

Hyperreality: JEAN BAUDRILLARD

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]

The postmodern semiotic concept of "hyperreality" was contentiously coined by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*. 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. 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.

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

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.

Key relational themes[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. 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.

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.

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