



Hyperreality

Hyperreality is a concept in post-structuralism that refers to the process of the evolution of notions of reality, leading to a cultural state of confusion between signs and symbols invented to stand in for reality, and direct perceptions of consensus reality.^[1] Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which, because of the compression of perceptions of reality in culture and media, what is generally regarded as real and what is understood as fiction are seamlessly blended together in experiences so that there is no longer any clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins.^[2]

The term was proposed by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, whose postmodern work contributed to a scholarly tradition in the field of communication studies that speaks directly to larger social concerns. Postmodernism was established through the social turmoil of the 1960s, spurred by social movements that questioned preexisting conventions and social institutions. Through the postmodern lens, reality is viewed as a fragmented, complimentary and polysemic system with components that are produced by social and cultural activity. Social realities that constitute consensus reality are constantly produced and reproduced, changing through the extended use of signs and symbols which hence contribute to the creation of a greater hyperreality.

Origins and usage

The postmodern semiotic concept of hyperreality was contentiously coined by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981).^[3] Baudrillard defined "hyperreality" as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality";^[4] and his earlier book *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Hyperreality is a representation, a sign, without an original referent. According to Baudrillard, the commodities in this theoretical state do not have use-value as defined by Karl Marx but can be understood as signs as defined by Ferdinand de Saussure.^[5] He believes hyperreality goes further than confusing or blending the 'real' with the symbol which represents it; it involves creating a symbol or set of signifiers which represent something that does not actually exist, like Santa Claus. Baudrillard borrows, from Jorge Luis Borges' "On Exactitude in Science" (already borrowed from Lewis Carroll), the example of a society whose cartographers create a map so detailed that it covers the very things it was designed to represent. When the empire declines, the map fades into the landscape.^[6] He says that, in such a case, neither the representation nor the real remains, just the hyperreal.

Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality was heavily influenced by phenomenology, semiotics, and the philosophy of Marshall McLuhan. Baudrillard, however, challenges McLuhan's famous statement that "the medium is the message," by suggesting that information devours its own content. He also suggested that there is a difference between the media and reality and what they represent.^[6] Hyperreality is the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced societies.^[7] However, Baudrillard's hyperreality theory goes a step further than McLuhan's medium theory: "There is not only an implosion of the message in the medium, there is, in the same

movement, the implosion of the medium itself in the real, the implosion of the medium and of the real in a sort of hyperreal nebula, in which even the definition and distinct action of the medium can no longer be determined".^[8]

Italian author Umberto Eco explores the notion of hyperreality further by suggesting that the action of hyperreality is to desire reality and in the attempt to achieve that desire, to fabricate a false reality that is to be consumed as real.^[9] Linked to contemporary western culture, Umberto Eco and post-structuralists would argue that in current cultures, fundamental ideals are built on desire and particular sign-systems. Temenuga Trifonova from University of California, San Diego notes,

[...]it is important to consider Baudrillard's texts as articulating an ontology rather than an epistemology.^[10]

Significance

Hyperreality is significant as a paradigm to explain current cultural conditions. Consumerism, because of its reliance on sign exchange value (e.g. brand X shows that one is fashionable, car Y indicates one's wealth), could be seen as a contributing factor in the creation of hyperreality or the hyperreal condition. Hyperreality tricks consciousness into detaching from any real emotional engagement, instead opting for artificial simulation, and endless reproductions of fundamentally empty appearance. Essentially (although Baudrillard himself may balk at the use of this word), fulfillment or happiness is found through simulation and imitation of a transient simulacrum of reality, rather than any interaction with any "real" reality.^[11]

While hyperreality is not a new concept, its effects are more relevant in modern society, incorporating technological advancements like artificial intelligence, virtual reality and neurotechnology (simulated reality). This is attributed to the way it effectively captured the postmodern condition, particularly how people in the postmodern world seek stimulation by creating unreal worlds of spectacle and seduction and nothing more.^[12] There are dangers to the use of hyperreality within our culture; individuals may observe and accept hyperreal images as role models when the images don't necessarily represent real physical people. This can result in a desire to strive for an unobtainable ideal, or it may lead to a lack of unimpaired role models. Daniel J. Boorstin cautions against confusing celebrity worship with hero worship, "we come dangerously close to depriving ourselves of all real models. We lose sight of the men and women who do not simply seem great because they are famous but who are famous because they are great".^[13] He bemoans the loss of old heroes like Moses, Odysseus, Aeneas, Jesus, Julius Caesar, Muhammed, Joan of Arc, William Shakespeare, George Washington, Napoleon, and Abraham Lincoln, who did not have public relations (PR) agencies to construct hyperreal images of themselves.^[14] The dangers of hyperreality are also facilitated by information technologies, which provide tools to dominant powers that seek to encourage it to drive consumption and materialism.^[15] The danger in the pursuit of stimulation and seduction emerge not in the lack of meaning but, as Baudrillard maintained, "we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us."^[16]

Hyperreality, some sources point out, may provide insights into the postmodern movement by analyzing how simulations disrupt the binary opposition between reality and illusion but it does not address or resolve the contradictions inherent in this tension.^[17]

Key relational themes

The concepts most fundamental to hyperreality are those of simulation and the simulacrum, first conceptualized by Jean Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. The two terms are separate entities with relational origin connections to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality.

Simulation

Simulation is characterized by a blending of 'reality' and representation, where there is no clear indication of where the former stops and the latter begins. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance; "It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."^[18] Baudrillard suggests that simulation no longer takes place in a physical realm; it takes place within a space not categorized by physical limits i.e., within ourselves, technological simulations, etc.

Simulacrum

The simulacrum is "an image without resemblance"; as Gilles Deleuze summarized, it is the forsaking of "moral existence in order to enter into aesthetic existence".^[19] However, Baudrillard argues that a simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes—through sociocultural compression—truth in its own right.

There are four steps of hyperreal reproduction:

1. Basic reflection of reality, i.e. in immediate perception
2. Perversion of reality, i.e. in representation
3. Pretense of reality, where there is no model
4. Simulacrum, which "bears no relation to any reality whatsoever"^[20]

Hyperstition

The concept of "hyperstition" as expounded upon by the English collective Cybernetic Culture Research Unit generalizes the notion of hyperreality to encompass the concept of "fictional entities that make themselves real." In Nick Land's own words:^[21]

Hyperstition is a positive feedback circuit including culture as a component. It can be defined as the experimental (techno-)science of self-fulfilling prophecies. Superstitions are merely false beliefs, but hyperstitions – by their very existence as ideas –function causally to bring about their own reality.

—Nick Land

The concept of hyperstition is also related to the concept of "theory-fiction", in which philosophy, critical theory and postmodern literature speculate on actual reality and engage with concepts for potentialities and virtualities. An oft-cited example of such a concept is cyberspace—originating in William Gibson's

1984 novel *Neuromancer*—which is a concept for the convergence between virtualities and actualities.^[22] By the mid-1990s, the realization of this concept had begun to emerge on a mass scale in the form of the internet.

Consequence

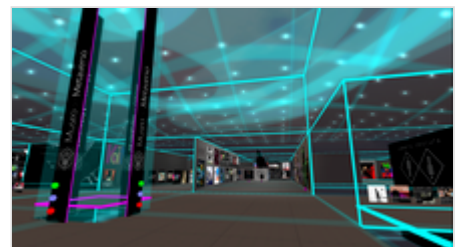
The truth was already being called into question with the rise of media and technology, but with the presence of hyperreality being used most and embraced as a new technology, there are a couple of issues or consequences of hyperreality. It's difficult enough to hear something on the news and choose not to believe it, but it's quite another to see an image of an event or anything and use your empirical sense to determine whether the news is true or false, which is one of the consequences of hyperrealism.^[23] The first is the possibility of various simulations being used to influence the audience, resulting in an inability to differentiate fiction from reality, which affects the overall truth value of a subject at hand. Another implication or disadvantage is the possibility of being manipulated by what we see.

The audience can interpret different messages depending on the ideology of the entity behind an image. As a result, power equates to control over the media and the people.^[24] Celebrities, for example, have their photographs taken and altered so that the public can see the final result. The public then perceives celebrities based on what they have seen rather than how they truly are. It can progress to the point where celebrities appear completely different. As a result of celebrities' body modifications and editing, there has been an increase in surgeries and a decrease in self-esteem during adolescence.^[25] Because the truth is threatened, a similar outcome for hyperreality is possible.

In culture

As society has transitioned toward a consumer culture, the combination of the free market economy and the advancements found within media and communication technologies have influenced this development towards a hyperreality. Through the emergence of new media technologies and the ever-growing role of media found within the modern day, a growing link is displayed between the incorporation and effects of hyperreality.^[26] The transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 to Web3 has been studied as a process of transitioning towards hyperreality.^[27] On the basic level of hyperreality, Web 1.0 was designed for freely downloading and reading information, with readers being able to search for topics; Yahoo, Google, and MSN are examples of Web 1.0. Instagram, TikTok, and Messenger are examples of Web 2.0 platforms that transformed what was once a reading platform into an interaction platform. Web3 is a newer platform that allows users to fully integrate the virtual world into decentralized and autonomously controlled environments, such as Filecoin and the metaverse.^{[28][27]}

There is a strong link between media and the impact that the presence of hyperreality has on its viewers. This has shown to blur the lines between artificial realities and reality, influencing the day to day experiences of those exposed to it.^[30] As hyperreality captures the inability to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, common media outlets such as news, social media platforms, radio and television contribute to this misconception of



Metaverse museum^[29]

true reality.^[26] Descriptions of the impact of hyperreality can be found in popular media. They present themselves as becoming blended with reality, which influences the experience of life and truth for its viewers.

Baudrillard, like Roland Barthes before him, explained that these impacts have a direct effect on younger generations who idolize the heroes, characters or influencers found on these platforms. As media is a social institution that shapes and develops its members within society, the exposure to hyperreality found within these platforms presents an everlasting effect.^[31] Baudrillard concludes that exposure to hyperreality over time will lead, from the conservative perspective of the institutions themselves, to confusion and chaos, in turn leading to the destruction of identity, originality and character while ironically still being the mainstay of the institutions.



VR, an example of hyperreality

Social media and public image

With the introduction of the smartphone in the early 2000s, online presence and presence in the real world have become synonymous. An individual's digital footprint can often tell us more about an individual than their real lives. This is because people's behaviors can change dramatically on the internet with virtually no repercussions or laws telling them to do so; the internet has become the anarchist's safe haven. The role of social media in society has dramatically increased in recent decades and creating a public image or online presence has become an online standard. Twitter has become a main source for public figures to express themselves and for corporations to inform the public. The hyperreality environment on the internet has shifted dramatically over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, so much so that it has an influence on the Italian Stock Exchange in 2021.^[32] The hyperreality created on social media platforms has been regarded as strong and influential enough for its quality and emotion to be translated into social reality, where value is lost and careers are damaged. Emotions expressed on social media are directly having real-life effects on numerous sectors despite having any factual basis or tangible information. As social media becomes more ingrained into the daily lives of countless individuals, the distinction between stories on the internet and truth in real life are becoming more blurred as it descends into the core of hyperreality.

Squid Game created hyperreal conditions on the internet where millions were sharing their own feelings and opinions about the show, even going as far as to play the games and practice the activities portrayed in the show. The hyperreal conditions were created so effectively that individuals were picking up unique Korean cultural aspects but only giving credit to the show and not the country; individuals believed the show created these games. This is hugely significant because it illustrates Baudrillard's notion of models of reality without reality; a fictional TV show produced real events and practices and completely removed the real cultural significance.^[33] The Hollywood sign in Los Angeles, California, itself produces similar notions, but is more a *symbol* of a facet of hyperreality—the creation of a city with its main target being media production.^[34]

The increase in social media influencers has given rise to a popular "storytelling" trend, where creators recount past experiences, often exaggerating and dramatizing the experience for perceived importance and relevance. The trend mixes reality with the virtual world as viewers often feel part of the creators' life and identify with this given image the creator produces for their audience. Social media currently offers

what news and other sources of media could not forty years ago: the chance to not only share news but to also create news.^[35] To exaggerate this even further, TikTok has seen the nuance of AI accounts that present themselves as human-like animated beings with unique personalities, artificial social circles and personal likes and interests. Once designed by humans, now completely independent of any influence, these AI creations have mass followings that present conditions of perfect four-dimensional simulation as described by Baudrillard. With the incentive for viewership and notoriety, social media influencers/creators have little incentive to produce meaningful and actual news and instead lean toward these storytelling methods that produce large reactions that blur the lines of reality and false online narratives.

Disneyland

Both Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard refer to Disneyland as an example of hyperreality. Eco believes that Disneyland with its settings such as Main Street and full sized houses has been created to look "absolutely realistic", taking visitors' imagination to a "fantastic past".^[36] This false reality creates an illusion and makes it more desirable for people to buy this reality. Disneyland works in a system that enables visitors to feel that technology and the created atmosphere "can give us more reality than nature can".^[37] The "fake nature" of Disneyland satisfies our imagination and daydream fantasies in real life. The idea is that nothing in this world is real. Nothing is original, but all are endless copies of reality. Since we do not imagine the reality of simulations, both imagined and real are equally hyperreal, for example, the numerous simulated rides, including the submarine ride and the Mississippi boat tour.^[8] When entering Disneyland, consumers form into lines to gain access to each attraction. Then they are ordered by people with special uniforms to follow the rules, such as where to stand or where to sit. If the consumers follow each rule correctly, they can enjoy "the real thing" and see things that are not available to them outside of Disneyland's doors.^[38]

In his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues the "imaginary world" of Disneyland magnetizes people inside and has been presented as "imaginary" to make people believe that all its surroundings are "real". But he believes that the Los Angeles area is not real; thus it is hyperreal. Disneyland is a set of apparatuses which tries to bring imagination and fiction to what is called "real". This concerns the American values and way of life in a sense and "concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle."^[39]

"The Disneyland imaginary is neither true or false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real. Whence the debility, the infantile degeneration of this imaginary. It's meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly among those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions of their real childishness."^[40]

Examples

- The hyperrealist painter Denis Peterson intentionally emphasized familiar signs and images which did not in fact faithfully reveal true reality. Instead, he coalesced these alternate perceptions of realities into subliminal depictions of contemporary cultures and boldly launched them into his body of work as hyperreality. No longer satisfied with an art-for-art's sake approach to realist cityscapes and the like, Peterson saw hyperreality as a vehicle for

social change, oftentimes conjuring themes of corruption, decadence, and genocide in his subject matter.

- The 1999 film *Existenz* follows Allegra Geller, a game designer who finds herself targeted by assassins while playing a virtual reality game of her own creation.
- The 1999 film *The Thirteenth Floor*: a murder mystery set within a cutting edge computer simulator, exploring ownership and abuse within the Utopian ideals of AI.
- The 2008 film *Synecdoche, New York* in which the life of the main character Caden Cotard is lived in the confines of a warehouse made to be the set of a play which is about his life, blurring all distinction between what is real and the simulation.
- The 2014 film *Birdman* portrays a theater director haunted by making his show as authentic as possible, leading to people getting hurt.
- Films in which characters and settings are either digitally enhanced or created entirely from CGI (e.g., *300*, where the entire film was shot in front of a blue/green screen, with all settings super-imposed).
- In *A Clockwork Orange*, when Alex says, "It's funny how the colors of the real world only seem really real when you viddy them on the screen" (sic.) when he undergoes Ludovico's Technique.^[41]
- A well-manicured garden (nature as hyperreal).
- Any massively promoted versions of historical or present "facts" (e.g., "General Ignorance" from *QI*, where the questions have seemingly obvious answers, which are actually wrong).
- Professional sports athletes as super, invincible versions of human beings.
- Many world cities and places which did not evolve as functional places with some basis in reality, as if they were *creatio ex nihilo* (literally 'creation out of nothing'): *Black Rock City*; *Disney World*; *Dubai*; *Celebration, Florida*; *Cancun* and *Las Vegas*.
- TV and film in general (especially "reality" TV), due to its creation of a world of fantasy and its dependence that the viewer will engage with these fantasy worlds. The current trend is to glamorize the mundane using *histrionics*.
- A retail store that looks completely stocked and perfect due to *facing*, creating an illusion of more merchandise than there actually is.
- A high end sex doll used as a simulacrum of an unattainable partner.^[42]
- A newly made building or item designed to look old, or to recreate or reproduce an older artifact, by simulating the feel of age or aging. Such as *Reborn Dolls*.
- Constructed languages (such as *E-Prime*) or "reconstructed" extinct dialects.
- *Second Life*, where the distinction becomes blurred when it becomes the platform for RL (real life) courses and conferences or leads to real world interactions behind the scenes.
- Weak virtual reality.^[43]
- The *superfictional* airline company *Ingold Airlines*.
- Works within the spectrum of the *Vaporwave musical genre* often encompass themes of hyperreality through parody of the information revolution.^[44]
- *Plastic surgery*, which can be described as the construction of faces that efface the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" in the syntax of beauty.
- Airbrushed images of men and women; for example, *Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty*.
- *Heidiland*, is a region in eastern Switzerland named after the "Heidi" novels by *Johanna Spyri*, encompassing alpine landscapes, villages, and recreational areas inspired by the story's setting. The labels throughout the village attraction treat Heidi as a historical figure with few hints of make-believe. ^{[45][46]}
- The restaurant Chain, which features nostalgic callbacks to real fast food chains (in particular *Pizza Hut*) though is a pastiche of fast food restaurants from a previous era. ^[47]
- The *superfictional* video game *Petscop*.

- ChatGPT is highly proficient at confidently generating answers which can be either right or wrong, even blending both truth and falsities. For example, it has argued with all seriousness that the word cat starts with the letter S, but can employ many different formats, from essays to casual conversations.^[48] See [Hallucination \(artificial intelligence\)](#).

See also

- [Allegory of the cave](#)
- [Authenticity \(philosophy\)](#)
- [Database consumption](#)
- [Escapism](#)
- [Extended reality](#)
- [Hypersociability](#)
- [Immersion \(virtual reality\)](#)
- [Life imitating art](#)
- [Marx's theory of alienation](#)
- [Metamodernism](#)
- [Metaverse](#)
- [Post-irony](#)
- [Post-truth politics](#)
- [The Real](#)
- [Real life](#)
- [Sandbox game](#)
- [Simulacrum](#)
- [Simulated reality](#)
- [Social simulation](#)
- [Solipsism](#)
- [Suspension of disbelief](#)
- [Superficiality](#)
- [The Symbolic](#)

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External links

- International Journal of Baudrillard Studies (<https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/>)
- Baudrillard and Hyperreality; Simulacro y régimen de mortandad en el Sistema de los objetos (Disney World and Hyperreality) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160916213343/http://revistadefilosofia.com/94.pdf>) (PDF) by Adolfo Vasquez Rocca (in Spanish)
- Reality/Hyperreality, The Chicago School of Media Theory (<http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/realityhyperreality.htm>)

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