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Hyperreality

Capitalism is the backbone for much of Americas financial standings, allowing for the competitive rivalry that boosted the capital of the entire nation. Therefore, when blaming such a vital economic and political system for an invisible destruction, there undoubtedly will be skeptics. However, Jean Baudrillard, French theorist, believes that the doubt of the cynics is simply due to the ignorance of an issue that has been masked in reality: the hyperreality. The hyperreal is a theory coined in 1981 by Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he discusses what exactly the hyperreality is. More so than just a theorist, Baudrillard was also known to be an accomplished photographer, and this was crucial to the development of his thoughts. As a photographer, Baudrillard characterized “every photographed object” to be the mere “trace left behind by the disappearance of all the rest [reality of where the image was taken]” (Britannica). This idea of taking reality and symbolizing in a form that is no longer reality aligned similarly to his hyperreality ideology. Hyperreality, a fake realm created by imitations of reality, is becoming increasingly predominant as humanity’s perceived truth—especially with the proliferation of newer technologies like mass media; thus, turning reality into something fake and incomplete.

Before we can discuss the drawbacks and conventions of hyperreality, we must take a step back to understand the origin of theory. Despite *Simulacra and Simulation* being the first time Baudrillard went in detail about what the hyperreal was and why it was a scary truth, he had hinted towards the concept all his life. Not only in his photography, but also his previous philosophies suggested a developing perception. In 1976, five years before *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard had published another book named *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Although this book received a lot less public attention, it presented evidence on Baudrillard’s thought process in crafting the hyperreality theory. While the term “death” has always had an intimidation factor to it, we should be appreciating it for what it allows for. Sure, this one word represents the end of a life; however, the end of something only means the genesis of new life. In an interview about this idea, Baudrillard describes how death—instead—should not be shied away from. Afterall, it is the counterpart to every life. Only when something dies or disappears can it effectively be renewed into something more advanced. This concept of recycling between “appearing and disappearing” is the basis of “the complete symbolic operation” (125). Because these two process rely so heavily on one another, when one is no longer has the reversibility possibility between the two characteristics, Baudrillard recognizes this as a problem. Most notably, the capitalist regime results in the lack of disappearance so that much of Capitalism’s success relies on constant production and accumulation. Therefore, instead of being two concepts that are symbiotic, life and death are represented as opposites to one another. Humanity is put under a false understanding that destruction equates to evil and production symbolizes good; in response, we will attempt to ward off death. However, as much as we want to delete death from occurring, with life there will always be death, making death ever-present in the process of Capitalism—also known as Sigmund Freud’s “death drive” (126). This is very important to the concept of hyperreality, as Baudrillard describes our actions as one that “tries to split the positive moment from the negative moment [life and death]” in order to (or at least attempt to) preserve “the positive” so one ends up in a kind of ultrareal reality, a hyperreality which has no end” (126). In other words, we create a world that is fake—a hyperreality—to mask the truth of death. Hyperreality is ultimately an escape—all the conflicts, risks, the seduction that destroys by attempting to create positivity.

While the influence behind Baudrillard’s hyperreality is important to understanding the cause of the problem, Baudrillard illustrates the true gravity of the issue in Simulacra and Simulation. He first and foremost describes what the hyperreal is, splitting it into four different stages, each stage demonstrating the shift from our reality to the hyperreal. With each stage, we step further into the depths that of hyperreality—each phase more fake than the previous. Until finally, the fourth, and final, stage is a pure simulacrum. Simulacrum is when there is no longer an ability to differentiate reality from a false reality. This is the world that Baudrillard fears we live in today, where products no longer even have to pretend to be “fake” to be our reality. These four stages display why the hyperreality is an issue, indicating that we have imploded into a simulated world and lose a bit more of every principle and of every objective with each passing day(177). Although, Baudrillard has already claimed Capitalism as the root of the issue, he specifically defines aspects of “deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization” in capitalism which destroy human goals and shatter the differences between “true and false and good and evil” (177). The wanting for production, and specifically overproduction, is why the restoration of the reality eludes us and why contemporary "material" production is itself hyperreal (177). The dangers lie knowing that simulations “suggests, over and above its object, that law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation” (175). Therefore, we are encroaching a hyperreality where laws become rules, then guidelines, then fade into nothing.

While to some, the loss of a reality and order would be incredibly daunting, others like Thomas Heyd author of *The Real and the Hyperreal: Dance and Simulacra* reasons otherwise. Instead of blaming capitalism for its creation and depiction of a faulty hyperreality, Heyd first addresses the positives to having omnipresent simulations in our society today. Ultimately, simulacra are used to implant happiness, and this façade that has been given by the hyperreal is meant to shelter us, to simulate something that may not have been possible in reality. And can we blame us for doing so? Why would we want to follow laws of reality, when we can create or simulate something that’s better than what's defined by reality. A genetically modified fruit has little drawbacks, seemingly only benefits—one could easily reason that there should be no reason to condemn simulations seeing how vital it is to a more fruitful life. Afterall it is because the hyperreal is not limited by such orders, that freedom is given to simulation allowing it to "surpasses [the] traditional and natural” (17). However, before Heyd goes too much into complementing simulation, he brings forth a new argument: simulations and the hyperreal are just for show. In simulations, objects often “exhibit certain features that make them highly attractive”, but these happiness are only a form of detachment from the “human embodied nature” (23). As we fall into the traps that are simulations, we forget who we are as individuals. As a response, Heyd proposes a new perspective in dance. The art of dancing entails a responsiveness to the “presence of its environment”; therefore, signifying that each dance is unique (22). His assertion, therefore, is to let dance “address the alienation from nature generated by the multiplication of simulacra in societies” (23). Heyd accepts that there’s nothing we can do to stop our addiction to the hyperreal, but through the process of connecting ourselves to both the human and physical spheres of our environment, we can evade being enticed by hyperrealism.

\*The beginnings of a conclusion because I wanted to put down some thoughts before writing my final text\*

Baudrillard continues to state the hyperreal consuming the reality of our world; however, how would we address an issue that’s not only invisible but also so deeply rooted in our society? Baudrillard mentions how the hyperreality is already too involved in our everyday, capital-based, life to rid ourselves of it (Simulacra and Simulation 172). Instead, his only offer for a plausible solution is to “reinject realness” into the world around us. Instead of regarding actions as either hyperreal or reality, treat everything of the real. The consequences will ultimately be on the real world, so therefore regardless of whether it was actually simulated or not, you’ll always be prepared to face such consequences. Ironically this act of injecting reality, though it leaves us more prepared for the hyperreal, is just another simulation. Of course, he realizes this solution is not ideal, but he believes even the “discourse of desire” would be less dangerous than a forever-lasting hyperreality (Simulacra and Simulation 177). He reflects on this incomplete proposal, noting how the process of creating everything into a reality is a “confusion of the reality principle” (Simulacra and Simulation 177).

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Baudrillard>