

# **D E A D L A B O R**

**TRACES OF MARXISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**Theory ProSeminar II**  
Professor Stephen Pfohl  
Boston College

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**Brian P. Hogan Jr**

The connection of Baudrillard to Marx's work via sign and the fetishism of the commodified form is an interesting place to begin a reaction to the Traces of Marxism lecture because through an analysis of dead labor, dead power, and dead truth our attention can question the potential power carried in signs and signifiers in the modern era. Are we engulfed in a world of symbols linked to commodified forms and experience such that commodities, as signs, have eclipsed a referent to the real (Kroker, pg180)? If we are currently absorbed in a aimless cycle of exchange then are we disconnected from the real and internal fleshy feelings? Such thoughts are important and will be considered in the following while also trying to develop a critical perspective of how current forms of the capitalistic mode of production are linked to manufacturing information that is perhaps significantly impacting an individual's social construction.

In Arthur Kroker's article *Baudrillard's Marx* we find an intense exploration of how Baudrillard connected Marxist's writings in *Capital* to the modern era. We begin by reviewing his reflection of being imprisoned in a world of abstract power ruled by black boxes, intelligence systems if you will, that capture, absorb, and bound the social in media imagery / forms. This capturing and bounding for Baudrillard separates an individual from himself through mass structural ordering of signs. Baudrillard argues that the individual's self is not internal but exteriorized into the simulation of signs. He argues that the social results from the residuals of a web of simulations in which vast commodities of signs are processed. But, these signs are not merely objects. He argues they are entities bounded with meaning, desire, and that which represents the real and one's connection with nature. He also argues that these signs have aligned themselves with the purest form of Marx's commodity-form because use-value and exchange-value are embedded in them. As such, an endless cycle of exchange is possible because experience is entirely bound in the sign. A simulational world results as our connections fade from the real.

In order to support this argument, Kroker explores nihilism and its association with the commodified form in Western Culture. This is an important connection point in his review of Baudrillard's hypotheses because it sought to illustrate how Christian metaphysics combined with internal psychology to morphemically replace the trinity. Baudrillard argues, through use of Nietzsche's *will to power*, that accumulation fused itself in the modern mind because of a self-perpetuating value process. As this process continued wo/man became disconnected from the metaphysical and the psyche locked itself in the realm of the sign. Capital grew in power and became more abstract because wo/man was too focused on accumulation and sign exchange in the simulation. The above has been summarized but Baudrillard's material provokes us to consider why a substantial rise Palm Pilots, cell phones, and wireless internet technologies has occurred. Are we becoming more fascinated and simulated? Can Walter Benjamin engage us in this regard?

From the in-class lecture, we learn Walter Benjamin challenges social scientists to learn from the commodified form that has struggled to gain dominance. By reviewing these dominating objects perhaps we could find something individuals are yearning for not captured in the commodified form and turn it into a device of anti-capital. This is what Benjamin termed an attempt to capture the *missing* from the ruined. I feel there is some possibility in this argument but only if that which is missing could powerfully penetrate Baudrillard's simulated reality because the businesses of capitalism are continuing to force imagery and information on us at ever increasing speeds.

Studying this Marxism material is important because societal forms, structure and institutions are real, powerful, and capable of exerting significant influence on the paths individual pursue. Gramsci's analysis of Marx's *Capital*, as covered in the lecture notes and Stuart Hall's piece *Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity*, reveals how he was concerned about the relationship of social processes to the production

processes. He considered the new *ultra* modern subject to be a product of improved modes of production that led to higher wages and increased consumer consumption. He also extended Marx's notion of class consciousness by speculating how modes of production colonized the imagination and positioned homogeneity and self-awareness at the class level. This insight is important to consider because it requires us to think rigorously about hegemony, how it forms, and its relation to production. In concluding on Gramsci, his concepts of organic and occasional historical movements are relevant today because they capture the importance of understanding the historical affects of successful social movements based on embedded imagery and ideas.

Overall, I would be challenged to compare and contrast *Traces of Marxism* to say poststructuralism as I find myself positioning with the Marxist idea of the body being located in economic relations and rituals. Individuals are located and subjected to political, social, and industrial modes of production. As such, we can see the affects of this if for example we consider the relationship between state education and industrialization levels. I feel challenged to better understand how to blend the positive and negative sides of this material with the other theories covered.