

»For Jean B.«

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Curated by Stephan Köhler

*“To perform, to materialise, to realise, to produce: it appears as if this is the ideal purpose of every single thing, following a movement determined by progress and a inner necessity, passing from a state of the possible to that of the real.”**

This exhibition intends to reveal the possible connections between J. Baudrillard's arguments in 'The Intelligence of Evil' and phenomena and tendencies in contemporary art. In his late work, published by Passagen Verlag, Vienna, Baudrillard introduces a new status for anthropological development. He calls this state 'Integral Reality'. In addition to the quote at the beginning of this text, he specifies 'integral reality' for a second time:

*“By 'integral reality' I am referring to the implementation of a borderless operative project targeted at the world: everything should be real, everything should be visible and transparent, everything should be freed, everything should be fulfilled and have a purpose (however the idiosyncrasy of meaning is that not everything has a meaning). There should be no more of that which has nothing to say.”***

If one follows Baudrillard's model, there was a time in which belief, idea and imagination were clearly separated from the material, physical world. Naturally certain ideas, certain Utopias, certain inventions have transgressed this boundary and became 'reality', but in this moment it was clear that they had changed their state: from the realm of imagination into the realm of reality. In his book Baudrillard attests as early as 2004 the end of this old, balanced dualism between imagination and reality, because the dominance of reality is strongly promoted in our current society. Baudrillard shows this in many developments, including the worldwide exponential growth in industrial production, service industries, data volume, mass media and not least the code based virtuality in our lives, which leads to manifold effects on the physical world. The increasing production of reality has consequences.

1. There is always more and increasingly less of that which never existed.
2. The boundaries of states dissolve. Today the outcome of an idea, a thing, a process can take the form of numerous 'qualities': as a picture, as a film, as a program, as an object, as a mechanical process, as the blocking of a credit card, as the passive collapse of a bank but also still as a dream.
3. The interconnectivity of the processes increases and leads to uncontrollable, hypercomplex systems. Upon this premise lies the current fundamental question concerning representation and thus the crisis of the image, what is real and what is a simulation? What is generated and multiplied and what is documentation? The term 'truth' unravels. Furthermore, the question of the production of reality arises. Is reality based on 'digital operation' or physical material? Is everything not an all-embracing production? What is real if everything is real? The differentiation grasps at thin air, the term loses its meaning. Thirdly, the question of causality arises when we can no longer decide what is real, or how things are linked to each other; how do we intend to act rationally? The implications of these developments manifest themselves amongst us in a multitude of ways; examples include the phenomena of high frequency financial trading, whose collapse bankrupts entire communities in the blink of an eye, or on screen killing assisted by a joystick and an armed drone.

To summarise, according to Baudrillard, the greatest need of our society is to produce more and more 'reality', regardless which medium, which size and which material. These desires are generated through the conditions of global capitalism. Baudrillard calls this alarming social undertow 'integral reality'; he leaves no room for doubt that this phenomenon will have a major impact on us.

This development cannot leave the production of art in our time untouched, even when many established institutions in the art world wish it would. We will bear two manifestations of this 'dynamic' in mind with regards to the selection of artists and works in this exhibition.

1. The expanded reality – the 'integral reality', a form of hyperreality leads to a collapse of reality as a category. The division of fiction and reality becomes obsolete; everything will be available in all 'forms'. Current works of art are examples, indeed forerunners of expanding 'realisation', because they produce virtual phenomenon through the demonstration of their materialisation and thus fulfil the physical in the material. They are the manifestations of uncommon virtual and synthetic visions.

2. Through the dispersion of 'integral reality' arise irresolvable hybrids from various media, conditions and formal characteristics. This means that things exist multimedially and manifest themselves fluxionally in different ways. It becomes increasingly difficult to draw boundaries and to keep processes and things accessible and under control. This hybrid essentiality is in many of today's art works already clearly applied.

Based upon the above, »For Jean B.« brings together a selection of positions in the laboratory-like rooms of the Studiogalerie in the 'Haus am Lützowplatz'. These works – with the exception of one incisive contra-point – take on the principles of 'integral reality' as if seemingly self-evident. There are works, which already in production and pre-production for the next exhibition oscillate without resistance between media and states. Still just an idea they are already numerical codes, which transverse through media only to manifest themselves here and there as a single image, as an operation, as a series of moving images or as an object. Their source code is immaterial and remains flexible. According to Baudrillard they are already 'realised' in all these forms and inundate us in the enormous diffusivity of their facets and their adaptiveness.

In the light of the connection between the exhibited works and the underlying theoretical framework, it remains important to point out that this exhibition addresses the Baudrillard's theses by using artistic evidences for his central paradigm of an 'integral reality'. Thereby the exhibition is indeed literally »For Jean B.«. The presented works are testimonials of an 'integral reality', which Baudrillard in fact explicitly classified as a negative and dangerous development. In this respect the selection supports his late ontology by showing something that is not good, namely the corrosion of reality. Through this quality the selection becomes at the same time an accomplice of this criticised development. The works are forerunners of an 'integral reality'. They substantiate the development; in the best instance they initiate the test or the malfunction. That takes place mostly subversively in the context of typical forms, such as code based paintings, programmed processes, mechanical production and crossing of medial parameters. Or the works let the digital process fail at the boundary to the physically material, or rather they place these boundaries explicitly in focus.

Although during the nineties a critical Internet art in Berlin based around the groups 'Bionic' and 'The Thing' and 'ZKM' in Karlsruhe politically tested the possibilities of a collective-libertarian digital space, current market led tendencies, such as the Post Internet-Generation, are occupied with an intoxicated appropriation and utilization of the potential of digital expansion. It is not interface and the limits of categories such as private / public, free / controlled or real / virtual which are decisive; instead it is the desire for unscrupulous genesis, a boundless 'realization' and overcoming all categories. The clear objective is also financial participation in the global art market, even the representation of their aesthetic products by a gallery is strived for – an idea from analogue times.

»For Jean B.« can only be understood as a limited analysis of the current situation. An artistic deconstruction of 'integral reality' takes place to some extent, not least by making one conscious of its mechanisms through means of artistic positions. Critic manifests itself partly in diverse strategies, but the opposite, the 'real' alternative to that depicted by Baudrillard is not in sight; neither in culture nor politics and only 'hazily' in the book itself. Global society appears unenlightened, without motivation and overwhelmed. The title »For Jean B.« is also a mark of respect for the late thoughts of the deceased Jean Baudrillard, which despite an apparent lack in scientific thoroughness and a polemic oversimplification, in there radicalness and vigour they have inspired the author of this text more than much that came before.

Stephan Köhler

* Jean Baudrillard „Die Intelligenz des Bösen“, page 16, lines 4-9 (second definition of „Integrale Reality“), Passagen Verlag Wien, first edition 2007

** Jean Baudrillard „Die Intelligenz des Bösen“, page 13, lines 1-7 (first definition of „Intergrale Reality“), Passagen Verlag Wien, first edition 2007

Postscript

Two definitions are prerequisites:

1. 'Real' is everything, which manifests itself materially.
2. 'Real' is everything of which something can be said.

If one takes the fusion of both definitions as the basis for Baudrillard's ontology (which his two definitions suggest), there arises a third by elimination: Not real is that which is not or is no longer materialised and of which nothing can be said. It is the realm of the unconscious possible (more threateningly it could be called the 'dark potential'). Into this space reality expands itself, but it also retreats from there. But it is impossible to say how 'large' this negative potential space of unconscious possibility is and if it can ever be filled by reality. In this respect reality will keep its counterpart. It may become uncontrollably complex and seemingly all embracing, but it remains consistent as a concept or even a 'maxim of belief'.

20 Jun – 17 Aug 2014

Tue – Sun 11.00 am - 6.00 pm

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