**Baudrillard: Consumer Society:**

In the beginning of his academic career Baudrillard was heavily influenced by Marxian perspective. It is in his later part of life that he disagreed with him. In fact, **he has tried to pick up the areas, which Marx had left out. For instance, Marx developed his theory on production relation. He talked about to the dialectical materialism, class war and alienation. He did not consider cultural factors as vital to economic organism. Baudrillard took up the issue of consumption for the analysis. What is particular about Baudrillard is that he focuses on cultural, emerging from simulations, TV and other sources of media through the Marxian Perspective of economic and material processes.** He argues that postmodern culture is basically rooted in economic organization. Baudrillard concludes the postmodern simulation society is ultimately a consumer society focusing on mainly two observations. **The postmodern society is simulation society, that is, run and controlled by code, sign and image, and the postmodern society is consumer society**. According to Mike Gane (1991) Budrillards approach to culture remains in many senses on the ground of Marxian theory, giving more way to economic and material processes in cultural analysis than other Marxists of this period. Marx’s analysis of industrialization and capitalism has influenced many social scientists throughout the 20th century. It is noted that large numbers of postmodernists have been influenced by Marx and his ideas. Baudrillard has been picked up some of the Marx’s ideas and developed his own theory in his writing. With the arrival of industrialism, there was a search for labour, raw material and new markets. Marx looked at this, but recognized in it a potential for improving material comforts for people’s lives. Modern period had a great capacity for improving people’s standards of living. Marx also recognized that, the innovations of modernity were boosted by the capitalist economic system, and he was deeply critical of this capitalist economic system. Marx was historical materialist. He believed that all society in history could be understood through the organized peoples’ labour. In all society people’s lives are defined by labour. Marx believed that labouring under capitalism in a particularly immoral way was useless. The basis of his analysis was under capitalism. All aspects of culture were determined by economic forces. This was dehumanization and economic failure of creativity. Marx believed that in order to buy what they need to live, people have to sale their power for wages. Their labour is bought and sold as commodity; a price tag is attached to everybody. Everything is just a means of making profit. Marx argued that labour for exchange never been a fair deal. The employers need workers to create wealth far in excess of their basic requirements. So only a part of the working week is spent replacing the value of wages. The rest is extra amount of work which generates wealth for the capitalist. This is exploitation. In a capitalist society, the goods produced by the labour have their use value taken away from them and replaced with exchange value. Under the dominance of the market, it is not what things mean or what real purpose they served, how much they are worth. Everything is equal to money. Money and not face to face communication, now acts as the vital social bond. Marx in his analysis of exchange value argues that there is clash between the needs of the workers and the capitalist system. The result of this clash is the class struggle. This will lead top revolution. **Baudrillard analyzes Marx’s theory of capitalist society at two levels. The economic level consists of production and distribution of goods. The cultural superstructure level consists of arts, religion, shopping, entertainment, language and party politics**. **Simulations and consumerism is major thrust of Baudrillard’s thought. Baudrillard developed his theory of a simulations and consumerism out of his dialogue with Marxism.**

At the base of consumer society, there is a substantial communication system. It is through this system that the media float a large number of signs and images. These signs and images constitute simulations. **Baudrillard’s thesis is that commodities of market are nothing in themselves, they are known by the signs and therefore the consumers actually purchase these signs. We have signs for milk, shirting, refrigerator, TV, two wheelers, cars and what not. We purchase these object for consumption through the images. These object images carry brand or sign value. They are status- loaded characterized by a particular brand. Those models through whom these signs are communicated also enjoy a celebrity status. Film stars, national leaders and experts of various walks of life are also used to create images. The signs, therefore, do not have use value. They only indicate exchange value. What is important in this kind of marketing is that there is a great increase in consumerism. Consumption leads to production. Baudrillard has departed from traditional Marxism by focusing on consumption instead of production; he ultimately returns to production. His argument is that if America’s model of consumption is accepted as a dominant pattern by Europe, it will lead to the complete union of production. Baudrillard thus, argues at length that an increasing in consumption will end up in enhancing production.** Signs and images build up social stratification. Marx explained social stratification on the basis of production. He writes that the root cause of class war was the class antagonism. Production relations decided the class structure. **Baudrillard, in his theory of consumerism, says that signs and images create classes of commodities of consumption. From this perspective, a social stratification of a society is secondary to the consumption of signs and images**. Baudrillard’s thesis of social stratification is about consumption. When we consume object we are consuming signs and images and in the process, we are defining ourselves. Thus, categories of objects are seen as producing categories of persons. Through object a stratified society speaks in order to keep everyone in a certain place. Baudrillard argues that people are what they consume and are differentiated from other types of people on the basis of consumed objects. Actually, what we consume is not so much objects, but signs. Consumption is a systematic act of the manipulation of signs. In order to become object of consumption, the object must become sign. It is the code that controls what we do, and do not, consume. Man ceases to be rational in choosing consumption articles to the lay person; the world of consumption seems, on the surface, to be quite free. He is rational man, and if there is money in his pocket he may pick up whatever he wants. There is nobody between his wisdom and the object. But, Baudrillard has something else to say. **He argues that though the individual is free to market at his will, he can only marginally exercise his personal choice. Further in consumption, we all feel quite unique, but in fact, we closely resemble everyone else in our social group, members of that group consume much the same thing. It is clear that we are not nearly as rational as we think we are. All are subordinate to the pressure of sign and image. Consumption does not satisfy the requirements. In the postmodern society, it is the code which controls the consumption behaviour. In such a situation, consumption does not satisfy our needs. The needs are, in fact, not real; they are created by simulations.** Baudrillard writes that the idea of needs is derived from the false separation of subject and object, the idea of needs is created to connect them. The end result is a tautology with subjects and objects defined in terms of each other (subjects need objects; objects are what subjects need). Baudrillard deconstructs the subject-object dichotomy and, generally, the notion of needs. We do not buy what we need, but rather what code tells us we should buy. Further, needs themselves are determined in code so that, we end up needing what the code tells us we need: there are only needs because the system needs them. Codes, simulacra, simulation and hyperreal have unpacked in more detail in order to gain an understanding of how they operate. **Virtual reality is an impoverished substitute for reality. The virtual is regarded as secondary or weakened derivative of reality.** Representation suggests the virtual is deceptive or even dangerous because it attempts to usurp or challenge notions of reality. The virtual reality is a perfection of the real, more real than reality, and the hyperreal. **Baudrillard’s central theme is ‘Manipulation of Code’ in the analysis of simulation. The object or consumption items are given signs whose value is determined by a disciplinary code. Code is the controlling system of sign. It consists of rules, which guide and control the signs. The items of consumption are part of these sign system. The items of consumption are purchased on the basis of signs and images. But these signs are ultimately subjected to the control of code. We do not buy what we need, but it is the code, which tells us to buy.** Hence, code is the dominant controller. Consumption has nothing to do with reality. Representation relates no reality. In a simulation society, there is nothing like reality. Baudrillard believes that in consumption society we do not have anything what we usually think as reality. **According to Baudrillard, consumption in fact is about the systematic and indefinite possession of object-signs of consumption. These object-signs and the code are part not real. From this point of view, when we purchase a BMW Car, we are not purchasing a car; rather we are acquiring what BMW Car signifies.** We are a mobile society and we cannot afford to go for an old model Car. Car is not reality. Reality is floating sign and image. There is a relationship with the Objects in the Consumption. Postmodernism declares the end of reality. Baudrillard was basically a poststructuralist. His guide Ferdinand de Saussure argued that word assumes meaning not with its relation to object but with other word. It means that the word is not related to reality. For instance, the word, ‘night’ becomes meaningful with the word ‘day’. The simple linguistic norm is: the words are meaningful with the words and not the object’s (real things). In such a situation, the meaning of the word does not come with its relationship to people. Instead, the meaning is derived from the relationship of word with other words. Baudrillard says that the consumer society is controlled by the code. Human relationships have been transformed into relationship with objects, especially; the consumption of those objects. We are living in the period of objects. These objects have no longer meaning because of their usefulness, their utility. They do not even acquire meaning from concrete relationship or disparity from other objects. This collection or networks of objects come to have a meaning and logic of its own. The objects are signs (they have sign value rather than use or exchange value), and the consumption of those object-signs constitutes a language to understand. Commodities are purchased as an expression and mark of style, status, luxury, power and so on. **Marx argued that business transactions in the market are done on the utility of a commodity. If the price is high, it is assumed that it carries greater utility. Marx’s basis of it is the use value of commodity. Baudrillard challenges it. He says that it is the sign value of the object, which carries the price tag. In a capitalist society what we want is difference in consumption.** The capitalist society has a very strange social formation. We try to associate and align ourselves with our class people, and on the other, we also wish to differentiate ourselves from others. The process of differentiation is a lifelong process. In our city, there are hundreds of thousands of people who own high value sign motor car. That is not a cause of worry for us. But, when our next door neighbour goes for high value sign motor car, it disturbs us much. Obliviously, the neighbor has tried to differentiate himself from us, now he enjoys better status and cherished higher social meaning compared to us. In fact, our neighbour does not go for this car to fulfill his needs, as fulfilling consumer needs is not his objective. It was already fulfilled by his old car or two wheelers. He just wanted to show that he is different from us. **Baudrillard makes a point in this respect that in a capitalist society, people seek difference so that they can acquire higher status compared to others. Consumption does not give satisfaction, instead it gives pleasure.** Needs cannot be satisfied; our need, therefore, is to differentiate ourselves from others. Baudrillard’s concept of difference is observed in consumption in modern capitalist society not pleasure, not the pleasure of obtaining and using an object that we seek, but rather difference. This leads to the view that when they are defined in this way, needs can never be satisfied; we have a continuing, lifelong need to differentiate ourselves from those who occupy other positions in society**. Baudrillard’s analysis of consumer society is basically borrowed from Marx production relation. Whereas Marx focuses on production, Baudrillard takes up the problem of consumption.** Consumption increases through the floating of signs, images and code. And Baudrillard proves, with the increase in consumption, there is corresponding increase in production. The ultimate result is extension of capitalism. In a consumer society people do not have social relationship with other people. They interact with the objects through signs. Therefore, in practice, they purchase signs and consume signs. There is yet another characteristic of consumer society. Signs have status value and not use value. **Baudrillard uses structuralism to analyze consumer society. His argument is that there are objects or say items of commodity. These items are sold in the name of signs and images that is simulations. Thus, in practice, simulations are sold. Simulations have nothing to do with the items for objects. Thus, items are not real. They are signs and hyperreality.** In linguistics the meaning of the word is always understood with reference to other words. Words are not concerned with the object that is their reality. In the same way, according to structuralism, signs are related to signs and not to objects or reality. In a consumer society, things are consumed on the basis of signs. **Baudrillard has developed the theory of consumer society through the system of signs and images and code. He ends up the consumer society by saying that consumptions are a system which assures the regulation of signs and the intergradations of groups. It is simultaneously a morality and a system of communication; a structure of exchange.**