

Hyperreality

Hyperreality, in semiotics and postmodernism, is an inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced postmodern societies.[1] Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins.[2] It allows the co-mingling of physical reality with virtual reality (VR) and human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI).[2]

Individuals may find themselves, for different reasons, more in tune or involved with the hyperreal world and less with the physical real world. Some famous theorists of hyperreality/hyperrealism include Jean Baudrillard, Albert Borgmann, Daniel J. Boorstin, Neil Postman and Umberto Eco.

Origins and usage[edit]

The postmodern semiotic concept of "hyperreality" was contentiously coined by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*. [3] Baudrillard defined "hyperreality" as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"; [4] 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 Marshall McLuhan. Baudrillard and Eco explained that it is "the unlimited existence of "hyperreal" numbers or "non-standard reals", infinite and infinitesimal, that cluster about assumedly fixed or real numbers and factor through transference differentials." [7] 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.[8] 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".[9]

American author Micah Dunham 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.[10] 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.

Significance[edit]

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.

While hyperreality is not a relatively new concept, its effects are more relevant today than when it was first conceptualized.[citation needed] 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.[11] 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".[12] He bemoans the loss of old heroes like Moses, Ulysses S. Grant, 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.[13] 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.[14] 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." [15] 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.[16]

Key relational themes[edit]

Simulation/Simulacra: 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[edit]

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." [17] 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[edit]

The simulacrum is often defined as a copy with no original, or as Gilles Deleuze (1990) describes it, "the simulacrum is an image without resemblance". [18] Baudrillard argues that a simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right. He created four steps of reproduction: (1) basic reflection of reality, (2) perversion of reality; (3) pretense of reality (where there is no model); and (4) simulacrum, which "bears no relation to any reality whatsoever". [19]

Definitions[edit]

- "A real without origin or reality" – Jean Baudrillard [20]
- "The authentic fake." – Umberto Eco [21][22][23]

Quotations[edit]

"Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra— it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable

today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map."
— Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," *Simulacra and Simulation*
Examples[edit]

Disneyland[edit]

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".[24] 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".[25] 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.[9] 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.[26]

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." [27]

"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." [28]

Filmography[edit]

- Existenz. Dir. David Cronenberg. Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jude Law. Miramax, 1999. Film.
- 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.

Other examples[edit]

- 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" when he undergoes Ludovico's Technique.
- 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; 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.[29]
- 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: The distinction becomes blurred when it becomes the platform for RL (Real Life) courses and conferences such as Alcoholics Anonymous meetings or leads to real world interactions behind the scenes.
- Weak virtual reality.[30]
- 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.[31]
- Plastic surgery: the constructed face that effaces 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.
- The superfictional video game Petscop.

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

Jean Baudrillard was a French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorists whose work is most closely tied with post-structuralism and early post modernism, through which the idea of hyperreality has been shaped.

Baudrillard's early semiotic study found that today's consumer society exists as a large network of signs and symbols that need to be decoded. It is from this that he formed the basis for the work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, which furthered this idea that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is a simulation of reality. Here, Baudrillard recounts a story by Jorge Luis Borges that tells of imperial mapmakers who makes a map so large and detailed that it covers the whole empire, existing in a one-to-one relationship with the territory underlying it. It is a perfect replica of the empire, and so the citizens of the empire now take the map, or the simulacrum of the empire, for the real empire. The map eventually begins to fray and tatter, but the real territory under the map has turned to desert and all that is left is the frayed map as a simulacrum of reality.

In our culture, Baudrillard argues that we take 'maps' of reality television and film as more real than our actual lives. These simulacra or hyperreal copies precede our lives, such that our television friends may seem more 'alive' to us than the real person playing that character. He also began studying how media affected our perception of reality and the world. Here he found that in a post-modern media-laden society we encounter "the death of the real", where one lives in a hyperreal realm by connecting more and more deeply with things like television sitcoms, music videos, virtual reality games or Disneyland, things that have come to simulate reality. He argues that in a post-modern culture dominated by TV, films, the Internet and media all that exists are simulations of reality, which aren't any more or less 'real' than the reality they simulate.

As such, Baudrillard points to the process of simulation in which representations of things come to replace the things being represented, and that the representations become more important than the 'real thing'. The massed collection of these simulations has resulted in the condition of

hyperreality, where we only experience prepared realities such as edited war footage or reality TV and the distinction between the 'real' and simulations has collapsed.

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is closely linked to his idea of Simulacrum, which he defines as something which replaces reality with its representations. Baudrillard observes that the contemporary world is a simulacrum, where reality has been replaced by false images, to such an extent that one cannot distinguish between the real and the unreal. In this context, he made the controversial statement, "The Gulf war did not take place", pointing out that the 'reality' of the Gulf War was presented to the world in terms of representations by the media.

In his book Simulations, Baudrillard offered four basic historic phases of the sign: 1) there is truth, a basic reality which is faithfully represented, as in the paintings of LS Lowry, which represent the monotony and repetitiveness of life in 20th century Britain.





2) Reality exists but is distorted in representation, as in the Victorian artist John Atkinson Grimshaw's paintings of Liverpool and Hull (Life in these cities was grim and dull but the paintings present a glamourised and romanticised image.



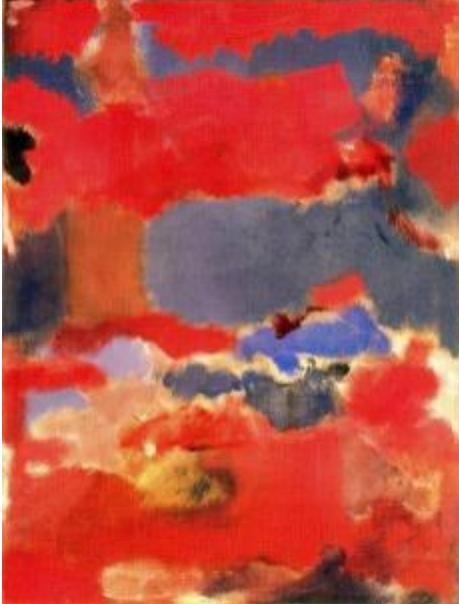


3) Reality does not exist, but this fact is hidden through representation that feigns a reality (René Magritte's painting in which, what is shown beyond the window is not reality, but another sign which has no semblance with reality).





4) There is no relationship between the reality and representation, because there is no real to reflect (the abstract paintings of Mark Rothko).





According to Baudrillard, Western society has entered this fourth phase of the hyperreal. In the age of the hyperreal, the image/ simulation dominates. The age of production has given way to the age of simulation, where products are sold even before they exist. The Simulacrum pervades every level of existence.

Examples from contemporary everyday life include the creation and remoulding of virtual selves (that may seldom have any basis on reality) ,in internet chat rooms and disussion groups; and the twenty-four hour news channels that bombard us with information proves that the representation is more Important than what is being represented.

Trackbacks

1. Fredric Jameson's Concept of "Depthlessness" – Literary Theory and Criticism Notes
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