



Kate Millett Born 1934 in St Paul, Minnesota. Graduated University of Minnesota, 1956; subsequently worked as a professor of English at Barnard College and as a sculptor. Received PhD from Columbia 1970, and wrote a series of radical feminist books, including political and cultural treatises and autobiography. Made the film *Three Lives* (1971) and was active in feminist politics, campaigning for the Equal Rights Amendment in America and women's rights in Iran. Currently sells Christmas trees from her farm, where she runs an artists' colony. Her key book was *Sexual Politics* (1970). Re-emerged internationally with *The Politics of Cruelty* (1994), an investigation of the use of torture across the world. Among more personal works are *Sita* (1977), about a lesbian love affair, and *Mother Millett* (2001), the story of her mother's final years

Norman Mailer (living) and Jean Genet (then living). While she discussed ancient, medieval and Renaissance literature in the west and eastern literature in general as bulwarks of misogynist hierarchy, she opened her book with three sex scenes, one each from Henry Miller's *Sexus*, Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* and Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal*. She explicated the power dynamics in each sex scene – Genet being contrapuntal because he approached “sexual hierarchy from the oblique angle of homosexual dominance”. She used Genet because he dealt with sexual oppression.

When Millett wrote *Sexual Politics*, Miller, Mailer and Lawrence were the sages of sexual liberation. These writers were primary influences on the generation that came of age in the 1960s. It is hard now to understand the grip these writers had on the imagination. For the left and the burgeoning counter-culture, these were the writers of subversion. In fact, they helped to socialise a generation into believing that force and violence were valued elements of sex. Millett's analysis destroyed their authority.

I cannot think of anyone who accomplished what Kate Millett did, with this one book. It remains the alpha and omega of the women's movement. Everything that feminists have done is foreshadowed, predicted or encouraged by *Sexual Politics*.

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Jean Baudrillard

by Andrew Hussey

Even among those who have never read any of his books, Jean Baudrillard is celebrated for his ideas of “simulation” and “hyperreality”, which he uses to describe a world in which, as he sees it, images have replaced reality to the extent that objective truth about any human experience from art to war has become an impossibility. Baudrillard is known, too, for his notorious observation that the Gulf war of 1991 “did not take place”. What he meant was that laser technology and video reportage had eliminated the truth of battle – the blood, the gore, the suffering, the corpses. What we were presented with instead was a sanitised version of war, a media construct. ►

Jokes about wife-beating abounded while it was society's position that no such brutality really existed. Millett claimed that hostility towards women was expressed through laughter and “[m]isogynist literature”, which she called “the primary vehicle of masculine hostility”, being both a “hortatory and comic genre. Of all the artistic forms in patriarchy it is the most frankly propagandistic. Its aim is to reinforce both sexual fictions in their status.”

Millett's methodology was new. While using anthropology, sociology, economics and history to back her argument, she found the meaning of sexual politics and sexual power in literature. She eschewed prior schools of literary criticism and declared her own criticism a “mutation”: “I have operated on the premise that there is room for a criticism which takes into account the larger cultural context in which literature is conceived and produced.”

Millett used contemporary literature to demonstrate her notion of “sexual politics”. While other critics danced on the graves of dead writers, Millett dug some new graves herself. She especially concentrated on the works of D H Lawrence (dead but widely read as if he were a contemporary), Henry Miller (then living),

► The statement was deliberately provocative, and met with derision in the Anglo-American world. Elsewhere, Baudrillard was received as a prophet. Today, from the film *The Matrix* (the makers cite him as an influence) to the arguments around the latest Gulf war, his ideas are everywhere in the culture, even if they are only partly digested or half-understood. In interviews, he is usually evasive; when asked about his life, he invariably replies with the statement: “No background.”

Born in Reims in 1929 into a family of minor civil servants, whose own parents had been farmers, he was the first in his family to go to university; he eventually ended up in Paris where, despite an earlier interest in German metaphysics, he wrote a doctoral thesis arguing with and alongside Roland Barthes that the newly emergent consumer society in postwar Europe was a potential disaster. He was based then at the University of Nanterre in north Paris, scene of much agitation during the troubles of May 1968. He worked under the influence of Henri Lefebvre, a Marxist who had left the Communist Party in 1957 and committed himself thereafter to working with groups of artists and intellectuals. Lefebvre had made his reputation in 1947 with the publication of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, in which, taking the young Marx and the surrealists as his models, he argued that the commonplace experience of ordinary people was the main stumbling block for theoreticians of the revolutionary left. This insight was to prove a crucial influence on the early Baudrillard.

Baudrillard's collaboration with Lefebvre on the doctoral thesis also brought him temporarily under the sway of a revolutionary group called the Situationist International and its charismatic leader, Guy Debord. In 1967, Debord published *The Society of the Spectacle*, which prophesied the convulsions that would tear France apart in 1968 and much more. Baudrillard

took from the situationists the notion that everyday life had been reduced to a series of “spectacles”, non-events that, from shopping to the evening news, were somehow distanced from the real experience of the spectator. For the first time in history, Baudrillard said, human beings were no longer participants in their own lives. In an essay called “What Are You Doing After the Orgy?”, he pointed out how what were considered to be the liberating forces of modernism – sexual and racial liberation, freedom of speech, the abolition of class differences – have been smoothly integrated into the “society of spectacle”, where they have become the opposite of what they had originally represented. The greatest example of this is pornography, which ought to represent unbridled sexual licence, such as that dreamt of by

the surrealists or the Marquis de Sade, but which, in reality, is “un-erotic, unexciting, nothing” – a symptom of the dreary and relentless commodification of time and experience that characterises our “hyper-real” media world.

Baudrillard's works were first translated into English in the late 1970s, when he was placed in the academic imagination alongside Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida as a prophet of what would become known as “postmodernism”. He was, however, neither a prophet nor truly a postmodernist. Rather, he is, or was, a Marxist who had found it difficult but necessary to abandon revolutionary hopes in favour of attacking, often through irony, the shifting conditions of modern society.

His early works *The System of Objects* (1968) and *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) betrayed the influence of the renegade surrealist Georges Bataille and, more conventionally, René Descartes. Unlike his postmodernist peers, and although he writes poetry, Baudrillard is seldom concerned with textual theory. Rather, like Descartes, Baudrillard is a sophisticated materialist thinker whose



Jean Baudrillard Born 1929 in Reims, France. Leading French cultural critic who has theorised that reality loses meaning in a media-saturated society, leaving only “hyperreality” and “simulation”. Professor of sociology at the University of Nanterre from 1966-87. Some of his more notable books are *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), *Simulacra and Simulations* (1981) and *America* (1986)

primary concern is with the verification of reality, which, he says, is a metaphysical problem that in our time has spread across all forms of experience. He uses the now-famous terms “simulacra” and “simulation” to describe how reality is imitated and annihilated, especially in the language of the media, advertising and marketing. It is, above all, the disappearance or eradication of reality across these so-called communication channels that both disturbs and fascinates him, opening up the possibility of new forms of political and ethical debate.

In recent times, Baudrillard has been vilified outside France and, in particular, from within the United States as a “fellow-traveller” of Islamic terrorism. The reason for these perverse attacks was a small essay, “The Spirit of Terrorism”, first published in *Le Monde* in the wake of 11 September 2001, which tries to provide not a rationale but an understanding of the emotional climate in which terrorism flourishes.

Again, the spectre of Guy Debord, who wrote so well about terrorism, is present. Baudrillard believes that terrorism is inevitable in a global society based on the false premise, emanating from the United States, that good can overcome or exclude evil. Such a Manichaeon view, he says, is not only naive, but an open invitation to terror. The collapse of the twin towers, says Baudrillard, was not so much the result of hubris but the consequence of American bad faith about what the country is and represents in the world.

Today, Baudrillard is everywhere, even in places he never expected or wanted to be. He is often thought of as a nihilistic prophet. His energetic dedication to a variety of activities, from teaching and public lectures to political campaigns, demonstrates otherwise; only recently, he was involved in the campaign to save La Flèche d’Or, the huge nightclub and meeting place for musicians, writers and artists on the northern outskirts of Paris—a long way from his usual territory in Montparnasse, but an example of his long-standing commitment to micro-political issues. As this form of activity and his writings demonstrate, his real importance is less as a philosopher than as a cultural critic who unflinchingly understands what it means to live in the deadening, Disneyfied world of today, a world dominated by huge, impersonal multinational corporations, where history has been abolished in favour of the hypnotic allure of the perpetual present.



Antonio Negri Born 1933 in Padua, Italy. Postmodern Marxist philosopher, politically active in the Italian left in the 1960s and 1970s. Rejected violent revolutionary movements but was convicted in absentia of terrorist involvements after fleeing to France. Returned to Italy in 1997, where he was kept in prison by night, though allowed freedom during the day. Released in 1999 but kept under curfew, and finally freed in April 2003. Most recently co-author of *Empire* (2000), a bestselling manifesto against globalisation

Antonio Negri

by Katharine Ainger

Antonio Negri is not just one of the most significant figures of current political thought, but one of the few contemporary western intellectuals to have been imprisoned for his ideas. In 1980, Michel Foucault asked: “Is it not true that Negri is in prison simply for being an intellectual?”

The history of this Italian dissident is remarkable. He has been a revolutionary, a convict, a professor, an exile and a politician. Today he is celebrated as the co-author, with Michael Hardt, of *Empire* (2000), a powerful and original analysis of the political formulation of globalisation.

In the early 1960s, the University of Padua made Negri a professor of state theory at an extraordinarily young age. He was then, and continues to call himself, a communist, but in terms that most communists would not recognise. Rejecting the Communist Party, he criticised not just capital but the state; a major life project has been to rescue Marx from historical Marxism. Central to his thinking was a departure from the traditional communist and socialist celebration of labour. For Negri, it was not enough to control the means of production: workers needed to liberate themselves from the disciplinary regime of work itself.

Refusal of work became central to his thought and to the group Potere Operaio (“worker power”), a loose association of student and worker movements that rejected not just capital but political parties and unions. In 1973, Potere Operaio dissolved and ►

