is reflecting on imaginary, since the relation between imaginary and reality is purely illusionary. When critical thinking abandons his vocation to uncover reality and 'plays' with the absurd, then it becomes 'radical thinking' re-approaching reality. According to philosopher L'Yvonnet, the idea of *fragment*, of detail as a 'way of thinking' enables Baudrillard's work as worth-studying for contemporary scholars (L'Yvonnet, 2013).

For Morin, thought and culture in general must also promote radical change. His work 'Sociologie' (first published in 1984) proposed a true 'reform' of thought by introducing his theory of the principles of complexity that he had already formulated elsewhere: the need for a systemic overview, in which the system is open and based on self-eco-organization; the need to replace the deterministic and mechanistic principle by a dialogic principle in which order, disorder and organization are in a complementary relationship; the need to replenish the observer within the observed object, of which it forms a part. Sociology must take up three major challenges: to communicate

both scientific and humanistic culture, to understand fundamental anthropo-social complexity, and – even more daring – to re-think the essential paradigm shift in the human sciences, of whose urgency is now increasingly evident.

Social phenomena, even unexpected events in the social system, must be designed with specific attention to their symbolic, mythological aspect, which is a constituent part of social communication with respect to the phenomenon itself. Aspects generally confined within the irrational lie must have their space as an object of study, in order to increase awareness of the continued contamination and of the indissolubility of the epistemological couple subject-object. Such contamination has now become an intrinsic part of the very advanced, so-called ‘hard’ sciences, as for example microphysics. We are operating in the field of anthropology, but not in an ‘academic’ sense, where anthropology is the study of archaic societies, but in the sense that anthropology was understood in the nineteenth century, as a reflection on the different aspects of human knowledge, i.e., prehistory, ethnology, history, and certainly of sociology and psychology. Any discipline shut in on itself will never find the imaginary substance: we need to be anthropologists, to see the different aspects of the imaginary, to truly capture it. We need a new ‘image’ of the reality and of the mankind. Morin’s complexity refuses the parceling of knowledge and division among disciples. The role of intellectuals is problematizing a complex reality with a human conscience as biological, cultural and social in nature, ethically directed to a ‘concrete universal’, where passion for imaginary encounters passion for intercultural dialogue through self-knowledge and other’s knowledge (Pasqualini, 2007).

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