
Jean Baudrillard

Editors' note: The following three articles from the Paris newspaper Libération appear here in translation for the first time. At the time of the publication of this volume, the siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serbs has gone on for over a thousand days and has been covered intensely by the Western media. In much of his previous work, the prominent French social theorist Jean Baudrillard has written critically of the voyeuristic tendencies of postmodern society. One of his most notable contributions is his discussion of the world of "hyperreality," a world characterized by the detachment of symbols from their social contexts and references. The currency of the world of hyperreality is the "simulacrum," that is, the image created as a representation of the real world. Increasingly, as Baudrillard informs us, audiences have lost the ability to distinguish simulacra from the real world phenomena they are meant to represent. This might explain some of the Western inaction in Bosnia: images of atrocities, death, and destruction do not seem real because they are simply placed in and among a wider universe of unreal images in which audiences exist. Lack of action proceeds, then, from the fact that the mediated images of the world are mere representations that lend an air of unreality to the things they represent.

Baudrillard's criticisms of Western media and intellectuals, contained in the following essays, cause us to move from thinking only about the perpetrators of genocide to thinking about those who stand passively by or engage in self-serving forms of ineffective action while genocide proceeds. Just as media watchers lose touch with reality—even as they are presented with its most evil manifestations—so, too, have many Western intellectuals lost the ability to differentiate effective moral intervention from other kinds of symbolic action. The result has been the transformation of Western intellectuals from effective moral agents into postmodern voyeurs, aggregates of radical individualists whose voyeurism and individualism feed on televised images of evil. Baudrillard is not afraid to name and confront evil, or to name the aggressor in Bosnia. Nor is he afraid to suggest what many might consider heresy: that the new Europe, by refusing to confront aggression and genocide in Bosnia, has proven itself a sham. Baudrillard reminds us in his own provocative way that the

case of Bosnia informs us as much about our Western selves as it does about the nature of evil in the present fin de siècle.

No Pity for Sarajevo

What was striking about “The Corridor for Free Speech” (the December 19, 1993, simultaneous broadcast between Strasbourg and Sarajevo, on the Arte channel) was the exceptional status and absolute superiority conferred by misery, distress, and total disillusion. It was this disillusion that enabled the citizens of Sarajevo to treat the “Europeans” with contempt, or at least with a sarcastic sense of freedom, in sharp contrast with the remorse and hypocritical regrets of their counterparts. They had no need for compassion, and pitied our own dejection. “I spit on Europe,” one of them said. One is in fact never more free or sovereign than when one’s contempt is not only justified, but directed at those good consciences basking in the sun of solidarity, rather than at the enemy.

They certainly have seen their share of such good friends. Most recently, it was Susan Sontag who came to Sarajevo to stage *Waiting for Godot*. Why not bring *Bouvard et Pécuchet* to Somalia or Afghanistan? Worse than such cultural soul boosting, however, is the condescension and the inability to distinguish positions of strength from positions of weakness. They are strong, and we, who look to them for something, anything, to revive our strength and our lost sense of reality, are weak.

Our sole reality is indeed at stake, and we must save it, even if through the most pitiful of slogans: “Something should be done. We can’t just do nothing.” Yet to do something simply to avoid doing nothing has never been a valid principle for action or liberty. It is, at the most, a form of self-pity and a way of absolving one’s own powerlessness.

The people of Sarajevo are not faced with such questions. Given where they are, what they do is out of absolute necessity. They do what they have to, without deluding themselves about the outcome, and without self-pitying self-indulgence. This is the meaning of being real, and of being in reality. Their reality has nothing to do with the “objective reality” of their misery—which *should not exist*, and which elicits our pity. Their reality exists “as is,” as the reality of action and fate. This explains why they are alive, and why we are dead. It also explains why we sense reality must be salvaged from war, and why we must impose this “pitiful” reality

on those who, in the midst of war and misery, suffer from it without truly believing in it.

Susan Sontag admits that the Bosnians do not really believe in the suffering that surrounds them. They end up finding the whole situation unreal, senseless, and beyond their understanding. It is hell, but a somewhat hyperreal hell, made even more so for their being harassed by the media and humanitarian agencies, who simply reinforce the incomprehensibility of the world's attitude toward them. Thus, they live amid a type of spectral war—luckily so, since they could never bear it otherwise. I should mention that these are not simply my words, but theirs.

But, of course, Susan Sontag is from New York, and she must have a better idea than they of what reality is, since she chose them to incarnate this reality. Perhaps it is simply because this reality is what she and the Western world most lack. To re-create reality, one must go where the blood flows, and all these “corridors” we have opened for our food and “cultural” shipments are really emergency lifelines along which we import their life blood, and the energy of their misery . . . yet another unequal exchange. These people, who are absolutely disillusioned with reality, and who no longer even believe in the rule of political rationality that is very much a part of the European reality principle, have found an alternative source of courage, founded on surviving in a senseless situation. These are the people Susan Sontag wants to convince of the “reality” of their suffering, by acculturating it, of course, and by putting it on stage, so that it may serve as a useful reference point within the theater of Western values (which includes solidarity).

Susan Sontag is not, however, the issue. She is merely the high-society instance of what has become a generalized situation, where harmless and powerless intellectuals exchange their misery with those who are miserable, each sustaining the other through a sort of perverse contract. This parallels the way political classes and civilian societies exchange their respective misery: the one offering up corruption and scandals, the other artificial convulsions and inertia. Not so long ago, for example, Bourdieu and Father Pierre were the offerings in a televisual holocaust, the one exchanging the language of pathos for the other's sociological metalanguage on poverty.

In the guise of ecumenical pathos, our society as a whole is literally on a path of “commiseration.” It is as though we were in the midst of a moment of immense repentance, shared by intellectuals and politicians alike, and linked to the panic of history and the twilight of values. We

must therefore replenish the preserve of our references and values. By way of that smallest of common denominators known as world suffering, we must restock our preserves with artificial game. "It is presently impossible to show anything else than suffering on television newscasts." (David Schneidermann). Ours is a victim-society, and I surmise society is simply expressing its own disappointment and remorse faced with an impossible, self-inflicted violence.

The New Intellectual Order follows, in every way, on the heels of the New World Order. Everywhere we look distress, misery, and suffering have become the raw goods of the primitive scene. The victim status of human rights is the sole funereal ideology. Those who do not directly exploit it do so by proxy, and there is no dearth of middlemen skimming a financial or symbolic profit along the way. As with global debt, deficits and suffering are negotiable and have resale value on the futures markets—here, the intellectual-political markets—which are the present-day equivalents of the military-industrial complex of the sinister old days.

The logic of suffering governs all commiseration. Even if we mean to confront suffering, our very reference to it gives suffering an indefinite base of objective reproduction. Clearly, to combat anything, one's starting point must be the evil underlying suffering.

Sarajevo is truly the theater where evil is in evidence. It is the repressed cancer cell that rots all else, the virus whose most blatant symptom is now the paralysis of Europe. The belongings of Europe are salvaged through the GATT negotiations, only to be thrown into the flames of Sarajevo, which, in a way, is a good thing. Bogus Europe, undiscovered Europe, and the Europe squandered in the most hypocritical of dealings is a flop in Sarajevo. Thus, the Serbs could almost be hailed the demystifying tool and the savage analyzer of this phantom Europe, born of the techno-democratic policies that are as triumphant in their discourses as they are decrepit in their deeds. The disintegration of Europe keeps pace with the burgeoning discourses of a united Europe (exactly as the weakening of human rights keeps pace with the proliferation of speeches on human rights). The fine point of the story is the following: in carrying out ethnic cleansing, the Serbs are Europe's cutting edge. The "real" Europe in the making is a white Europe, a bleached Europe that is morally, economically, and ethnically integrated and cleansed. In Sarajevo, this Europe is victoriously in the making. In a sense, what is happening there is not at all an incidental occurrence along the way to a nonexistent, pious, and democratic Europe, but a logical and ascending

phase of the New European Order, itself a branch of the New World Order, whose global characteristic is white fundamentalism, protectionism, discrimination, and control.

Some say that if we let this happen in Sarajevo, it will be our due later on. We are, in fact, already there, since all European countries are on the road to ethnic cleansing. This is the true Europe, slowly in the making in the shadows of national parliaments, spearheaded by Serbia. Invoking some undefined sense of passivity or inability to react is useless, since we are dealing with a logically implemented program, of which Bosnia is merely the new frontier.

Why do you think Le Pen has all but vanished from the political scene? He has vanished because the substance of his ideas has in every way infiltrated the political class in the form of "French particularity," the sacred union, the Euro-nationalist reflex, and protectionism. Le Pen is no longer of any use, since his victory was not political, but viral, winning over people's way of thinking. Why should this be limited to Sarajevo, since the same thing is at stake everywhere? Displays of solidarity will change nothing. The miraculous end will be at hand only when the exterminations come to an end, and when the borders of "white" Europe have been drawn. It is as if all European nationalities and policies had acted in concert to take out a contract for murder with the Serbs, who have become the agents of the West's dirty jobs—just as the West had taken out a contract with Saddam Hussein against Iran. The problem is, if the killer goes overboard, he too must be eliminated. The operations against Iraq and in Somalia were relative failures for the New World Order, but the Bosnian operation bodes well for the New European Order.

The Bosnians know all this. They know they owe their accursed fate to the international "democratic" order, and not to some vestige or monstrous excrescence of fascism. They know they are scheduled for extermination, exile, or exclusion, as are all heterogeneous and rebellious elements throughout the world. I do not wish to upset the hypocritical guilty consciences of Western democrats and humanitarians, but there can be no appeal to this process, since it is the unswerving path of progress. Clearly, modern Europe will rise from the eradication of Muslims and Arabs—unless they survive as immigrant slaves. The strongest objection to the offensive led by guilty consciences, and as displayed in happenings such as the one in Strasbourg, is that it perpetuates the image of the alleged weakness of European policies, and the image of Europe's conscience supposedly torn by its own powerlessness. It thereby covers up entirely

what is really going on, by granting this reality the benefit of spiritual doubt.

Of course the people of Sarajevo who appeared on the screens of Arte seemed disillusioned and without hope, but they did not look like martyrs in waiting. Rather, they displayed their objective misery, whereas the true suffering of false apostles and voluntary martyrs, was on the other side. Then again, it is written, "the voluntary martyr will not be recognized in the hereafter."

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Translated from the French by James Petterson

The West's Serbianization

At the price of a superhuman effort, after three years of massacre, and, above all, after the humiliation of the forces of the international community (finally something unbearable), international opinion seems to have recognized, though grudgingly and with strong reservations, that the Serbs are the aggressors. This recognition might also seem to demonstrate that we are being as firm and lucid as possible. In fact, it simply brings us to the war's starting point. Even those who long ago contradicted the official doctrine of the "belligerents" and denounced Serb aggression now welcome this change of position as a victory. They naively hope that, from now on, the only possible conclusion will be that the Western powers end this aggression. This, of course, will not happen. This rather platonic recognition of the executioners as executioners does not imply that the victims will be recognized as victims. To be fooled in this respect is to buy into the evangelical idealism of those who suggest that the "depths of ridicule and dishonor" have been reached, and who call on a sudden reaction from the international powers and from a "suicidal" Europe, without for an instant being surprised by the uselessness of their efforts (which are certainly a match for the unending hypocrisy of politicians). Recrimination goes hand in hand with the crime, and the two proliferate through an unending orchestration of events. Since the West's conscience takes it upon itself to mourn this situation, and since it simultaneously monopolizes hypocrisy and good intentions, there is no reason that the criminal will not maintain his monopoly over arrogance and

crime. In fact, neither the grotesque gesticulations of the international powers nor the sickened outcries of the stewards of good causes can have any real effect, since the decisive step has not been taken. No one dares nor wants to step up to the final analysis, to recognize that the Serbs are not only the aggressors (this is a bit like breaking down an open door), but are our objective allies in this cleansing operation for a future Europe, freed of its bothersome minorities, and for a future world order, freed from all radical challenges to its own values—based on the democratic dictatorship of human rights and on free markets.

What is at stake is the question of evil. By denouncing the Serbs as “dangerous psychopaths” we pride ourselves for having put our finger on this evil, without questioning the innocence of our democratic intentions. We suggest our job is done once we have declared the Serbs the “bad guys,” but not the enemy. With good reason, since from a world perspective, we Westerners, we Europeans, are fighting exactly the same enemies as the Serbs are: Islam, the Muslims. Everywhere, in Chechnya with the Russians (the same shameful, deadly intolerance); in Algeria, where we denounce the military powers, all the while giving them major logistical support. (By some quirk of fate, the good souls who discredit the official doctrine of the “belligerents” in Bosnia use this doctrine’s language when speaking of Algeria: state terrorism against fundamentalist terrorism—equally matched evils—while we remain the helpless victims of this barbarity. As if state terrorism were not *our* terrorism, administered in homeopathic doses on the home front). The short of it is that we will bomb a few Serb positions with smoke-mortars, but we will never really intervene against them, since their work is basically our own. If it were necessary to end the conflict, we would rather break the backs of the victims, since they are far more irritating than the executioners. If Bosnian Muslims make an attempt at defending themselves, then you will see that it is they the International Rapid Reaction forces will have to neutralize and liquidate. In the event of a powerful Muslim offensive, the international forces will become efficient.

These are the real reasons for this unending war. Appearances to the contrary (which, by their very ambiguity, speak for themselves), without this deep-rooted complicity, and without this objective alliance (which was not necessarily willed or deliberate), there is no reason this war should still be going on. The scenario is the same as with Saddam Hussein: in our battle against him, we deployed a great deal of media and technology. In the final analysis, however, he was, and is, our objective

ally. Reviled, denounced, and discredited in the name of human rights, he remains our objective ally against Iran, against the Kurds, and against the Shiites. This is why the Gulf War never really took place: Saddam was never our true enemy. This is also the case with the Serbs. By banishing them from the human community, we are actually protecting them and continuing to let them carry out their work.

The trick lies in convincing the Bosnians that they are responsible for their own misery. If this goal is not obtained through diplomacy, already two years in the works, it will have to be reached through force. Maybe we should take a look behind this gigantic *trompe l'oeil*, behind the rote speeches of the humanitarians, the diplomats, and the military. In any conflict, the political dimension of war implies a distinction between what is fought against and what is sacrificed. Though it is seldom admitted, the main stake and the ultimate objective of war is not necessarily the defeat of the adversary, but what is truly swept away and liquidated. During the Algerian War, for example, we fought against the Algerian military, but what was really sacrificed was the Algerian revolution—this sacrifice was (and still is) carried out with the Algerian military. In Bosnia, we are combating (not excessively) the Serbs in the name of a multicultural Europe, but what is being sacrificed in the process is precisely the other culture, the one that, through its values, opposes an indifferent world order lacking in values. We are carrying out this sacrifice *with* the Serbs.

Imperialism has changed faces. What the West wants to impose on the world, from here on out and in the guise of universals, are not completely disjointed values, but its lack of values. Where any particularity, any minority, any specific idiom, any passion or irreducible belief, and, above all, any antagonistic worldview survives or persists, an indifferent order must be imposed—as indifferent as we are to our own values. We generously distribute the right to be different, while secretly and inexorably working to produce a pale and undifferentiated world.

This terrorism is the result not of fundamentalism, but of an unfounded culture. It is the integrationism of emptiness, whose stakes are beyond any political forms or vicissitudes. There is no longer a front or a balance of power, but a transpolitical fault line that, for the most part, presently runs through Islam—but also through the heart of each so-called civilized and democratic country, and certainly through each of us.

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Translated by James Petterson

When the West Stands In for the Dead

The West's military inability to react to Serb aggression is equaled by its inability to put the life of a single soldier at risk. Accordingly, these soldiers were hostages long before the Serbs actually took them as hostages. Their life must be spared above all else, and the body count must be zero: this is the leitmotif of a clean war, and the decisive factor of a perfect war: a flawless, athletic performance.

We already witnessed this during the Gulf War, where all fatalities among Western soldiers were attributed to accidents. At least this war was pawned off on us through a technological demonstration that gave the illusion of power (virtual invincibility). Bosnia, on the other hand, exemplifies total weakness. Even if this weakness, which gives the Serbs a free hand, corresponds to the war's unavowed objective, it is, nevertheless, the equivalent of the symbolic castration of the West's war machine. Poor Western powers! If only they could swiftly and victoriously accomplish their mission to establish a World Order (by liquidating all pockets of resistance). Instead they must watch helplessly, from the depths of their torn consciences, as this dirty little job (with international status) is carried out by intermediary mercenaries. The West has to watch helplessly as it is humiliated and disqualified.

This military paralysis is not surprising, however, since it is related to the mental paralysis of the civilized world. It might seem that the West's inability to put a single soldier's life at risk is the highest expression of civilized society, where even the military heeds the humanitarian call and respects the sacred right to life. Yet quite the opposite is true. No longer even a soldier, this virtual soldier's fate is the same as civilized man's. The latter's stakes and collective values have, for the most part, disappeared, and his existence can be sacrificed to nothing—something we do not value cannot really be put at risk.

The individual we have produced, and glorify, is absolutely concerned with himself. This individual, whose weakness we protect through the entire judicial system of human rights, is the last man mentioned by Nietzsche. He is the final user of himself and of his own life. He is the terminal individual, without hope of descendant or transcendence. He is without return, devoted to hereditary sterility, and counting down. Merchandise without return—environment without return—raw goods without return—atmosphere without return: this man is the cycle's end.

His sole final task is to try desperately to survive, by becoming spectralized, fractalized, pluralized, by becoming his own creature and his own clone. Thus, this last man cannot be sacrificed, since he is the last. No one any longer has the right to put his life at risk, since it has been reduced to use-value and to real-time survival. This is the fate, or lack thereof, of the last man. These are the consequences of his weakness, which are also those of the civilized nations that cannot even risk saving face.

The following two aspects are profoundly linked: on the one hand, eliminating any foreign culture and any singular minorities, in the name of ethnic cleansing; on the other hand, eliminating the singularity and irreducible fact of death itself, eliminating death, as the most singular of all singularities, in the name of protecting ourselves and surviving at any cost. In a way, our life is also cleansed—ever more sheltered from death in its virtual shell, just as the virtual soldier of the United Nations forces goes about in a technical shell. Being taken hostage does not make this soldier any more real. He simply serves as exchangeable matter in the trompe l'oeil potlatch of complicities and divergences between the West and the Serbs. He is the exchangeable item in this unlikely chain of watered down collusion and cowardice, in this military masquerade, where the virtual soldier replaces the tomb of the unknown soldier. This soldier does not die, but is paralyzed and immobilized, a stand-in for the dead. Thus death, in all its forms, is redeployed, precisely where we no longer expected it.

Consider UNPROFOR or the Rapid Reaction Force: in the Bosnian conflict they immediately stood in for (and fervently defended!) the dead. Behind our television screens, even we secretly stand in for the dead. The Serbs, the assassins, are alive in their own way, whereas the victims of Sarajevo are on the side of real death. We, however, are in a strange place, neither dead nor alive, but stand-ins for the dead. In this sense, the Bosnian conflict is a global challenge; everywhere in the present world, the West stands in for the dead.

Certainly, we tried everything possible to avert this situation. We almost managed the Swiss trick, whose secular ruse was to furnish mercenaries to all of Europe and to shelter themselves from war. This is what all rich countries are doing today, furnishing weapons the world over, thus managing to exile, if not violence, then at least war from their territory. But this is a hopeless attempt. Where we had thought to hem

death in, death pops up again through all our layers of defense and even in the depths of our own culture.

This is what all our humanitarian and ecological ideologies are about: the human species and its survival. This is the difference between humanitarianism and humanism. The latter was a system of strong values, related to the concept of humankind, with its philosophy and its morals, and characteristic of a history in the making. Humanitarianism, on the other hand, is a system of weak values, linked to salvaging a threatened human species, and characteristic of an unraveling history. The only, necessarily negative, outlook for humanitarianism is the optimal management of waste that is by definition nondegradable. From the point of view of survival—life superstitiously prolonged and sheltered from death—life itself becomes a waste product we can no longer rid ourselves of, one that falls under the spell of infinite reproduction.

In Bosnia we are witnessing this infinite reproduction, this macabre parody, and this sinister confusion of history unraveling. We are witness to the face of history where the military and the humanitarian converge.

History reproducing itself becomes farce.

Farce reproducing itself becomes history.

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Translated by James Petterson