# *Deconstructing Frameworks and Reconstructing Meaning within Hyperreality*

How can graphic communication design help navigate the state of hyperreality, embedded with late capitalist ideology, so that one can lead a liberated and meaningful life?

By Sun Min Kim
Unit 10 Critical Report

Introduction

We live in hyperreality. A state where truth has disconnected from reality due to the embrace of simulacra, or image, as real. Better put, truth is indistinguishable from representation of truth to the extent that the distinction does not matter anymore; simulation has become reality. (Baudrillard, 1994) The hegemony of late capitalism is strengthened by hyperreality and its capacity to construct a social reality out of simulacra. As such it is able to implement an all encompassing rationality that prevents one's perception of the world from transcending its ideology; effectively incapacitating the individual's, and by extension society's, ability to imagine alternative possibilities of existence. (Jameson, 1991)
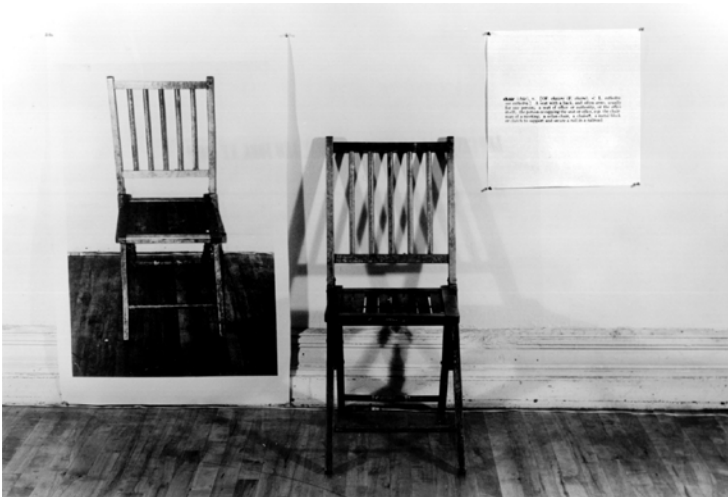
¹ One and Three Chairs, Joseph Kosuth, 1965 (MoMa 2021)

It is my position that graphic communication design (abbreviated to GCD) has a responsibility as society's primary image producers to help society navigate the state of hyperreality. Indeed, GCD practitioners have a unique potential not only to share knowledge of image and meaning production but to subvert late capitalist rationality through a counter hegemonic practice. In this way design becomes a tool to decode hyperreality, allowing one to cut through its webs of meaning to not get tangled in concealed ideology.

The ultimate aim of this critical shift in GCD practice is to aid the ideological liberation of the individual so that one can lead a meaningful life. As such, I am not interested in putting forth my own systems of value in place of late capitalist ideology. Furthermore, I am sensitive to the possibility for postmodern scepticism to liberate the individual as well as destroy personal meaning. So I opt for a methodology that is able to straddle both sides by going through the stages of deconstructing frameworks and reconstructing meaning. Therefore, this method

1 I find I always come back to this artwork by Kosuth when trying to understand hyperreality. To me, Kosuth is asking what is the difference between the three different 'chairs', perhaps none.

opens possibilities for individuals to regain their creative agency in imagining alternative modes of being and self-determined meaning without becoming lost to deconstructed emptiness.

This essay will explore in detail the above argument through the synthesis of critical theory, philosophy and my own design practice. The essay will begin with a contextual exposition on the concepts of hyperreality, its definitions, its consequences and how this idea underlies my GCD practice. Then my methodology of deconstructing frameworks and reconstructing meaning will be discussed, first in relation to its supporting theories and then secondly in relation to my practical design practice. By the conclusion of this essay I hope to inform the reader on the ideological underpinnings that can go unnoticed in GCD practice, social relations and image consumption, and demonstrate the possible solutions to counter late capitalist hegemony so that one can live an ideologically liberated and personally meaningful life.

Contextual Exposition

What is Hyperreality?

Hyperreality, put forward by Jean Baudrillard, is the state where representations or simulacra replace reality and becomes more real than reality. (Baudrillard, 1994) Building upon Ferdinand de Saussure's concept that a sign can be split into the signified (content) and the signifier (expression), Baudrillard asserts that our reality is increasingly constructed of signifiers without reference to the signified. (Underwood, 2021) This is a state where truth is determined and constructed within a system of signs. Like a dictionary which defines words with other words, an endless regression of definitions, without any direct contact to reality.

What is Simulacra?

Within hyperreality, reality is indistinguishable from simulacra, which are representations or imitations of the real. Baudrillard reminds us that a simulacrum does not 'hide the truth', rather the proliferation and acceptance of simulacra means that there

are no truths. (Baudrillard, 1994) We have become accustomed to a hyperreality that feels more real than reality, constructed by various simulacra; images, symbols, models, maps, etc.

If simulacra are representations that signify something real, then these words (that compose this text), these geometric letterforms (that compose those words) and these pixels (that compose those letterforms) are suitable examples. However, Hyperreality is not merely the congregation of simulacra. It is the layering of simulacra, a copy of a copy of a copy and so on. It is when under those layers the original referent gets lost and forgotten. Eventually the real core does not concern our reality. A bootstrap process occurs and what remains is the hyperreal coating, thick enough to hold its own. The result is a dynamic loop of meanings and definitions able to create more truth from within itself.

Love Island UK Season 4 (9now, 2018)

The phenomenon of reality television is a classic example of this layering. This imitation of reality, in both the medium of a flat screen that projects life-like images and the content where actors fake a realness, is consumed by viewers who then begin to copy that model of human behaviour. Thus, a loop of copies is formed where the viewer goes on to copy the model of reality and perpetuate a imitation of reality which then becomes a basis for a model of reality and so on. What is left is a hollow imitation of real human behaviour.

It should be noted that I tend to think of hyperreality in a broader sense. Rather than using it as a technical term to describe a the inability to distinguish reality from simulation, where the simulacra becomes more real than real, I often understand it as an encompassing state of this historical, philosophical and existential time period.

As such, the term 'hyperreality' in the context of this essay has multiple implications such as its consequences on social relations, the underlying emptiness that ensues from the deconstruction of meaning, its part in cultivating ideological hegemony, and the absurdity that arises from postmodernity.

What are the consequences?

There are several consequences that result from hyperreality. The ones I will elaborate on in this essay are the perpetuation of late capitalism through cultural hegemony, the loss of meaning and the chief concern that we are unable to live a liberated and meaningful life. It will become apparent in later sections that these consequences are all interlinked and thus difficult to perceive and overcome.

When one is unaware of hyperreality they remain within a vicious cycle, destined to repeat the feedback loop of consuming and producing simulacra. The current generation of hyperreality is accelerated by social media, its constant over turning of trends and endlessly scrolled content. Reality tv is replaced by 'influencers' and the viewers are replaced by their followers. The performances of the ideal self on these platforms are infused with capitalist ideology as happiness and success are defined through its rationality. In that space between the screen and oneself, one loses their capacity for self determined meaning, instead constantly reiterating a version of self that is no longer real unless represented via digital images and videos posted online. As a result, one becomes a hypnotised conduit to embody and perpetuate capitalist ideals.

Main Argument

Though one may not fully transcend hyperreality, being aware of it can begin to liberate oneself from unconscious participation in a reality constructed by others. This rejection of existing frameworks of meaning and reality opens the possibility for ideological liberation and creative self determination.

This argument is founded on the attitude summed up in Douglas Kellner's foreword to Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man: "Perceiving the possibility of self-determination and constructing one's own needs and values could enable individuals to break with the existing world of thought and behaviour. Philosophy was thus to supply the norms for social criticism and the ideal of liberation which would guide social change and individual self-transformation" (Marcuse, 1964)

As such, my practice is built upon the ideals of self revolution, combining the inquisitive spirit of philosophy that seeks to continuously overturn accepted reality with the practical applications of GCD as a vehicle to navigate, dismantle and reconstruct the kaleidoscope of meanings that exists in hyperreality.

How does it concern GCD and myself as a practitioner?

As a field of practice that is involved with sign and image production, GCD inevitably perpetuates hyperreality. As a student of this discipline I am concerned with how my practice will contribute to the repression of others. This concern taken to its extreme dictates that I should not produce any work at all. However, I developed my position in alignment with Marshall McLuhan's assertion that knowledge of the medium allows one to stand aside from its structure and discern its 'principles and lines of force'. (McLuhan, 2015)

Additionally, the problem of capitalism has extended beyond the question of economics, whether it allocates resources in the best way possible, and now concerns social relations between individuals. The path taken by late capitalist ideology in its encroachment of the personal sphere is that of images and meaning, the same field of knowledge that concerns GCD. Therefore, as late capitalism begins to pervade all spheres of life, particularly the social and personal domain, it is increasingly possible for GCD to counter act its ideological domination and dismantle these new forms of ideological dissemination.
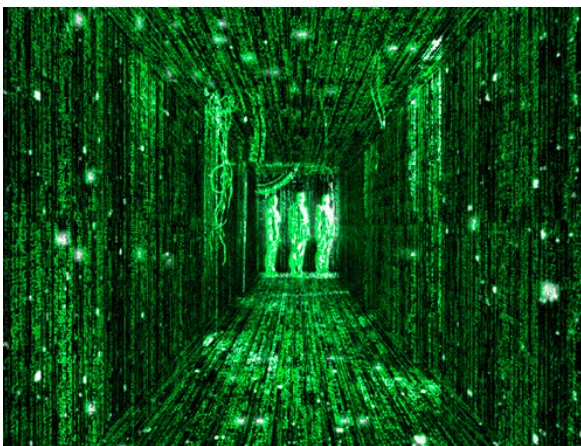
[2]The Matrix (Stackexchange, 2021)

2 To use a familiar example, GCD as a decoder of hyperreality can help us defeat *agents* of hegemony.

Methodology to navigate hyperreality

Deconstruction and Reconstruction

The methodology in navigating hyperreality through
GCD that is put forward in this essay consists of
Deconstructing Frameworks and Reconstructing Meaning.

Deconstructing frameworks pertains to critical thinking and the
deconstruction of cultural, social and ideological frameworks.
Questioning fundamental truths about reality can liberate one's
self from dogma but this deconstruction can also leave one
lost within the meaningless fragmentisation of (non-)truths.
Therefore, what naturally follows is the effort in reconstructing
meaning. In doing so, one is able to reconcile the emptiness
that is revealed and create one's own meaning in life.

In this way, both deconstruction and reconstruction
are integral to the navigation of hyperreality which
allows one to find liberation and meaning.

Deconstructing Frameworks

The Supporting Theories

The deconstruction of frameworks is the practical and critical
application of the social constructivist view; that our realities
are formed by social constructs. This practice draws from a rich
background of institutional critique and can help understand
the ideological implications embedded in hyperreality.

Frederic Jameson, in Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of
Late Capitalism, critiques of our current historical situation
by recognising that hyperreality and late capitalism are
inextricably linked. He ties the two together through the term
'depthlessness' in his characterisation of this new cultural
era. This depthlessness is comprised of the physical flatness

of screens, the postmodern attitude that rejects a transcendent truth beyond surface appearance and the superficiality of our hyperreal culture. It is in this depthlessness that we lose the depth of our character and the ability to perceive ideology which culminates in an inauthentic and meaningless life. (Jameson, 1991)

The development of this depthlessness and its critique can be understood through other cultural theorists. This becomes clear when the repeated motif of 'detachment' is paid particular attention.

Walter Benjamin noted the loss of aura in the mechanical reproduction of artworks. Here the market began to detach the image of an artwork from its original time and space so that it may be sold. In that process Benjamin saw the deterioration of culture and the loss of something meaningful. Thus began the commodification of human meaning and the spread of the capitalist free market encroaching on all spheres of life. (Benjamin, 1978)

In a similar fashion, John Berger observed how advertisements began to detach the image of happiness from the viewer, so that it may be sold back to them. 'The publicity image steals the love of herself as she is and sells it back to her' In this stage the consumer is no longer sold goods and services based on their material, exchange or symbolic value but for a sign value that has been completely inflated. Here begins hyperreality. As the signifier detaches from the signified, the meaning of happiness can be sold embedded within products and services. (Berger, 2008)

Within this organisation of society that relies on surface appearances and a system of constructed meanings, Guy Debord recognised the advent of spectacle society. This is one where the value of an individual is no longer determined by their character or what they have but rather by the social meaning of appearances. At this stage identity detaches from the individual as well. One is are no longer a mere consumer of simulacra but also becomes a producer of simulacra. In a societal structure that relies on spectacles, the individual must sell their self-image to be understood, to exist. (Debord, 1967)

These detachments of sign from signifiers, that occur not just through intellectual deconstruction of meaning but also through intentional commodification, produces the development of 'depthlessness'. He recognises that this creates a distinct

flavour of cultural hegemony previously unseen until the current epoch. The detachment of meaning that results in hyperreality allows for the commodification of all spheres of life. This results in the progression of late capitalism into an all encompassing rationality; effectively preventing one from thinking outside its ideological frameworks.

Fortunately, the intellectual practice of deconstruction and scepticism that developed within the same postmodern milieu can be utilised to dismantle the hegemony of late capitalism.

Kellner elaborates the following: "Critical thought seeks alternative modes of thought and behaviour from which is created a standpoint of critique. What Marcuse calls 'negative thinking'. This practice presupposes the ability to make a distinction between existence and essence, fact and potentiality and appearance and reality." (Marcuse, 1964)

However, I recognise that within hyperreality, it becomes impossible to distinguish appearance and reality. As such, my GCD practice is not concerned with separating the two, to define what is real and what is not. Instead, by deconstructing and questioning rigidly held foundations of reality through my design, I intend to heighten the criticality of my users via an awareness of hyperreality and it social constructions.

Design Practice

Hegemony is echoed in Herbert Marcuse's concept of repressive desublimation. He suggests that one is free to consume pleasures and pursue happiness in commodified forms. Thus, by allowing limited freedom to express and indulge one's self, the desire to overturn the dominant system is dissipated. In this way social control is exercised not by denial but through allowance. (Marcuse, 1964)

To raise the criticality of my audience I was specifically interested in deconstructing the culture of happiness in order to reveal its ability to exert repressive desublimation. In other words, I aimed to tackle how social relations has been subsumed into capitalism so that our performance of happiness is an act of compliance to the dominant ideology.

To understand the commodification of happiness one can start by looking at the counter cultural revolution throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Old hierarchies, ideals and authorities were rejected and the 'self' became a project. However, the very same intellectual and psychedelic movements that tore down the past foundations of meaning in the name of liberation left the frightening possibility that there was no ultimate purpose, no genuine 'self' to find, and in the words of Samuel Beckett 'nothing to be done'. This is what Erik Davis in his book High Weirdness describes as 'the Munch-like scream of the smiley face'. He recognises the strange mood of mixed emotions that pervaded this moment in history, the joy of liberation and the dread of existential emptiness. (Davis, 2019)

It can be argued that while this existential crisis continue today, the genuine movement for hope, peace and happiness in the face of an empty universe has been replaced with capitalism and its unending cycle of consumption, production and growth as a distraction from this terrifying truth.

Smiley Face Brand (Smiley, 2021)

The Smiley Company, a brand licensing company which holds rights to the smiley image is a testament to the manner in which the positivity of the 60s and 70s were assimilated into mainstream culture. Indeed, the very idea that some fictional entity could own the image of a smiley face as if it were a real object would be bizarre if not for the state of hyperreality and its capitalist rationality.

This is all to say that the revolutionary potential for existential enlightenment is forgotten and the void left by this destruction of consensus reality has been filled by new forms of capitalism that exploit these decentralised and fragmented realities as new markets to cater to. Certainly, the empty smile continues, sanitised, corporatised and commodified, to be sold back to consumers today.

With grand narratives deconstructed away, the pursuit of happiness is perhaps the only tenet left to live by. Thus, happiness is to be pursued at all costs and, as evidence, one must smile at all costs. It is here that Marcuse's concept of repressive desublimation applies. Happiness is the one thing

the secular world can collectively believe in and as such
becomes the perfect stronghold to impose the status quo.

"Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity
with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more
so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages
and threatens the smooth operation of the whole" (Marcuse, 1964)

Therefore, in order to undermine late capitalism, I decided
to question happiness. This decision was made in order
to reveal the concealed ideology that remains embedded
in our culture of happiness. Additionally, I wanted to
apply the technique of defamiliarisation in my work, to
create a moment of confusion and in that dissonance evoke
a level of critical reflection from my audience.

In an article written for Modes of Criticism, Peter Buwert
puts forward the potential for the technique of ostranenie,
which was first coined by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky,
or 'defamiliarisation' to be utilised in graphic design in
order wake up the viewer. By making a previously familiar
object unfamiliar, the artist or designer is able stop
habitual thinking, subvert assumptions, draw attention to
it, and as a result, rouse deeper inspection. Within this
moment the viewer is able to step outside the normalised
frame of mind and elevate their criticality. (Buwert, 2021)

Buwert continues to describe how the strength of the effect
positively correlated with the extent to which the object
at hand was previously so ordinary and familiar. Therefore,
I wanted to defamiliarise happiness
which is a familiar purpose of life.

Smile At All Costs Posters
by Sun Min Kim

In order to communicate this intention I created
posters which were then wheat-pasted onto walls.
The artwork itself illustrates a person who is
smiling while their eyes are covered by a pair of
hands. Immediately there is something unsettling
about this image and in that uncanny space the
smile suddenly becomes unfamiliar. Here the
illustration serves to displace the viewer out
of their habitual associations with the smile,
to make them slightly uncomfortable. In this
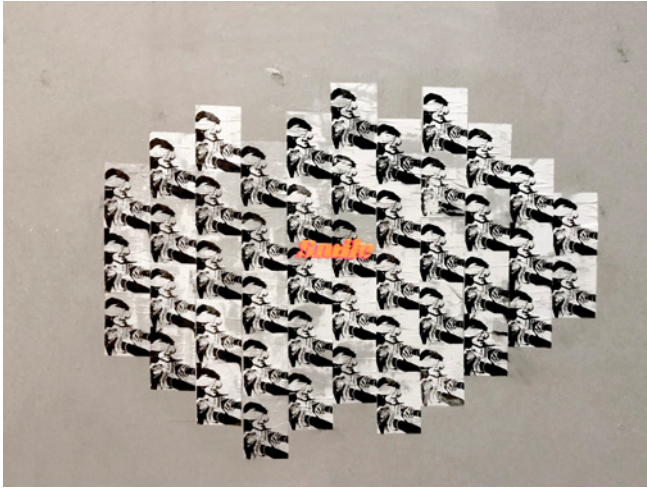
Top: Final Design, wheatpasted by Sun Min Kim
Bottom: Detail, stencil work by Sun Min Kim

regard they begin to pay attention to the image and take time to discern its intended meaning. The meaning of the poster becomes more apparent when the posters are placed in a tessellated pattern so that the image repeats, creating a visual loop. However, even the loop is made difficult to comprehend. The arms do not seamlessly meld into the hands, instead it is the white space that reaches out into the next instance of the poster. This is reminiscent of classic optical illusions and by breaking up the visual field in this manner, the viewer is again forced to look harder, more intently.

Regardless, the looped illustrations signify the idea that the status quo is affirmed and perpetuated by the continual performance of happiness within our social patterns. This figurative exchange of 'Yes, I'm happy. Are you happy?', that occurs in daily life whether in habitual speech patterns or online performance of happiness, should be brought under scrutiny.

The cultural expectation to remain positive, at least in appearance, is ideological in nature. An enforced state of happiness leads one to believe that the current state of affairs is ideal and, in line with repressive desublimation, any desire to transcend or revolt subsides. One performs happiness blindly because they have not yet questioned it and because they have not questioned it they are blind to its ideological underpinnings. As a result the image of happiness continues to be an agent for hegemony.

The decision to wheatpaste these posters was guided by the reluctance to use mainstream channels of dissemination, such as websites and social media, which would contribute to the perpetuation of hyperreality.

'We are all undesirables'
May 68 Poster
(The Paris Review, 2021)

Additionally the decision has historical significance in relation to street-art and civil disobedience. Specifically, the theoretical framework that underlies my practice extends back to the civil unrest in France known as May 68. There the key theorists who influence my work, such as Guy Debord and Herbert Marcuse, had also influenced the students who took part in that protest. Through this choice of medium I align myself with the ethos of these protestors, and bring both the spirit and theory behind them up to date with contemporary times.

The historical significance also contributes in creating an effective communicative design. The connotations assigned to wheatpasted posters by history signal a context of social commentary and a critique of the status quo.

The Loss of Meaning

Though deconstruction can liberate an individual, a purely sceptical and cynical point of view can lead to the total loss of meaning. It is not difficult to see how questioning happiness, which I discussed as perhaps one of the last agreeable tenets to live life by, leaves one feeling purposeless and meaningless. Even Baudrillard seems to acknowledge the need to reconfigure our sense of meaning in a quote attributed to him "once you are liberated you are forced to ask who you are".

Reconstructing meaning

Supporting theories

This leads me to the method of reconstructing meaning, an integral part to navigating the state of hyperreality. In this endeavour I turned to the existential thinking in Buddhist and Absurdist philosophies that deal with emptiness, the Void and the Absurd. However, rather than providing insight into how meaning could be found within meaninglessness, the study of these philosophies only seemed to affirm the emptiness.

The common concern between postmodernism and Buddhist philosophy in the deconstruction of reality led me to consider how Buddhism reconciles the apparent meaninglessness of non-constructed reality.

Buddhism recognises the illusory nature of reality as Maya. Beyond images that might persuade us of permanence, beyond language which might persuade us of rational logic, and beyond our phenomenological senses that might persuade us of material reality lies emptiness and the Void.

Buddhists might persuade one to see through Maya and realise that reality is ungraspable to escape suffering. However, this does not do much good for the layperson who will not devote their whole life to cultivating emptiness and ridding themselves of the ego. I realised Buddhism did not want to actively reconcile emptiness because that would mean denying Dharma and returning to Maya, grasping at security in meanings, knowledge, definitions and narratives. (Aitken, 2016)

For this reason my research led to other existential philosophies. Albert Camus wrestles with meaninglessness in The Myth of Sisyphus, where he details the philosophical problem of the Absurd.

The Absurd is the strange core of our human condition where one seeks meaning in a world that is devoid of it. Camus' solution is an everyday conscious revolt against the Absurd. By continuing life we regain agency while fully awake to the truth of our existential condition and are able to savour our uniquely human struggle. (Camus, 1942)

To me this was less esoteric and more immediately impactful. The conscious act of revolt even seemed to illuminate the mind to the existential truth of emptiness, creating a brief moment of Zen-like clarity.

Design Practice
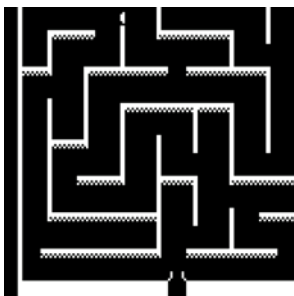
I reflected this absurdity through a game titled 'My Purpose is to Find the Middle'. The gameplay involves controlling a character through a series of mazes to reach the centre of a labyrinth. Each level completed triggers a dialogue in which the in-game character contemplates what might be in the middle, the source of his purpose. Eventually, the player discovers that the middle is empty.
In that emptiness he has the decision to either continue or rest, This false choice alters the dialogue but in either case the game returns back to the beginning regardless. Thus, there is no purpose to this game, no end or any way to win.

Similar in tone and intention to Samuel Beckett absurd plays, this game reflected the bleak and stark truth of the meaninglessness human condition. Though it was meant to express Camus' revolt against the Absurd, this design did little to help the audience reconstruct meaning, it only reinforced meaninglessness. I felt that there was little joy in this outcome and certainly no liberating laughter. (Esslin, 1961)

Left: My purpose is to find The Middle,
a short narrative game by Sun Min Kim

Space Voyager Lost in Hyperspace

Through the development of this second project I underwent rigorous thinking that involved and shaped my own world view. My design process became lost within the emptiness that stemmed from my research on social constructivism, postmodern scepticism, Buddhism's Maya and Camus' Absurd.

It was only towards the end of this project that things took
a turn. In a discussion with my tutor, Ken Hollings, about
the duality of liberation and emptiness in postmodernity
I saw a meaningful path that stayed true to what I had
learnt and synthesised the ideas I came across.

He suggested that the cynical view that reduces postmodern
surface appearances to mere simulacra that are commodified by late
capitalism might be a narrow view. Instead, he helped me see that
there is exciting potentialities for meaning that are untethered from
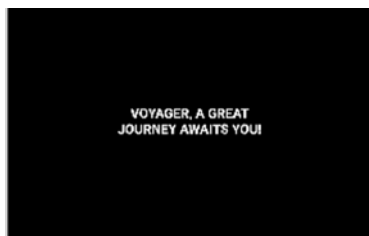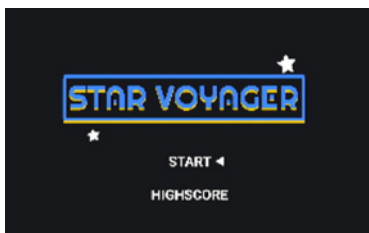old and restrictive systems of values, authority and distinctions.

He said 'Once the centre is not as important, suddenly the
fringes and margins become a lot more interesting'. From this I
saw that postmodernity offers us exciting ways to reconfigure
and create meaning. The price for liberty is not emptiness, it
is from that emptiness that all meaning is equalised and any
path to absolute truth and existential purpose is validated.

The aforementioned writer Erik Davis would agree, 'the problem
with using construction this way [that reduces everything to
social construction] is that it is too tightly coupled to the
nothing but.' Instead he argues for the widening of our scope
from strict social constructivism to a broader philosophical
constructivist view. This perspective does not concede that reality
is 'nothing but' a human construction rather it understands that
there does exist a reality independent of our minds, it is only
that human knowledge of this reality is constructed through
models, approximations and representations. (Davis, 2021)

Davis aligns this approach with experimental metaphysician Bruno
Latour's understanding that there are different 'modes of existence'.
Within such a perspective of our world, 'there is no single logical
or scientific or metaphysical level' that explains all of reality,
indeed he writes 'the will to knowledge is not the only category
that allows us to interrogate the diversity of being'. Thus, there
is an argument to be made for the seeded potentialities of new
meanings germinated and nurtured by the decomposition of old dogmas
and narratives. The navigation of hyperreality does not mean one
must resign themselves to nothingness but rather it requires one to
recognise that there are a multitude of ways to be. (Davis, 2021)

Indeed, Davis describes this duality of postmodern liberation in the following:

"But [the] centrifugal force [of postmodernity] cuts both ways. On the one hand, the decentered self becomes a charged vector of exploration and creative re-invention; on the other it spins like an aimless and lonely satellite through random space." (Davis, 2021)

From here that I began to develop the idea of a narrative game design called 'Space Voyager: Lost in Hyperspace'. This project outcome used space exploration as a metaphor for this duality.

The exterior design presents the player with a colourful retro arcade machine, the playful soundtrack that accompanies the beginning cutscene promises an exciting gameplay experience. This surface appearance of 'Star Voyager' is at once the hope of modernity and the slick veneer of late capitalism.

However, the game does not meet those expectations and disappoints the player. Instead, the 'Space Voyager' character seems to crash land on a rogue planet after travelling through hyperspace. Indeed, within the postmodern era one might become 'Lost in Hyperspace', the web, hyperreality and meaninglessness. It is here that the first of my meanings is communicated. The crashing of both the spaceship and the player's expectations signals the collapse of modernity and the wake of existential meaninglessness.

Star Voyager: Lost in Hyperspace by Sun Min Kim

The gameplay is instead revealed to be a non-linear narrative with the dialogue prompted whenever the player interacts with the props. This was conceived as an interactive Theatre of the Absurd in which the actor(s) are not tied to a script and as the dialogue progresses the tone of voice becomes more meaningful.

This communicates the idea that we are able to salvage meaning from the disappointing crash of modernity. We might be stranded on a strange planet with the wreckage of our past but we have control over our future narrative. There lies the potential the combine

and reinterpret the pieces left behind, reconstructing meaning.

The representation of this idea through space exploration coincided thematically with the spectacle of the Space Race and how this technological endeavour was ideologically motivated under the context of the Cold War. I wanted to pose the question of what lay beneath the spectacle of space exploration. When you strip away the ideologies and its subsequent commodification, is there anything left? Is it just emptiness or was there genuine meaning?

The theme of space exploration also tied into the Golden Era of Arcade Games through its popularity of space related games such as Space Invaders and Asteroids. Not only does the visual language of retro gaming fit into the space theme, it also signals the time period when ideas of postmodernism began taking hold. There is sense of optimism and excitement associated with this era following the rise of the counter cultural movements and the dissolution of old narratives. I wanted to place the viewer in this turning point of modernity, to suggest that perhaps the deconstruction of old frameworks has failed in bringing new modes of social and economic organisation, and left us with meaninglessness, yet the project is still on going and creative re-invention and reconstruction provide the potential for a meaningful and liberated life.

Conclusion

As the recent Covid pandemic shows, reality can be lived purely through media technology and society can become atomised and divided into clusters of individual existence. We are increasingly living in a world where hyperreality is pushed to its extreme.

Simultaneously, our attention is increasingly sought after by large tech corporations who want to maintain engagement, collect data and sell the individual to targeted advertisers. These companies wield enormous power to shape society, as historian Yuval Noah Harari noted in an interview 'when you have too much power you try to conceal it'. (Harari, 2018) Thus, it is within the interest of these large

global corporations that we remain unaware of hyperreality, that our daily life is synonymous with the services they provide, until the sum of our human existence becomes analogous with the free market.

Indeed, the forces of cultural hegemony are strengthened by the constructions of hyperreality in which reality is indiscernible from simulacra, or rather simulacra become real. These powerful corporations are able to conceal their large amounts of power by blending into the pervasive background of reality mediation. We do not see Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Youtube when we engage with these services, we see friends, family, news, entertainment, etc. As such late capitalist ideology seeps into all spheres of our human experience.

Therefore, we must begin to question the very basic tenets of our life, the unconscious and habitual thought patterns constructed by the indirect forces of cultural hegemony, or we risk walking through life in submission and compliance. To that we must revolt, in the same way we must revolt against the meaninglessness of life. In everyday waking life we must assert our agency to create our own meaning.

It is my interest as a graphic communication designer to use my knowledge of image production and semiotic systems to reveal the construction of our reality. In a very optimistic sense, to disrupt programmed behaviour and empower the viewer to make conscious decisions. To create a more aware society. To create a more equal society. Likewise I do not want to impose my own ideology, I only wish to empower my audience.

I borrow from Buddhist and Absurdist philosophy only to make the claim that we can live in harmony with a meaningless world, that the breaking down of old values and constructions does not necessarily lead to chaos but perhaps a liberated and meaningful life.

Thank you for reading!

(This essay was a simulacrum of critical essays on hyperreality by Sun Min Kim)

https://sunnikim.github.io/projects/hyperrealessay/index.html

Bibliography

Texts

Aitken, R., 2016. The gateless barrier. New
York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Baudrillard, J., 1994. Simulacra and Simulation. Translated
by S. Glaser. University of Michigan Press.

Berger, J., 2008. Ways of seeing. London: Penguin Books Limited.

Benjamin, W., 1978. Illuminations. New York: Schocken Books.

Buwert, P., 2021. Defamiliarisation, Brecht and Criticality
in Graphic Design | Modes of Criticism. [online] Modes
of Criticism. Available at: <https://modesofcriticism.org/
defamiliarisation-and-criticality/> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

Camus, A., 1942. The Myth of Sisyphus. Penguin Books Limited.

Davis, E., 2019. High weirdness. London: Strange Attractor Press.

Debord, G., 1967. Society of the spectacle. Soul Bay Press.

Esslin, M., 1961. The theatre of the absurd. Bloomsbury Academic.

Harari, Y., 2018. Under The Skin.

Jameson, F., 1991. Postmodernism, The cultural logic of
late capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press.

Marcuse, H., 1964. One-dimensional man. Beacon Press.

McLuhan, M., 2015. Understanding media.
Berkeley, Calif.: Gingko Press.

Underwood, M., 2021. Semiotics. [online] Cs.princeton.
edu. Available at: <https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~chazelle/
courses/BIB/semio1.html#signifier> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

Images

MoMa, 1964. An image of Joseph Kosuth's Three
Chairs. [image] Available at: <https://www.moma.org/
collection/works/81435> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

9now, 2018. A woman crying on Love Island UK. [image]
Available at: <https://external-content.duckduckgo.com/
iu/?u=https%3A%2F%2Ftse2.mm.bing.net%2Fth%3Fid%3DOIP.
QTux0pbgXpCShj8aRK-TAAHaEK%26pid%3DApi&f=1> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

Stackexchange, 2021. A screengrab of the film The Matrix
when Neo sees the code. [image] Available at: <https://
external-content.duckduckgo.com/iu/?u=https%3A%2F%2Fi.stack.
imgur.com%2FzymAc.gif&f=1&nofb=1> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

Smiley, 2021. Picture of Pharell Williams wearing a
Smiley T Shirt. [image] Available at: <https://smiley.
com/imagecache/67f8de955e747ec7bbfaaa64c2272c63.
jpg> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

The Paris Review, 2021. an image of may 68 poster. [image]
Available at: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/wp-content/
uploads/2018/04/jn03_032.jpg> [Accessed 18 May 2021].