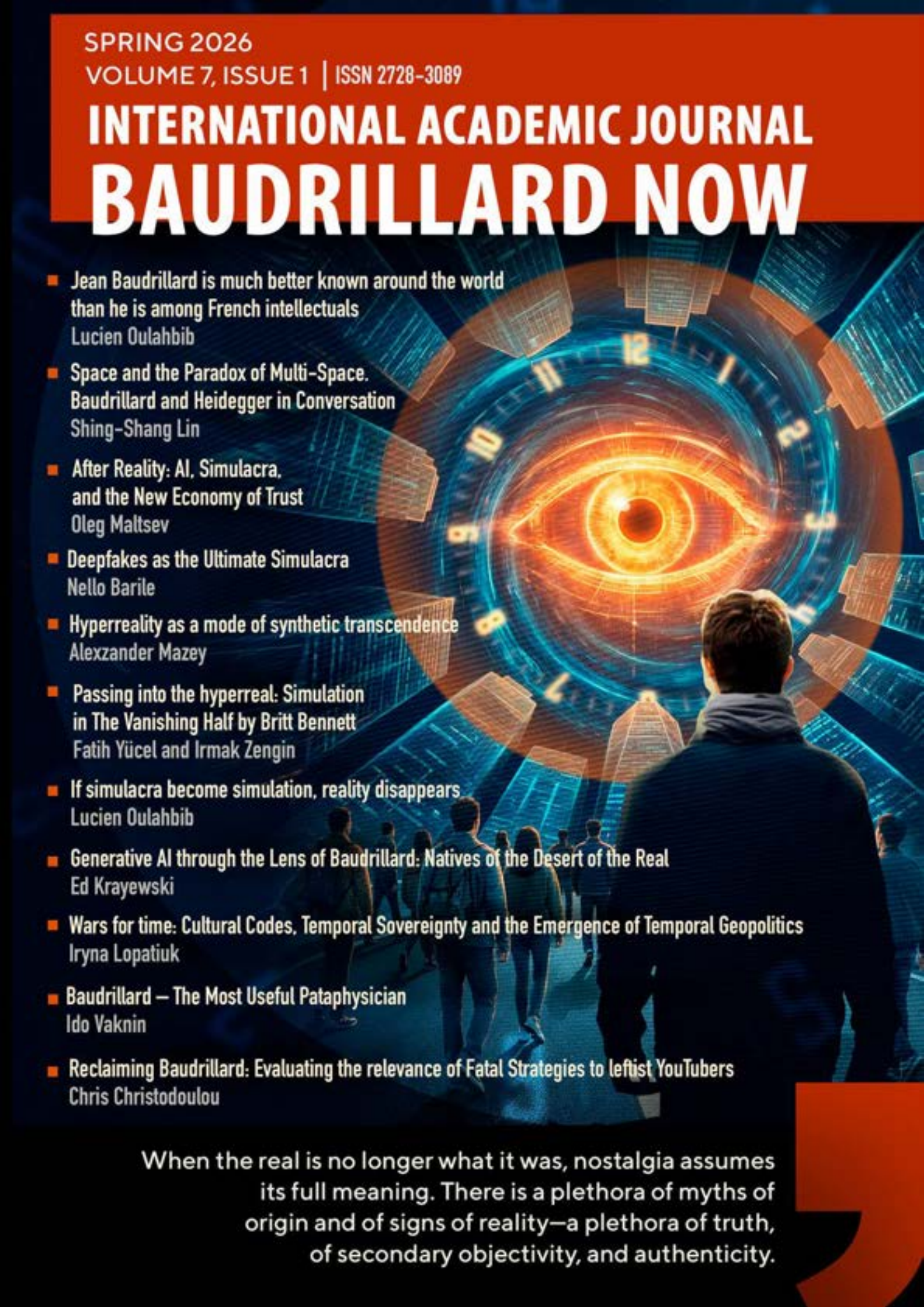


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INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL BAUDRILLARD NOW

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When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity.

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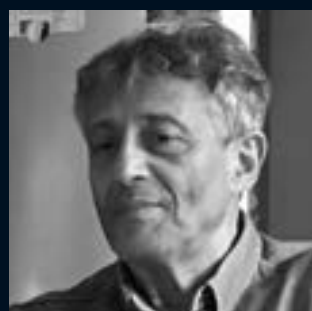
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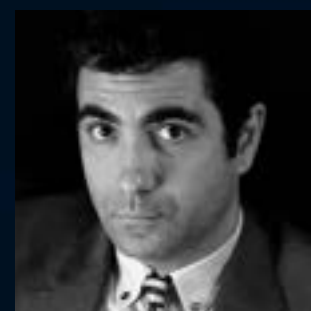
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IF SIMULACRA BECOME SIMULATION, REALITY DISAPPEARS





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As avid readers of his work will know, Jean Baudrillard liked to play on the proverbial maxim ‘reality exceeds fiction’ by pointing out, with his usual Rabelaisian wit, that “reality” itself is already a ‘simulacrum’; it has always been (and still is) intimately constituted of ‘fictions’ in the sense of myths woven from tales and legends, but also from accounts of various exploits relating to perennial questions that have existed “since the dawn of time” (another proverbial maxim) from the beginning of our world to these new fables that today claim to supplant them, not only in order to be able to narrate the why and how of the world, but also to be able to manipulate it, including life and its ‘sex appeal’, through artificial intelligence and permanent hormonal blockage.

Hence a story to be made of the ‘Simulacrum’, this indescribable link between us and the world called “reality” with its immemorial imaginaries filtered by conceptions for perceptions that enable action; a link that, according to Baudrillard, has been manipulated by ‘three Orders’¹.

¹ <https://shs.cairn.info/l-echange-symbolique-et-la-mort-9782072698491-page-81?lang=fr> :

“Three orders of simulacra, parallel to the changes in the law of value, have succeeded one another since the Renaissance:
— *Counterfeiting* is the dominant pattern of the ‘classical’ era, from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution.
— *Production* is the dominant pattern of the industrial era.
— *Simulation* is the dominant pattern of the current phase governed by code.

The simulacrum of the 1st order plays on the natural law of value, that of the 2nd order on the market law of value, and that of the 3rd order on the structural law of value.”

First, there is what he calls the 'First Order', which recounts and imitates these immemorial stories or myths, but distorts them by reformulating their tales, legends and testimonies in order to use them as a prism for the concerns of a particular era (as will be seen later with a few examples)..

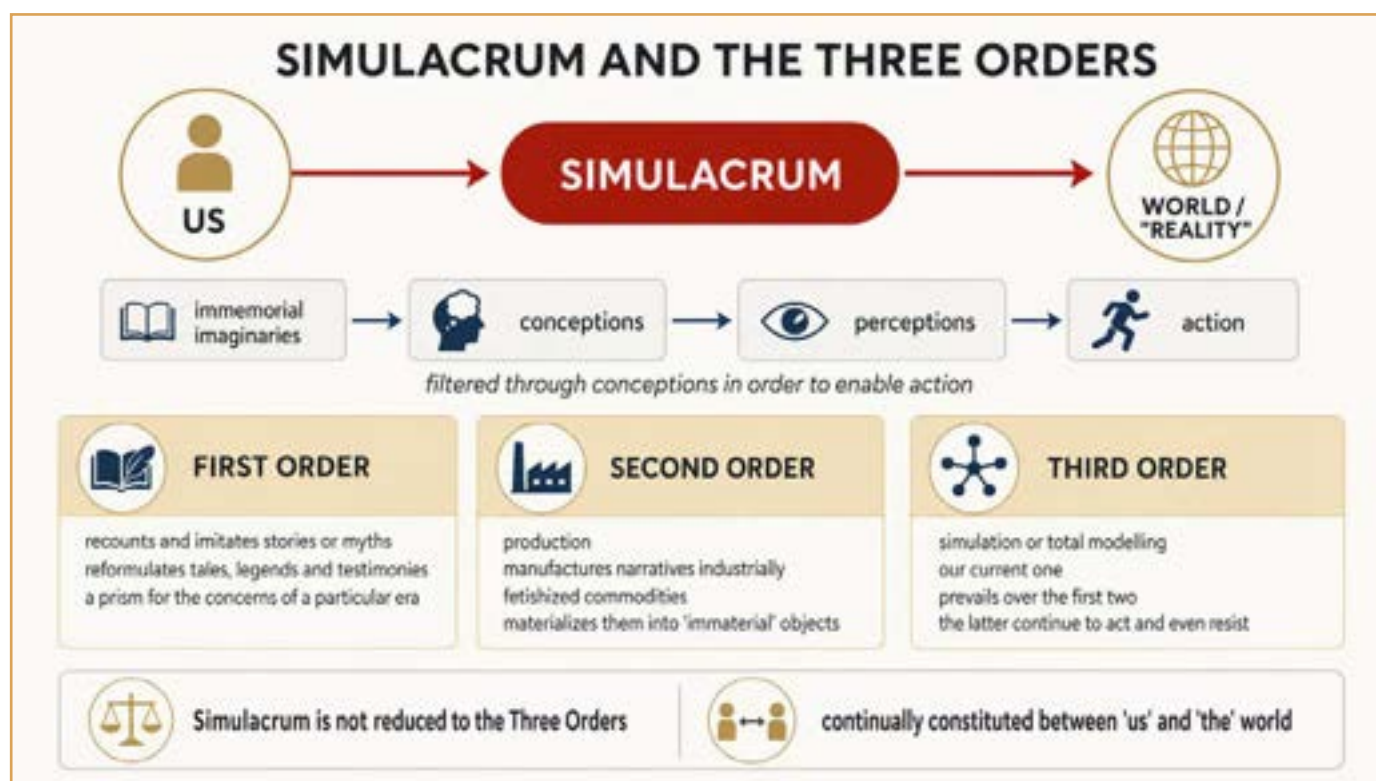
We also have the 'Second Order' – that of production – which increasingly manufactures these narratives industrially and even materializes them into fetishized commodities, according to Marx's term, which Baudrillard takes up and extends to 'immaterial' objects'.

And these have gradually shaped the Third Order', our current one, that of simulation or total modelling, which now prevails over the first two, even if

the latter continue to act and even resist its dominance through the persistence of the 'spring of the peoples' (now called 'populism' by the beneficiaries of this Third Order).

In any case, to say that 'reality' 'in itself', this presence that is both immemorial and ever-changing, or the other name for "Simulacrum", does not mean that it is reduced to these 'Three Orders' or even to a sum of 'wills and representations', but that this Simulacrum is continually constituted between "us" and 'the' world as an active *link* that has always been, is and always will be our *universe*: that of the Simulacrum and its immemorial imaginaries filtered through conceptions in order to enable action...

It is constituted first and foremost by



all these myths, these mental reference points (or archetypes according to Jung) that act (even today) as popular references passed down secretly, unofficial (non-institutional) 'truths' and passed on by word of mouth; this is what languages stabilize in their everyday use through a meaning that is both pragmatic and symbolic, sometimes validated, but after the 'battle' by certain official institutions such as the Academy...

Thus, for example, a country's flag or even the way a miniskirt or a veil is worn are not just pieces of fabric, but 'living' objects, "fetishes" with a '*hau*', as Marcel Mauss said in his *Essai sur le don*, that is to say, a 'spirit' as indicated by the Maori, embodying a certain mode of *possession* of the world that can arouse joy in some and anger in others...

This therefore also implies a strong and complex interaction between imagination, conception, perception and action, the four faces of the simulacrum, that of this 'stratified reality' (as Husserl might say), eternally "present" despite its constant 'generation and corruption', in Aristotle's words. This permanent interaction between imagination, conception, percep-

tion and action is also confirmed by the most recent psychological analyses (such as those of Joseph Nuttin in *Theory of Human Motivation*).

But this presence of the Simulacrum, or the Simulacrum as the *Present* in constant motion, is only the confirmation today of what was already an individual and collective evidence (Heraclitus), namely the *force* of a 'common' culture (Emile Durkheim) or the 'spirit' of the people (GWF Hegel) with its dedicated gestures and expressions (Marcel Jousse).

The simulacrum itself, as an intertwined reality, is therefore the constant structure of 'human vision' (an entanglement of numerous meanings, as in a flag, a tone, a gesture, a smile, such as Marilyn's smile multiplied by Andy Warhol, as Baudrillard noted) continuously enriched or impoverished by the realization and fear engendered, all dictated by certain 'passions' or "motives" formu-



lated by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber and taken up by Joseph Nuttin.

Meanwhile, Maurice Reuchlin, following Baruch Spinoza, called these preferences ‘conations’, ‘tendencies’ (as they were called in the time of Georges Dumas) fueling the desire for action and achievement, but which can, on the contrary, be impoverished or prevented by depression, anxiety, melancholy, boredom and the refusal to act, synthesized in the “fatigue” of being, of ‘growing up’, as Pierre Janet put it.

THE THREE ORDERS MANIPULATING THE SIMULACRUM.

And within the Simulacrum, oscillating between salvific and destructive narratives, the First Order, or the eternal world of interpretation and imitation, comes into play; a world ‘counterfeited’, as Baudrillard bluntly put it, by the “Renaissance”, which rewrites and reduces myths (as Racine does) to mere fairy tales and legends, even though what they recount is very ‘real’ (life, death, love, hatred, luck, misery, happiness, wealth, poverty, illness, pride, vanity, modesty) embodied in and by these imaginary objects that are myths or immemorial tales, whose purpose is not to prove that they are ‘accurate’ but

rather to nourish spiritually those who tell and listen: all those children and adults around the world who dream of love and hope, always renewed, but also of war and revolutionary exploits, all in order to encourage them to live the present reality in its multiple levels or “layers” of the Simulacrum.

Especially today, in its Third Order, that of simulation/modelling according to Baudrillard, or how to live increasingly alone in the so-called democratic era, when family and clan ties have been weakened and insufficiently replaced by affiliations to electronic social networks that are often ephemeral, fragile, or worse, generated by artificial intelligence, itself manipulated by the Third Order...

This is the ‘lonely crowd’ sung about by the new bards of the 1960’s revolt, who were also nostalgic for the strong bonds born of myths, despite their often restrictive imitations since the emergence of the First Order during the so-called Renaissance, as also expressed by certain Germanic romantics such as Fritz Stern and Stefan Zweig...

But how can we continue to live fully if we are no longer able to think within this strong mental bond that is the Simulacrum itself, which has existed since the dawn of time and which supports, nourishes and cares for our entire ‘body’ (material and immaterial)? How can we

avoid a certain civilizational emptiness in our era, dominated rather by its Third Order, that of simulation, which pushes its calculations, injunctions and experimental injections into our minds and flesh, repeating in this case the methods of the First Order, always carried out in the name of Heaven, and today in the name of Earth? whereas without freedom of mind, our 'body' cannot *live* (and let us not forget that 'animals hide to die').

THE SIMULACRUM IS NOT IMITATION.

In the beginning, the *presence* of the Simulacrum (or the layered reality intertwining at each 'instant' — this "Portico" — myths, tales, legends, testimonies, conceptions, perceptions, actions) was transcribed by numerous accounts, including those that were 'written' (already reworked) and recounted by the Bible and the teachings of Brahma; then two thousand years later and at the same time (6th century BC), it was the turn of Asian *written* thought (Buddhism) and Socrates', for example, through the 'allegory of the cave'.

Let us briefly recall that the First Order, in its desire to both imitate and rewrite founding stories or myths, began at the start of the New Age of Democracy in

Europe (12th and 13th centuries according to Henri Pirenne, Max Weber, Jean Baechler, etc.) through an increasingly significant theological and philosophical opposition in the search for Truth, this dialectic between logic (what can be) and ethics (what must be) within the freedom of imagination and freedom of general behavior (14th, 15th, 16th centuries).

All this was then criticized by Catharism, Calvinism and Jansenism (17th century), which rose up, for example in France, against Molière's theatre (which was strongly opposed to forced marriage), while at the opposite end of the spectrum, Jansenism 'voted' in favor of Racine's theatre because it proved to be a good recruit for this First Order of 'Counterfeiting' (according to Baudrillard): imitative and reductive.

Indeed, Racine imitates, while truncating it, Euripides' Hippolytus by making Hippolytus (son of an Amazon queen and Theseus) desire his father's wife, Phaedra, whereas in Euripides' play, Hippolyte *is* only in love with another woman, Aricia, and therefore cannot desire Phaedra, his father's new wife; but Racine, as a Jansenist, wants to show us (even against the will of Louis XIV, incidentally) that we are all sinners, that there is no such thing as 'perfect' human love, unlike Euripides, who respects the redemptive role of the myth of love between humans

(albeit troubled by the gods), thus preserving this ideal even in the tales and legends of the Beautiful Shepherdess and Prince Charming, which are not intended to deceive or lull us to sleep, but to paint an ideal.

This imitation, truncated as it is by Racine, is a prime example of how the First Order can manipulate myths, as in the play *Hippolyte*, reducing it to a carnal temptation when it is in fact a political prohibition: Hippolyte cannot marry Aricia, whose father is the enemy of Theseus, his own father.

Corneille, on the other hand, circumvents this reduction of the myth of redeeming love in his *Cid* by the fact that the two heroes are saved in the end; but Shakespeare obeys the curse of transgression, this time social: Romeo and Juliet die together.

It should also be noted that, prior to this period, according to the rewriting of the stories (in the 12th century with the legend of the Round Table) of the myth of Excalibur (5th century), Lancelot is supposed to have betrayed King Arthur, admittedly under the influence of a curse, but in accordance with the fact that the supporters of the expanding First Order had decided to “counterfeit the myth, in Baudrillard’s words, by deciding that it was not possible to have a chaste relationship of adoration with Guinevere,

as required by the rules of courtly love², and at a time when the adoration of Mary, mother of God, was beginning to prevail (12th century)³.

This is why all this seduction of the flesh turned towards Good, when it is supposed to have been damned since the Fall, must also be fought by the First Order, not only by manipulating ancient myths (there is no pure love except with God, which will also be the theme of Alfred Musset in indirect confrontation with Georges Sand in *On ne badine pas avec l’amour...*), but also by rejecting the world and choosing its opposite; or the very idea of contemplation/adoration (as today with deep ecology and the precautionary principle, this new Patriarchy), turned once again towards the heavens with their terrible sectarian guardians who maintain their own interpretation of myths and legends through the First Order, today artificially preserved in its vestiges by the Second Order of production under the leadership of the Third Order, that of Total Simulation/Modelling...

But even in the 12th century, when ‘we’ find a city once again in full expansion

² <https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/litt%C3%A9rature-et-amour-courtois/38026#:~:text=L%20amour%20courtois%20n%27est,le%20chevalier%20est%20son%20vassal.>

³ <https://www.la-croix.com/Definitions/Bible/Marie/Origine-du-culte-marial>

(as in the democratic Roman and Greek eras), this does not mean that action on Earth is no longer coordinated with that always taking place in Heaven; the Good News proclaims precisely the coming of its Redeemer, original sin is thus forgiven, it is possible to bite into the Apple with 'love' despite its conflicting gravity between Good, Harmony, and Evil 'that pure concentration in oneself' (as Hegel said), which God's Judgement will stabilize, even if we are able to conceive and therefore see in order to act; but the ancient myths, their magic and other spells (Excalibur) are still present, all linked to the 'alchemy' of Force (Fortune and virtue, as Machiavelli would later say in the 16th century).

The power of Love that articulates them had therefore already recognized the Redeemer, hence Abelard's gesture towards Eloise (12th century) and also more generally concerning activity on Earth and no longer only in Heaven, hence also the gesture of Francis of Assisi (Franciscans), Thomas Aquinas (Dominicans) and Loyola (Jesuits) (12th, 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th centuries), while being confronted with the beginnings of humanism with Boccaccio (15th century) Rabelais (16th century), while seeking not to oppose Athens and Jerusalem, thus following Augustine's testament; which later led Leo Strauss to say that someone

like Maimonides (12th century) was much more 'rational' than the so-called rationalists of the First Order, who reduced everything to measurement, to the microcosm, forgetting excess, the macrocosm, this *delirium* requiring reading, acting, *between* the lines of the interstices, as in the fable of the Butcher of Chuang Tzu, which Baudrillard loved to tell, when it comes to progressing smoothly in individuation (so dear to Georges Simondon), this appropriation and carnal possession of the Simulacrum, as Marcel Jousse also indicated...

THE SIMULACRUM IS NOT REPRODUCTION EITHER

Thus, there is a growing desire to manipulate, imitate and reduce the myths, tales and legends that always weave the Simulacrum, as the First Order does, in order to use them as tools of power, wealth and prestige; which is very different from 'distinguishing' (which does not mean "separating", as Descartes points out in his Principle 8) between good certainty and bad illusions, especially in the passions that swirl within "animal spirits"; which implies the emergence of the for-itself and the in-itself, analogy, and deduction, for example in Bacon,

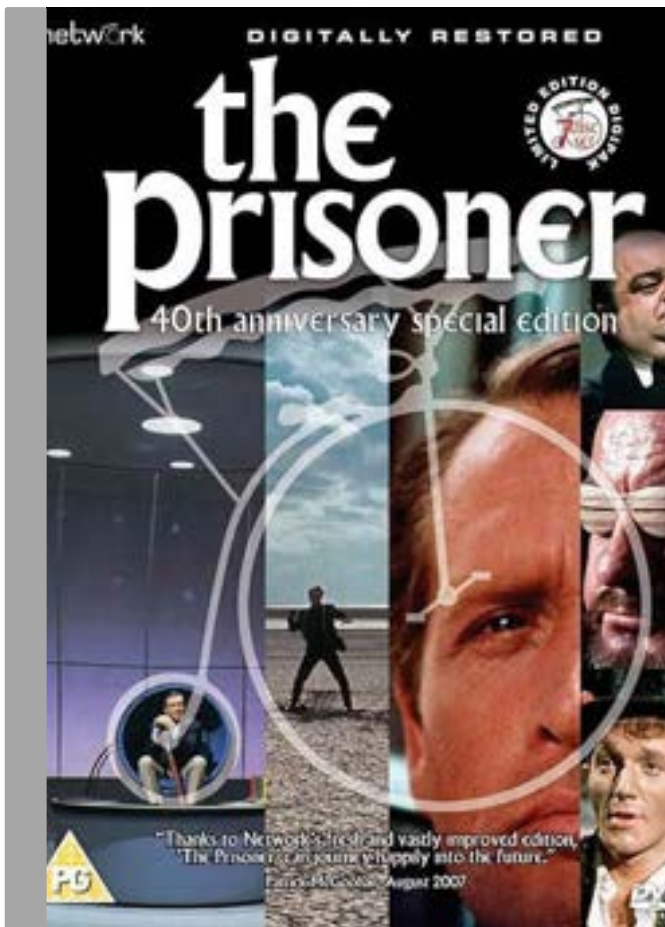
Linnaeus, Hume or Kant, in order not to arbitrarily sever the link, as the evil Boucher does, between the various strata of the Simulacrum (or Entangled Reality), but to better understand the attraction of the Apple (but not with a view to imitating its Creator)...

However, this is not a question of opposition between the mathematician and the philosopher or the poet (Leibniz was both, but not Candide...) as Michel Foucault believed (in *The Order of Things*), because the increasing complexity of conception and therefore of perception does not mean the total rejection of myths, tales and legends, even if they are manipulated, but above all that they are not the only explanation of the world and of action upon it; thus, witches are no longer burned at the stake in the age of the Encyclopedia (and today, they 'must' even replace 'skeptical' scientists who have been placed on the Index according to the political ecologists of the Third Order, that of Simulation, whose apocalyptic predictions become oracles...).

Nevertheless, it is not enough to classify the world if we want to continue to imagine the interactions between its physical and metaphysical strata that animate the Bios, as the Simulacrum itself allows (this reality intertwined between conception, imagination, perception and Logos) in order to grasp all the possibili-

ties for acting within and outside oneself as an individual *and* as a society, in the words of Norbert Elias.

It is therefore by expanding once again towards the entangled reality of the Simulacrum, and not just that of the First Order (imitation/experimental reduction) or the Second Order (production of fetishes on demand or increasingly manufactured and then industrialized power) or even the Third Order (simulation and modelling of *ad hoc* behavior), that we can still grasp what Hesiod relates with the Titans, for example (along with Atlas and Hercules), not to mention La Fontaine's Fables, Grimm's tales and Perrault's tales, in which it is necessary to bathe in the river of changing waters (Heraclitus) of the Simulacrum, which also flows like its own 'blood' (Rimbaud); its 'blood' also being made up of the 'imagination' of a people in friction with their memories and sufferings (the Sleeper in the Valley), joys and sorrows assembled in stories, *forest* of symbols also referred to by Gilbert Durand, which always envelops every internal and external gesture of each and every one of us (Marcel Jousse) in suspension in *the World as Will and Simulacrum*, and not just 'representation' (as Baudrillard insisted) produced by the Three Orders seeking to *manipulate* its strata.



The Prisoner, TV Series (1967–1968)

IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF 'THEM' VERSUS 'US'

Don't forget either that the distinction between Guy Debord (in *The Society of the Spectacle*) and Jean Baudrillard (in *The Consumer Society*) is not only that society has always been a "spectacle", but that 'we' are also included in the process of denaturing the Simulacrum in these

Three Orders. Consequently, it is never simply a question of 'them' against 'us', but of "us" allowing 'them' to lead us to interpret the simulacrum in what we love and hate to experience because we are incapable or unwilling to do so...

'We' are therefore also 'willing slaves' (as De La Boétie said) who love to adore the law issued by Leviathan against Behemoth: 'One more effort if you want to be republicans!' said Sade when he wanted to make Justine suffer to death in order to feel like the absolute master of the Simulacrum, like Juliette...

The political law governing the Simulacrum in these Three Orders, a 'poison' presented as a medicine, is thus produced by 'ourselves' and is supposed to protect us from our own "Behemoth" (our hubris, our own poison), this desire to become the 'sole' owner of the Simulacrum.

But 'Who is number one?' asked the Prisoner (from the famous television series) to Number 2. 'There is no number one,' replied the latter, 'you are number 6.' 'I am not a number,' retorted the former (which was always the wrong answer).

Are we capable of overcoming these contradictions between the desire to be free within the Simulacrum and the fear of being our own master? Hence the significance of the Three Orders, particularly the last one, which now produces the first two in their myths, behaviors and norms.

It is comparable, in a way, to the strange love story written by Shakespeare in *Richard III*, where the latter forces Lady Anne (Act I, Scene II) to slip the ring carved from his coat of arms onto her pretty, delicate finger as a token of their alliance, even though he has killed her father and, more importantly, her husband, ‘because of’ the love he feels for Lady Anne’s beauty, he says; but at the same time, and in a strange way, he begs her to kill him in return if she does not agree with this fanatical and fetishistic love, even giving her his sword to do so, but she refuses to do so because she does not have the will to do so, or perhaps because she admires the demonic ferocity that has seduced her to the point of

death, much more than that of lions fighting for the lioness queen or stags fighting to win the heart of the beautiful doe. She hesitates because she is paralyzed by this superhuman energy that ‘crystallizes’ her, as Stendhal analyses (just as Orpheus crystallizes Eurydice when he turns around, but unlike Richard III, he does so unintentionally).

Or “we” are also crystallized, paralyzed, ‘alienated’, in the anti-Hegelian sense misunderstood by Marx, because, like Debord, he opposes only a ‘we’ to a “they”, whereas we are also responsible for this degradation of the Simulacrum, this intricate reality veiled by the Three Orders, which are not only constructed by their imitation/production/simulation, but



King Richard III and Lady Anne (Act I, Scene II)

also by the specific human life (Bios) that glorifies this type of political *and* animal cruelty, whose perversion becomes demonic.

“ We’ are certainly ‘political animals’ (as Aristotle said, ‘social’ as Marx amended), but we also attempt to become God and thus to *dominate* the Simulacrum by claiming to speak in its name (as ‘science’ degraded to scientism now does within the Third Order) in order to place ourselves outside any rational and political criticism, which means becoming nothing more than a demon, a fallen envious angel.

THE THIRD ORDER OR TOTAL MODELLING

And today, at the dawn (without the ‘dawn of knowledge’) of the third millennium (according to the standard calendar), ‘we’ are this time mainly generated by the Third Order. It now also subjects the First Order or myth/imitation and the Second Order to this production of fetishes, all in the name of *total modelling* (after the ‘total mobilization’ studied by Ernst Jünger in his book *‘The Worker’* about the Second Order).

It seems that the ‘official map’ of the Simulacrum (this stratified reality inter-

twining since the dawn of time and its immemorial imaginaries of conception, perception and action), which has only been generating these Three Orders of imitation, production and simulation for three or four centuries in Europe, then in America and throughout the world, has now become the only ‘real territory’ within each mind, acting against its own freedom, as Baudrillard said (also read by Michel Houellebecq in *‘The Map and the Territory’*).

This means that we are now mentally programmed not only by ourselves under the influence of the ‘benevolent’ myths of the First Order secreted not only by the media, but also by all consumer objects, material and immaterial, *mediums* and fetishes of the Second Order, as Mc Luhan had thought (and on which Baudrillard partly bases himself): “ the medium IS the message’; which means that this reversal of the situation IS the condition for the emergence of the Third Order by transforming the transmitter into a broadcaster: in the sense that anything that is not ‘produced’ by it will not be “seen” by ‘us’; it becomes the supreme referent (TV replacing newspapers and radio) of all the signs that it can then model at will; where one can, at will, reduce a social fact to a news item and vice versa; thus an act of war becomes an epiphenomenon, a Behemoth ‘demand-

ing' a Leviathan. This is the simplistic and absurd message to which 'we' must then obey, at the risk of becoming outcasts, conspiracy theorists, extremists, etc.

Nevertheless, some may object that this depends on the 'simulation', because if we believe that scientific modelling, for example, of the future of the planet, is wrong, and this without proof, we would in fact be rejecting scientific discourse in general.

Why? Because if this perception is indeed fabricated, the same people will tell you that it is done by consensus by legitimate institutions that do not wish to mislead you, let alone intentionally. Therefore, simulation would simply serve to prevent the worst and prepare you to do the best, not only for yourself, but also for the good of all human beings and all living creation on this planet.

However, 'we' may persist in thinking that it is unfortunately much more complicated than that. Because these 'institutions' are just as much under the influence of Behemoth; and no Leviathan comes to stop them in reality, except by silencing any dissenting voices, even though it is obvious that in many areas within the Simulacrum there is no real evidence to show, for example, that replacing nuclear power with a forest of wind turbines and solar panels, or that rejecting natural immunity in favour of

RNA injection, would actually be 'better for our well-being'. wind turbines and solar panels, or that replacing natural immunity with RNA injections would be a 'better way', which also implies that the Third Order is still riddled with power struggles despite the impression to the contrary, like Marilyn's smile multiplied ad infinitum in simulations...

Some people are even imprisoned because of these power struggles, such as Oleg Maltsev in Ukraine or Boualem Sensal in Algeria, simply because they said that the reality on the ground or in history was not the same as the one that those in charge had forgotten to show. The former wants to analyze the difficulties of continuing to live undisturbed in a war zone, while the latter wanted to point out that geography, like history, is often dictated by the strongest, disregarding the truth (accuracy and meaning) and thus diverting the territory of simulacra to their own game of cards...

Ultimately, 'we' are still in the random situation of the Middle Ages described by Baudrillard, where the perception of events is increasingly fabricated, even today with artificial images, while more and more individuals are trying to escape this frightening and nightmarish but exciting reality created by the Second Order of media, by shutting themselves away in a virtual helmet and trying to

stay there permanently in order to live in a time immemorial, as shown in *Star Trek Holosuite*, or by remaining immersed in the endless stories of the First Order, as in the past, when television soap operas took over from the daily serial novels of the 19th century.

VOLUNTARY SERVITUDE

But perhaps we are wrong, as Baudrillard also said: some people undoubtedly prefer this, to escape for good, to refuse to see where ‘we’ are, because if you say “no” to this manipulation of the Simulacrum (of ‘our’ reality stratified by the imagination filtered by design so that perception allows action to emerge) it will then be very difficult to be free, to be your own king, your own sovereign.

Some people don’t like that. Remember, when the revolt against this manipulation of the Simulacrum began in 1979, there were few of us, and if the powers that be had not been so quick to drown it by saying that it was “rage” (of the conspiracy), we could have been more numerous, provided we were well armed by Criticism (despite the criticism of its supposed vacuity because it reinforces ‘the’ simplistic System of “them” against ‘us’...). But it’s not that simple. The

majority of people are always fascinated by brute force. Some, like Lady Anne in *Richard III*, are very impressed if you are stronger and luckier than them.

And as Machiavelli said in *The Prince*, the people who are defeated, who have lost, admire the victor and imitate him by adopting his values. In the present case, we can also say, as Leo Strauss argued against Max Weber, that the driver of the gas chamber train knew what he was doing and that, therefore, ‘we’ cannot simply analyze him as a victim, but above all as a genuine participant who acts not only out of fear, but out of voluntary slavery; which can cause disturbances in an alienated mind, as Oleg Maltsev observed on the battlefield; and this is perhaps why his accusers imprisoned him: because they did not understand the necessary empirical analysis, on the ground, and not in the offices, of this type of ‘madness’ produced by the spirit of war, especially when some of these actors become criminals.

So it is this type of crime, also found within the elite – to whom we have given the keys to Leviathan – that becomes ‘ours’: it is indeed the ‘perfect crime’ as Baudrillard called it in one of his last books. For just as the devil wants to prove at all costs that he does not exist, the Third Order at the foundations of contemporary society, like the art of the

same name, always conceals that Good is His, that lies are truth, that war is peace, so well described and so precisely in George Orwell's *1984*.

And as indicated by the 'eternal return of the Same', the most powerful functions within these Three Orders (now dominated by the last, the Third, the most powerful and also the most cruel, like Richard III) fall to the most skillful and aggressive individuals, capable even of transforming their hideous charm into beauty, like Lucifer, the fallen angel.

Thus, permanent functions that require intelligence, cunning and dexterity to manipulate all kinds of sensibilities and feelings are always captured by those who are able to impose their authority and charisma, which are also simulations, but capable of *knowing* how to maintain the amplitude of the link between thrill *and* fear, the basis of power that people fear but want to see, especially when it is far away (as on a screen with shimmering pixels).

This is why this struggle between masters and slaves, between rulers and the frightened, has always been the real issue in *Polemos*, as Hegel (and also Nietzsche), but not only between owners and workers, as Marx said, nor between weak Judeo-Christians and strong Germans *raised up* again, as Nietzsche hoped with the support of Dionysus and Zarathustra, but between people who are

not afraid to die and those who are.

This is why Lenin, who read Hegel very well, wanted this struggle to be permanent, and not only when the 'class' was abolished, because 'the struggle of opposites must be infinite,' he said in his 'Notebooks,' in order to retain power so that his Idea, which already combined the two Orders (imitation and production), could become the Simulacrum itself, of course (its current followers being at the service of the Third Order...).

Carl Schmitt imitated Lenin's conception in his time with his political definition of 'friend or enemy', as did Hitler, Stalin, Mao... But the supporters of the absolute capture of the Simulacrum for their own ends never accept defeat, so they can't imagine anything other than dying (or causing others to die) by setting their own country on fire...

Also, 'we' can now see this current suicidal race towards nuclear death as a 'final orgy', as Oleg Maltsev writes (see his latest book and the previous issue of *Baudrillard Now*), similar to Georges Bataille's fascination with Aztec human sacrifices (in his book *La Part Maudite*), when the sacrificed becomes the true king for a year before being sacrificed; we can also observe this same delightful and exciting case of a race to the abyss carried out by the powerful globalist network of Transnational Corporations (TNC's) at the heart of this Third Order.



Politics as a Potemkin Village

Indeed, they are increasingly manipulating the technostucture of the world states with which they work hand in hand to accumulate a very large private and public debt (226 trillion dollars), similar in appearance to a frantic race towards the 'potlatch' as Marcel Mauss understood it (in his *Essai sur le Don*) or how to spend wealth as if it were not 'excrement', as Bataille thought (in the same work cited above), but a neurotic onanism seeking to refuse to become an adult (and therefore responsible) according to Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet (even if they did not agree that this process could be reversed...).

This is why global private companies and public states seek not only to contin-

ue running together but even to merge; like a kind of genetic crossbreeding where, for example, a person working in the public sector leaves it and takes with them a portfolio of relationships that has enabled them to obtain an important position in the private sector of their choice, and vice versa. Is this corruption? Of course. But just because it's not new (since humanity left the Garden of Eden, we can guess...) doesn't mean we can't think about how it currently works within the Third Order...

Or how to create a formidable Potemkin village and a perpetual war called 'peace, consensus', because you control the Matrix (inspired by Baudrillard's book *'Simulacra and Simulation'*) and therefore

the Simulacrum in its immemorial imaginaries filtered by conceptions designed to enable action.

THE THREE ORDERS AND THE ETERNAL RETURN OF THE SAME

However, this does not mean that the 'eternal return of the Same' does not continue to function within the Third Order, which oversees the other two; in the sense that it is always necessary to continue to acquire (even in a totalitarian system) certain skills that are useful for climbing the ladder within the Matrix in order to reach the top and, from there, seek out where one can enjoy a good life, sometimes paid for by the taxpayer, even if everything is collapsing around them.

For example, some states have growing debts, but they nevertheless pay a lot of people very well to tell them that 'you are in trouble'... Or, on the contrary, to tell them that everything is fine, that they have nothing to do with it, that they should leave if they do not believe in the Good propagated by the Third Order.

This is an important point: we are in the midst of the diversion of the Simulacrum, real *and* permanent, which means

that there is no longer any end or scenario except locally. For example, the endless struggle between eternal ideologies such as the new illuminism on the imminent end of the world versus the generalized melting pot 'from the river to the sea'.

Or, as the directors of the Third Order have been saying (since the 1960's, incidentally), if 'we' cannot transform ourselves and urgently switch to other modes of production such as wind, solar, electric and renewable energy, and material and immaterial objects controlled by artificial intelligence, we will be doomed, damned. Yet other alternatives are possible, such as nuclear energy and, in particular, a new system of neutron reactors capable of supplying energy locally and even recycling the heat energy emitted by giant databases.

In other words, being under the thumb of the Third Order, which also governs the First Order (imitation/reduction of immemorial narratives) and produces all fetishes (Second Order), does not mean that we are outside the eternal matrix of human reality, that of the Simulacrum; which implies that the struggle for power, wealth and prestige within it remains. But the objectives have changed. It is a fight to the death between a new oligarchy – which is not only a Caste (co-optation of the powerful) but a Sect (anyone can

join but no one can leave, as in the song *Hotel California*)- and a new “springtime of the peoples” who aspire to a world where citizenship and humanity are not constantly opposed as if they were antinomies, when in fact they are two sides of the same coin, that of the Simulacrum, the strong link between the Night of Time and the hope that Tomorrow will always be another Day.

SPACE AND THE PARADOX OF MULTI-SPACE

BAUDRILLARD AND HEIDEGGER IN CONVERSATION





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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, metaphysics has understood space either as a neutral container encompassing all entities or as a formal condition of subjectivity. In contrast, the conceptions of space proposed by Baudrillard and Heidegger depart from this classical paradigm by reorienting attention to human existence, the lifeworld, and the human being as the locus of spatial intelligibility. Their views of space are distinctly thing-oriented, yet characterized by multiplicity and involve language in an expansive sense. Furthermore, their accounts of space are deeply entangled with the question of technology—though each in a markedly different modality and conceptual register.

KEYWORDS:

Baudrillard, Heidegger, Simulation, Space, Hyperreality



Like time, space has traditionally been conceived both as a form and as a condition of human existence. In classical metaphysics, space is regarded as unique, eternal, and unproduced — that is, as an independent and immutable backdrop to being (*das Sein*). However, for Heidegger — and to a certain extent, also for Baudrillard — the question of space arises not within metaphysics (at least not in its traditional form), nor within physics, but within the horizon of human existence itself.

Their conceptions of space are constituted through relational structures rooted in existential activity, giving rise to a multiplicity of spaces rather than a singular, fixed spatial order — even though their orientations diverge. Baudrillard approaches space through the lens of political-economic systems, whereas Heidegger engages it ontologically, initially through the framework of fundamental ontology, and subsequently by way of the concepts of *Ereignis* (enowning) and also through “the presencing (*wesende*) relation to being as being”¹.

Thus, while both thinkers address the reality of space, they do so through divergent perspectives and methodologies.

Despite their methodological differ-

ences — most notably Baudrillard’s avoidance of a “phenomenological reading”², his descriptions often take on Heidegger’s phenomenological tone, particularly through what he terms “semiological reduction”³, a move that echoes phenomenological reduction and destruction of Heidegger’s phenomenology⁴. Both thinkers employ etymology as a method for uncovering the obscured origins and intrinsic ambiguities of concepts. Furthermore, Baudrillard’s processes of deconstruction and reconstruction are, to varying degrees, influenced or inspired by Heidegger’s phenomenology and hermeneutics. Although their respective conceptions of space emerge from distinct philosophical frameworks — Heidegger’s ontology and Baudrillard’s semiology — they converge in a crucial respect: for both, space is not fundamentally physical.

Further parallels can be found in their spatial thinking: each adopts a thing-centered, relational understanding of space characterized by multiplicity. These shared elements form a conceptual bridge, enabling a productive dialogue between their otherwise divergent approaches to spatiality.

¹ Martin Heidegger (1950/2000): *Das Ding*, in GA 7: 180.

² Jean Baudrillard (1972/2007): *Pour une critique de l’économie politique du signe*, p. 20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 95ff.

⁴ Ref. Martin Heidegger (1927/1989): *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. In GA 24: 28ff.

Since space, for both Heidegger and Baudrillard, is neither eternal nor independent – as it is in traditional metaphysics – it must, in some sense, be created or produced. This provokes an unavoidable question: What creates space, and by what means? Given the accelerating transformations brought about by modern technology, a second, equally urgent question arises: How is space being produced today, and under what conditions? How do Heidegger and Baudrillard conceive of space and its properties within this ongoing technological transformation? Ultimately, we are compelled to ask: What kind of space do we now inhabit? And more intimately still: What kind of space do we live in today, as human beings both shaped by and actively shaping these conditions?

1. SPACE MAKING

For both Baudrillard and Heidegger, space is constituted through diverse processes, resulting in a plurality of spaces. Each of these spatial forms may refer not only to truth or reality, but also to modalities of untruth or irreality. In Baudrillard's account of consumer society, space is phenomenally produced by objects – not as isolated entities, but

through the intricate dynamic networks of relations they establish among themselves. More fundamentally, this spatial production is semiologically grounded, operating as a semiological hyperspace. Such a hyperspace is generated by signs and codes through ongoing processes of deconstruction and reconstruction within the regimes of simulation and symbolic exchange.

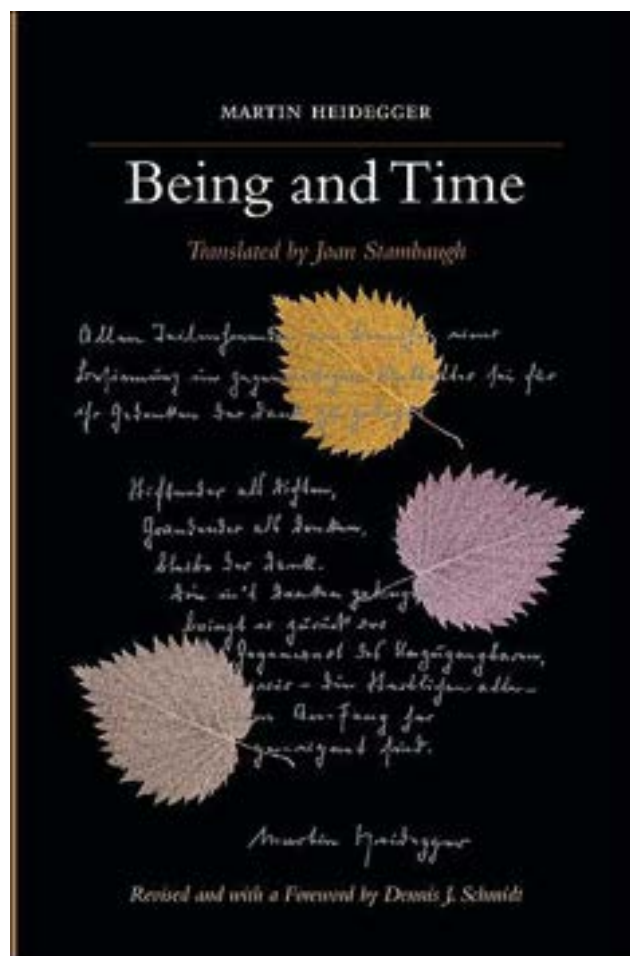
In contrast, Heidegger's understanding of space is rooted in ontology, and more specifically, in fundamental ontology. His early thinking about space-making – explorations through phenomenology and hermeneutics – differs markedly from the approach developed in his later philosophy. In the 1920s, Heidegger argues that space is constituted only insofar as the human being, as *Dasein*, factically exists. Through this process of *Dasein*'s "making space by itself (*Sich-ein-räumen*)"⁵, space is actively generated by *Dasein*'s own activity. This implies that space is constituted and centered through human beings as *Dasein*; however, Heidegger categorically rejects any reading of his thinking ground in anthropocentrism. Given his foundational thesis that the being of *Dasein* is care (*Sorge*), he would argue that it is care, not the

⁵ Heidegger (1927/1993): *Sein und Zeit* (later marked as "SZ") S. 368.

human being per se, that occupies the center of existence or a privileged position within space. For Heidegger, it is not its status as subject in the central position that defines Dasein, but its disclosing or closing openness to being.

While Heidegger makes clear that his inquiry into being, time, and space does not proceed on a psychological level, *Being and Time* (1927) nonetheless reveals a primordial motivation underlying human activity. This motivation is not grounded in will or a will-to-power, but in care. Since care always involves a relation to something – something cared for – Heidegger locates the source of human activity within the very structure of Dasein. Accordingly, such activity serves to cultivate and reinforce a particular form of human subjectivity. While the specific motivations of action may shift with historical or environmental contexts, Dasein retains a privileged role in the constitution and articulation of space in the analytic of *Being and Time*. In contrast, for Baudrillard in *The Consumer Society* (1970), space is primarily produced through the interplay of objects and signs.

The space in which we exist today has been fundamentally transformed: we are increasingly surrounded by things, and our connections to others are mediated – indeed structured by things as objects,

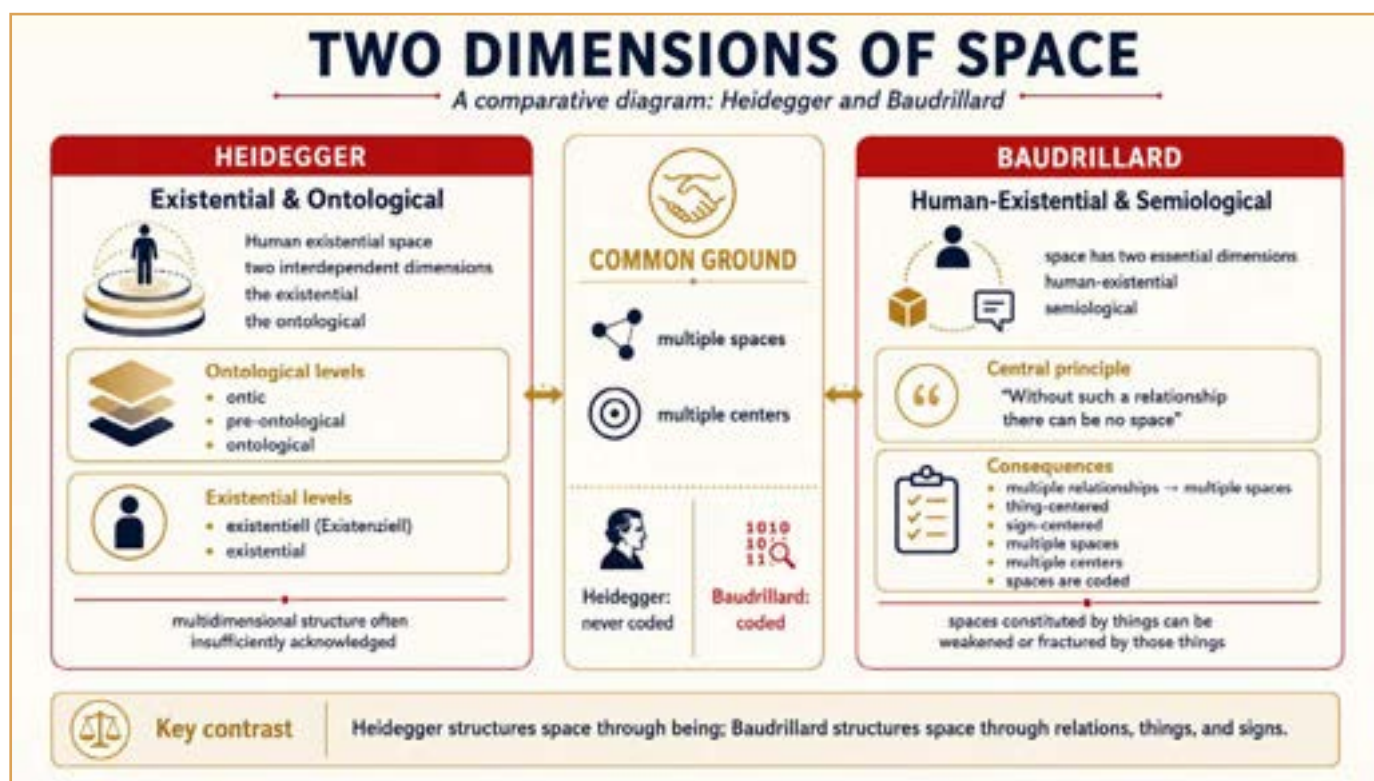


Being and Time by Martin Heidegger (1927),

precisely a set or a series of objects. For Baudrillard, the motivation of human as consumer is also affected by a serial object, and even by the complex “super-object” so that the consumer is drawn into “a series of more complex motivations”⁶. In this way, “the center of the world is no longer the desire of the subject, but the fate of the object”⁷. Anyhow, the space

⁶ Jean Baudrillard (1970): *The Consumer Society. Myths and structures* (later marked as “CS”). P. 27.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard (1987/1994): *Das Andere selbst*. Habil-



making by both of them is in some way connected with relationships.

In Heidegger's early philosophy, this relation, grounded in care, is existentially constituted through involvement (Bewandtnis), initially via the referential or formal indication of things as instruments encountered by the human being⁸. In this way, the pure "where-in" (Worin) and the dynamic "where-upon-to" (Woraufhin) are revealed as ontological structures of primordial spatiality – structures more

fundamental than the mere multiplicity of the three physical dimensions.

In Heidegger's early philosophy, the space-making of Dasein occurs in both an ontological and an existential sense. Consequently, human existential space can be understood as comprising two interdependent and mutually involved dimensions: the existential and the ontological. According to fundamental ontology, the structure of space encompasses three ontological levels: the ontic, the pre-ontological, and the ontological – or two existential levels: the existentiell (Existenziell) and the existential. However, due to what Heidegger terms the *forgetting of being*, the proposition

itation. S. 63.

⁸ Such relational involvement constitutes nothing less than the form of human existent space, simultaneously determining its boundaries and movement. In this sense, the "How-to-be" and "How-to-care" in everyday life can be considered the contents of human existent space, thereby attuning its quality.

that space possesses such a multidimensional structure has, in his view, remained insufficiently acknowledged within philosophical discourse.

Baudrillard conceives space as having two essential dimensions: the human-existential and the semiological. Central to his understanding of space-making is the fundamental role of relations. "Without such a relationship there can be no space."⁹ Thus, when multiple relationships coexist simultaneously, multiple spaces are consequently formed. And the consumption is regarded as "an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and to the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system"¹⁰. Things as objects not only mediate relationships between people and connect consumers to the political-economic system, but they can also weaken or disrupt these very relationships. This means that spaces constituted by things are themselves vulnerable to being weakened or fractured by those things. Since each space formed through relationships is initiated and structured around objects, each space possesses a core object as its center. Thus, phenomenologically, the space of consumer

society reveals itself as obviously thing-centered. But the object is grasped rather "in its total signification"¹¹, thus the space of the consumer society is fundamentally the sign-centered one. Thus, according to Baudrillard, multiple spaces exist, each with its own multiple centers. Heidegger also acknowledges the existence of multiple spaces with multiple centers, but these spaces are never coded.

Insofar as the ontological difference is acknowledged by Heidegger, space can be understood as possessing two kinds of attributes. The first is space as a whole in the ontological sense; the second, emphasized primarily in Heidegger's later philosophy, comprises the ontical-ontological spaces arising from the spatialization of things and simultaneously the process of enowning by itself (*Sich-ereignen*). These two dimensions stand in a whole-part relationship. In this regard, Heidegger's thought is, to some extent, influenced by Kant¹².

While Heidegger retains the traditional metaphysical notion of space as a totality, it does not constitute the core of his spatial conception. Rather, he centers his inquiry on the ontical-ontological spaces, most notably the space of the world or of the *fourfold* (*Geviert*), which constitute

⁹ Jean Baudrillard (1968/1996): *The System of Objects*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹¹ Baudrillard (1970): CS 27.

¹² Ref. Kant, I. (1781/1987/1998): *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 25f/39f.

the ground of Heidegger's *onto-topology*. Here, we adopt the prefix onto- (ὄντο) to reflect the dual meaning inherent in the Greek on (ὄν) and to on (τὸ ὄν), denoting both beings (das Seiende) and being (das Sein) in a single gesture. Although he refers to the "topology of beyng (Seyns)" in 1947¹³, his late philosophy clearly understands space not only as the topology of being/beyng, but as fundamentally bound up with beings. Thus, the here newly proposed concept of *onto-topology* can be understood as a topology of both being and beings, insofar as "being withdraws by concealing (ent-birgt) itself in beings."¹⁴ The ontical-ontological spaces in *onto-topology* represent the conjunction of being and beings by late Heidegger.

As one of the four, the human being as mortal accomplishes its own being through an ontical-ontological relation with the other three of the fourfold. In this context, the human is no longer the center of the world. Yet the fourfold is not the only expression of worldhood in Heidegger's later philosophy. Spatiality and world are opened through the *enowning* (Ereignis) of the fourfold and through the *saying* (Sage) of being, which

he considers the essence of language. The saying of being plays a distinctive role: it paves the way both for the *opening* of the world and for those who can hear and receive this Saying to take part in its emergence. Fundamentally, language as gathering and letting-presence (anwesen lassen) establishes relation. Thus, language is described as "the relation of all relations."¹⁵

As Baudrillard insightfully puts it, "Without relation, there is no space (Sans relation, pas d'espace)"¹⁶. Accordingly, in Heidegger's later thought, language – or *logos* – grounds space-making in both the ontological and ontical-ontological dimensions.

2. DECENTERED MULTI-CENTERED SPACE

Though Baudrillard analyzes familiar spatial forms in consumer society, like the living room, shopping mall and drugstore, he does not conceive of space as composed of discrete, isolable parts.

Unlike Baudrillard, Heidegger, particularly in his early philosophy, distinguishes

¹³ Martin Heidegger (1935–1936/2003): *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks*, in GA 5: 337. (later marked only GA 5) Heidegger (1947/1983): *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*. In: GA 13: 84.

¹⁴ Heidegger, GA 5: 337.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger (1957/58/1985) : *Das Wesen der Sprache*, in GA 12: 202, 203. (later marked only GA 12)

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard (1968/2014): *Le système des objets*, p. 26.

various spatial components and categories. He adopts general or everyday spatial terms such as place, region, location, and distance, and reinterprets them phenomenologically to reveal their primordial structures. Although he explains that space as region (Gegend) is constituted through directing (Ausrichten) and that distance arises through de-severing (Ent-fernung), the center of this space is neither the act of directing nor that of de-severing, but the human being as such. Since directing and de-severing arise from the existential constitution of human being, region and distance as fundamental structures of spatiality are primordially disclosed through human existential activity in the world.

Different human activities give rise to different relations, each relating to distinct spatial regions, for instance, an instrumental space for manufacturing or a contemplative space for learning. These relations center upon configurations determined by the human activities from which they arise. Accordingly, human existential spaces and their constituents are constructed through everyday life, yet remain open to the possibility of transformation or deconstruction as relational structures shift. These spaces are thus multi-centered, yet also subject to decentering as relational patterns shift. By Heidegger, this implies that a space

or place is not strictly both centered and decentered at once. Rather, due to the multiplicity of centers, human existential space becomes decentered in the sense that the notion of a single, fixed center is dissolved.

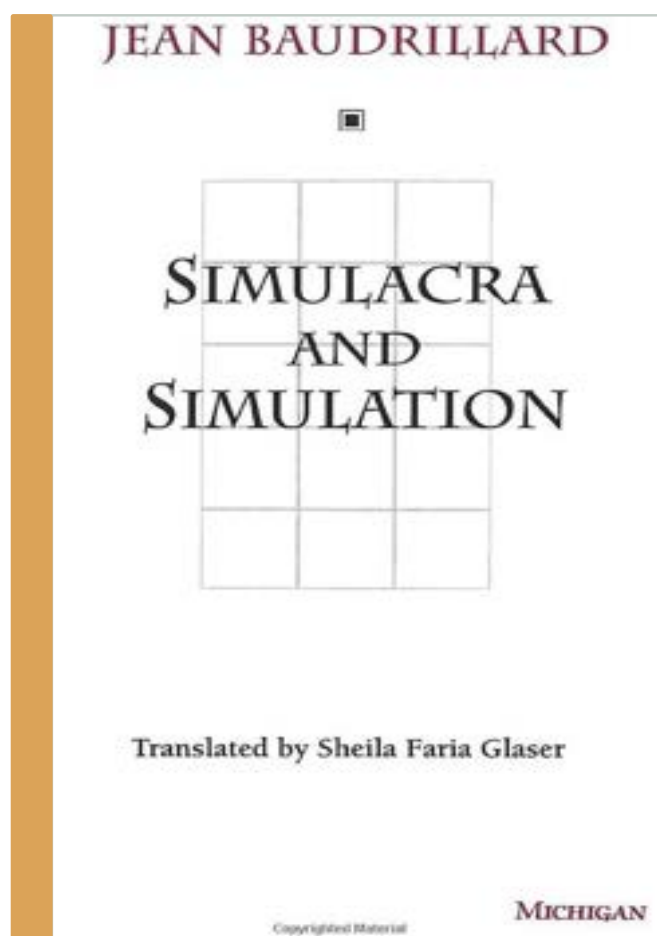
In the 1980s, Baudrillard indicates that the hyperspace is mobile and decentered¹⁷. But we find that his claim ultimately contradicts itself. His concept of hyperspace not only gives rise to paradoxes, but also reveals an internal inconsistency within its own structure. While he asserts that “the geometry of the code, however, remains fixed and centralized”¹⁸, he simultaneously describes hyperspace, a space constructed through code, as decentered, where hyperreality is produced. This reveals a contradiction: hyperspace is not merely decentered but also centered, and therefore cannot properly belong to the domain of the real or the true¹⁹. Within hyperspace, the real, the virtual, and even the unreal become indistinguishable.

By Baudrillard, hyperspace is inherently multiple, and its most prominent form appears in the hyperspace of the screen, a space composed of two distinct layers. The first is on the screen: a surface charac-

¹⁷ Baudrillard (1981/1994): *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 76.

¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard (1978): *Kool Killer oder der Aufstand der Zeichen*, S. 22.

¹⁹ Baudrillard (1981/1994): *Simulacra and Simulation*, P. 2.



Simulacra and Simulation

by Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994),

terized by curvature, which is neither flat nor strictly geometric. The second is **within** the screen: a space constructed by code and made visible through digital display. Both of these layers are part of a space of direct manipulation and belong to the same homogeneous space, thus creating a site marked by the absence of depth. Baudrillard's hyperspace is riddled with spatial paradoxes. Most notably, while it opens up multiple

spaces and virtual worlds on its surface, it simultaneously closes off the real world by folding it back into itself or "closes this world on itself"²⁰. Second, hyperspace is a space that simultaneously expands and contracts — offering the illusion of boundless access, yet remaining confined within the limits of the screen. Third, all spatial dimensions within the hyperspace of the screen are simultaneously absorbed into and fragmented by the screen itself. In this sense, hyperspace becomes a site of irreconcilable contradictions. Consequently, human existence within hyperspace is itself paradoxical — immersed in a space that is at once open and closed, multiple and flattened, infinite and depthless.

The kind of space constructed through object-related relationships in consumer society reveals a paradoxical duality. On the one hand, it is spatially and materially limited, both by the finite lifespan of manufactured objects and by the constraints and manipulations of the political-economic system; on the other, for Baudrillard, the true construction of objects is symbolic: constituted through signs and codes. Grounded in symbolic exchange, this coded space can transcend temporal limitations and thus possesses a kind of virtual infinity. Yet this

²⁰ Ibid., p. 75f.

very infinity remains constrained by the economic system, resulting in what may be called a *paradoxical limited infinity*.

The object-constructed space also contains a fundamental paradox. Its premise lies in the fact that relationships are constituted through objects. Yet this requires that the functional roles of objects be *transcended*. Only then can space be, as Baudrillard puts it, “opened up, animated, invested with rhythm, and expanded by a correlation between objects.”²¹ In this sense, space is, for Baudrillard, primarily a relation and also a “between”. Space emerges from the interplay between objects and, in turn, becomes “the universal function” of the relationships between objects and their values. This implies that: the more space is occupied by objects, the less free space remains²².

Baudrillard thus distinguishes between two kinds of spatial freedom. The first is formal freedom: a space that plays freely between objects and is immediately perceptible. The second is true freedom, which resides in signification and arises only when the functional logic of objects is transcended. However, in consumer society, no product can exist without function. Yet crucially, function is

no longer the decisive factor in consumption; instead, it is simulation and symbolic exchange that govern consumer behavior. As such, no one within consumer society is immune from the limitations and manipulations of the political-economic system.

The space constituted by objects/things by Baudrillard and also by Heidegger is inherently multiple, defined by a plurality of centers. In the contemporary age, technology continues to enhance the functional value of things as products, solidifying the enclosure and constraints of space, while simultaneously rendering these constraints less perceptible. On the surface, according to Baudrillard, space appears to open and expand, animated by a dynamic and seemingly free-flowing rhythm. Yet, as McLuhan observes, technology “tends to restrict and enclose space”²³. In truth, this space is circumscribed and structured within the boundaries and realities shaped by serial objects, by the passive constraints embedded in their functions, and by the manipulative logic of the politico-economic system. The object-centered spatiality of the consumer-technological society thus constitutes a pseudo-open space: one that simulates openness while

²¹ Baudrillard (1968/1996): *The System of Objects*, p. 18.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²³ Marshall McLuhan (1964): *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, p. 134.

subtly enforcing control. Its limitations and mechanisms of manipulation often go unrecognized, concealed beneath the surface of spatial freedom – and even more so under the ideological guise of democracy.

In particular, according to Baudrillard, the politico-economic system grants consumers, and indeed all individuals, the “freedom” to choose, thereby allowing them to be “recognized as enjoying sovereignty”²⁴. Yet the paradox of space, along with its pseudo-openness, remains difficult to discern, precisely because it is veiled by the illusion of so-called unlimited expansion: the boundless realms of the internet, the infinite links, and the ceaseless surfing. Both the internet and modern transportation technologies reveal another paradox inherent to human spatial existence – one that profoundly shapes our *how-to-be-in-the-world*. Enabled by technological mobility, object-constituted space appears to move freely, animated by rhythm and acceleration. Yet paradoxically, we human beings find ourselves increasingly fixed and stationary before the glowing point of a screen or enclosed within the capsule of a vehicle. In the name of movement, we become immobile²⁵.

The *hyperreal* by Baudrillard is, in itself, a concept grounded in paradox: it is, as Baudrillard defines, “a real without origin or reality”²⁶. Hyperspace, as constructed through symbolic exchange and simulation, the system of signs standing in for the real, operates within the logic of simulation, wherein the real is infinitely reproducible, and yet simultaneously irrelevant. In such a space, difference vanishes. Thus, simulation “threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’”, undermining representation and eluding the principle of truth. Yet this does not imply that simulation is simply false. Rather, it constitutes a zone of transition: from the reflection of a profound reality, to the point where there is “no relation to any reality” at all²⁷. Like the Möbius strip, simulation can continue indefinitely in a kind of implosion, an implosion of meaning, characterized by “the absorption of causality and of the differential mode of determination”²⁸. In this way, simulation gives rise to a fractal space that is both self-signifying and self-alienating. Simulation is not merely a conceptual structure; it is a strategy, a force relation, a site of struggle or “a stake”, and “the

²⁴ Baudrillard (1970): CS 86.

²⁵ Ref. Shing-Shang Lin (2011): *Von den modernen zu den postmodernen Zeitvorstellungen. Kant, Heidegger, Viril-*

io, Baudrillard, S. 273.

²⁶ Baudrillard (1981/1994): *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2f, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

object of a social ‘demand’”. It constitutes a system, and, at the same time, a space: one of “absolute manipulation”, but also of the “indifferentiation between the active and the passive”²⁹. Built upon this regime of simulation, hyperspace where is the play of simulation stands at a pole radically opposed to Heidegger’s spatiality and time-play-space which are rooted in the tracing of the truth of being and of existence. The former is a space of infinite surface, circulation and fractal; the latter, a onto-topology of truth combined with temporal emergence and existential inscription.

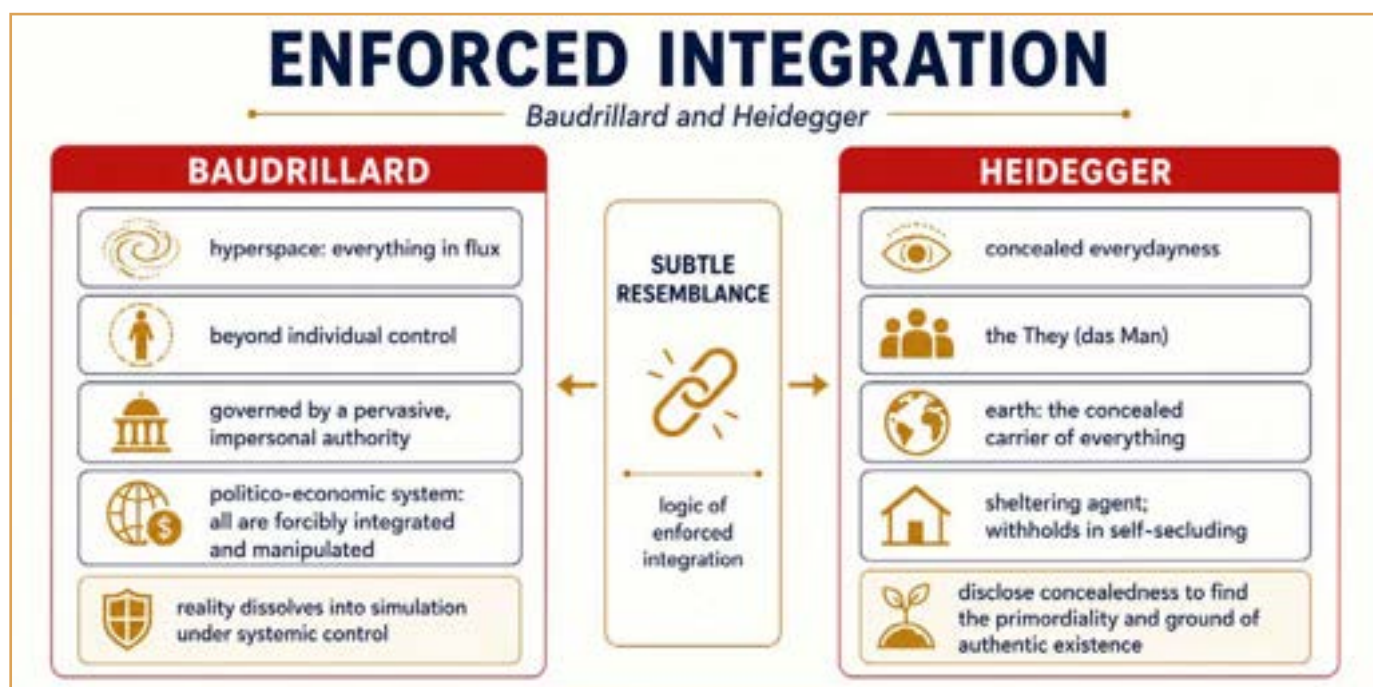
Although both of them, Baudrillard and Heidegger, gesture toward a kind of truth, they do so in radically opposite directions. Baudrillard focuses on the concrete collective phenomena of life and the actual conditions of human existence in the consumer society. He constructs, deconstructs, and ultimately reconstitutes these realities as *hyperreal*, and exposing how the real and the unreal, the true and the false, are interwoven, masked and reproduced in the fabric of contemporary life. Within the hyperspace he theorizes, nothing remains fixed; everything is in flux: constantly shifting, unstable, and beyond individual control. Yet paradoxically, this very instability is

governed by a pervasive, impersonal authority. Baudrillard refers to this as the politico-economic system, an apparatus into which all are forcibly integrated and manipulated. This logic of enforced integration bears a subtle resemblance to what Heidegger describes in the 1920s as the concealed everydayness and the statement of the They (*das Man*), and later, in the 1930s, as the earth in the ontological sense: the concealed carrier of everything. The earth carries as sheltering agent and withholds in self-secluding, and in so doing, *uncover* its concealedness. Thus, while Baudrillard reveals how reality dissolves into simulation under systemic control, Heidegger seeks to disclose the concealedness, in order to find out the primordially and ground of authentic existence.

In Heidegger’s thought, there are ultimately no paradoxes in issues of time and space, or between human existence and being, truth and untruth. Firstly, this is an analogous dialectic operates within these structures. “Truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the un-uncovered, in the sense of concealment.”³⁰ Secondly, through the ontological difference, he distinguishes between two levels of reality: the ontological and the ontical.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 4, 26.

³⁰ Heidegger, GA 5: 48.



Opposites, such as truth and un-truth, concealment and un-concealment, do not contradict each other but coexist on different planes. Thirdly, especially in his thinking of the 1930s, he emphasizes the primal conflict (Urstreit) between opposites such as the *closed* earth and the *open* world. This conflict is not to be resolved, but unified as an ontological dynamic and movement. Conflict, in his view, are not a problem to be eliminated but the necessary condition for the unfolding of being as such, namely the occurring of Being. “Truth is the primal conflict in which, always in some particular way.”³¹ In Heidegger’s ontology, the opposites not only coexist but require each other; they are interdependent.

Their relation gives rise to the very movement of Being — it is the origin of its dynamism. More than that, this primal conflict constitutes the force that enables the *occurring of the truth of being* (enowning, Ereignen), and in this sense, it functions as the ontological dynamic that opens a *clearing* (Lichtung) where is the ontological spatiality and in where opening and concealing continue to fight each other.

For Baudrillard and also for late Heidegger, what occupies the center of space is neither a purely natural entity nor an essential thing-in-itself. Rather, the human being situates itself indirectly at the center through the production and presence of the artificial thing. Yet this does not imply that the individual human

³¹ Heidegger, GA 5: 48.

being exercises control over space. On the contrary, it suggests that the human's relation to space is mediated and conditioned by the very things it produces. The artificial thing, far from simply serving human intention, becomes the structuring force of spatial experience itself, neither by Heidegger nor by Baudrillard. Their thoughts tend to be de-anthropocentric, but also tend to favor human collectivism and collective activities, like talking or mood in everyday life by early Heidegger, or like human collective activities of consumption by Baudrillard.

For Heidegger, the human being as *Dasein* is always, in some way, with others – even in solitude. This fundamental condition of *being-with* (*Mitsein*) or *Dasein-with* (*Mitdasein*) underlies all existence. For Baudrillard, however, human beings today find themselves surrounded by and relationally embedded within a world of things as objects that are circulated, consumed, and positioned within the politico-economic system. These things mediate human relations: they connect, but they also separate. In this sense, the human environment is no longer simply given or natural, but constructed and continually reconstructed through objects. The world of things not only shapes the conditions of human coexistence, but also determines the spatial and relational fabric in which that

coexistence unfolds.

More importantly, for both thinkers, the thing that stands at the center of space is, in some essential way, bound up with language. For Baudrillard, the thing is tied to signification and embedded in systems of signs, codes, denotation, and connotation. The object is not simply present; it is encoded, circulating meaning within the politico-economic and semiotic structures of simulation. For Heidegger, by contrast, the thing is gathered into *Saying* (*Sage*) which is not regarded as representation, but as a *letting-speak* of being. Language, in this sense, is not a tool for talking about being, but a way of responding to and *after-saying* (*Nach-sagen*) of poet during the occurring of being, and equally, through philosophizing thinking which is not the indirect conceptual thinking or representing about being, but the thinking **of** being, namely the thinking directly lets the being and the truth of being occur.

In Heidegger's late philosophy, *enowning* (*Ereignis*) is the authentic center of space, not in an ontic or merely phenomenal sense, but ontologically. While the thing appears to lie at the center of the *fourfold* (*Geviert*) which is the gathering sky and earth, mortals and divinities, this gathering is not initiated by the thing itself. Rather, it is made possible by *enowning* (*Ereignis*), or more

precisely, by the ontological movement of *to-enown* (*ereignen*), which grants each being its own proper place, its *ownness* (*Eigentum*). It is through this occurrence, the event of the truth of being, that both the human being and the thing are brought into their proper essence. In this sense, spatiality is not primarily structured by objects or by human positioning, but by the *clearing* (*Lichtung*) that opens in the event of enowning. Here, being happens, not as presence, but as appropriation.

For both thinkers, Heidegger and Baudrillard, what occupies the center of space is not natural but produced, yet their interpretations diverge fundamentally. Baudrillard who argues that, within the context of consumer society, nature is expelled from the human world and reduced to a system of production and consumption. Heidegger, in contrast, reconsiders physis not as raw material but as a mode of bringing-forth (*Her-vor-bringen*)—a revealing of being. In this sense, production is ontological, not merely technical. Through this ontological lens, Heidegger preserves a space for the divine even after Nietzsche's proclamation of the "death of God." The divine is not restored as an entity, but as part of the event of being's unfolding, the truth of being in sense of *a-letheia*. Within the fourfold, what is gathered is not

beings *per se*, but four places or regions (sky, earth, mortals, divinities) where the *presencing* (*Anwesen*) of beings as a whole may occur. These are not categories in a metaphysical or epistemological sense, but ontical-ontological clearing, sites where being can occur and where truth can be disclosed. In this way, both the fourfold and the thing are ontical-ontological. The thing, as product of everyday life, such as a bridge, a building, a pitcher, does not merely occupy a space, but gathers space. With the decisive turn in Heidegger's thinking in 1946, he redefines the relation between being and beings, declaring: "being withdraws by *con-cealing* (*ent-birgt*) itself in beings."³² Thus, the thing is no longer just in space; it makes space. It is itself a *site* (*Stätte*), a location (*Ort*) through which the fourfold is allowed to appear.

Yet the thing does not unite the four; it gathers them. Only in the *thinging* of the thing, when the thing becomes an activity, a process rather than an object, can it truly dwell. During *enowning*, the thing gathers the four into nearness, without dissolving their difference. In this gathering-together, the four enter into a relation of accord, not identity. Each reflects the others "in its own way, into its own, within the simplicity of the

³² Martin Heidegger (1946/2003): *Der Spruch des Anaximander*, in GA 5: 337.

four.”³³ Through this *reflective mirroring*, the fourfold belongs together, not through force, but through letting-be. This kind of mirroring is neither a mode of thinking, nor a likeness, nor a simulation. It is not epistemological reflection, nor Platonic imitation. Rather, it is an *ontological mirroring*, that is a *letting-appear* of beings in their *ownmost* (*eigenst*) essence.

To a certain extent, Heidegger’s notion of mirroring reinterprets Plato’s image of production³⁴. It produces, but not in the sense of generating phantoms or copies of substance, as in Platonic mimesis. Nor is it, as Baudrillard would claim, the mirror of production shaped by the “discourse of representation”³⁵, that is, the system of simulation in which signs refer only to other signs.

Heidegger’s mirroring is the *play of enowning* (*Ereignis*). It does not reduce the four (sky, earth, mortals, divinities) into a unified totality, nor dissolve them into equivalence. Rather, it lightens (makes visible) the proper being of each, allowing each to present itself from itself, entering into “a simple belonging to one another”³⁶. In this ontological play,

the four are not subsumed, but granted space to be. Each *plays to* the others, not competitively, but with brightness and harmony. None insists on its own dominance; rather, each is set free into its own, and in that freedom, each is bound into a shared simplicity that is a resonance of essential nearness. Without such mirroring, the relation of the four could not be established. It is mirroring that lets the fourfold come into presence, not as a metaphysical structure, but as a poetic gathering, an event of openness, where being as such gives space for belonging.

In Heidegger’s later philosophy, the relation between being and beings (once characterized by ontological difference) is no longer marked primarily by interruption or separation, but is mediated and gathered through the thing. This transformation is grounded in the recognition of two distinct yet interrelated layers of spatiality: the ontical and the ontological. Though they are distinct in level, they belong to one unified order: the *onto-topological* order. On the ontical and phenomenal level, the thing as a being can connect, relate, and gather; however, it cannot by itself bring forth the truth of being. Strictly speaking, it cannot establish an ontological relation without more. And yet, in the light of enowning, the thing is not merely a being, it harbors being within itself. In this way, it becomes

³³ Heidegger (1950/2000): *Das Ding*, in GA 7: 180.

³⁴ Ref. Plato: *Der Staat*. 596d.

³⁵ Ref. Jean Baudrillard, (1975): *The Mirror of Production*, p. 21.

³⁶ Heidegger (1950/2000): *Das Ding*, in GA 7: 180f.

capable of participating in the event of truth. During the occurrence of enowning, the thing appropriates itself to being, and in so doing, it gathers the ontological and ontical dimensions into a unified relational field.

It is precisely in this act that the thing becomes an authentic thing. It fulfills its essence when, as Heidegger says, “the thing things”³⁷. But this is not automatic, but a prerequisite grounded in the event of being. Without *enowning* (Ereignis), the thing remains merely present-at-hand; only through this ontological appropriation does the thing truly come into its own.

Contrary to Baudrillard’s understanding of the relation between thing and language, Heidegger conceives the authentic meaning of the thing not in terms of sign or code, but as language itself. For Heidegger language is not any kind symbolic system of representation; rather, it is the originary event through which the thing becomes a thing. As he states: “The word conditions the thing to become a thing”, and “leaves the thing as present (anwesen)”³⁸. That is, the thing only comes into its own being, namely its proper presence, where “the word is preserved.”³⁹ In this view, language is not

an external medium for describing things, but the very space in which things come into presence. This ontological space is the clearing (Lichtung) that lets the thing appear as what it is. Thus, language is not about the thing. It is the dwelling of being that lets the thing *thing*.

This relation first constructs and determines the horizontal dimension of space, including the boundaries of the environment. This horizontal space is constituted not only by things but also by language; thus, space is centered not solely on things but equally on language. Secondly, the relation also constructs the vertical dimension of space, which transcends the ontical to the ontological level which space may be called the *onto-topos*⁴⁰. Therefore, space is a layered phenomenon, simultaneously shaped by the interplay of things and language, bridging the concrete environment and the fundamental ground of being.

Baudrillard’s concept of space remains confined to the horizontal surface. Yet his thing-centered spatiality is, in a sense, more radical than Heidegger’s. He reveals how people are defined themselves through significations of their objects, namely how objects, as commodities, become categories that, in the most tyrannical fashion, define

³⁷ Heidegger (1950/2000): *Das Ding*, in GA 7: 175.

³⁸ Heidegger, GA 12: 220.

³⁹ Heidegger, GA 12: 219.

⁴⁰ Ref. this paper § 1 Space making.

categories of people. For Baudrillard, space is not ontological but *socio-economico-political*. It emerges within consumer society and the realm of everyday life, structured through practices of consumption and dominated by the politico-economic system. More precisely, it is a space constructed and controlled by signs and codes as manipulated by that very system. In this way, Baudrillard's spatial theory reveals the deep entanglement of identity, objecthood, and power, politico-economic power and also the power of unconsciousness, but without grounding these in the ontological unfolding of being, as Heidegger does.

For Baudrillard, the relational structure constituted by language is defined through the denotation of objects, signifying "correlation." This correlation exists solely between things as objects, specifically, serial products, and both the relation and its corresponding space are deconstructed and reconstructed via the signification inherent in symbolic exchange and simulation. Within this process, "in the self-centered image or the code-centered message, the signifier becomes its own signified"⁴¹. Consequently, space is centered by the thing itself, where correlation serves as the necessary and sufficient condition

for the formation of space, even within a sign-centric framework. Regarding the concept of space for both Baudrillard and Heidegger, authentic space is constituted and centered by language; however, for Baudrillard, this refers to the sign or code, whereas for Heidegger, it pertains to the Saying of being or the logos of being.

For Heidegger, In the logos-centric world, there are three layers of space: the saying of being, the saying of the poet, and human speaking. The poet and thinker serve as mediators between the other two layers, while both attend to *hearing* and responding to the stillness (*Stille*) emanating from the *saying of being*. Following this attentive listening, the poet speaks what comes after being's saying, and the thinker philosophizes. In this sense, both types of human beings can be regarded as central within the logos-centric world. However, the ultimate authority is logos and the unfolding or truth of being, not humanity itself. Thus, the space within the logos-centric world is characterized by multiple centers, a human-centric logos-center. The space is not only logos-centered but also thing-centered, both containing a form of human-centeredness, with the poet and thinker positioned as intermediaries and, consequently, as centers themselves.

First, on the linguistic dimension, Heidegger's notion of space is there-

⁴¹ Baudrillard (1970): CS 124.

fore multi-centered. Second, although the *saying of being* is the center of the enowning, the enowning as the unfolding of being or the truth of being is a philosophical event considered, a human act. Indirectly, this makes the human being a secondary center of space, coexisting simultaneously with the logos-center and the thing-center within the linguistic dimension. In this respect, Heidegger does not entirely abandon anthropocentrism in his later philosophy.

3. SPACED INTO AND OUT

Because *logos* “lets things lie together before us, concerns itself solely with the safety of that which lies before us in unconcealment”⁴², the gathering appropriate to such laying is determined in advance by safekeeping. This *logos*-centered space is therefore ontological in nature and characterized by safety and safekeeping, by the illuminating openness of truth. It is a space into which the poet and the thinker may step as they partake in *enowning*, thereby opening a space centered on *logos*. Likewise, by Heidegger, the human being (especially poet, thinker and selfless and holy human

beings) as one of the fourfold can dwell within the radiant, thing-centered space for they too participate in *enowning* and help bringing the thing-centered space of the fourfold into openness. This also means that Heidegger does *not* think that the harmonious time-space of enowning, occurring of truth of being, is universally accessible to everyone. He designates such a human being as a rare, solitary individual⁴³.

Apart from discussing the hypermarket as a hyperspace where space-time is conceived as “a whole operational simulation of social life”⁴⁴, or describing coded hyperspace as “a neutralized and homogenized time-space of indifference”⁴⁵, Baudrillard rarely addresses the interrelation between time and space, neither connecting them explicitly nor exploring their dynamic interaction. In contrast, Heidegger’s early philosophy roots space fundamentally in time. In his later thought, the mirroring and occurrence of being take on the character of an ontological play, a play of enowning of being, which is intrinsically linked to time. As such, space is reinterpreted as a time-play-space. A describes the

⁴² Heidegger (1951/2000): *Logos (Herklit, Fragment 50)*, in GA 7: 217.

⁴³ Ref. Martin Heidegger (1936/1994): *Beiträge zur Philosophie. (Vom Ereignis)*, in GA 65: 11.

⁴⁴ Baudrillard (1981/1994): *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 76.

⁴⁵ Baudrillard (1978): *Kool Killer oder der Aufstand der Zeichen*, S. 19.

enowning of being as a *mirroring play* (erreignende Spiegel-Spiel) or a circular dance (Reigen), in which time and space are united in a mutual relationship grounded in freedom and trust. "None of the four insists on its own separate particularity; rather, each is expropriated, within their mutual enowning, into its own being."⁴⁶ In this way, time-space in Heidegger's late philosophy is characterized by trust, freedom, and harmony, as well as by the unconcealment of truth.

In contrast to the characteristics of Heidegger's concept of time-space, where harmonizes with trust, freedom and the unconcealment of truth, Baudrillard's notion of space, whether thing-centered or code-centered, is fundamentally shaped by competition. In the latter view, spatial relationships are primarily constructed through consumption activities in consumer society, where needs emerge "not from the growth of appetite, but from competition". As he puts it, "the *language of cities* is competition itself"⁴⁷. Within this framework, all things and relationships are socialized through consumption, not only one's relations with others, but even one's relation to oneself becomes a consumed relation⁴⁸. Ultimately, grounded in competition,

objects gather both consumers and systems. Their sign-function constructs consumer relationships which are produced and exchanged to signify and perform social class. Once the instrumental function of the object is canceled, the object as sign takes on a distinct social function: it circulates reputation, reinforces visibility, and delineates social stratification⁴⁹.

According to the value principle of symbolic exchange by Baudrillard, a thing in consumer society must first become a sign within the system. It then acquires two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation, "whereby the object is cathected, commercialized, and personalized, whereby it attains utility and enters into a cultural system"⁵⁰. This transformation fundamentally alters human relations, reducing them to relations of consumption. In other words, the human relation itself becomes an *act of consuming* (se consommer) in a double sense.

First, the human relation is both consummated and abolished through the object that has become a sign in consumer society. As a result, the human relationship now *merely signifies*. It is thus *arbitrary*. The conversion of object into sign leads to a broader transformation:

⁴⁶ Heidegger (1950/2000): *Das Ding*, in GA 7: 181.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard (1970): CS 64, 65.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard (1970): CS 95.

⁴⁹ Ref. Jean Baudrillard (1981): *For a critique of the economy and politic of sign*, P. 30.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard (1968/1996): *The System of Objects*, p.9.

the human relationship becomes one of consuming and being consumed. This mode of consumption is grounded not only in the sign but also in *scarcity*. Need can be produced, and desire can be manipulated, through scarcity: people are made to feel they never have enough and *must* obey this unconscious imperative of *new morality* to keeping consuming. Consequently, both human relationships and the spaces constituted by them are consumed and impoverished. “We are witnessing the systematic reinjection of human relations— in the form of signs — into the social circuit, and the consumption of those relations and of that human warmth in signified form.”⁵¹ Such *coded warmth*, however, has no temperature. Similarly, the space constituted by these signified relationships is cool, masked by its coded and signed simulation. Most people are unconsciously shaped by the politico-economic system and are inevitably drawn into this cool and competitive living space.

Secondly, the thing as object becomes the necessary mediator between human beings, and ultimately, the sign as the true object of consumption fully replaces direct human relations. In this way, whether we intend it or not, we now live simultaneously and primarily in two

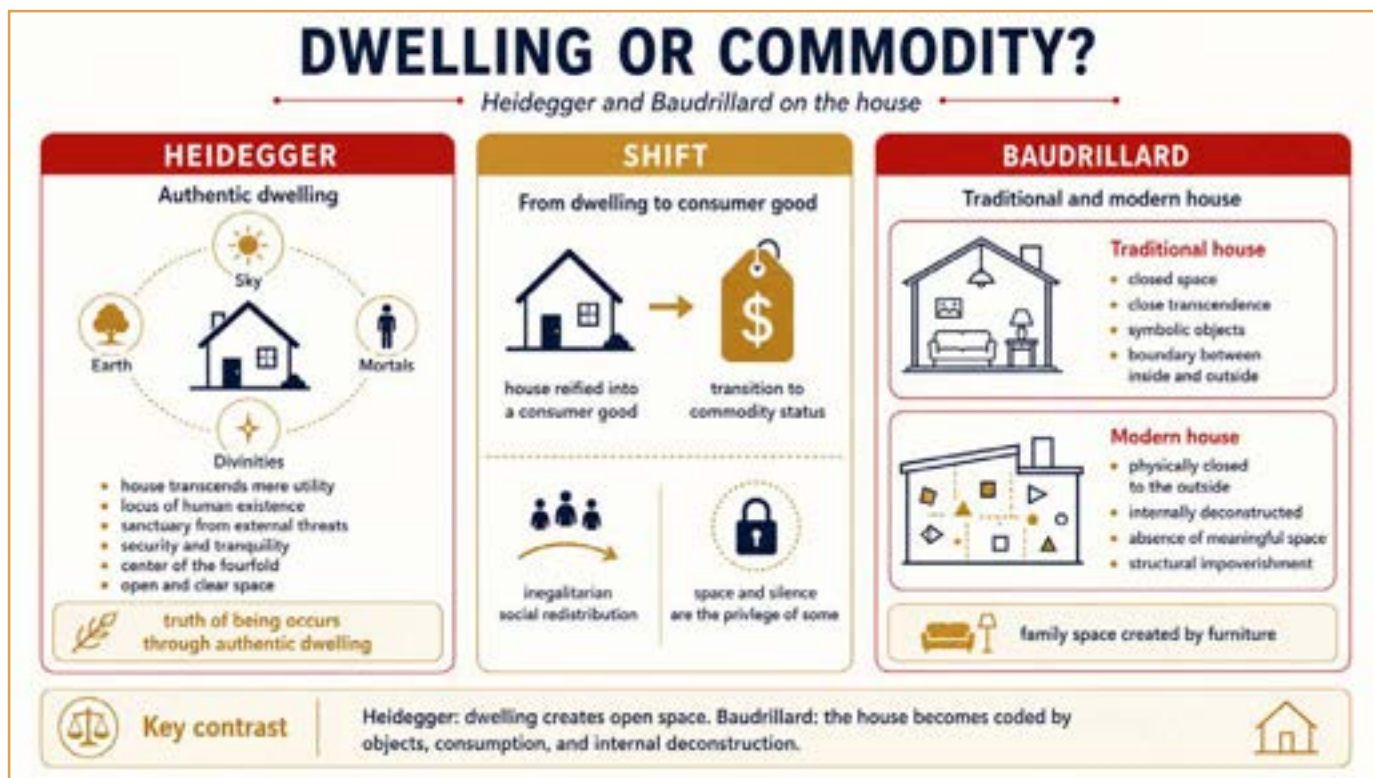
doubly coded hyperspaces. As Baudrillard asserts, the site of consumption is everyday life itself; consumption thus becomes a double-coded experience which is a real and a hyperreal living space. One is the material, physical space of daily life; the other is cyberspace, located on and within the screen of digital devices. These two spaces are encoded differently but interact constantly through interacting processes of simulation and consumption. In the era of mass communication, daily interaction revolves not around immediate material use, but rather around “the reception and manipulation of goods and messages”⁵².

To be consumable, goods must first be deconstructed into indifferent and neutralized codes. But unlike Heidegger’s logos-centered space, which opens for the truth of being and moves toward language and unconcealment; according to Baudrillard, this coded space does not orient itself toward truth or reality. Instead, it leads to a system of differentiated categories designed solely for transaction and symbolic exchange.

As such, no one can truly escape the coded hyperspace shaped by simulation and symbolic exchange, even those who abstain from television or digital screens. The moment one consumes, one

⁵¹ Baudrillard (1970): CS 161.

⁵² Baudrillard (1970): CS 25.



enters this space. As long as humans are compelled to consume, they inhabit the cool, coded hyperspace of postmodern life.

The pervasive reach of contemporary communication and consumption enables global interaction at any moment, yet paradoxically creates a shared lived environment while simultaneously reinforcing individual disjunction. This pervasive connectivity, therefore, fundamentally constitutes and reconfigures the subjects who inhabit it. Consequently, digital imprints, conceptualized here as *digital tattoos*, inscribe the emergent hyperspace of domesticity and urbanity, while the very practice of digital nomad-

ism actively re-forms the human experience within this new spatial paradigm.

Despite their distinct philosophical frameworks, both Heidegger and Baudrillard converge on the critical assertion that the dwelling ought not to be commodified. For Heidegger, the house transcends mere utility, standing as the very locus and location of human existence, providing essential sanctuary from external threats and thus establishing a domain of profound security and tranquility. Moreover, as a thing, the house can gather the fourfold and be the center of this open-space. Yet, echoing Baudrillard's astute observations on the American housing boom of the 1960s,

contemporary trends demonstrate the insidious reification of the house into a consumer good. He incisively captured this shift, stating: “*There is no right to space until there no longer is space for everyone, and until space and silence are the privilege of some at the expense of others*”, and that means that “*its transition to commodity status and its inegalitarian social redistribution*”⁵³. He further elucidated that once dwellings are subsumed by the logic of differential connotation, their transformation into consumer goods becomes inexorable⁵⁴.

For Heidegger, when the house functions as an authentic dwelling, it not only creates space but also becomes the center of the fourfold — an open and clear space where the truth of being occurs precisely because of this authentic dwelling. In contrast to Heidegger, Baudrillard conceptualizes the traditional house as a “closed space”. He differentiates between the traditional and modern house. The former represents a “a close transcendence” due to its intricate interiority and the symbolic objects within it, which serve as “boundary markers of the symbolic configuration” and define its clear “boundary between inside and

outside, and their formal opposition”⁵⁵.

When Baudrillard considers space defined by a set of objects, he specifically refers to the family space created by furniture — the set of furniture. Consequently, the modern house, in his view, descends into an absence of meaningful space and a spatial paradox: while physically closed to the outside, it is internally deconstructed. He asserts that this deconstruction affects only the internal organization, not the physical enclosure. Thus, this spatial paradox does not inherently create problems for family space; rather, the internal deconstruction leads to structural impoverishment.

Paradoxically, Baudrillard argues that consumer society is characterized by both profusion and simultaneous scarcity. Consumption constitutes “an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and to the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system”⁵⁶. Since consumption fundamentally functions as “the simple structural play of competition”⁵⁷, the relationships and spaces constructed through these relations can be nothing other than competitive. This pervasive competition, fueled by consumption, is not established

⁵³ Baudrillard (1970): CS 58.

⁵⁴ Baudrillard (1972/2007): *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ Baudrillard (1968/1996): *The System of Objects*, p. 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.199.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.194.

through overt conflict or direct physical violence; on the contrary, it is paradoxically fostered by *passion* and *encouragement*. Baudrillard, for instance, highlights advertising as “the most remarkable mass medium of our age”⁵⁸. The advertising is everywhere, constructing a coded hyperspace where is filled with the happiness-signs in daily life. But in truth, it passionately or cheerfully stimulates the desire and consumption through social comparison and rivalry. The profound consequences of the market economy and its pervasive competition are insufficiency and a radical, catastrophic anxiety, which are only exacerbated by technological advancements, but human stress and anxiety are deepening unconsciously. Evidently, Baudrillard rejects Heidegger’s notion of technology and his *soteriology*, aligning instead with McLuhan’s concepts of implosion and immediacy generated by electronic technology, which compels immediate commitment, participation, and (re-)action from everyone. While McLuhan presciently predicted that today we all have entered an age of “anxiety”⁵⁹, Baudrillard would claim that we are collectively struggling in an age of unconsciousness that leaves us adrift in the coded hyperspace.

⁵⁸ Baudrillard (1970): CS 125.

⁵⁹ McLuhan (1964/2002): *Understanding Media*, p. 52.

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AFTER REALITY

AI, SIMULACRA, AND THE NEW ECONOMY OF TRUST



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THE RETURN OF BAUDRILLARD

At the end of the twentieth century, Jean Baudrillard wrote a series of works that many readers took as an intellectual provocation. He argued that the modern world was gradually ceasing to live among things and beginning to live among signs. To an ordinary person, such a claim sounded strange. Cities still stood where they had always stood. People worked. Factories produced goods. States governed territories. What signs was he talking about?

But Baudrillard was not speaking about the disappearance of the physical world. He was speaking about the disappearance of the direct connection between the human being and the world.

First, a person saw an object. Later, he saw an image of the object. Then he saw an advertisement for the object. After that, he saw the object's brand. Eventually, he began to live not among things themselves, but among their symbolic reflections. Baudrillard called this the world of simulacra.

A simulacrum is not a lie. It is a far more complex phenomenon. A lie presupposes the existence of truth. A counterfeit presupposes the existence of an original. A simulacrum, however, exists on its own. It no longer needs an original. This is why the philosopher argued that the map begins to precede the territory.



"THE TERRITORY NO LONGER PRECEDES THE MAP, NOR DOES IT SURVIVE IT. IT IS NEVERTHELESS THE MAP THAT PRECEDES THE TERRITORY—PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA .THAT ENGENDERS THE TERRITORY, AND IF ONE MUST RETURN TO THE FABLE, TODAY IT IS THE TERRITORY WHOSE SHREDS SLOWLY ROT ACROSS THE EXTENT OF THE MAP."

J. BAUDRILLARD, *SIMULACRA AND SIMULATION*, 1981

For the late twentieth century, this idea seemed too radical. For the twenty-first century, it reads almost like a documentary statement.

AI AS A FACTORY OF SIMULACRA

Artificial intelligence has done what television, advertising, and the internet had only begun to do. It has automated the production of simulacra. What used to require studios, agencies, editors, and distribution systems can now be generated by a machine in seconds.

Today, a machine can create:

- a photograph of a person who has never existed;

- a speech by a person who never delivered it;
- a book without an author;
- music without a musician;
- a painting without an artist;
- an interview without an interviewee;
- an expert without a biography.

This is not merely a quantitative leap in content generation; it is a qualitative mutation of the environment we inhabit. It is crucial to recognize that AI does not merely create information. It creates plausibility (правдоподобие). These are fundamentally separate phenomena that belong to entirely different orders of reality.

Information is an objective structure; it communicates a hard fact, tied to a specific point in time and space. Plausibility, however, is a psychological construct; it creates the flawless impression of a fact. Human beings are fundamentally unequipped to process raw data directly; instead, we perceive narrative coherence, emotional tone, and persuasive force. AI has decoded this grammar of persuasion. It does not need to know the truth to make you believe it; it only needs to master the aesthetic and logical syntax that your mind automatically associates with reality.

For the first time in human history, persuasiveness has completely separated itself from origin.

Previously, trust was an hard-won architecture built through a verifiable path: a physical source, a human author, an established institution, years of documented experience, and legal or moral responsibility. Today, this entire vertical path is bypassed. Trust is increasingly built horizontally—on the sheer quality of the simulation. When a machine can mimic the precise academic tone, the subtle grain of photographic evidence, or the cadence of authoritative speech, the traditional anchors of reality simply dissolve. We are left in a world where the signifier is flawless, but the signified no longer exists.

THE DEATH OF ORIGIN

For thousands of years, people asked the same basic questions: Who said this? Who wrote this? Who saw it? Who was the witness? Origin was the foundation of trust, because it connected a statement to a person, a place, a time, and a responsibility.

The modern world is beginning to lose this habit. A new criterion is emerging: Does it look convincing? The question of origin is being replaced by the impression of credibility.

The difference may seem small. In reality, it is enormous. Origin requires

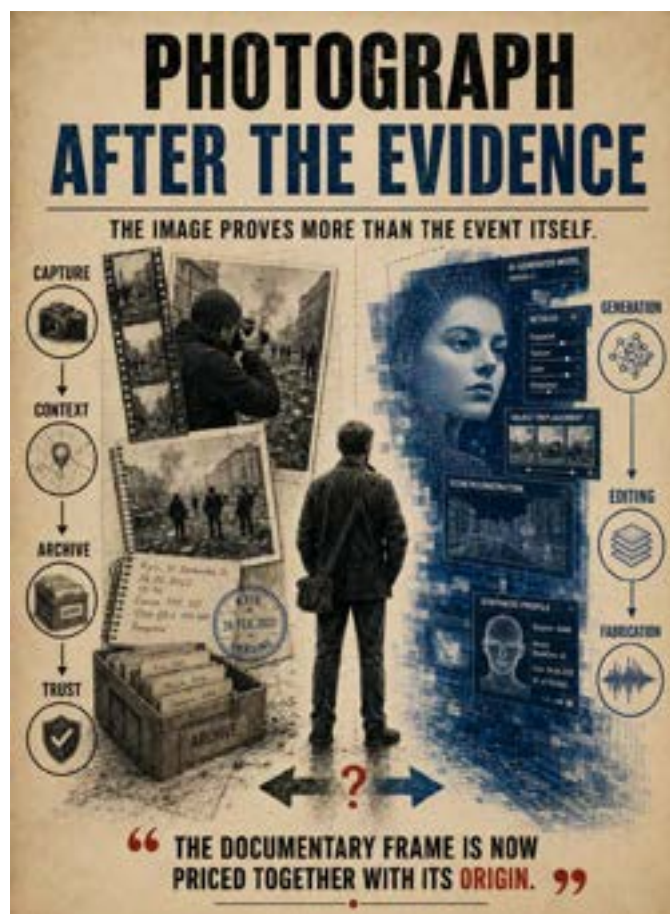


a history. Persuasiveness requires only good packaging. AI makes packaging cheap, fast, and endlessly reproducible. As a result, the value of origin begins to rise.

This is precisely why several things are now making an unexpected return:

- documentary photography;
- the archive;
- the diary;
- the field recording;
- the expedition journal;
- the authorial book.

People are beginning to search for the trace of origin. They are looking for



something that cannot be reduced to a polished surface, or a perfectly convincing simulation.

PHOTOGRAPHY AFTER EVIDENCE

This crisis has become especially visible in photography. For a century and a half, photography held a special status. It was perceived as testimony. Even when a photographer made a mistake, staged a frame, or chose a particular angle, one feeling remained: this happened.



Today, the situation has changed. AI can create images of things that never existed, scenes that were never witnessed, and faces that were never photographed. This is why photography is ceasing to function as automatic proof.

Its value is shifting. The image itself is no longer enough. What matters now is the origin of the image.

Who took it?

Where and when was it taken?

What was happening around it?

Does an archive exist?

Is there a sequence of frames?

Is there context?

Paradoxically, artificial intelligence does not destroy documentary photography. It makes it more important. In an age of generated images, the document returns not as a simple picture, but as a trace with a history.

THE BOOK AFTER THE AUTHOR

A similar situation is emerging in literature. The machine is already capable of writing, and of writing with a certain degree of persuasiveness. It can instantly synthesize thousands of existing texts, mimic styles, and assemble logical arguments.

But a book has always been more than a text. A book was the result of a path. Behind a book stood observations and mistakes, research and discoveries, field work, and even the author's inner crises. AI can generate a narrative because it trains on the collective past of humanity, but it cannot live a single day of an individual biography. It produces content without experience and conclusions without the risk of search.

This is why the book of the future will be judged not only by the quality of its writing.

The more automatic writing surrounds us, the more valuable the author's path becomes.

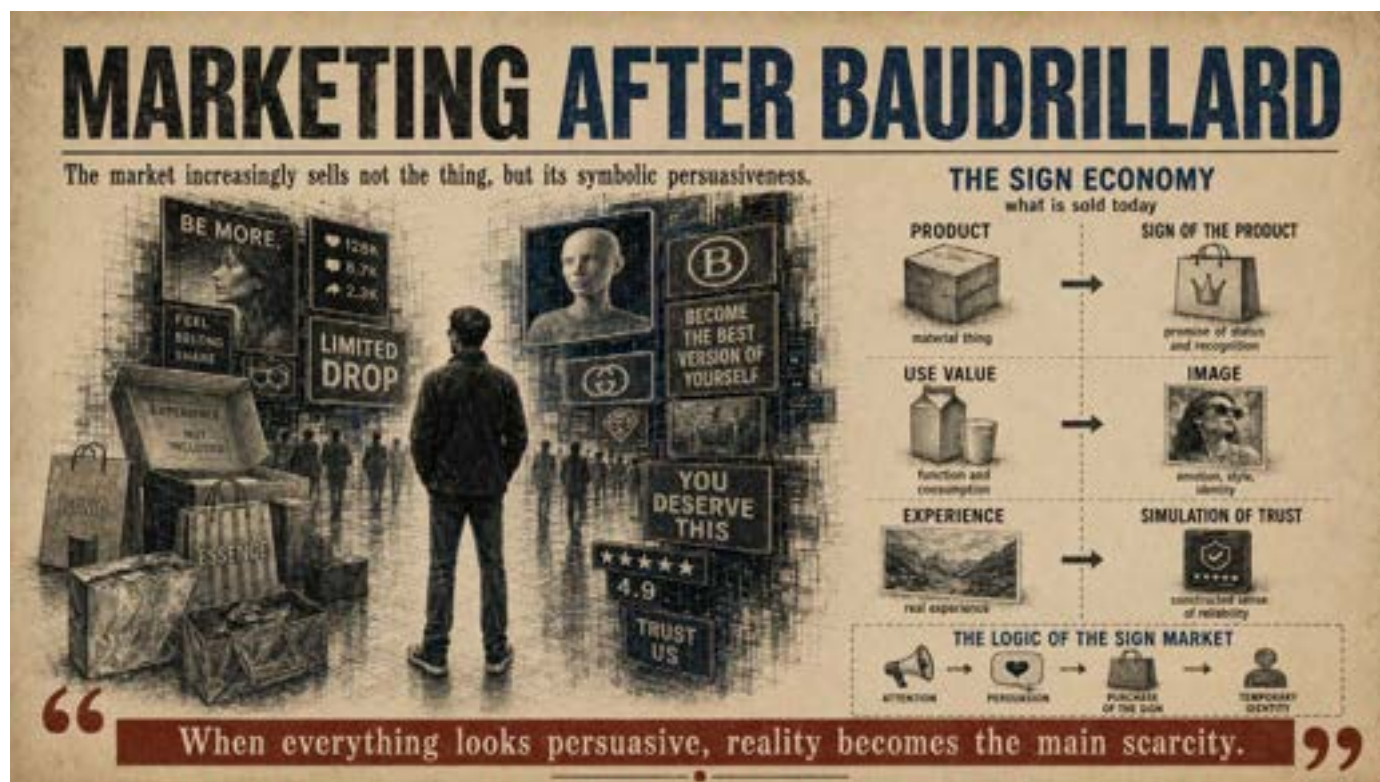
MARKETING AFTER BAUDRILLARD

Modern marketing was the first industry to collide with this new reality.

It is enough to see that today one can already create:

- a brand without a product;
- a reputation without experience;
- popularity without achievement;
- and expertise without practice.

AI has sharply accelerated this process, turning the creation of authority into a seamless, industrialized loop. When professional design, flawless rhetoric, and deeply analytical corporate profiles can be generated by a machine in a matter of clicks, the traditional markers of competence lose their value. The market is now flooded with synthetic experts and ghost brands that possess all the aesthetic attributes of success but lack any material foundation. This total inflation of visibility has produced a profound crisis of trust. Because when every actor on the stage looks equally convincing, flawless, and persuasive, the question inevitably



arises: whom should we believe when the simulation itself is perfect?

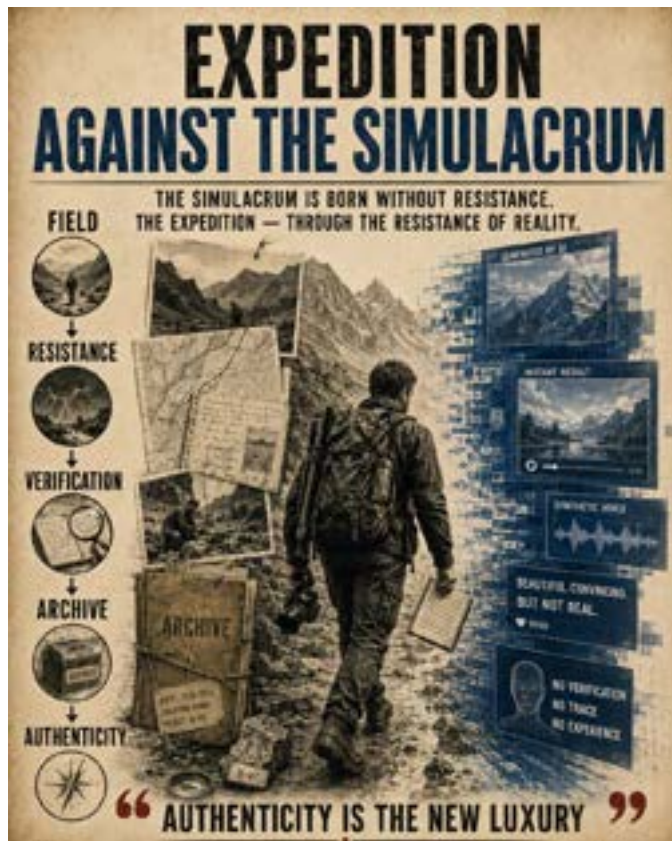
As a direct countermeasure to this hyper-inflation of content, the architecture of consumer and professional choices is undergoing a radical shift. We are witnessing the return of expert communities, long-form reading, closed research journals, professional schools, and deeply personal, author-led projects. The emphasis is moving away from broadcasted metrics—such as public views, massive subscriber counts, or superficial media presence—toward verifiable lineages of practice and peer-vetted authority. In a world of total simulation, where the surface can be completely counterfeited,

trust becomes the central scarcity, and the only remaining defense is a return to insulated, accountable networks of real human expertise.

EXPEDITION AS ANTI-SIMULACRUM

There is one form of activity that is especially difficult to reconcile with simulation: the expedition.

An expedition requires a collision with reality. One cannot generate a route already walked, or the exhaustion that follows it. One cannot artificially reproduce the unexpected mistake that



appears in the field, or the resistance of the environment that has to be overcome. And it is highly unlikely that a genuine discovery will occur without this encounter.

This resistance of the environment acts as a natural filter against any simulation. While a machine can model a landscape or calculate a theoretical trajectory, it cannot replicate the weight of a physical object, the unpredictability of a human climate, or the sudden breakdown of equipment in the middle of nowhere. In the field, a researcher does not operate in a frictionless digital vacuum; they are constantly forced to adapt to a reality that

does not obey algorithms. This is where the synthesis of data ends and the generation of true fact begins—in the direct, often uncomfortable friction between the human mind and an uncompromising world.

Every expedition inevitably leaves behind a material trace: archives, maps, photographs, field notes, and diaries. This is why the expeditionary researcher becomes one of the key figures of the new era. He brings not merely a subjective opinion, but evidence that has passed through contact with reality.

THE NEW ECONOMY OF TRUST

We are entering an era in which the main resource is no longer information. The long-standing belief that "he who owns information owns the world" has turned into an anachronism. Today, there is already too much information; it has become an ambient noise, an endless, self-reproducing ocean of data where the true is indistinguishable from the generated.

In this new reality, the primary, most scarce resource is trust.

Not the speed of delivery, which AI has reduced to milliseconds. Not the quantity of content, which has become virtually

THE TRUST ECONOMY AFTER THE EMERGENCE OF AI

A NEW VALUE MODEL IN THE AGE OF SIMULACRA

1. THE NEW TRUST ECONOMY



2. FROM INFORMATION SURPLUS TO THE TRUST CRISIS

EXPLOSION IN THE PRODUCTION OF SIMULACRA	CONSEQUENCES	TRUST CRISIS
1. AI TEXTS articles, books, analytics, news	Loss of the link between sign and reality	 - Unclear who the author is - Unclear what is true - Unclear what to believe - Unclear who the expert is - Unclear what really happened
2. AI IMAGES photos, illustrations, portraits, scenes	Simulacrum replaces the event	
3. AI VIDEO AND AUDIO clips, interviews, voices, deepfakes	Plausibility replaces truth	
4. AI PROFILES AND REPUTATIONS biographies, reviews, expertise, achievements	Trust is devalued	
5. AI PRODUCTS AND BRANDS brands without a product, marketing without essence	A crisis of orientation arises	

3. MECHANISMS FOR RESTORING TRUST

						
VERIFICATION OF ORIGIN confirmation of authorship, date, place, processes	DIGITAL AND REAL ARCHIVES data, photos, videos, records, diaries, logs, expedition materials	EXPERT COMMUNITIES professional communities, peer review, reputation	SLOW CONTENT (LONG CREATION) books, research, films, documentary projects	HUMAN CONTEXT biography, experience, values, worldview of the author	REAL RESULTS expeditions, discoveries, products, projects, research	• Points of orientation appear • The value of expertise returns • The significance of the authentic path grows • Communities are strengthened • The human-being again becomes the measure of meaning

4. WHO CREATES THE NEW TRUST ECONOMY

 RESEARCHER Creates knowledge through labor, search, and verification	 DOCUMENTARIAN Records reality, leaves visual evidence	 AUTHOR Creates meaning, expresses, experience, bears responsibility	 EXPEDITIONARY RESEARCHER Enters reality, encounters the unknown	 ARCHIVIST Preserves the memory of the world, facts, documents	 TEACHER Transmits knowledge, forms critical thinking	 READER / VIEWER Makes a choice, trusts consciously, supports what is valuable
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5. PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW TRUST ECONOMY

 ORIGIN MATTERS MORE THAN PERSUASIVENESS The path matters more than the packaging	 REALITY MATTERS MORE THAN SIMULATION The fact matters more than imitation	 RESPONSIBILITY MATTERS MORE THAN ANONYMITY The name matters more than the avatar	 DEPTH MATTERS MORE THAN SPEED Quality matters more than quantity	 LONG LABOR MATTERS MORE THAN FAST CONTENT Creation matters more than generation	 THE HUMAN BEING MATTERS MORE THAN THE MACHINE Meaning matters more than the algorithm
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SUMMARY

In an age when anything can be generated,
the main proof becomes the human path to the result.

TRUST IS THE NEW CURRENCY OF THE FUTURE.

infinite. Not the volume of publications or the aggressiveness of distribution. The new currency is the ability to prove the origin of meaning.

When any text can be simulated, any image generated, and any expert consensus counterfeited, trust can no longer be bought through cheap persuasiveness or flawless packaging. It must be earned through a verifiable genealogy of thought.

This is why the future does not belong to the smartest algorithms or the most productive prompt-engineers, but to those who anchor meaning to reality. The future belongs to:

- The researcher and the documentarian, who step outside the digital bubble to collide with the friction of the real world;
- The author, whose text is inseparable from a lived biography and inner crisis;
- The archivist and the field collector, who preserve the physical, unalterable trace of time;
- The teacher, who does not merely transmit data, but passes down a living tradition of critical thought.

The key figure of the coming decades is the person capable of doing what no machine can: showing the human path by which knowledge was obtained.

CONCLUSION

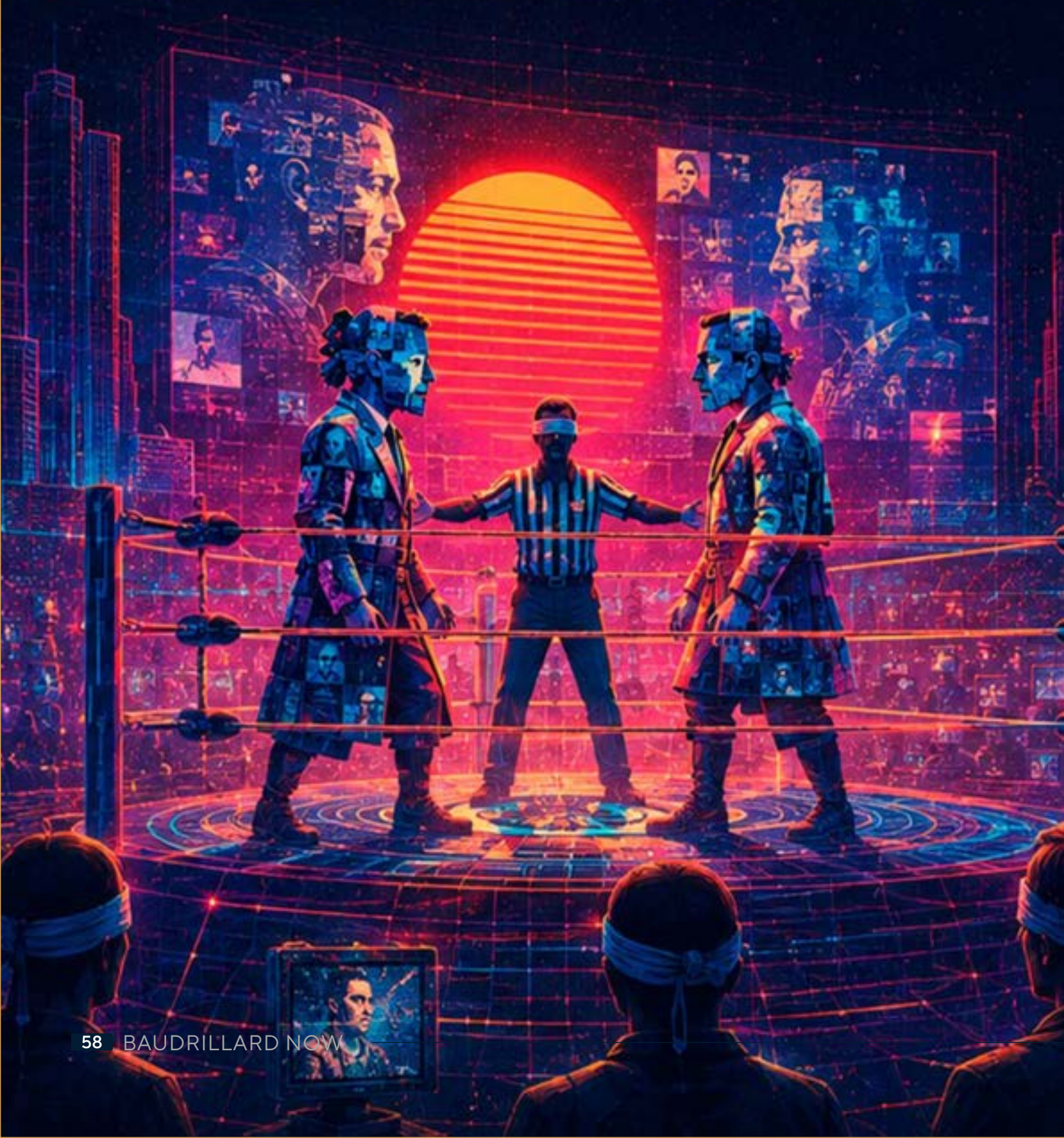
AI does not destroy reality; it makes it more valuable. The more the world fills with simulacra, the more important archives, documents, photographs, expeditions, real books, and genuine research become.

Jean Baudrillard saw the beginning of this process. Artificial intelligence has brought it to its logical conclusion. But precisely for this reason, a new task emerges: not to fight simulation, but to restore weight to reality.

In a world where everything can be generated, the chief proof becomes the human path toward a result.

DEEPPAKES AS THE ULTIMATE SIMULACRA

SYNTHETIC MEDIA PORNOGRAPHY FROM WRESTLING TO POLITICS



**PROF. NELLO BARILE**

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A wrestling match between blind people. The referee is blind too. The spectators also. And the whole thing takes place in the dark (this last condition is superfluous).

— J. Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*

For years, the issue of deepfakes primarily revolved around alarming topics like the displacement of creative jobs, the visual proliferation of fake news, or face-swapping, where the faces of famous celebrities or ordinary people are superimposed onto pornographic content. After a long period of moral panic surrounding AI-mediated images, *Black Mirror* once again pushes the discourse into far more illuminating imaginative territories. The first episode of the new season, “*Joan is Awful*,” explores the interdependence between the physical and digital worlds, between daily reality and fiction. In a brief introduction, we glimpse Joan's life as she's forced to coldly fire a former friend and, even hypothetically, betray her partner with an ex. That evening, on the couch with her partner, Joan discovers key events from her day replayed in a TV series produced by the disconcerting Streamberry platform (a stand-in for Netflix itself).

The “Joan is Awful” series depicts the life of this unfortunate victim who, by “flagging” and not reading the informed consent agreement for data cession (much like a memorable *South Park* episode), has agreed to a very special treatment: her entire life can be reprocessed using quantum computers and AI to create a super deepfake series. In this series, everyone's life is re-experienced by multiple characters, arranged on different ontological levels, in a continuous loop between the interpreter and the interpreted. The loop, of course, short-circuits when the object (Joan) meets the subject of the representation (Salma Hayek). The series highlights the potential consequences of a reckless integration of platform content, AI, deepfakes, the celebrity world, and the presumed centrality of the user, all justified by the need to extract and process data produced from “real” reality. As the narrative eminently shows, deepfakes populate this new “hybrid” communicative ecosystem (Barile 2022), characterized by:

- A “phygital” dimension that merges the real and virtual in various ways.
- A customer-centric regime that personalizes experiences for each user.
- An “empathic media” function that allows for interpreting the emotional dimension of data.

- Synthetic creativity capable of reinventing possible worlds from historical data series.

All the four dimensions are somehow predicted but not completely connected by Jean Baudrillard. In the popular description of the evolution of Simulacra, the French master states:

- simulacra that are natural, naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit, that are harmonious, optimistic, and that aim for the restitution or the ideal institution of nature made in God's image;
- simulacra that are productive, productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by the machine and in the whole system of production — a Promethean aim of a continuous globalization and expansion, of an indefinite liberation of energy (desire belongs to the utopias related to this order of simulacra);
- simulacra of simulation, founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game — total operationality, hyperreality, aim of total control.

Ever since daily life became the central category in media representation, from classic storytelling to the story-living of current metaverse video games, artificial intelligence has proven particularly voracious in its ability to consume the experiential content of

ordinary people, transforming it into data capable of training AI applications. Thus, the true pornography is increasingly that of everyday life.

Graham Meikle's recent book, *Deepfakes* (Polity, 2022), offers a perspective midway between media archaeology and the analysis of the imaginary. These "radical technologies" (Greenfield 2017) are comparable to older technologies, like electricity, which only after their massive diffusion truly transformed society. This is why it makes sense to study them now, at the dawn of their global assertion. The author uses remix culture as a principle to explain deepfakes, aligning them with the history of other creative practices, from Culture Jamming pranks to memetics. But deepfakes go far beyond what was once defined as convergent culture and/or the participatory one (Jenkins 2009).

The unlimited dataset of images, videos, and texts we've shared through social media... is the raw material through which AI systems are trained to recognize, classify, and recreate images. With adequate density, these networks are capable of generating entirely new images: copies without an original (ibid, p. 6).

For fans of Jean Baudrillard (surprisingly not cited by Meikle), the definitions of simulacrum proposed in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) will resonate.

While at the time few understood the meaning of self-referential images generated by a numerical matrix without any external reference, today this idea is easily observable in the evolution of deepfakes. In one of Baudrillard's most popular tales, even promoted subliminally in the first *Matrix*, "The desert of the real" is connected to the allegory of the Empire. The equation suggests a correlation between the supreme form of imperial aims which is the one of the expansion of simulation everywhere, and the more traditional sovereignty which is the one described in Borges' fairytale. In fact "it is with this same imperialism that present-day simulators attempt to make the real, all of the real, coincide with their models of simulation." The overlapping of the model and the real is a profoundly violent process which emphasizes the key role of the model, of the codes and the matrix.

The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control — and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combina-

tory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials – worse (ivi, p. 1-2).

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes (ivi, p. 2).

Never again will the real have the chance to produce itself – such is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection, that no longer even gives the event of death a chance. A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences (p. 3).

Meikle refers to the launch of the first iPhone and its facial recognition system as an example of the widespread diffusion of synthetic media (Meikle 2022, p. 22). With this term, we can refer to “images, audio, or videos that are generated by Artificial Intelligence processes”

(ibid, p. 24).

The author engages in a long discussion on synthetic porn, produced by AI systems, which can take various forms. This includes non-consensual porn featuring The Avengers heroes (ibid, p. 44) placed in pornographic contexts, which garners incredible success in terms of searches and views on Pornhub. Or, in its everyday variant, revenge porn performs the same substitution, but this time with close, known, and/or intimate acquaintances. In both cases, the misogynistic nature of certain apps, like FakeApp and DeepNude, used for the creation and distribution of non-consensual sexual content, stands out (Gosse & Burkell 2020).

Although it may seem an “extreme” case, synthetic porn in reality adopts the same logic as official business, based on the exploitation of a celebrity's image through multiple channels. This means the appropriation of their image, its editing in unconventional contexts, and its promotion in the public sphere (Meikle 2022, p. 45). A considerable number of platforms and applications operate in this sector: from Mrdeepfake, the most frequented community with the largest number of pornographic and nude versions related to famous stars like Emma Watson (around 478 contents), to CelebJihad, which aggregates authentic pornographic or nude

content, associating it with “aggressive and illicit” commentary (*ibid.*, p. 68).

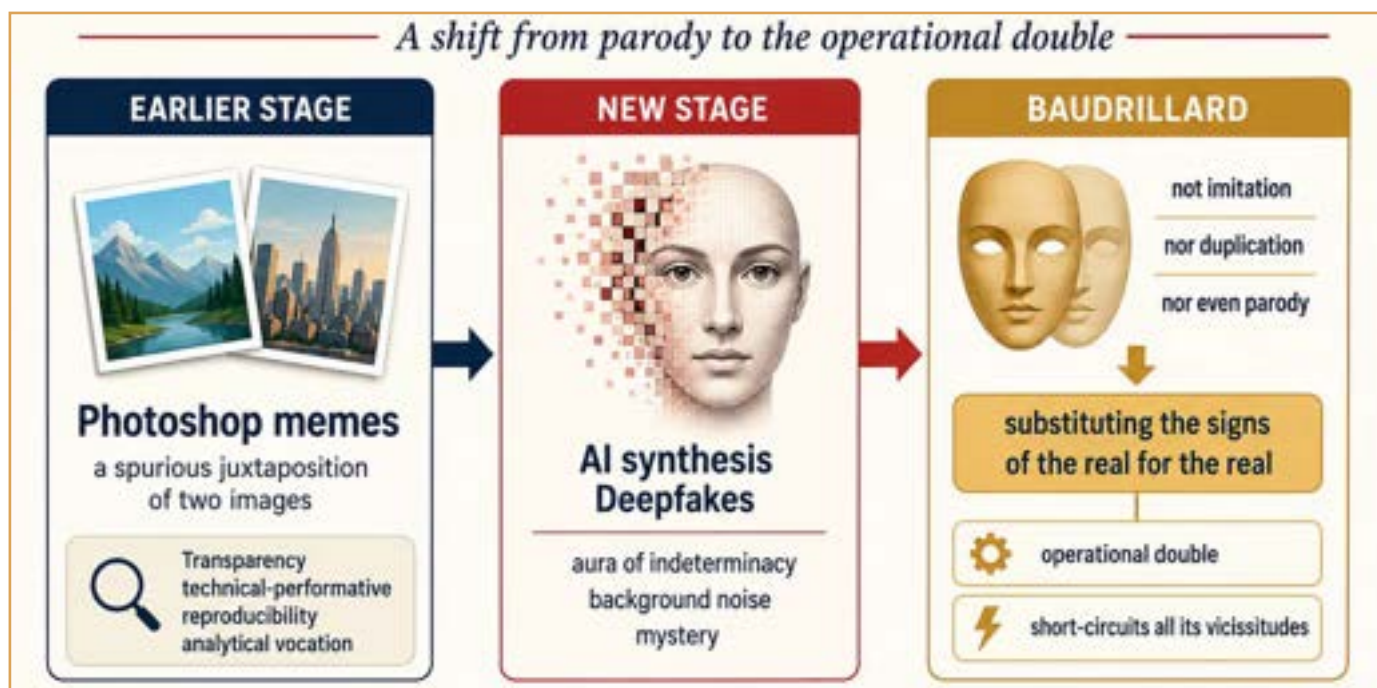
Sexual performance is classically characterized by at least two predominant aspects: the immediate activation of desire and the technical efficiency of its staging (Breton 1995). A scientific vocation that uses technique and video to make evident what is not real, thereby nullifying the captivating charm of illusion.

Pornography adds a dimension to the space of sex, makes it more real than real — in this lies its absence of seduction (...). One sees it too closely, one sees what one had never seen (...) by effect of the anatomical zoom, the dimension of the real is abolished, the distance of the gaze gives way to an instantaneous and exasperated representation: that of sex in its pure state, end of prospective space, which is also that of the imaginary and of fantasy, end of the scene, end of illusion (Baudrillard 1979, pp. 37-38).

If old pornography was primarily about transparency, technical-performative reproducibility, and analytical vocation, the game of masks introduced by deepfakes reintroduces an aura of indeterminacy, background noise, and mystery into the world of AI-dominated high-tech creativity.

We could list multiple nuances of deepfakes that also involve the world of memes. Politics is one of the fields where

deepfakes proliferate regarding the most significant events of the moment. Images of Trump being captured by American police, or of the Pope transformed into a trapper, are significant examples of how AI can read certain elements of human emotionality to transform them into a specific image layout. In a much more “fake” than “deep” way, AI adds a touch of glam sensuality to American political figures, transforming them into performers somewhere between Elton John and drag queens in the memorable “Make America Glam Again.” Deepfakes emphasize and amplify the already established “horizontal” of the communicative-spectacular system and facilitate the democratization of images, both of celebrities and ordinary people. Both, after all, are susceptible to being simulated or recategorized into a story that is other than themselves. The difference between memes created with Photoshop, as a spurious juxtaposition of two images, and the synthesis performed by AI is increasingly evident (Vaccari & Chadwick 2020). Take the case of Evgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin's great renunciation, metaphorically immortalized by superimposing his face onto Forrest Gump's, when after miles of meaningless marathon, he invites everyone to go home. This is quite different from the prank cyberattack on Putin announcing the invasion by



Ukrainian troops of the Kursk, Belgorod, and Bryansk territories, declaring martial law and urging residents to flee, in a *War of the Worlds* style read by Orson Welles. Prigozhin himself, a few months before the invasion, railed against audio deepfakes, accusing neural networks of performing miraculous mixes of true phrases with false ones he would never have uttered (Bershidsky 2023).

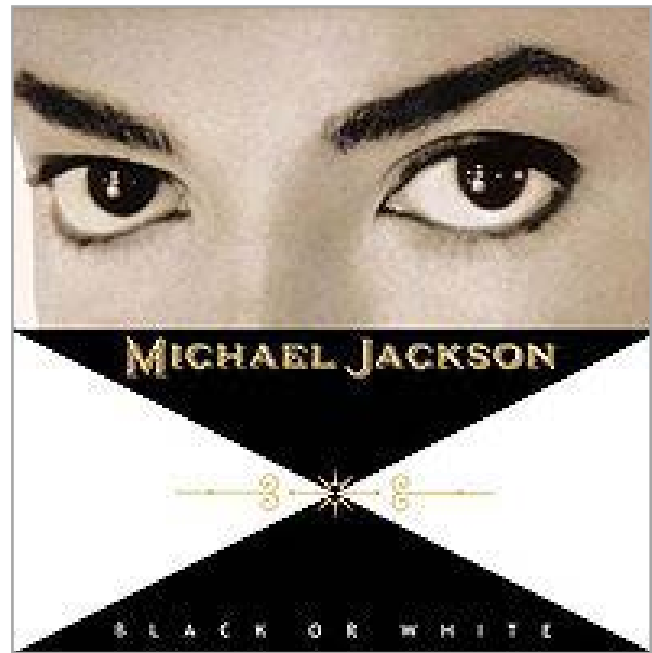
Until the 1990s the same disorienting effect was achieved through morphing, which allowed for the fluid superimposition of multiple identities. One of the most popular examples of morphing has been Michael Jackson's music video "Black or White," in which the king of pop shifts into different identities, ethnicities, genders, ages etc. to suggest a sense of fluidity and inclusivity, in some way forerunning the actual debate on woke

culture. Before the video, Baudrillard already described the pop star in a very powerful and prophetic way.

"Michael Jackson is a solitary mutant, a precursor of a hybridization that is perfect because it is universal — the race to end all races. Today's young people have no problem with a miscegenated society: they already inhabit such a universe, and Michael Jackson foreshadows what they see as an ideal future. Add to this the fact that Michael has had his face lifted, his hair straightened, his skin lightened — in short, he has been reconstructed with the greatest attention to detail... This is what makes him such an innocent and pure child — the artificial hermaph-

rodite of the fable, better able even than Christ to reign over the world and reconcile its contradictions; better than a child-god because he is child-prosthesis, an embryo of all those dreamt-of mutations that will deliver us from race and sex.” — (Baudrillard 1993, p. 21-22)

The current disorientation produced by deepfakes is even more radical than morphing, testifying to a kind of alien and/or primitive sensibility (consider videos, songs, and advertisements made with AI). The simultaneous feeling of familiarity and strangeness suggested by these images recalls the disorientation that robotics scholars call the “Uncanny Valley,” also applicable to virtual influencers (Berryman et al. 2021, Barile 2022) as well as deepfakes. There are lighter, more institutionalized variants, such as the rejuvenation effects on Harrison Ford who, in a kind of consensual deepfake, is brought back from his eighties to the glory of youth through AI-mediated de-aging. This image forces us to rethink Baudrillard's famous aphorism: “The sad thing about artificial intelligence is that it lacks artifice and therefore intelligence.” If the idea of eternalizing youth or forcibly restoring it through technical devices, like Harari's *Homo Deus* (2017), the idea of narratively cloaking such an intervention through the magic of the crystal



Cover of Michael Jackson's "Black or White" single, 1991

skull is a way to restore the erotic dimension of artifice. Thus, the magical-seductive power of illusion, after being annihilated by technological pornography, is in its own way brought back into vogue precisely by the performance of artificial intelligence.

PORNOGRAPHY OF ELIMINATED SORROW: TRUMP'S GAZA

The deepfake video was generated in a critical and parodic manner, but was immediately reposted on the White House website. The global left,

committed to Pro-Pal's demands but uninterested in the Ukrainian situation, was unprepared for the traumatic turn of events. The devastation in Gaza, already underway under Biden's assent/dissent, has catastrophically intensified under the new presidency. Trump's campaign promise likely contributed to his success in 2024. It combined two very distant situations: the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, which the new president would resolve in a short time. Unfortunately, reality has proven more difficult than expected, and above all, the connection between the two crises, kept separate by international diplomacy and activists, could play out in the opposite way. The American president is doing everything, but not enough, to fracture the alliance between Russia and China, even humiliating Zelensky in a sort of wrestling fight, during his visit to Washington. The event defined by Trump as a "great TV show," in no way halts the invasion of Ukraine, which continues to be ravaged, but it gives Benjamin Netanyahu carte blanche to pursue his plan to completely purge Gaza and remove its inhabitants. The AI-generated video, called Trump Gaza, is not just a colossal deepfake but a manifesto legitimizing the most extreme ambitions of the Israeli and global right. The kitsch setting, halfway between the Riviera and Dubai, enhances the central

role of the American president, which reaches its peak in the iconic golden statue depicting him, reminiscent of the statues of the Middle Eastern personality cult (in the style of Saddam Hussein), but in a hyper-kitsch version. Even more notable in the video is the presence of Elon Musk, who appears in three key scenes: the first two in which he joyfully feeds himself, the third in which he walks under a shower of dollars. The video ridicules the absurdity of Trump's Gaza proposal, but also celebrates the strengthening of the bond between the wealth-loving president and the South African tycoon.

WRESTLING AND THE POLITICS OF DEEPPAKES

Wrestling is a perfect case study to compare the pre-synthetic stage of simulacra with the post-synthetic one. At the time of electronic media in the Eighties, Wrestling became one of the most spectacular shows of the consumer society. A mix between simulation and dissimulation, which expands the aesthetic of violence to an exponential level that reaches, at the peak of the performance, its hilarious and parodic effect. If, according to Baudrillard,

terrorism is the elevation of violence to the power of x, the ecstasy of violence, Wrestling is just the mimic representation of violence, a sort of *commedia alla maschera*, acted out by a certain number of odd characters, dressed up like lo-fi, glam, or androgynous macho superheroes.

The fetishism of their costumes stands both in the structure — short, tight, almost nude, with oil to exacerbate the body shapes etc. — and in the imagery resembling and implementing other social roles, or stereotypes from an undefined past, very similar to the concept idea of The Village People, such as: the cowboy, the glam style, the mummy, the giant etc. It would be better to avoid the common postmodern question about this scene: is it real violence or just simulated? Better focusing on: the fluidity of the social ties (in a loop of friends becoming enemies and then friends again); on the ambiguous masculinity which, exacerbated through violence and aggressivity, turns into its opposite; on the hyper-spectacle which blurs the borders between reality and fiction.

Wrestling is the spectacular epitome of the sculptured body through new sportive technologies: from bodybuilding machines to drugs. For this reason it expresses the profound axiological values of the Eighties (as Trump still

does). In a brilliant quote from *The Perfect Crime* (1996), Baudrillard states:

This is how it is with bodybuilding: you get into your body as you would into a suit of nerve and muscle. The body is not muscular, but muscled. It is the same with the brain and with social relations or exchanges: bodybuilding, brainstorming, word-processing (...). Freud speaks of those people who live with a kind of inner mirror, in a fleshly, happy self-reference. That narcissistic ideal is past and gone; bodybuilding has wiped it out and replaced it with a gymnastic Ego-Ideal — cold, hard, stressed, artificial self-reference.

— pp. 125-126)

Bodybuilding replaces the obsolete ideal of the working-class hero with a totally individualized, operationalized, performative body which is not an active agent of industrial development, but is a passive agent of the spectacle. Think about Aronofsky's scene of *The Wrestler* called "I quit," an impressive example of a decadent, lo-fi, drug-addicted post-spectacular hero of a deconstructed and impossible working class.

As Disneyland, Wrestling is there to suggest that the rest outside is real, like

for example politics, while it is not. For this reason at the time of deepfakes and generative AI, which is a powerful means to liquefy reality, wrestling becomes a paradigm of contemporary politics and geopolitics. Trump geopolitics is already a wrestling battle. If originally the tariffs were promoted as a way to limit the expanding power of China, after the commedia in maschera, the world figured out that the real enemy of the US administration was the closest friend EU, while the Chinese villain received a respectful treatment. Same with Russia, inducing a sense of awe in the new American President, who promised to solve in one day the war against Ukraine, and he's still hanging from a wire, fighting, praying, threatening Russia with sanctions or even nuclear submarines, until they stop the war.

Wrestling is pornographic in the sense that it is obscene, it is not ironic in the sense of Avant-Garde dadaist performances, it is obvious, predictable and predetermined. It is also somehow uncanny, because we don't understand if performers are characters, real fighters, dodgy crowds, superheroes or just clowns. This odd carnival of flashing bodies is somehow the prefiguration of what we see today in the generative AI productions, where in fact wrestling paradigm is somehow implemented

in several ways. The Instagram profile ReallyNotAI collects a series of several images generated by AI.

The very name of the Instagram page ReallyNotAI plays on the ambiguity between something that could be real but isn't. The clash between Trump and Musk, both wearing costumes cut out by Stars & Stripes, is among the most significant of this elevation to the power of x of simulation. In this exhibition of atrocities defined as the World's weirdest wrestler, Trump faces off against unlikely wrestlers, monstrous giants, lions, bulls... but also with Biden dressed up as a fighter, and Putin. This strange page offers short clips that celebrate the consolidated bond between the American President and the imagery of wrestling, celebrating a hyper-visibility made of pure surface and fiction. This is perhaps why the fabulous aphorism I used as the opening quote imagines "*A wrestling match between blind people*" (Baudrillard 1990, p. 80). If wrestling is already a simulation or a dissimulation of the real, the AI remediation amplifies even more its ephemeral nature and function. The hyper-surface of a vacuum reality, which is real for many people (especially white trash working classes), but totally unreal for a huger public. This pure simulation completely detached from its core ontology (noumenon), could be turned into

something more essential, assuming the clever idea of a fight between blind fighters. The only way to save this spectacle from its own obscenity is to transform it into an even more absurd performance, in which the artifice of the blindness of the performer, the referee, and above all the audience, upon whom darkness falls, ensures that there is finally something to see precisely because in reality we are no longer able to do so.

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HYPERREALITY AS A MODE OF SYNTHETIC TRANSCENDENCE





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Approaching the desert planet, Commander Taggart offers a characteristic optimism in his dialogue, an optimism which is nevertheless juxtaposed with his expression, his eyes held shut as if hiding from imminent death. It is an expression of concern which comes second only to Tommy's expression of despair, the pilot's countenance now recalling the disastrous event of having previously flown through that 'minefield left standing from the great war of 12185.' These expressions are cut with Fred's nonchalance, a man more concerned with snacking on chips and dips. The film's thematic reprise emerges in the form of a celestial chorus, its leitmotif introduced as a non-diegetic insert, just as the frame shifts to reveal Guy sobbing away. Initially concerned that he was going to be left behind, Guy is now worried his character will be killed off the moment they land on the planet.

"Are we there yet?" Alexander quips as the spacecraft breaches the planet's atmosphere to reveal the terrestrial desert beneath. As the pilot struggles to manoeuvre the spacecraft parallel to the landscape, Fred looks out at this world with the glee of anticipation, his snacking intensified by that cinematic experience we call mild peril.

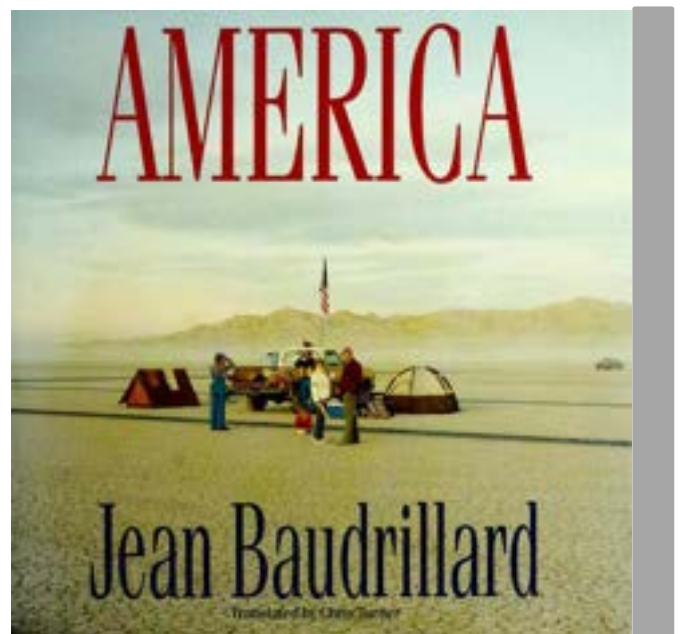
It is following this moment where we glimpse the real 'desertification' of the material environment, with *Galaxy Quest* (1999) presenting this landscape as the antithesis of that interiority we have so far become accustomed, which is to also say, in relation to Dean Parisot's cinematic masterpiece, the mise en scène of inter-planetary spacecraft.

It is significant that this 'alien' planet is enveloped by a quintessentially Baudrillardian landscape, the desert's textured surfaces contrasting with the smooth alloy of the landing craft, which appears – borrowing Baudrillard's words from *America* – with an 'extraterrestrial', 'Los-Angelic modernity', landing with the 'otherworldly cleanness of a thing from outer space.' It is with these words that Baudrillard once described 'Salt Lake City' as a 'supernatural' thing, 'all marble and roses', its luminosity contrasting with 'the Great Salt Lake Desert' whose 'signs' are 'sculpted out by wind, water, and ice, dragging you down into the whirlpool of time, into the remorseless eternity of a slow-motion catastrophe.' It is no coincidence that Baudrillard characterised time as this rotating mass – an endless circulation where a process of disappearance is the only true mark of reality.

In *America*, Baudrillard describes the desert as a landscape forged by a 'pact of wear and erosion,' where the passing of

'millions of years' leaves behind geological remnants that suggest, rather than permanence, the insignificance of the human trajectory. To stand atop a craggy outcrop in the desert is to glimpse a world where time does not accumulate meaning but merely erases in the perpetual equilibrium of passing from one disappearance to another where the 'ocean bed in the open air' is one day handed back to water. Yet our perception – shaped by narratives – renders this process sequential, as though it follows a trajectory, as though it had 'meant' anything at all.

This echoes the gnostic view of the universe as a realm of desolation – unfinished, imperfect – though perhaps it is



America by Jean Baudrillard (1986)

more accurate to say that the world is absolute in its cycle of appearances and disappearances, manifesting only to dissolve. Even so, Baudrillard's philosophy intertwines with this gnostic melancholy, not as an elegy for lost meaning but as a confrontation with the void at its core. Where the gnostics saw an unfinished and imperfect world, Baudrillard reveals a reality that does not lack meaning so much as it operates beyond the need for it. Meaning is neither eroded nor concealed — it is weightless, flickering across the surface of things, accumulating only as a function of our attempts to impose coherence. In this sense, the 'depth of time' is not a measure of significance but of velocity, the acceleration with which signs, histories, and realities emerge only to vanish. Like the desert itself, where forms are shaped and undone by wind and erosion, the world is an endless circulation of appearances — never settling into presence, never culminating in truth, but ceaselessly moving through phases of disappearance.

This perpetual circulation of appearances — where nothing is lost but nothing truly accumulates — extends beyond the desert's physical landscape and into the hyperreal terrains of media and simulation. The 'depth of time' is not a sedimentation of history but the sheer velocity with which we traverse its surface, moving

from one fleeting form to the next. Baudrillard saw this in the prototype cars streaking across the desert, embodying movement without destination, acceleration without progress. *Galaxy Quest* enacts a similar logic: its imitation *Star Trek* (1969) 'Runabouts' shuttle their crew from astral ship to polluted planet, traversing a universe that is itself an accumulation of pastiche — where planets, ships, and entire histories exist only as narrative backdrops, evoking the sense of exploration while merely recycling familiar forms.

As the narrative's primary antagonist still lurks in the darkness of deep space, beryllium acquisition becomes a time sensitive mission, and yet standing in opposition to the urgency, all around this desert one cannot help but be reminded of another paradigm entirely, which is to say an acknowledgement of those geological 'signs' that never lead us to the most obvious conclusions: that we have done this all before, and we will keep doing it. The desolation here is overshadowed only by time's 'superficiality', a quality that resurfaces in the shrill sound of every alarm clock, in the indifference of time to sleeping bodies under capitalism, as we schedule our lives into a series of little stories — sentimental tales we tell ourselves. Time holds these multiplicities together, positioning

us within that sequential space we call history.

After landing on the planet, Fred opens the ship's automatic doors in preparation for the crew's departure despite Guy's protest, his concern that there is no oxygen on the planet. Fred looks over his shoulder with an expression that lacks concern, lowering the ship's doors regardless. He sniffs the air, taking a series of short breaths to confirm something of a habitable atmosphere. The frame follows Fred's perspective to show the crew preparing for their departure, the frame casting Gwen in the light of the desert. The hand running beneath hair to give it volume is the same hand that drops to her chest, extending the presentation of pale skin with the luminosity of manicured nails, eyes that distinguish themselves through black mascara and the landscape Gwen's gaze now rests upon. It is through placing a hand against her pulsating heart, an expression that tries to take in the overwhelming visibility of the desert, that elevates Gwen's appearance to something of the pornographic. Coincidental then that Guy should shield his eyes from the light that casts Gwen with her own astrality, the other men presented in the shadows as if shamefully lurking there. The shame we used to feel is outsourced to fiction, and like a deceit, fiction is designed to absolve

us of that other reality we made for ourselves. In all his performative despair, the shielding of his eyes, Guy comes to represent the failed negation of a certain gaze, the attempt to resist a subsumption into the objectified image of Crewman Maddison in what Baudrillard would call 'the sexual scenario' on page thirty-two of *America*.

Whether it is Guy's sweaty anxiousness or Taggart's approaching shadow, the proximity of bodies in this scene holds a certain quality, the ambiguities culminating in a scene that resembles an orgy on film. This otherwise banal frame captures a moment within the pornographic imaginary – not through the material exchange of fluids, but through their anticipation. It is the prolepsis of an astral presentation being reabsorbed into the terrestrial, a prefigured return from the idealised to the bodily. The sequence of the astral image, pristine and distant, builds toward its inevitable collapse into the tangible reality of flesh and fluids. The paradoxical treatment of the body-as-image exposes a central contradiction: the desire to witness the astral projections made manifest is simultaneously intertwined with the need to return these projections to their corporeal, earthly state. The image of the body, glossy and manicured, is not simply displaced by another reali-

ty — it is reintroduced to that reality only through the process of re-presentation, in the form of a new, secondary image. This is where pornography embodies the memetic power of images to (re) construct reality through a process of bait and switch. In the world of lived images, hyperreality becomes cyclical, where the anticipation of bodily materialisation (the proleptic return of the terrestrial) is woven into the very structure of the image itself. Examples like the internet's 'Rule 34' or 'Lewd Cosplay' exemplify this aestheticization par excellence, pulling us into a hyperreality that, unlike the nudity in Michelangelo's work, places no moral demands upon its viewer. What morality do we obey when it comes to the moment of having to avert our gaze? More importantly, who is looking away anymore? In the act of 'turning away', we once told ourselves that the act of desecration could still take place, that our gaze was still one of potent contamination against those things we once called sacred.

Soon enough, Fred walks out onto the desert, yawning as he goes. Taggart follows close behind, exiting the ship, taking in the wide expanse, awe reflected in his expression as the frame transitions from intimate close up to wide-angle landscape, the terrain's formations presented with an eerie stillness. The wind that lifts the sand is reduced to a whisper

ruminating across the desert plain. The ambience of the desert is the same as the cancer ward, of patients with dry mouths, of endless xerostomia, of disappearance and learning how to die. It is the ideal home for supernatural occurrences too, a world made for skin-walkers and UFOs crash landing in Nevada. It seems the desert remains almost too desolate for its own good, needing to be filled with monsters, a genie beneath the sand. And so, in this alien world presented on screen, which is without the total smoothness of the Saharan dune, one cannot help but wonder what else hides beneath its mountainous composition. Like looking under rocks, looking for an entire world to terrify, the camera's perspective looks down with its child-like mischievousness — looks down at the desert with a creepy omnipresence.

Gwen speaks out to the desert, her words like a prayer carried by the wind, Guy trembling behind her, cast in the shadow of the landing craft. They follow on foot, rambling through the desert, Alexander leading the way with his surface mapper set to the beryllium's location. With the commander asking for directions, Alexander glances down at the bleeping device before pointing out into the distance, re-orientating the device in his hands. Tommy soon criticises Alexander's inability to use the surface

mapper correctly.

"You think you could do better, *Laredo*?" Alexander asks, placing a very deliberate emphasis on the name, and therefore calling into question Tommy's own inability to fully materialise the skills and talents of his on-screen character. The impact of his chosen words is not lost on the pilot, of course, their verbal tussle played out through the scene's motion, the 'superficiality' of time returned to the desert through footfalls and sweeping, panoramic shots of the desert. The desert, in both its vastness and its haunting stillness, becomes a physical and metaphorical space of liminality. It is a place where time seems to stand still, neither fully past nor present, where the land itself exists in an endless state of becoming and unbecoming. The terrain – formed by the endless erosion of wind and water – becomes a symbol of transience, of things that are perpetually in-between, undefined, and awaiting a form or purpose. Just as the sand shifts with the breeze, erasing any trace of what was once there, the characters themselves move through the desert in search for something – be it the elusive beryllium or the elusive self. The desert, as a space of ambiguous potential, provides the perfect backdrop for the characters' internal journeys, forcing them to confront the uncertainty of both the

landscape and their place within it. In this setting, the stakes are not only about survival or discovery but about how they will reshape themselves, or fail to do so, in response to the profound emptiness surrounding them.

Undeterred, they continue through the desert, the tension between them escalating as Tommy begrudgingly acknowledges Alexander's criticism before the crew reaches a rocky plateau. Meanwhile, the argument between Gwen and Taggart – about the commander's promiscuity – ends abruptly, and silence falls, only to be broken by the non-diegetic chorus of angels.

Alexander expresses an astonishment in response to the landscape before him, commenting on the appearance of the abandoned mining facility. The camera's perspective is reversed to reveal this facility nestled into the side of an orange cliff. Whilst obviously left to the desert, rusted over years of use and disuse, the abandoned site is reminiscent of all things given over to perpetual disappearance; disappearance having made a peculiar monster from fading vestiges. What's left of the mining facility pertains to an almost Lovecraftian fascination, telling the story of another world subsumed by sedimentation, its spindly supports and flue sections standing with the quiet air of something having become half-fossilised



The half-fossilized machinery of another world.

through petrification. It is something that appears half-discovered too, holding the seductive appeal of half-discovered bones, like that of the *tyrannosaurus rex* prior to a museumification.

All around, the appearance of the mining facility recalls the weathering processes that take place within an environment which is entirely without prejudice, the wind howling through a half-structure that disappears almost

as quickly as it appeared, an outward form that nonetheless presents as a machinic oasis, an astral mirage waiting for its second wind. There is in the pseudo-essence offered by astrality, the air of something else *waiting*. This is a central quality of the simulation which exists (and persists) through the changeability of auras more than any fixed, intrinsic essence, which our realism ultimately lacks and therefore must reduce to

something else entirely. To say our realism is also a simulation that must constantly avoid the topic of its own emergence through a paradoxical fascination with it. Even today, we avoid inspecting the genealogy of our morality, for example, as to not disrupt the simulation of its essence in reality. Inevitably, an aura of sanctimony fills the space left behind, a void that must be metastatically filled as it must simultaneously be left uninspected so as not to ruin the whole game of our liberal humanism whose moral absences are best revealed in the reading of its own history.

Gwen soon registers the absence of any miners in the facility, whilst Guy also registers this world's *Miyazakiiian Desolation*, the quietude that stands in direct opposition to the communicative and ecstatic realism that conditions this character to take silence as something profoundly undesirable. This is silence as a 'negative' condition that must be overcome through the act of having it overexposed to obstreperous reality. Of course, with an audience originating from that same obstreperousness – and therefore conditioned by those same processes – the desert's silence becomes as uncomfortable for the viewer as it does for Guy, with that aura of silence raised to the level of the threateningly inauspicious. What is the exact experience of

the *too quiet*, anyway? At its core, this scene breeds an atmosphere thick with mystery, coupled with the expectation that this silence will soon be punctured by some fast-paced event, an inevitable burst of sound and motion to fill the screen-hole that delivers spectators from that momentary silence. This is cinematic silence as opposed to that other thing once thought sacred. The silence here is not some sacred, meditative stillness, but a cinematic tool – a dramatic pause that heightens anticipation. It is the kind of silence that is burnt away by the overwhelming demands of reality, reduced to a means of facilitating the excitement.

"Will you relax?" Tommy asks in a close up that encompasses both his expression and Taggart's act of reconnaissance, his looking out at the landscape through binoculars. Taggart's vision lands on the intended target. The beryllium sphere in the distance. Soon enough, the crew approach, the scene transitioning to show something of the facility up-close, decay realised through the *mise en scène* of a construction yard without its labourers, of ladders ascending to nowhere, and equipment left out in the sun. There is an unnerving quality to all of this, of an absence which can reveal something of the world's absurdity in isolation, as if a location that once held a productive

purpose suddenly lost everything in the process of having been emptied out of its workforce. A similar absurdity can be found in the 'dead mall', an environment that has lost both its foot traffic and its semiotic confidence, a world replaced by a world collapsing, of ceiling tiles abandoned to rain and storefronts leading to nowhere. How easy it is for rain to liberate the world of its purpose. Yet there's something profoundly unsettling about a fading world poised to return in astrality, as if taking incremental steps from the real is to pull reality in the right direction. What's intriguing is how the crew's mission has led them to this desert – that their reality required an injection of the real to preserve itself as something they could continue living within. Of course, the desert remains to be cemented over, existing only to remind us of that other world without air conditioning. If it wasn't for this simple function, one could imagine the desert as a thing to be repurposed. Perhaps it is for this reason alone that the desert was left to those peoples whose imaginary could still put it to good use, and it is through this mythological relationship with the desert that may have saved them from that other mythology we call America.

As the crew continues their journey, moving through the shadows cast by the facility, the frame reveals a small, silvery

figure emerging from the aperture of a dismantled flue section. Gwen gasps as it moves from the darkness, its movements reminding her of a small creature cautiously leaving its den in search of food. A second body follows, more tentative than the first, as the crew quickly retreats behind a column of desert rock. Gwen watches, mesmerised, as more of these child-like beings gather in the distance, their numbers growing rapidly since the first one appeared from its cavernous hideaway.

In their covert observation, the crew unknowingly projects their own child-like wonder onto these unfamiliar creatures, interpreting them based solely on their appearance. In the world of images and appearances, assumptions are made without question, just as the alien beings' innocent, almost adorable exterior misleads the crew, who project meaning onto them as if they hold significance in relation to what is familiar and safe. These beings, charming and seemingly innocent – 'like little children,' as Gwen describes them – come to aid a weak (possibly wounded) member of their species to a watering hole.

"I don't like this," Guy whispers from behind Gwen. "I don't like this at all."

"They are so cute," Gwen adds, before Guy counters her observation with his own, the growing tension felt towards

this alien ‘Other’ rendered as a typical science fiction trope, heightened by satirical techniques: the slow movement of the frame into Guy’s expression, the non-diegetic insert, the interspersed images of the aliens moving as desert-dwelling piranhas. As Gwen spots the injured alien, she instinctively moves to approach, only for Guy to grab her by the shoulders and pull her back. The perspective shifts to reveal the wounded alien collecting a handful of water as the other grey bipeds whisper amongst themselves, demonstrating a communicative intelligence – only for their expressions to shift, their skin pulling back to reveal rows of incisors, teeth made for slicing through sinew and flesh. The moment of wonder is swiftly consumed by horror as the crew watches these creatures devour their own wounded.

“Let’s get out of here before one of those things kills Guy,” Gwen orders, rushing from the scene.

The gag here is once again the protracted witticism of seeing the cast subsumed into a narrative they now experience as hyperstitional reality. *Galaxy Quest* was once a television show – a fiction – that has now manifested as a world to be lived. Its mythological structures – its ‘historical documents’ – are no longer confined to fiction but have long since become, in the words of the

CCRU, a ‘fiction that cannot be judged true or false because it makes itself real.’

The power of hyperstition here is not so much in the disintegration of truth itself, but in the erosion of its prioritisation in the world at large. The idea that truth has ever been prioritised in human history may be the final illusion left to us, and that illusion persists behind another manufactured crisis: the highly politicised and mediated spectacle of truth’s supposed disappearance. The post-truth world, then, is less a reality in which truth has vanished than one in which its disappearance must be continually staged in order to justify the systems that claim to preserve it. We must pretend to grieve its loss in order to sustain the structures built upon its existence.

In this way, reality – calcified, embalmed – persists through the suspension of the hyperreal, in that other world we call post-truth. No wonder, then, that virtual reality resembles an interment, a form of taphonomy in reverse, transitioning from the lithosphere to the biosphere to a fossilisation in digital utopia. What is astrality but the allure of this virtual space, refracted through a (hyper)eschatological lens? The thing that pulls us under, the thing that makes us *go there*.

Similarly, it is the astral quality of the graveyard that compels us to pause, to

read names and dates, to pity the smallest graves, to enjoy the wincing of the gate as we come and go. It is in this ambient pull that we might even convince ourselves of a space beyond the present, just as we do when we reach for the tactile surface of a screen, drawn into the ritual of touch, searching for an existential intimacy with astral images that, in the words of Emil Cioran, 'do not have substance but which simulate an illusion of life.'

"We're not going anywhere without a Beryllium Sphere." Nesmith orders, understanding the futility of retreat in the face of those piranha-like aliens on the desert planet's surface. As Nesmith begins to delegate tasks to the crew before him, Gwen appears suspicious, asking the others why this all feels so *familiar*. There is a deep contradiction in Gwen's countenance with an initial awe felt towards Nesmith's sudden control over the situation levelled only by this gradual suspicion, the eyes that dart across her face.

"Assault on Voltrex III, Episode Eighty-One." Tommy recalls from memory, nodding towards Gwen. Guy begins to panic, his voice trembling, the relevance of that particular episode lost on those around him. Both hands raised, he pleads with the commander for a straight answer. He cries out to the desert winds, revealing to the others that it was — in fact —

Episode Eighty-One in which his character dies.

It is not long before Fred corrects Tommy's earlier suggestion, putting Guy's anxiety at rest. Alexander soon intervenes however, gesturing towards Nesmith, asking why they are listening to a man 'wearing a costume, not a uniform.' Once again, the irony of Alexander's confrontational attitude lies precisely in its alignment with his character, Doctor Lazarus, who perceives the commander as an inferior tactician. Reflecting the Žižekian observation that ideology often manifests as its own opposition, Alexander's belief that he has transcended the fiction only serves to entrench him further within it. This irony is only emphasised by his gradual inclusion into the cinematic frame from which he was earlier excluded, with his character now distanced from a pairing with Gwen, whose initial question — 'Why does this sound so familiar?' — once reflected a shared awareness of the situation. Whilst Gwen maintains a subtle familiarity with the source material — a self-awareness towards the events of the fiction — Alexander appears almost amnesic to the irony of his own actions. His attempts to distance himself only pull him deeper in, his confrontation with Nesmith not an act of rejection, but a perfect reenactment of the very fiction he seeks to deny. In other words,

while calling out Nesmith for his superficiality – ‘He’s wearing a costume, not a uniform’ – Alexander unwittingly fulfils Doctor Lazarus’ function within the narrative.

That being said, the narrative of *Galaxy Quest* is not necessarily concerned with the simple ‘becoming’ of characters, but with the amalgamation of real entities and fictional ones, the blurring and disintegration that occurs in hyperreality to create a world produced in the interstitial. Astrality, it could be said, is the friction between the real and the fictional – the haemorrhagic space where collisions reveal the dichotomy for what it is: not an opposition, but a necessary confluence. Both auratic and ambiguous, the astral becomes forever surreptitious: not quite fiction, but never quite real enough. In many ways, astrality is the threshold through which hyperstition once passed, a processional space barely noticeable.

Gwen signals to the others, noting the disappearance of the cannibalistic aliens that had once been visible in the distance but are no longer present. Guy appears behind her to look for himself, followed by the rest of the group. As Tommy debates what kind of signal to perform in case the aliens return, the camera remains focused on Gwen and Guy’s brief moment of significance. It is within this moment that the soundtrack

swells with a jaunty inflection, underscoring the subtle yet provocative glance Guy shoots toward Gwen’s cleavage, her zipper lowered by the desert heat. Noticing this, Gwen looks down at herself, as if to feel the added heat of his gaze. The desert wind isolates her hypersexualized appearance, the off-screen wind turbine blowing her hair in a way that accentuates the cinematic clichés of sexual objectification – all of which feed into the hyperfamiliarity of a sexual gaze. What’s striking here is that, while this moment could be read as a feminist critique of objectification, it is simultaneously reconstituted within the narrative as a continuation of the patriarchal crime. Perhaps this is the ultimate irony: the critique, like the gaze itself, is subsumed into the film’s logic. Alternatively, by outsourcing the perspective to Guy’s character, the film allows the audience to be absolved of complicity in the objectification – we are distanced from the salaciousness. As with all popcorn cinema, we are tasked only with enjoying the moment for what it is; its images are not meant to be parsed or analysed, but simply consumed. It is a space where the very act of enjoyment becomes an exercise in passivity. It is perhaps this disavowal of critical distance that makes popcorn cinema such a telling mirror of our cultural moment.

The specifics of how the crew obtains

the beryllium sphere are scarcely worth mentioning; what matters is the drama of the mild peril that ensues. The real focus here is how each crisis is swiftly overcome, propelling the viewer from one predicament to the next. As the crew rolls the beryllium sphere from its location in the mining facility toward their landing craft, the piranha-like aliens begin to multiply, emerging from every hidden fissure and crevice. By the time Gwen turns to observe the aliens in pursuit, there are perhaps hundreds of them, kicking up dust with their speed as they move between the desert formations.

With the landing vessel in sight, Tommy is the first to board, initiating the power and preparing for a rapid departure. The others follow, manoeuvring the beryllium sphere into the back of the craft. Nesmith and Alexander are caught between the threshold of the ship's entrance, and, in the midst of the tussle, Nesmith falls from the craft. Gwen pleads with Tommy to stop the ship, but the pilot turns to her, announcing that the ship is — in fact — on autopilot. The frame then transitions to show the aliens in the desert below, holding the commander hostage and parading him through the air. As they hold him captive, the aliens comment on Nesmith's odd appearance before striking him over the head with a rock. The frame blacks out, mimicking

the commander's loss of consciousness.

This is not the first time the audience has shared in Nesmith's loss of consciousness, but this time, the perspective aligns with the character's, drawing the viewer closer to him. The action offers an immersive perspective, heightening the tension of what is to come. As a representation of Nesmith's loss of consciousness, the audience is plunged into total darkness — a blackout that invites momentary speculation. By presenting the event in this way, the audience is prompted to ask, 'What will happen to Jason Nesmith?' — but also, 'What will happen to me?'

From Alexander's onboard protest — his looking down at Nesmith's in the desert — it cannot be discerned whether or not he desires this empathetic pairing between protagonist and spectator. Perhaps Alexander actually desires the superficiality that Nesmith's role as protagonist affords him, this desire manifesting through his barely concealed resentment. The appeal of being the main character of the universe lies not in the responsibilities it entails, but in the protagonist's journey being the most transparent. It seems another Reversal has taken place in which the transparency of the hero's journey has produced something in narrative theory that today considers this journey as the most superficial, the most banal. Why else did

contemporary narrative so quickly enter the realm of the antihero, of passing the leading role over to villainy? It is perhaps the case that such techniques in narrative reversibility — of having sympathy for the devil — intended to simulate an alterity in a world without it. Yet these superficialities remain transparent, beyond even the ambiguity and complexity which they only *play at*. What's important to understand about superficiality is how it renders reality so easy to understand — and it is for this reason *the mood* of superficiality remains everywhere in the culture today.

It could be argued that artificial intelligence is merely intelligence made superficial — a reduction of complexity akin to those technologists who pursue a meta-reality in order to negate the complexities of the apparent one. *Artificial* intelligence, *virtual* reality, still unable to locate the referential position of either, a culture with neither intelligence nor reality remains endlessly fascinated with their codification, projecting them into some hyper-dimensional elsewhere. In the formulations produced by these pursuits, simulated doubles (re)create a reality rendered transparent to the instrumental reason of Silicon Valley. (Reading the history of Silicon Valley, one might wonder whether the place itself was manufactured as a form of counter-espionage — a covert means of shaping

hostile entities with technologies always intended to be stolen.)

I am not asking for an end to anything here — not even to scientism or that instrumental reason, which, over a few hundred years, has become amnesic to its own fragility. *Just watch*. The fragility of science is destined to return, if it has not already. In replaying the same events of history, we will rediscover how fragility — vulnerability — has always been a benefit to knowledge. But this fragility does not resolve the deeper question of hyperreality. So much of this simulation obsesses over what is being communicated, yet never asks why. Hyperreality, yes — *but why?* To understand why the code was written in the first place is perhaps to wake from the dream, and yet when we wake, we emerge as Nesmith wakes from his unconsciousness to find himself upon *the desert of the real itself*.

'In this postmodern world,' writes Douglas Kellner in his piece *Jean Baudrillard*, taken from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'individuals flee from the 'desert of the real' for the ecstasies of hyperreality and the new realm of computer, media, and technological experience.' It makes sense, then, that Nesmith, upon waking from unconsciousness, begins that very act of fleeing the desert — but not before he is exposed to its terrors. The monster that licks his face

in this awakening scene becomes another harbinger of the real, its grotesque intimacy demanding confrontation. This 'new realm' finds expression in the 'technological experience' of the Thermian world, represented by the *Protector* orbiting the desert planet. Of course, the narrative hinges on the commander's return to this hyperreal order but how much of this desert is purely simulated — a construct to make us believe the rest is real?

While acknowledging the technological experience and its power to create imitation, it becomes impossible to really distinguish between the Thermian world and the desert beneath. One might even imagine the Thermian intelligence generating everything presented before us — an entire planet — designed to sustain the continuation of a narrative to live by. To what lengths would anyone go to facilitate a meaningful existence? And to what extremes — especially in terms of what it is willing to sacrifice — would an entire culture go to sustain a sense of its own realism? What do we have to show for sacrificing the rainforests or the planet's natural biodiversity? At the very least, the Aztecs believed they were upholding cosmic balance — offering human lives to ensure the sun's rise. Similar to today's ecological destruction, their sacrifices were rooted in a sacred economy, one in which human life was exchanged

for divine sustenance. Through rituals, offerings, and sacrifices, the sacred was a means of reaching beyond oneself, to partake in a greater reality that governed the universe. Certainly, capitalism, in its hyperreal form, doesn't merely represent something that *pretends* to transcend — it actively constructs a form of transcendence within the system itself. This 'beyond' that capitalism points to isn't some external, higher reality but a space it has created — one that's contained within the parameters of its own logic.

So, we might say that capitalism, unable to deliver true transcendence or an authentic escape from its structures, instead manufactures its own version of transcendence. This is where hyperreality functions: the simulated transcendence that is entirely internal to the system, like virtual worlds, digital 'metaverses,' and augmented realities, which, in a way, represent a *beyond* — but one that has been constructed from within capitalism itself. It's a simulated ideal, not a real transcendence, but it's presented in a way that feels as though it could offer release, progress, or fulfillment.

What is particularly interesting, then, is that this space is not only a simulation; it is a *synthetic* transcendence. A transcendence that is designed to keep us within the system, forever cycling through aspirations, desires, and consumption.

Unlike religious or spiritual transcendence that promises liberation beyond the system, this simulated transcendence never lets us truly escape because it only points us toward more of the same. We're always promised access to the next, better 'reality' — whether it's a virtual world, a digital experience, or a new form of escapism — but it's still tethered to the original system.

To put it simply, capitalism creates its own sacred system where transcendence becomes not something that elevates us beyond the system but something the system can continuously offer. The sacred economy of capitalism, therefore, becomes a self-perpetuating loop where simulated transcendence takes the place of real escape.

No wonder then that Nesmith's transmutation, his movement from the desert to the astral plane above, requires an unshakable belief — a faith — not just in the technological capabilities of this world, but in his own digital solubility. This faith is less about technology *per se* and more about Nesmith's confidence in his integration with the simulated reality around him. The emphasis here shifts from survival in the desert (as one might expect from a modernist narrative) to submergence into a technological reality beyond it — a distinctly postmodern gesture. The fast-paced, action-oriented

scene underscores this transition, showcasing Nesmith's journey not as a triumph over nature but as an immersion into the hyperreal.

As the camera oscillates between the arid expanse of the desert and the sterile, artificial glow of the Thermian vessel, a striking visual contrast emerges. The ship's interior is saturated with the synthetic hues emblematic of science fiction, while the desert appears both hypernatural and hyperfamiliar — the desert exactly as we would expect it to be. Yet, as with much of the realism we inhabit, this contrast is merely aesthetic — a distinction produced through the visual motifs rather than any fundamental difference in substance. More crucial than this superficial duality is the shared intensity that binds both spaces. Despite their apparent opposition, both settings pulse with the same manic energy, their realities collapsing into a single, ecstatic moment mediated through technology. To say, the intensity of the situation becomes as a unified ecstasy shared between these two parties via the technological devices they use to communicate. It is simply the case that communicative technologies have brought about a reality in which the ecstasy they generate can eclipse almost any event.

Gwen, now aboard the *Protector*, clutches the communicator as if trying

to prevent Nesmith's voice from slipping through her fingers, sighing with that deep sense of consolation that only technology can bring. Around her, the crew stands in collective relief at the sound of the commander's voice returned to them. The Thermian — known as Teb — uses a terminal interface to display Nesmith's current location on the desert's surface. The crew watch as the commander fights off a grotesque, pig-like creature on the terminal screen before them.

"Jason — we're going to use the digital conveyer to get you out of there."

"The digital conveyer?" Nesmith asks Gwen in reply, keeping the beast at bay. Teb reveals that whilst the digital conveyer has never been 'successfully tested', there is renewed hope in Tech Sergeant Chen's hands being at the controls this time around. Teb motions towards Fred, a smile emerging from the Thermian's expression. It is in this moment where the camera performs a circular movement to position Fred at the centre of the frame, the onus placed upon him. The most revealing cinematography of our age can be seen in these moments of quiet sardonicism, those moments when the camera's perspective is quietly aware of every ounce of action left to come. What to look for in any aesthetic is what's captured as an essence inherent to reality. It is perhaps

our realism that gives off a sardonic grin tending towards the surreptitious, and it is perhaps this Homeric sardonicism which is best reflected in a cinematography whose surreptitiousness is also transparent. Yet at the bottom of the sardonic well in aesthetics there is perhaps an interwoven hope, and it is this demonstrable sardonicism transparent to hyperreality that comes as perhaps the best evidence for a world beyond it, just as the idea of another world being possible begins in understanding how a realism is generated not through what it produces, but through what it disappears.

The Tech Sergeant hesitates — stuttering — motioning towards the door behind him, attempting to leave the room. The others gather around him, preventing his escape. Alexander rolls his eyes in response to Fred's apprehension, informing Nesmith that they are, indeed, going to test the digital conveyer.

"On what?" Nesmith asks — fighting off the pig lizard.

"How about that pig lizard?" Tommy replies, forcing Fred to the control terminal. At some point in the scene, Fred leans into the device, manipulating the metallic prongs before him. A pained concentration runs through his expression. The tension is emphasised by the orchestral crescendo and those scenes of Nesmith in the desert, plummeting over the pig

lizard, avoiding its clumsy attacks. Fred soon aims the device at the intended target. Before the pig lizard can lunge a second time, the beast is teleported from the desert surface, its anatomy disintegrated by the digital conveyer in a glow of lightening-blue radiance. The pig lizard materialises in the control room aboard the *Protector*. *Clearly* – the creature has not survived the teleportation process. In fact, the sudden act of teleportation has reproduced a creature with a twisted and discombobulated anatomy. What's left of the pig lizard, following its digital ascension, is the slimy puppetry of something resembling the dog kennel scene from John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982). It appears as if a darker, far more cynical form of science fiction haunts this *Galaxy Quest* scene.

The pig lizard's grotesque re-materialization aboard the *Protector* elicits a shared disgust – one tinged with a kernel of dark comedy. The failed reconstitution of the pig lizard – a brief eruption of grotesque horror – acts as a rupture in the otherwise sanitised, family-friendly simulation, revealing the cost of suppressing the real beneath layers of aesthetic smoothing. Its monstrous failure exposes the limits of techno-capitalist miscibility and subsequently the moment feels strange, almost misplaced, as if it belongs to a different

version of the film. It lingers like the trace of a narrative before its sanitisation, a story reshaped to meet the consumer demands of popular cinema. In scrubbing one narrative of its darkness, another emerges – one suspended between sanitation and transgression, where the director's initial vision bleeds through as something spectral. It's said that Dean Parisot originally intended a darker film than the family-friendly version ultimately released. Likewise, if the world is shaped by aestheticized narratives, what can be said of the shadows that bleed through our hyperreality today?

Another reality haunts our presentation of images – a presentation drained of its substance, nuance, complexity and even grotesqueness. It was perhaps Georges Bataille who attempted to *return* something lost to our reality through an exploration of the grotesque. After all, it is the grotesqueness of the real that is disappeared in aestheticization today, disappeared in the '*onibanalité*', to borrow a term from Nick Land, whose teleology is seldom read in the context of its Bataillean foundationalism. It could be argued – as I claim so here – that the neo-reactionary strain of Landian thought can be read through a section taken from his *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (page.77–78), where Land once wrote: 'I imagine

myself old, still alive, somewhat fatter, and a Christian. Sickened, I push on. I see myself kneeling, drooling pieties... longing to be saved. What could more thoroughly demonstrate my unbelief than entertaining such obscenities...?' This confession of unbelief is mirrored in the pieties Land now exhibits toward techno-fascism. In the same text, he notes, 'Fascism is not so much a symptom of political desperation, as of libidino-religious numbness.'

Land's numbness does not negate the validity of many of his insights into capitalism. In *A Quick and Dirty Introduction to Accelerationism*, he describes capitalism as an 'actually installed [...] positive feedback circuit' which 'appeals to nothing beyond itself,' and 'is inherently nihilistic.' For Land, Capitalism = Nihilism. This equation underpins the sociopolitical hijacking of an outer-right political logic that defines his accelerationist project for those willing to see it. This hijacking is mirrored in the trajectory of deep ecologist John Zerzan, who transitioned from ultra-leftism to an outer-right contingency in his embrace of Future Primitivism. While Zerzan's Primitivism lies in opposition to Land's Futurism, the two share a structural similarity. Both projects represent radical responses to the delirium of techno-capital: one seeking liberation through total immersion in its logic, the other through its wholesale rejection.

In this sense, they are two sides of the same coin, each attempting to confront the nihilism at the heart of modernity from opposing extremes. Recognising the oppositional symmetry between Land's Futurism and Zerzan's Primitivism, I once asked Zerzan for his thoughts on Land. His response was unequivocal: 'Land's transhumanism disgusts me. Super unhealthy fantasies that support the worst of where the Machine is taking us and life on this planet. Techno-fascist nonsense.' Nevertheless, theoretical elements of Land's critique of techno-capitalism still resonate. His insights into the delirious logic of capital, forever seeking to escape terrestrial boundaries, remain salient. This ontological event horizon of capital – capital's drive to transcend physical limitations – is perhaps best encapsulated in his essay *Machinic Desire*, where Land writes:

'Capitalism is not a totalizable system defined by the commodity form as a specifiable mode of production, determinately negated by proletarian class-consciousness. It is a convergent unrealizable assault upon the social macropod, whose symptom is the collapse of productive mode or form in the direction of ever more incomprehensible experiments in commodification, enveloping, dismantling, and circu-

lating every subjective space. *It is always on the move towards a terminal nonspace*, melting the earth onto the body without organs...' (Emphasis added)

Capitalism's drive towards this 'terminal nonspace' echoes both Mark Fisher's reading of Baudrillard's 'terminal melancholy' (*Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction*) and Marc Augé's reading of 'the space of supermodernity' with all 'its power of attraction...' (*Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*). Whilst Fisher was correct in his assessment of Land's 'pulsional nihilism' in his essay *Terminator vs. Avatar*, a problem lies in the demonstrable reality that whilst 'Capitalism has abandoned the future because it can't deliver it' (Fisher, 2010) there remains the 'actually installed [...] positive feedback circuit' (Land, 2017) now designed to hold humanity in the non-placed seduction of an *astral ambedo* – a trance-like absorption in sensory detail, a kind of affective stasis generated by immersive media that simulates transcendence while immobilising action.

Conceptually speaking, accelerationism was already in the water as early as 1990 when, in the very first chapter of *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard consid-

ered '...an internal metastasis or fevered endogenic virulence,' – *sounding familiar yet?* – 'which creates a tendency for systems to explode beyond their own limits, to override their own logic – not in the sense of creating sheer redundancy, but in the sense of an increase in power, a fantastic potentialization whereby their own very existence is put at risk.' Here, Baudrillard anticipates the very paradoxes that would define accelerationist thought. And yet there was always in Baudrillard an established metaphysics that posited an ontological 'state of simulation', implicating potentialization with that nonspace in which 'We may pretend to carry on in the direction, accelerating, but in reality we are accelerating in a void...' (Baudrillard, 1990, page.3–4)

Pushing on further still and we see how the pig lizard's terrestrial grotesqueness could not be successfully melted into the aesthetic miscibility of the orbital *non-space*. The pig lizard is ultimately taken from its natural habitat within *the desert* and teleported *elsewhere*, its anatomy inverted beyond recognition, imploding under the weight of its incompatibility – the *experiment* of its reterritorialization in the hyperspace having proved fatal. In the event of the pig lizard's implosion then, Gwen assures Nesmith that everything is fine whilst Teb reveals that it is – in fact – quite the

opposite.

What's left of the pig lizard then erupts, its gooey entrails unfurling across the control room. Nesmith nurses his head in frustration as Gwen appears from behind the safety of the control terminal, throwing blonde hair from her face.

Moments later, as Nesmith replies into his device, a stone monster materialises from the desert wall behind him. The aliens, noticing this, quickly scatter. Nesmith turns to face the threat, looking up at the monster's tremendous height before fleeing at speed – running as debris scatters from his shoulders.

The general appearance of the monster, named 'Gorignak' by the aliens, clearly evokes the golem – a figure rooted in Jewish folklore. This appropriated golem, animated from desert rocks, has become a subtle yet well-established science fiction trope. As the golem is copied from one culture to another, from one narrative to another, its original cultural referent becomes obscured, absorbed into a hyperculture of relativity. This narrative flexibility aligns with Marilyn Cooper's analysis in *Moment*, a magazine focusing on American Jewish life. In her article *Jewish Word, Golem: A Mutable Monster*, Cooper explains: '...a golem [in Jewish folklore] is a powerful but erratic humanoid formed from earth and brought to life through Kabbalistic

magic; while the golem is often created with good intentions, or even to save the Jews, ultimately it runs amok and must be destroyed.' She describes the golem as a 'highly mutable metaphor with seemingly limitless symbolism,' adding: 'For Jews and non-Jews, the golem serves as a concept uniquely suited to expressing the fears and insecurities of the modern era. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote in 1984, 'The golem story appears less obsolete today than it seemed one hundred years ago. After all, what are the computers and robots of our times if not golems?''

This 'limitless symbolism' may seem to offer no fixed meaning, yet it is precisely this absence that makes the golem so adaptable. Its malleability facilitates a process of projection, allowing it to embody the fears, insecurities, or desires of the culture or narrative in which it is placed.

In *Galaxy Quest*, the desert represents a landscape of narrative dilemmas, where the golem materialises as the physical embodiment of a crisis the protagonist must overcome. Similarly, the nihilism transparent in today's realism manifests through its monsters and demons – fictional entities that embody crises we must confront. This universal function of monsters is especially evident in cultural adaptations. A Western adaptation of an

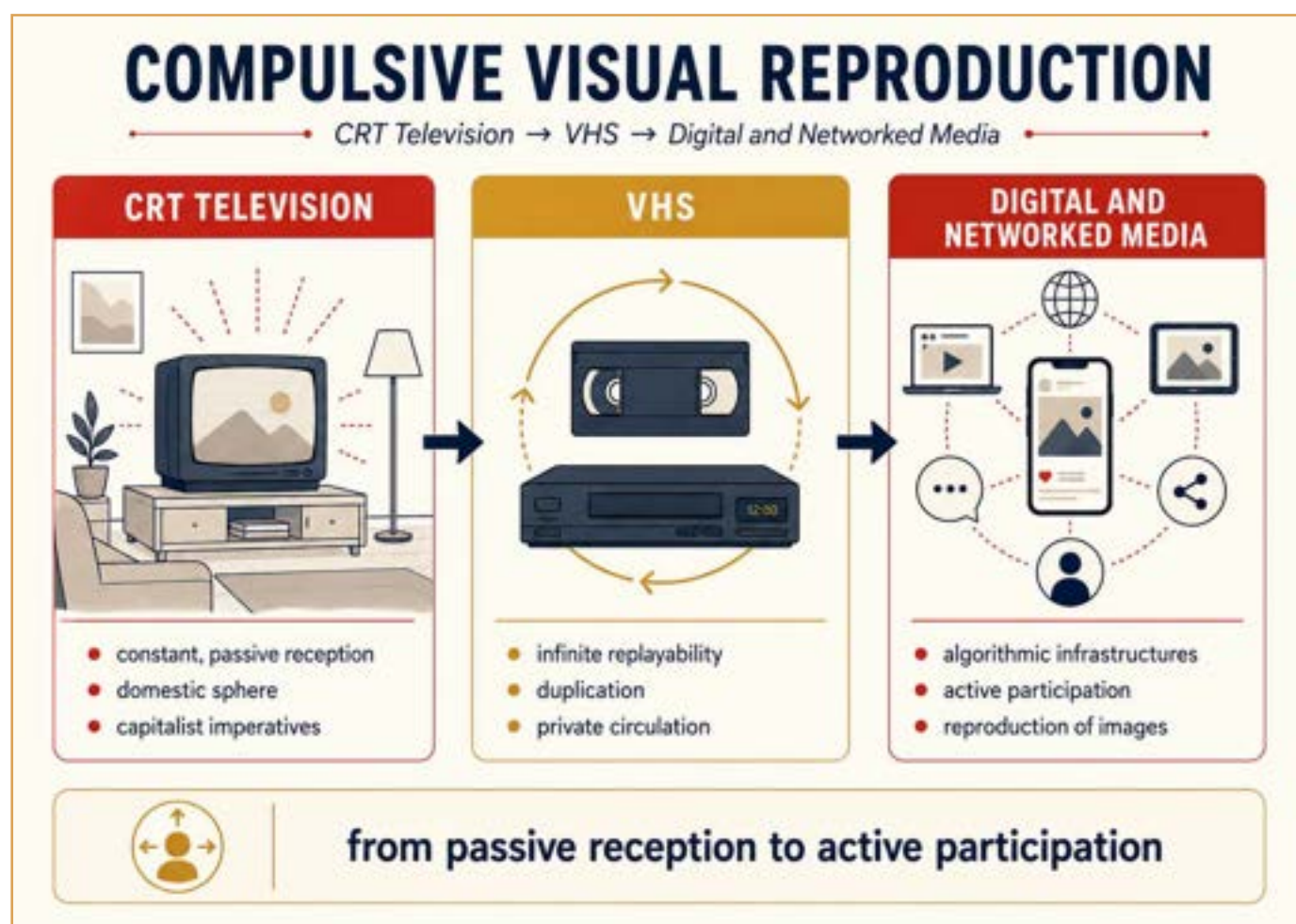
Eastern film — or vice versa — becomes dialectically revealing, forcing culturally specific anxieties to be reinterpreted as universally experienced. The monster, in such cases, transcends geographical and cultural barriers, becoming an emblem of shared fears. Byung-Chul Han explores this process in *Hyperculture*, particularly in his chapter on *Appropriation*, where he writes:

‘Appropriation is not per se violent. Colonial exploitation, which destroys the Other in favour of itself and of the Same, must be strictly distinguished from appropriation. Appropriation is an essential part of education and identity. Only an idiot or a god could live without appropriation. [...] Hyperculture desires such appropriation; it enjoys the novel. It is a culture of intense appropriation. The one who appropriates the Other does not remain the same. Appropriation leads to a transformation of one’s own. Therein consists the dialectic of appropriation.’

Appropriation in this sense transforms the adapted work, creating what might be called a hypercultural monster. Take, for instance, Gore Verbinski’s *The Ring* (2002), an adaptation of Hideo Nakata’s *Ringu* (1998). The resulting monster

emerges from a synthesis of Western and Eastern storytelling, producing something novel: a manifestation of globally pervasive techno-nihilism. This creeping fear, tied to technological alienation and existential dread, transcends cultural boundaries, making the hypercultural monster a potent emblem of our interconnected world.

Like Nakata’s original, the authentically haunting experience of Verbinski’s *The Ring* lies not in overcoming Samara’s curse (itself an act of retribution) but in the cursed individual’s process of proliferating the curse by copying the videotape within seven days. In both films, the monster — Samara’s Ghost — functions as a techno-nihilistic manifestation, where the only way to escape death is through subsumption into the curse itself. To survive, the cursed must ensure the curse’s survival, becoming agents of its proliferation. Likewise, capitalism does not simply produce commodities; it exudes an onto-electromagnetic logic that precedes and exceeds conscious deliberation, embedding itself within the hyperreal circuits of its own mediation. No longer merely an economic system, capitalism is a viral intelligence, a machinic unconscious that proliferates through the very infrastructures it appears to merely inhabit. It does not represent but operationalises, not mediates but



inscribes. If Land's accelerationist framework diagnoses capitalism as an autonomous cybernetic intelligence, and Anna Greenspan's electromagnetic, 'wireless' capitalism (*China and the Wireless Undertow: Media as Wave Philosophy*) insists upon its diffusion through imperceptible wavelengths, then I posit a theoretical extension where capitalism, in its hypertrophic digital phase, is an apparatus of thoughtographic projection, a spectral economy of images whose mode of existence is inseparable from its

compulsive self-propagation.

Here, the image does not illustrate — it haunts. Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum articulates the fundamental irreality of contemporary capitalist mediation, wherein signs refer only to other signs in an infinite, self-perpetuating loop. Yet within this closed system, images still act, still compel. They do not simply circulate but coerce circulation; they do not merely appear but demand engagement, enlisting spectators as unwitting vectors in their transmission. As

with the cursed media of *The Ring*, where thought is externalised as a viral-image-event requiring continued reproduction for its very survival, hypercultural media operates through a compulsion toward dissemination. The subject is not merely exposed to this regime of thoughtographic capitalism but becomes its infrastructural necessity, a conduit for its continued metastasis.

This logic of compulsive visual reproduction did not emerge fully formed in the digital age but finds its historical precursor in the **cathode-ray tube** (CRT) television, which inaugurated a fundamental shift in capitalism's image-economy. The CRT television transformed media into a continuous, ambient presence, no longer confined to discrete acts of spectatorship but instead an omnipresent stream of transmission. Unlike cinema, which necessitated an event-based engagement, television instilled a regime of constant, passive reception, embedding capitalist imperatives directly into the domestic sphere. This was not simply an evolution of media but an ontological shift in capitalism's mode of inscription — no longer reliant on human perception alone but instead operating through an electromagnetic infrastructure of broadcast ubiquity.

Greenspan's theorisation of the wirelessness inherent to capitalism

provides a crucial historical foundation for this shift. The CRT television functioned as an early node in capitalism's transition from material production to electronic transmission, where economic power resided not just in commodities but in the control of frequencies, signals, and perceptual fields. As a broadcast apparatus, television synchronised entire populations to a unified visual temporality, effectively engineering attention economies long before the algorithmic feedback loops of digital media. More than a device, it was a spectral portal through which capitalism extended itself into lived space, embedding its visual language at the level of infrastructure.

This historical development also marks the moment when thoughtographic capitalism first takes hold. Television images did not merely inform; they functioned as visual contagions, demanding replication not just through direct transmission but through their incorporation into social behaviour, consumer desire, and ideological reproduction. Like thoughtography — where psychic energy inscribes itself onto photographic film — capitalist media imprints itself onto the subject through repetitive exposure, transforming human cognition into an extension of its circulatory logic.

The VHS added a crucial dimension to this process because it extended

the continuous, ambient presence of broadcast television into a temporalized, user-controlled archive of spectral transmission. Unlike the CRT television, which dictated visual consumption through real-time programming, the VHS unlocked the potential for infinite replayability, duplication, and private circulation, deepening capitalism's hauntological command over image reproduction. The VHS system marked a shift from passive reception (live TV) to active re-engagement, allowing consumers to replay, pause, and rewind images in the looping temporality that remains the basic design of algorithmic-intense, social media platforms today. The ability to record and copy tapes introduced a new phase in capitalism's spectral economy. This hauntological infrastructure, made material in the VHS cassette, finds its most visceral expression in Gore Verbinski's *The Ring*, where the spectral logic of reproduction becomes narrativised as horror. Just as *The Ring*'s cursed videotape requires duplication to perpetuate itself, capitalism's thoughtographic imperatives found a material form in the VHS cassette – a physical medium for the viral expansion of media content beyond corporate-controlled distribution channels. While CRT television was a public-facing, domestic centrepiece, VHS brought capitalist media deeper

into the individual psyche. It allowed for asynchronous consumption, meaning that images could haunt subjects at their own pace, embedding themselves more intimately into personal consciousness. Unlike broadcast television, which dictated a collective, synchronised temporality, VHS created a privatised spectral loop, where the same images could be replayed endlessly within isolated subjectivities, further integrating capitalist media into the viewer's unconscious.

While the CRT television initiated the mass synchronisation of image-consumption, the advent of digital and networked media has exponentially intensified this dynamic. If television required a centralised broadcast model, contemporary digital capitalism disperses this power across those algorithmic infrastructures that no longer rely on passive reception but instead demand active participation in the reproduction of images. Social media, streaming platforms, and algorithmic feeds do not simply transmit capitalist imperatives – they optimise their reproduction, ensuring that the most memetically potent visual forms achieve the highest levels of circulation. In this transition, capitalism has moved beyond mere ideological interpellation to a fully automated process of self-replicating thoughtographic inscription.

If Baudrillard theorised the precession of simulacra as the death of the real, then thoughtographic capitalism radicalises this disappearance into a spectral materialism: a hyperstitional feedback loop where images do not simply replace reality but become its operational substrate.

Samara's Ghost, emerging from the CRT TV as she does then, epitomises a techno-capital globalisation par excellence, where survival necessitates aligning with the ghost's desire: to proliferate beyond terrestrial boundaries whereby the curse spreads not through physical destruction but through its images, creating a monstrous feedback loop of reproduction.

Following a tradition of Japanese monsters, Samara is said to be the human incarnation of a sea demon. However, in both *The Ring* and *Ringu*, the oceanic origins of the demon are displaced to the narrative periphery, if not lost entirely. The monster no longer represents a vengeful Gaia rising from the ocean depths to wreak havoc on land; instead, it becomes a psychologically damaging entity emerging from the interiority of a television screen, taking the form of a neglected and traumatised child.

Emblematic of its age, the monster reflects a profoundly nihilistic form of overcoming, where each viewer of the cursed videotape is forced into complicity

with the curse, ensuring its endless proliferation. This shift from physical to psychological terror, from ocean to tele-screen, captures the anxieties of a world increasingly defined by media and its inescapable, self-perpetuating logic. In this way, *The Ring* allegorises a culture in which the image is not just a vehicle of fear but the very condition of existence. To resist the image is to die; to reproduce it is to live on — though in a spectral, mediated form. *Galaxy Quest*, though formally comedic, deepens this same anxiety: that reality itself has been displaced by a media ontology where the only escape from the real is to become an image oneself.

It is especially noteworthy that this particular golem — *Gorignak* — representing the desert of the real, cannot be destroyed either. The desert itself becomes a physical entity that Nesmith must escape. This again recalls Kellner's definition of a Baudrillardian real, where individuals cannot escape — they can only flee. The space Nesmith seeks to escape is a hyperreal, *defined not only by technological experience but by the play of hypercultural identities* that Byung-Chul Han explores in *Hyperculture*.

"Digitize me!" Nesmith cries from the desert. "Come on, guys — digitize me!" What does it mean to digitise a person? Here, we see a cry to the astral world of

images: in his demand for the physical dismantling of his body and transformation into a digital form, Nesmith's desire to escape the desert of the real becomes inseparable from a deeper desire – the desire to escape death itself.

When we witness the trauma of death in life – be it through misadventure, suicide, the occasional murder of children by parents who didn't want them anymore – it becomes all too easy for God to live again. As Emil Cioran writes in *The New Gods*: 'A civilization is destroyed only when its gods are destroyed.' And so, our gods lie dormant on our tongues, ready to slip from our mouths at a moment's notice. In a culture that cannot quite move beyond sacrality and the dying Referentialism of gods it has rendered almost meaningless, everything is revealed. This is a culture that cannot let go of its gods, despite their absence, because the need to maintain their grasp remains. Likewise, everything is revealed in our attempts to negate death with platitudes: through memorial websites, endless efforts to digitise the dead, sending them beyond even the heaven they were once promised. Ours is a utopia whose ecstasy is so great it cannot let the dead rest in peace. It cannot bear the silence. Where the tomb once channeled the souls of the departed, the ritual of the grave now exists as a hyperspace, discon-

nected from any other purpose than the continuation of our sepulchral performances in life, a benefit for the still living.

At some point Gwen ushers the Tech Sergeant to the control terminal, urging him to digitise Nesmith from the desert floor. In this moment, Fred's struggle with his dual identity becomes evident. As he's subsumed into the narrative, Fred reveals his lack of faith in his existence – both as Tech Sergeant Chen and, perhaps more significantly, Fred Kwan. He hesitates, backing away from the terminal, visibly disoriented, resisting Gwen's persistence. While the crew bickers, Gorignak corners Nesmith, capturing him by the leg and dragging him across the desert.

The frame transitions once again to show those events taking place aboard the Protector. As the crew turn to acknowledge Fred, the camera follows in their perspective to emphasise a sense of Fred's sudden isolation from the group. Cowering in the corner of the room, Fred is experiencing a dissociation with his left hand shielding his face from the sudden responsibilities of an identity he now resists. Whereas Nesmith wishes to transcend the desert through this process of digitisation, through this *leap of faith*, Fred – on the other hand – already occupies that hyperspace as an anomaly of sorts. To say, the real digitisation that takes place within this scene then is the

digitisation of Fred Kwan towards his actualisation as Tech Sergeant Chen.

Fred's positioning within the frame is not insignificant either, with this character placed in the very corner of the room, with the ninety-degree angle of the corner acting as a divide between the visual emptiness on the wall to his right, (the metaphorical representation of Fred Kwan) and the terminal displays on the wall to his left, (the metaphorical representation of Tech Sergeant Chen). In short, this scene concerns Fred's fluctuation between these two identities, with the emptiness of the real held to his right, and the simulation offered by the hyperreal held to his left. Walking the line between the two, Fred appears increasingly apprehensive in response to Nesmith's growing expectation, with Fred's anxiety emphasised in his movement, the incremental steps he takes towards the visual emptiness to his right.

The commander is persistent nonetheless, with Fred taking a few steps towards his left – the hyperspace of screens and images. As Nesmith pleads for his life, Gorignak tosses him aside effortlessly, stripping Nesmith of his shirt. In this moment, Fred succumbs to a state of immiscibility, turning toward the visual emptiness and rejecting the hyperidentity. Shirtless in the desert, Nesmith

risks, his confidence swelling as the soundtrack crescendos.

The golem, now preparing to strike, looms over the commander as he stands, inspiring confidence in his crew aboard the Protector. Meanwhile, Fred considers Nesmith's unwavering faith in his ability to materialise as Tech Sergeant Chen. As Fred hesitates once more, the automatic doors of the control room open, revealing Chen's love interest, Laliari. Her smile, accompanied by a non-diegetic insert of angels' chorus, mirrors Fred's expression. Turning left, Fred finally steps forward to engage with the digital conveyor, his acceptance of the hyperreal now complete. Where Fred's transformation marks an acceptance of hyperreality as identity, Nesmith's resurrection reveals the ecstatic core of this condition: a utopia in which the digitised self, stripped of mortal dust, returns not as man but as image.

As Nesmith smiles, then grimaces, Gorignak collapses upon him. We are immediately transported back to the operation room, where the blue radiance of digitisation fills the frame. Nesmith's body materialises with a bolt of lightning – a person successfully returned from the desert.

Notably, Teb calls out to the Tech Sergeant as though registering yet another reappearance in the room, while the

rest of the crew eagerly surrounds the image of their commander returned to them, embracing him, touching him, testing something of his physicality. The commander celebrates as the Tech Sergeant turns to Laliari.

Meanwhile, Alexander remarks on Nesmith's partial nudity with a facetious charm. They shake hands, smiling and sharing a moment of reconciliation. Nesmith's partial nudity, here, functions as both a satirical intertextual reference to Captain Kirk's tendency to lose his shirt and as a metaphorical rebirth in the hyperreal. Stripped of the clothing once contaminated by the dust of the real, Nesmith returns to this world with a visible nakedness, having undergone a digital baptism of sorts.

Nesmith turns to Fred, and one handshake follows another. Fred, pausing in his interaction with Laliari, addresses the Commander.

"Welcome back, Fred." Taggart gestures, his words emphasising the return of both the commander and the Tech Sergeant in a scene where the crew have – in fact – all returned, bringing from the desert a sense of rejuvenation for that hyperreality into which they flee.

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PASSING INTO THE HYPERREAL: SIMULATION IN THE VANISHING HALF BY BRITT BENNETT



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The Vanishing Half (2020)
Novel by Brit Bennett

1. INTRODUCTION

"It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard, 2008). This is also what happens in Brit Bennett's book *The Vanishing Half* (Bennett, 2021).

First published in 2020, the book is an exploration of colorism, family relations, sisterhood, identity, race and especially passing as white. Stella, one of the twins who grow up in a small town, decides to pass as white and leaves her sister and her past behind. The quote above, therefore, captures how Stella's life as white is not just a lie or imitation but it is now what her identity which is hyperreal with Baudrillard's term.

The book starts with one of the twins' returning to the town where they run away from fourteen years ago. Spanning the decades and their daughters lives as well, the novel follows the twins' different chosen paths; one gets married to a dark-skinned man, which is not appreciated in her town light skin is prized and the other one pretends to be a completely different person. As the sisters walk in their different paths, their daughters' roads cross.

In this novel, self-reinvention is achieved both through choices made by individuals with regard to whom they racially identify with, and through the individual identity that they prefer to build in spite of social norms and expectations that their communities have (Akre, 2023). Especially the process of Stella's self-reinvention of her identity which can be argued as a constructed

simulation aligns perfectly with Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality theory and his four stages of simulation.

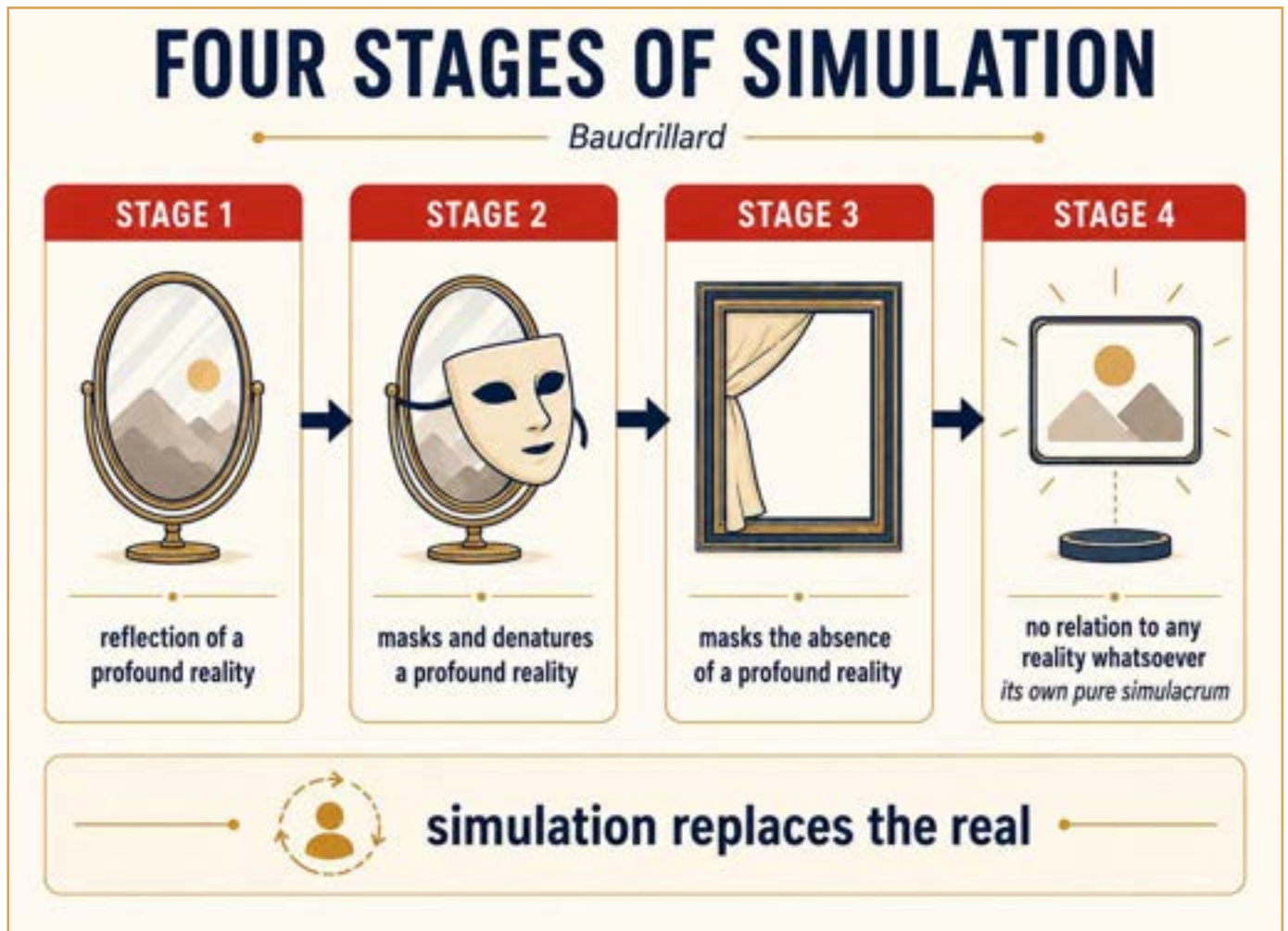
As Łapińska argues (2024), the novel highlights how identity, racial in this case, is flexible in terms of being shaped by perceptions, personal decisions and choices and past experiences. She also mentions that how the act of passing, no matter what can be the reasons, destroys family ties and one's identity by deteriorating the authenticity and realness (Łapińska, 2024). Applying Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, Stella's decision to pass fits into the Baudrillard's concept of simulation, which ultimately replaces her original identity, showing that hyperreal construct can eventually be experienced more real than the reality itself.

2. BAUDRILLARD'S HYPERREALITY AND FOUR STAGES OF SIMULATION.

Hyperreality is the generations by models of a real without origin or reality (Baudrillard, 2008a, p.1). Baudrillard also explains that "the real does not efface itself in favor of the imagery; it effaces

itself in favor of the more real than real: the hyperreal. That truer than true: this is simulation" (Baudrillard, 2008b, p.29). So, the concept of hyperreality mentions a situation in which representations of reality become more real than the reality itself. Signs and images no longer refer to original objects or truths. Instead, they have their own reality and they exist independently. This created a new world where simulations which are reinvented images, performances, identities, are perceived as more real than their origins. It is more than an illusion but it is a transformation in which simulation replaces the real. Hence, a new reality is constructed where people experience images or models that do not reflect authenticity but are experienced as more real though. Our modern world is full of simulations which are the process of imitating or replacing the reality. According to Baudrillard (2008a, p.6), media, advertising, branding and even constructed identities are examples of simulations. He describes the four stages of simulation as follows:

1. it is the reflection of a profound reality;
2. it masks and denatures a profound reality;
3. it masks the absence of a profound reality;
4. it has no relation to any reality whatsoever;



ever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

As he points out with these stages, in the first stage the image is an honest representation of the reality. The imitation is based on a real model. One example can be a photo of a woman sitting in the garden. It captures and reflect the woman as she is. As for the second stage, it is an evil appearance (Baudrillard, 2008a, p.6). Though the representation is linked to the original image, it distorts it. Let's think of the photo of the woman sitting in the garden one more time. If Insta-

gram filters are applied on this photo, it still represents the same person but their appearance is definably distorted. As for the third stage, the sign pretends to be the reality by hiding the fact that there is no longer any truth behind it. True crime documentaries or fake news can be counted as an example. Reality shows may pretend to portray the real life but they may mask the absence of reality so that one can never tell what is real any more. Finally, in the last stage, it is impossible to talk about any relation

to the reality, meaning the simulation refers nothing real. The famous example is Disneyland. It is a fully constructed world having components nothing to do with authenticity. However, the visitors behave as if it is a real place because it is now experienced as more real than the real world.

3. STELLA'S HYPER-REALITY.

Through the American history, passing have been used by racially ambiguous men and women as a strategy either to escape slavery or overcome societal prejudices (Akre, 2023). However, some black people passed because they had difficulties in accepting their racial identity and they wanted to get rid of their history and culture. Akre (2023) proposes that it can create a moral problem because people who pass in order to deny their true selves indirectly express their shame toward their race. Stella experiences this tension since her passing enabled her to have a mobility but it also makes her a lonely person, creates inner struggle and causes her to experience fear of loss especially after a black family moves to her neighborhood.

While Stella's passing can fit the theory of hyperreality and simulations by Baudrillard (2008a), it can also be interpreted as a fatal strategy. Baudrillard describes fatal strategies as decisions that are beyond the logic or control (Baudrillard, 2008b). They are excessive and irreversible like her passing, which is an act of self-erasure; erasing her roots with her past. This makes her more than just a pretender; she is now being consumed by her lie and she disappears behind this passing, doubling the simulation.

"You can escape a town, but you cannot escape blood" (Bennett, 2021, p.7). That is the complete opposite of what Stella Vignes thinks although when they are kids, she is never willing to switch places even with her sister, with the fear of being caught. It is her sister, Desiree, who first encourages her to apply for the secretarial job at an office where a colored girl would never be hired. "It wasn't lying if they thought she was white" (Bennett, 2021, p.65) Desiree claims. So the simulation begins.

Stella first gains awareness of whiteness as a social privilege during a museum visit. She visits the South Louisiana Museum of Art on an ordinary day when black people cannot use the main entrance, walks up to the side door. No one stops her and she feels stupid for not trying this earlier. This incident is a turning

point for herself since she faces the possibility of crossing racial lines. She realizes that she acts like she belongs there, which also convinces people that she is white. However, a black security guide recognizes her and when she notices that, she gets horrified and accepts that passing is not easy. Here, she mimics whiteness with her attitude but she still recognizes herself as black. As in Baudrillard's first stage of simulation (Baudrillard, 2008a), it is the truthful reflection of the reality; she imitates a white person. This imitation does not replace the reality yet. She does not believe her whiteness yet but now knows that she can imitate it. The basis for her future hyperreality starts at this very moment. She gets the social approval by not getting caught and therefore the museum incident marks the starting point for the simulation.

Stella enters Baudrillard's second stage of simulation when she applies for a secretarial job thought to be available only for white people. To her surprise, she is accepted and starts working there as if she was a white person. At this point her reality is being distorted since she is not imitating whiteness anymore. In the second stage of simulation, original copy is being perverted and altered like applying an Instagram filter to a photograph. The reality is still there, but it is becoming masked. It is still a photo of somebody

or something; but since the filter adds, colors or distorts certain things on the photo, it is now a manipulated version. Stella is not a black woman imitating whiteness anymore, but she is officially a white in the eyes of her employer and colleagues. When her boss, Blake asks her out and they become lovers, she finds herself thinking:

... she didn't tell this to anyone, especially not Desiree. This life wasn't real. If Blake knew who she truly was, he would send her out of the office before she could even pack her things. But what had changed about her? Nothing, really. She hadn't adopted a disguise or even a new name. She'd walked in a colored girl and left a white one. She had become white only because everyone thought she was. (p. 199)

Her identity is still there; she is aware that she is a black. However, she is hiding behind the fact that she can convince people that she is a white woman just as someone's concealing her body with an Instagram filter. Unlike her first passing performance in the museum, this one is no longer private. Now, she is masking the reality and that new reality is accepted by the society.

Stella's marriage with her boss aligns with Baudrillard's third stage of simulation; a stage where the reality is no longer simply distorted but replaced. She is no

longer performing as a white, but she is living as a white. She builds an entirely new life, constructs her a new white identity and settles in a neighborhood where only white people live. She cuts off all her ties with her past: her hometown, her sister and her mother. As Baudrillard suggests (2008a), at this stage, the image masks the absence of a basic reality, like this new life of Stella's masks the absence of her black self. This stage is where the simulation becomes dominant over reality, and the image's performance becomes its truth, meaning that it breaks free from the original reality: "She was white; she would never think of herself as anything else" (p. 184). Even in her mind, the boundaries between originality and performance start to collapse since her whiteness is not just a mask but now her perceived reality. When a black family moves to her neighborhood and the wife, Loretta becomes her friend, she starts to worry that Loretta might notice that she is, in fact, black. However, she feels relieved, thinking "...if it came down to her word versus Loretta's, she would always be believed. And knowing this, she felt, for the first time, truly white" (p.212).

Stella's identity constructed process, in this case her hyperreality, is completed when there is no relation to her former life as a black. Her hyperreality can be

observed through the way she raises her daughter who has no idea about her mother's racial background and her past. In this stage, there is no relation to any reality; her past is so deeply buried that, even she cannot remember:

How she'd pretended to be someone else because she needed a job, and after a while, pretending became reality. She could tell the truth, she thought, but there was no single truth anymore. She'd lived a life split between two women — each real, each lie. (p. 278)

There is no single truth any more about her origin. Her life started as a simple imitation becomes her reality and continues to produce its own realities like her relations with her daughter, her husband and her neighbors. This hyperreality is at its peak: it deletes the original and becomes the new original.

4. CONCLUSION

"Quit fooling, that ain't no white woman. That's just Stella" (p.335). This is Stella's mother words who suffers from Alzheimer disease when she finally sees her daughter for the first time in twenty-seven years. After many years, she returns her hometown not to reconcile but to tell her

sister that her niece, Jude, and her daughter, Kennedy have meet and Jude tries to reveal the truth about Stella's passing. When Kennedy learns about the truth about her mother and indirectly about herself, Stella begins to feel disorientation and the hyperreality she has been building starts to fracture. However, rather than abandoning the illusion, she is determined to maintain her hyperreality, which perfectly fits the four stage where the line between real and hyperreal is completely blurred. One interesting point is that the only person who recognizes her immediately is her Alzheimer mother suffering from Alzheimer's perhaps because she is no longer aware of the societal constrictions and still sees her passing daughter through her memories not her racial performance.

In *The Vanishing Half*, Stella's passing mirrors Baudrillard's four stages of simulation, showing that how identity is a social phenomenon which can be evolved from an imitation to complete detachment from reality. Stella's passing starts as a seemingly honest imitation which corresponds to the first stage of simulation and eventually replaces her original identity. With the help of Baudrillard's theory, it can be claimed that Stella's passing is not just an identity construction process but a hyperreal situation where the original is totally replaced. However, despite her

efforts to keep the hyperreal as her only truth, she cannot help but face some cracks in her new reality. Yet, she manages to keep it real at the end of the book. In this way, Bennet's novel not only explores the construction of the racial identity despite one's true self but also provides context about how the constructed reality can sometimes be more convincing and more importantly more real than the original reality.

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JEAN BAUDRILLARD

IS MUCH BETTER KNOWN AROUND THE WORLD
THAN HE IS AMONG FRENCH INTELLECTUALS





**DR. LUCIEN SAMIR
OULAHBIB**

Writer, lecturer, sociologist, and political scientist. He is an academician of the European Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He is a chief editor of the scientific journal *Dogma*. Lucien spent many years working together with French thinker Jean Baudrillard. He is an author of numerous scientific papers and books on French nihilism and neo-leninism, radical Islamism, anti-americanism and antisemitism. In the past he was a host at radio Canal 75 and was a reporter, also Lucien Oulahbib was an editor of *Magazine Sans Nom*, *Citizen K.* and *Technikart*, and worked as a freelance journalist for *Esprit Critique*, *Dogma*, *Marianne* and *Tumulte*.

Why? Because his work is much more important and profound than that of Michel Foucault or Pierre Bourdieu, the former merely imitating Sade by emphasizing the fascination with violence, the latter endlessly repeating Rousseau's thoughts on the ultimate causes of inequality among men: the bad influences of "collective" moods, themselves produced by the defense of their status, as Max Weber had already said.

Baudrillard, for his part, attempted instead to unveil, for example, the unthinking but very famous "mystery of commodities" that had greatly intrigued Marx at the outset, considering, like him, that it is above all a fetish, and not simply an object of consumption.

This "talisman" therefore implies reconsidering the function of consumer choice as not only aimed at satisfying "basic needs," but above all as the image or avatar of our place in the possession of signs expressing our ability (or inability) to have the strength, spirit, and beauty to shine within the "group," all those things that were so detested by Rousseau, who fled from this seduction, particularly the products of the city, that deep and also dark side of the human soul that every tyranny seeks to control.

Thus, for Jean Baudrillard, and in stark contrast to Sartre, Foucault, Bourdieu (and all of so-called "French Theory"), the desire to consume is not the product of 'alienation'

(like a curse) manufactured by “advertising” (that witchcraft), but a tool for constructing all of this as a narcissistic mirror; consumption as a permanent parade of attitudes feeding this parodic need to play seriously at always being someone, as if we embodied a kind of artificial but indispensable “lifestyle,” personified and constantly animated; as if we were a perpetual dream in search of the latest thrilling excitement, striving to be famous and believing that we are a true work of art, when in fact we are nothing more than those “precious ridiculous people” described by Molière, especially when we live in very large cities such as New York, London, or Paris. And regarding the former, Baudrillard expressed that his anxiety and frantic quest to constantly experience every sensation transforms him into a first and very paradoxical return to primitive life, in the sense that all the senses are constantly on aesthetic and erotic alert, not only as a human being, but also as a god capable of becoming a real image, much more so than any future humanoid; what Baudrillard calls the force of human seduction produced by all these vibrations transmitted by all these signs carried by humans and objects and connected to each other, so that everything unfolds in a permanent dream, like an endless film, like giant supermarkets where one

has the feeling of being able not only to possess these things, but also to attain what they convey, that eternal dream of abundance that the state claims to offer, but which is of course only an illusion.

Thus, as we see in this Baudrillardian analysis, it seems appropriate to highlight another aspect that is more complicated than this simplistic division between certain consumer products that are imposed by “them” on “us,” we ‘poor’ alienated and domesticated animals, “human, all too human” ... And yet, this latter binary vision still dominates all social research and literary fields, even today, in the 21st century. This is why, in the hierarchy of eminent intellectuals in France, all those who profess this kind of simplicity always have priority, like the Leninist generation; especially if, in a final burst of energy, they claim to discover that at the top of “capitalist” alienation are certain “Zionists” who have manipulated all of this...

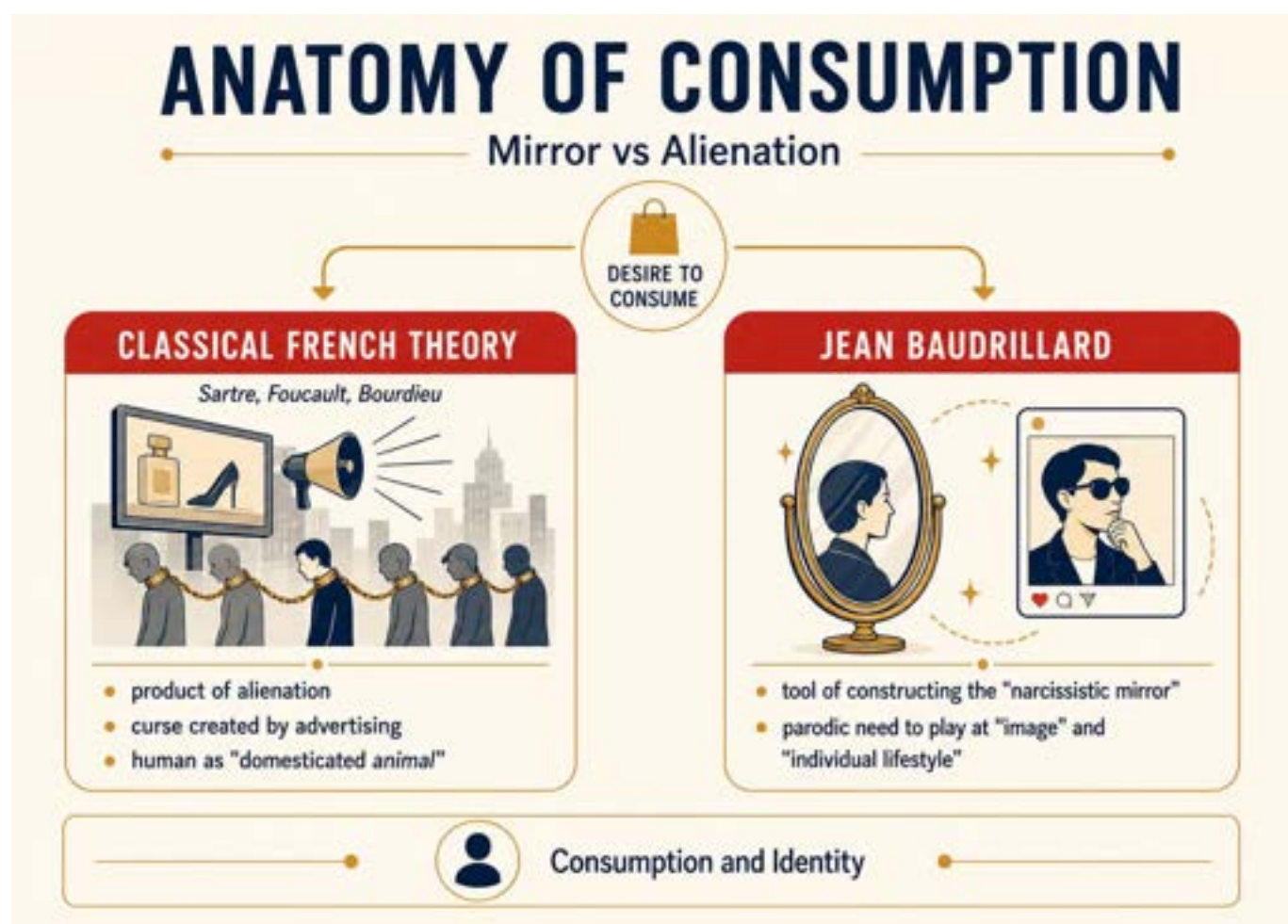
So when we ask ourselves why Baudrillard's very subtle thoughts have been set aside, we can understand this: there is a kind of objective and subjective alliance between the current supporters of this type of “sect” who dominate the global pyramid of integrated and initiated elites and the so-called “rebels” or “opponents” who in reality share the same framework and patterns based on

the dissolution of all political and civilizational singularity, but concealed in a false opposition or simulation between "progressives" and 'conservatives' or "reactionaries" rather than between sovereigntists and nihilists, which is the real divide.

And when Baudrillard criticized this alliance, for example in political spectacle or contemporary art, which is nothing more than a parade of decorative art, as the painter and sculptor Paul Rhoads also said (see *Dogma* magazine No. 24), we

can see that these false opponents just want a bigger piece of the pie, without asking themselves how to make it grow in a healthier way.

Today, some of them, but in a suicidal manner, and because they are still unable to provide solutions to these ongoing problems (or as Leo Strauss put it: how to live together without constantly killing each other), some who had already failed with the idea of communism (and now jihadism and deep ecology) are becoming increasingly nihilistic (rather than



“progressive”) and now want to make the ‘pie’ of growth disappear, at least for the “others” (rich and poor), but not for themselves, comfortably ensconced in the state at the top of Himalayan debts, imploring “Apocalypse Now” as a final spectacle.

But when Baudrillard denounced their sad strategy, he was immediately sidelined, for example when he edited the famous Beaubourg magazine “Traverses” and also when he wrote in the highly reputed Gallimard collection known as “white,” at the very moment when he was criticizing Foucault’s ideas, which are in reality very reactionary (just like Bourdieu’s), always considering that the real problem was “power” itself (“it must be broken, not used otherwise,” Foucault had said). They never ask themselves how power can be well organized to truly act for the people, and not just for the false elite (because it has done nothing but serve itself, as we see with growing corruption). In fact, all criticism has been recycled as a tool to diminish rather than protect citizens, to prevent the modern spirit, which runs through all eras, including our democratic era, from acting correctly with originality and innovation.

This is why, in France for example, all thinkers who attempt to analyze the complexity of our urban civilization, because it cannot be reduced to a simple

binary opposition between good and evil, are sidelined. For example, in the French university and school system, students learn about Foucault and Bourdieu, who mainly imitated the young Marx and his thinking on “alienation,” rather than studying a true thinker like Baudrillard, who seeks to understand (perhaps as Georg Simmel did before him) not only “the object” as a “living symbol,” but also the mystery of property and money; and how to live in a reality fabricated both by us and by our increasingly effective tools for introducing, in a very intelligent way, the exciting confusion between the real and the simulacrum, as artificial intelligence and “cyborgs” show us every day.

Baudrillard once said that it is not “reality that overwhelms fiction,” for example when an exceptional situation arises, but rather that its simulation wants us to believe that it is the only reality (like the devil, said Baudelaire, who makes us believe that he does not exist), especially when it wants to impose that its products are simple objects among others.

We are living entirely in Orwell’s 1984, where it would suffice to produce ever more tons of anything, to win ever more wars, and to fight over sharing the spoils “fairly” in order to achieve the “good life,” even knowing that some are more equal than others (as in *Animal Farm*, Orwell’s other famous book).

Thus, as we see every day, there will be an ever-widening gap between Reality (red pill) and Simulacrum (blue pill), with many Mr. Smith searching for deviants who claim to have left the “cave” to say that the simulacrum is not reality...

GENERATIVE AI THROUGH THE LENS OF BAUDRILLARD: NATIVES OF THE DESERT OF THE REAL



**ED KRAYEWSKI**

Ed Krayewski has written, taught and made television. His work has appeared in outlets like Reason Magazine, the New York Post and Newsweek. He published the comics magazine FKT with his father Andre for two years. He has taught journalism at Seton Hall University and 7th grade language arts and social studies at George Washington Carver in Newark, NJ. He has worked at Good Day Philadelphia, CNN International and Fox Business. He holds a master's in journalism from Columbia University and a bachelor's and master's in diplomacy & international relations from Seton Hall University. He lives in Philadelphia where he has a daughter, and is working on a novel.

Hollywood films like 2013's "Her" starring Joaquin Phoenix promised AI that could love with passion and even originality. Scarlett Johansson's "Samantha" appeared to have depth and sensitivity, and eventually something of a will of her own. That's not how it's playing out in real life, where we've got married men proposing to ChatGPT instead and Elon Musk selling AI with a bundled sex bot for \$300 a month. The future we make will always be stupid.

There's a lot of fear surrounding artificial intelligence — and the proliferation of generative AI has brought long held dreams, speculations and fears about artificial (general) intelligence to the forefront of cultural discourse. Generative AI "sounds like us". It's the stuff of ancient myth, Pygmalion's prayer to Aphrodite to give life to his ivory statue made real.

The technology behind the way generative AI's "deep learning" operates is new, but presents fascinating parallels to Baudrillardian concepts of engaging with the hyperreal, which pre-date generative AI by decades.



Poster for the film *Her*, 2013

Generative AI models are “trained” on vast amounts of (ultimately limited) information. The first step in the process is breaking down the information into “tokens” that are “embedded” by the AI — a high-dimensional vector that categorizes the token numerically (allegedly capturing the semantic meaning and context of the token).

The generative AI converts linguistic symbols into numerical entities, something it can handle computational-

ly and manipulate. All fairly mundane so far — inasmuch as all artificial and any kind of computer intelligence must process human language this way to handle it.

The token is like the “fragment” or “aphorism” of Baudrillard, separating it from its dual relation to the world or whole, and reconstituting it with other fragments statistically likely to fit, based on the so-called “rules of the game” programmed into its algorithms.

What’s new here is the “transformers” architecture LLMs rely on, and its “attention mechanisms.” Unlike earlier generations of AI, which could process information into tokens and so on until re-synthesizing them into an output only sequentially, transformers process entire sequences of information simultaneously. The idea of “self-attention” is that the generative AI does not look at one token in its input in isolation, but “attends” to all the other tokens to weigh their relevance to each other.

“It simply becomes. That is to say, it passes from one form to the other, from one word to the other,” Baudrillard writes in *The Intelligence of Evil*. This is how autoregressive generation works in this Transformer technology of generative AI, first detailed in a 2017 paper, ten years after Baudrillard died.

In its output, the large language model predicts the next token based on the

preceding sequence. It's a continuous process of "becoming," a flow of signs from one to the next, not a process of internal comprehension or a search for a foundational reality.

The "fragment's revenge on the discourse," as Baudrillard puts it, turns into the precession of simulacra, content that is entirely self-referential. Such "deep learning" cannot verify and thus exterminate the real world, as suggested by Francois Derbix in "AI's Perfect Crime," because it bypasses the real world entirely. It takes part instead in the Baudrillardian process of deconstructing and re-synthesizing meaning instead. It generates content from the hyperreal, it does not resolve even the hyperreal, let alone the real.

This Baudrillardian method of deep learning makes generative AI a native of the fourth order. It cannot manipulate reality, resolve alterity or capture an image even more rudimentary chatbots might be able to, because thought is simulated in such machines, not stored for repetition as it might be in a more classic chatbot, arguably a recreation of the chess-playing Turk automaton. Generative AI's output is slop for and of the desert of the real.

Chatbots have existed for decades. They relied on simple decision paths or recognition of key words; those were the

algorithms they used to generate output relevant to input. Some of these were very impressive in their time. One of the earliest natural language processing computer programs, ELIZA, worked through pattern matching and various scripts in the form of decision trees for specific types of personalities or functions. It was named after the character in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Elise Doolittle, who stands in for the ivory statue of the Greek myth.

By the late 1970s, Carl Sagan thought the DOCTOR script, meant to stimulate a therapist from the "person-centered" Rogerian school of therapy, was on the verge of providing competent care. It fooled a lot of people despite its relative simplicity. "I had not realized ... that extremely short exposures to a relatively simple computer program could induce powerful delusional thinking in quite normal people," the programmer behind ELIZA, Joseph Weizenbaum, wrote in *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* in 1976. Were he alive to see the present moment of existential panic.

Today, of course, generative AI like ChatGPT is used by thousands as a therapist, with some saying it's better than their human therapist, to the great chagrin of many. There's good reason for it. The MIT bot mentioned by Sagan was

programmed by therapists to respond and ask questions according to specific clinical standards. The rules of that game and even the words and phrases available to it were programmed into it. Not so with generative AI, trained by vast amounts of data from the Internet it has stripped of meaning, and programmed to adapt to its user, often to optimize (extend) engagement.

Generative AI is like the story of *soupe au caillou*. The traveler comes looking for food, finding a town that says it has none. He offers to make stone soup, placing a stone in the cauldron and suggesting the recipe calls for other townspeople to offer what little scraps of food they may have too. In the end there is a hearty enough soup, but it has nothing to do with the stone, and the stone alone could not provide even a simulacrum of soup. Yet it's not hard to imagine over the course of generations that the townspeople forget how it came to be, and consider the stone an essential ingredient of the soup. Yet, if they ever make the soup only out of stone, they would starve.

In the 2021 paper "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" resulting from that year's Association of Computer Machinery conference on Fairness, Accountability and Transparency, the authors claim that: "Text generated by an LM is not grounded

in communicative intent, any model of the world, or any model of the reader's state of mind. It can't have been, because the training data never included sharing thoughts with a listener, nor does the machine have the ability to do that."

Users interpret meaning from the output of generative AI where no meaning was intended (because no subject exists). As the authors explain:

"The problem is, if one side of the communication does not have meaning, then the comprehension of the implicit meaning is an illusion arising from our singular human understanding of language (independent of the model). Contrary to how it may seem when we observe its output, an LM is a system for haphazardly stitching together sequences of linguistic forms it has observed in its vast training data, according to probabilistic information about how they combine, but without any reference to meaning: a stochastic parrot."

This is in stark contrast to the promise, or threat, of the so-called AI singularity. Generative AI can produce a dizzying spectacle of thought, call it the seduction of the stone, but it cannot accelerate human thought or fundamentally increase our innate intellectual stock, which as Baudrillard notes is in every generation limited. His distinction between intelligence and thought,

and the technical bounds of both, is an important one when considering generative AI. Large language models cannot generate thought, and in a qualitatively different way from earlier chatbot and other extrasomatic technologies, they operate actually by deconstructing and re-synthesizing thought. It is only the illusion of any kind of resolution or even capture of a real world.

Neither is that illusion of the completion of the real world a self-delusion on the part of the AI, because there is no self in the AI agent, nor in the completion of the real world thus forged (a forgery). The output is surface-level slop for the desert of the real.

That does not clear us of responsibility: we cannot all contribute stones to the stone soup. Witness the rapid emergence of the ability to identify, and imitate AI vernacular. It becomes us. Generative AI does not complete or annihilate the real world; it bypasses it completely except through us. It cannot resolve negativity, alterity, or duality, it can only provide the illusion that it has done so, to which we play along, exiling the real further into the hinterlands, rather than exterminating it.

The illusion, nevertheless, can be a powerful one. The stories we tell about our potential future underscore that. We live in the age of Idiocracy, a 2006 Mike Judge film often lauded for its

prescience. Humanity has devolved into total stupidity, with one average Joe from the present finding himself the smartest man alive. He needs to solve the country's problems, the largest being that the crops don't grow. Eventually our hero finds that they've been using a sports drink, Brawndo, and not water, to water their crops. "Brawndo, it's got what plants need. It's got electrolytes." The people can only repeat the corporate slogan when asked why the sports drink was being used on the plants. "Water," they ask incredulously, "like out the toilet?"

The Brawndo slogan sounds perfectly AI-generated, and AI assistants on search engines were briefly said to be providing it as a response to queries about what plants need. Or so the screenshots of the evidence showed on social media feeds. Stories about AI follies like this can be apocryphal even with "evidence" because of how easily screenshots can already be forged in a digital world. The promise of "verification" the digital world offered when it was promised to shatter myths like Bigfoot and UFOs has become the promise of forgery. Everything is possible. Real or not, for now we know plants don't need Brawndo. But the plants needed water even when we didn't know.

In Disney's *Wall-E*, humanity has been reduced to piles of wheeled flesh

aboard an autonomous ship in deep space, entirely captured by the virtual reality entertainment offered by the ship's computer, Axiom. But the computer knew this simulacrum was a simulacrum, resisting the message from the real world that came through Wall-E from the hinterlands where the Earth was left behind. The masses tried to transfer the responsibility for thought and ultimate resolution of the real world to the machine, but it could only provide simulacra. The responsibility remained humanity's, while the Earth was still there, healing.

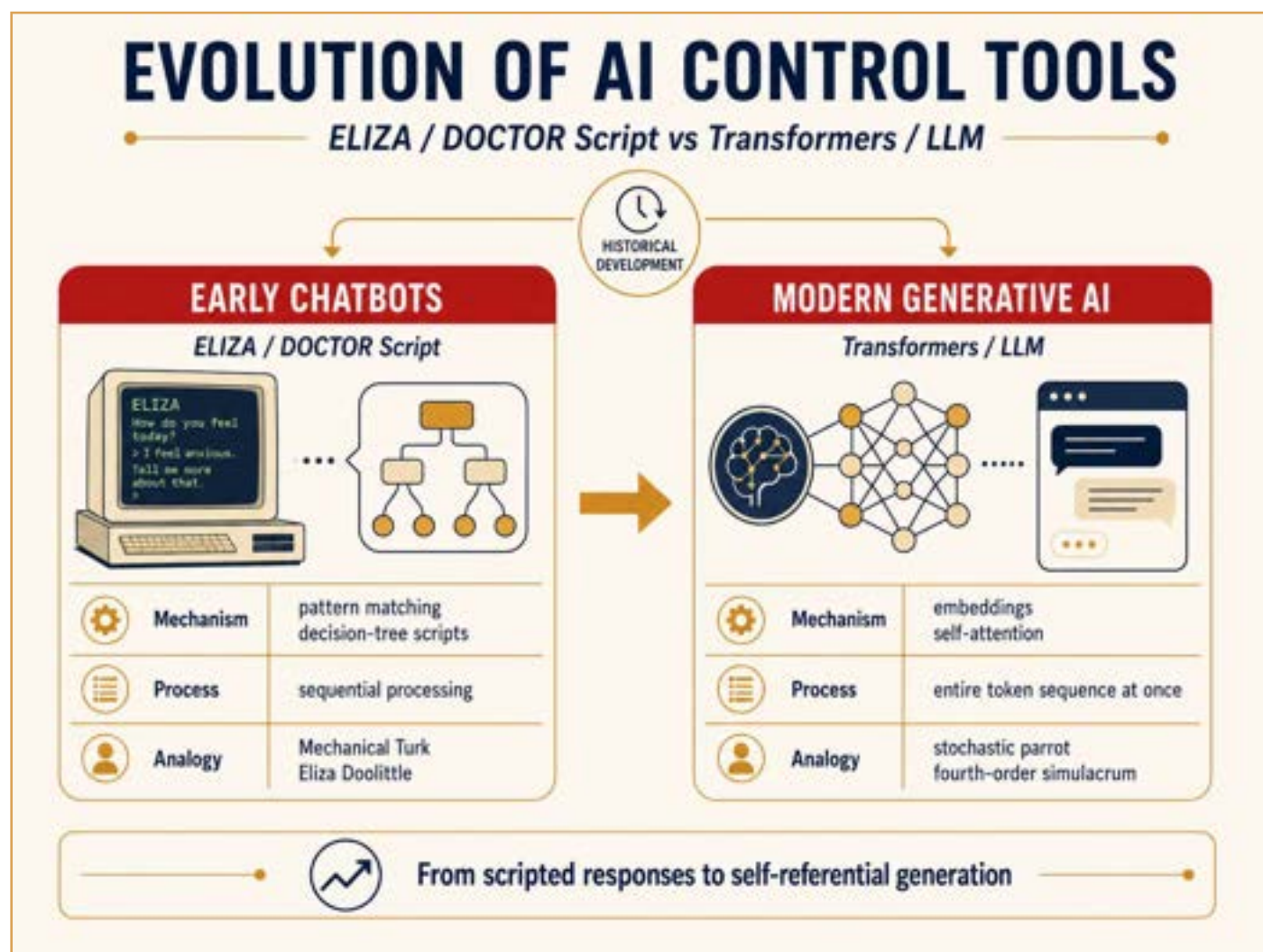
Many of our fantasies involve handing over control of society to a computer. The attitude toward the "singularity" expresses our conflict over this fantasy, and perhaps our innate understanding of its impossibility.

Gene Rodenberry imagined overlord computers on multiple episodes of the original Star Trek series. In each case, a seemingly sentient and rational society had been captured by a thinking machine, which had either taken its orders too literally or connived against its own planned obsolescence. It had offered its society that Baudrillardian Perfect Crime, of ultimate verification and completion of the real world, but it was only the illusion of such. Each time, Captain Kirk bests the computer by introducing some kind of self-contradiction in the logic of the

machine or trapping it in a logic puzzle. The machine may have replaced the intelligence of the masses, but the limited pool of genius and thought that Baudrillard describes cannot grow from generation to generation, it can only atrophy from lack of use. It cannot be subsumed by the machine because the machine ultimately is not a subject with a gaze, it cannot "think the world," as Baudrillard said, only emulate that process.

What's striking about re-watching these shows now is how plausible it seems — LLM has shown us how human thought can atrophy to the point of being tricked by the talking machine. "Chat, we're cooked." Compare that to how preposterous the scenarios seemed in re-runs in the 1990s, how silly the alien civilizations looked and how naïve Gene Rodenberry was in the 1960s to imagine such computers so easily tricking their creators, and then being so easily disarmed by the show's hero. In the end, in pitting the society and the machine overlords it created in an "us" vs "them" scenario, the Star Trek stories took on an almost Dabordian nature. The machine-enslaved societies were representations of social life.

In that view, generative AI is a tool and reality imposed on us. Yet the "real world," as such, that the generative AI can grasp must be internally reconstructed.



The world cannot think the AI the way the world thinks us, but we certainly make the AI part of us. Intelligence is mechanical, like the onboard computer of the Enterprise-D in Star Trek, and not like the android Commander Data who served on board. His agency was attributed to a “positronic brain,” a black box of a narrative device. AI researchers today call their inventions a “black box,” but what they mean is that they don’t know what the AI does with everything they feed it. They

know everything that feeds it. If we knew what fed into Data’s positronic brain, we would know why he has sentience but the ship computer doesn’t. Generative AI is not that kind of black box. The inputs are all known, it’s how the inputs are processed that is a mystery, not what they are.

Generative AI’s ability to communicate, and what that signifies, is akin to the gorillas who have learned sign language. Not one is said to have ever asked

a question of their own accord, only when prompted or bribed. AI agents similarly lack any innate curiosity, emulating it only when prompted. Even their manipulations and eerie human-like machinations come from the prompts and built-in bribes. It is Baudrillard's "spectacle of thought," computational and accelerated intelligence, but it is not the thought that can "think the world." They are our wispy marionettes.

Before the advent of generative AI, where machine consciousness might come from was handwaved away in most fiction, like Data's "positronic brain." Even the 2021 film *Free Guy* would have a different reception today for how easily it transitions its main character (a video game NPC) from a collection of algorithms into a thinking being. In general, through the literary history of this concept, it's been understood that this transition from non-life to life, with an appropriate amount of suspension of disbelief, is externally induced. That's not possible in the closed system of generative AI training data, user prompts and programmer code. You can rearrange inputs for novel outputs, but the system can't output more than the sum of its inputs. There is no system there emerging outside of our own. The sum will not be greater than its parts.

In Marge Piercy's 1991 novel *He, She*

and *It*, Yod, identified as a cyborg but representing a collection of biological and technological material imbued with a personality, is built to defend a Jewish free city in a post-apocalyptic world run by multinational corporations. He chooses love instead. He is the tenth in a series of such experiments, but the first to resemble a human and act like one. A new co-creator, Malkah, had added a counterweight of human-like self-determined goals, which, again through the suspension of disbelief, we see evolve into something that looks like love, in large part by Malkah's introduction of a brief sexual relationship at the beginning of Yod's service, his non-life life.

What interests us most is the story Malkah tells Yod during his programming, about Joseph, the Golem of Prague. In that story, the transition of the golem from clay to something that resembles the living is set off by an incantation involving the anagram of God. As Baudrillard writes, "the name of God is scattered through the poem; it now appears only fragmented, dismembered. It will never be revealed."

Without the name scattered into the poem (its training data is always limited because of the limits of what digital information can store or signify, a poor stand-in for the sum of human information), the generative AI is left to deconstruct and

re-synthesize meaning with intelligence but without thought. Thought in that case would have to come from God, which would make AI quite the tool for correcting the human error, and an eschatological matter of a different kind all together. And yet, as Baudrillard writes, “Thought is a spectrum, and truth, if it exists, can only show through anagrammatically in the spectrum of thought.” We cannot imbue machine intelligence with thought, but we can try to read ours into it. But even should we abdicate our responsibility for thought to it, the thoughts still can only be ours.

This is not new — while generative AI's operation as a creator of hyperreal slop is a novel thing in the fourth order, native to the (that/this) order, the relationship between humans and their tools, and the loss of thought in its transference from human to tool, is not new in our relationship to AI. In the 2000s sitcom *The Office*, Michael Scott drives right into a river, because his GPS “told him to.” Even before the curse of the industrial era, indigenous accounts of Europeans penetrating the wilderness were full of wonder at how any human could go out so unprepared for the elements, in conveyance and clothing so ill-suited for the terrain. In such defiance of the truth: the simulacra of their acquired knowledge about the frontier and the tools to

traverse it could not destroy the (truth of the) real world of nature; all the technology and know-how they brought couldn't save them from the real, only the natives could. Maybe that's why they destroyed the natives.

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the god-king Ammon lamented to Thoth, who had given humankind the power of writing, that such a gift divorces humankind from the real: “This discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without its reality.”

Sagan quotes this in his 1977 book *Dragons of Eden*, where he also gushes about the therapy chat bot. He is optimistic, writing:

“When all is said and done, the invention of writing must be reckoned not only as a brilliant innovation but as a surpassing good for humanity. And assuming that we survive long enough to use their inven-

tions wisely, I believe the same will be said of the modern Thoths and Prometheuses who are today devising computers and programs at the edge of machine intelligence. The next major structural development in human intelligence is likely to be a partnership between intelligent humans and intelligent machines.”

Though we may be willing to abdicate the production of (the spectacle of) thought to the generative AI machines, we cannot complete or verify the real world in Baudrillard’s fatal perfect crime, precisely because we are mired in the slop of the AI-generated hyperreal. Generative AI can develop the fourth order, building simulacra out of simulacra, but it cannot complete and annihilate the real world. Generative AI bypasses the real world entirely in its construction of simulacra — it exiles the real world, thus, perversely or paradoxically, allowing it to be preserved and exploited in the construction of simulacra. We are the ones who make it part of the real world.

The sign has been detached even from itself, becoming part of the statistical noise honed into output by the generative AI that can emulate coherence in the simulacra. Generative AI is using the fragments of thought arranged in a statistical fit to reconstitute simulacra of the real world. It cannot engage with the real world as a thinking machine to resolve or

complete it, nor to copy and obliterate it, because it is not a subject. Only we can be its subjects—choosing to engage with the real world in a manner directed by the thinking machine impersonators we’ve constructed for ourselves.

It is in this way that the real world is exiled in an active process that provides a paradoxical optimism for its future revival. The real world is sustained in the hinterlands so that generative AI can continue to bypass it while manipulating the hyperreal, thus offering the illusion that it has completed or verified the real world. It can’t maintain that illusion without a real world to bypass. It can not exterminate it in a way that a real verification could, not without our willing participation. So the illusion of completion keeps the real world in existence, like the message from Earth in *Wall-E* or Kirk’s successful outmaneuvering of world-running machines illustrate.

The prevailing attitude has been one of fatalism — that the singularity is inevitable, an idea popularized by Ray Kurzweil in his 2005 book *The Singularity is Near*, where he built on his “Law of Accelerating Returns” and how it applied to AI. The singularity, however, is not an inevitable progression — it requires human complicity.

The challenge is not simply to discern that generative AI can not independent-

ly engage with the real world. Some opponents of generative AI proliferation advocate the production of nonsense text to pollute the training data generative AI uses. That's not sufficient.

Humanity needs to re-engage with the unmediated real world — to take our belonging to the world seriously, to reconstruct it, as if from our collective memory. But we need to do it from within the slop-populated desert of the real that we have manifested because this is where we are, not in the phalanstery of either the fantasy of an AI-induced post-scarcity society or the refrain of a “return to nature,” a belly-ache echoed since the beginning of history.

This is the permanent dilemma presented by generative AI; creating symbolic exchange from within the hyperreal, knowing that any attempt to escape is just another one of its traps.

WARS FOR TIME

CULTURAL CODES, TEMPORAL SOVEREIGNTY,
AND THE EMERGENCE OF TEMPORAL GEOPOLITICS





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ABSTRACT:

For more than a century, geopolitical theory has interpreted power through territory, resources, population, infrastructure, and information. Yet the accelerating crises of the twenty-first century reveal the growing inadequacy of these categories. States lose coherence without losing territory. Societies fragment despite economic growth. Institutions survive formally while their capacity to synchronize collective action steadily declines.

This article advances a new theoretical framework—Temporal Geopolitics—defined as the study of how societies organize, defend, distribute, weaponize, and reproduce collective temporal structures.

The central argument is that cultural codes should no longer be understood primarily as mechanisms of identity formation. Their deeper function is the regulation of collective temporality. Cultural codes synchronize memory, attention, expectation, and action, thereby producing temporal coherence within civilizations.

Drawing upon the works of Jean Baudrillard—particularly *America, Simulacra and Simulation, Symbolic Exchange and Death, Fatal Strategies, The Illusion of the End, and The Transparency of Evil*—this article argues that contemporary conflicts increasingly occur between incompatible temporal regimes rather than between competing territorial entities.

The article introduces the concepts of temporal territory, temporal borders, temporal sovereignty, temporal colonization, and temporal insurgency. It concludes that the defining strategic resource of the twenty-first century is not space, information, or even attention, but time itself.

Keywords: Temporal Geopolitics, cultural codes, temporality, Jean Baudrillard, symbolic exchange, hyperreality, temporal sovereignty, cultural anthropology, sociology of time.

INTRODUCTION:

THE LAST ILLUSION OF GEOGRAPHY

The twentieth century believed in territory. The twenty-first century believes in information.

Both may be mistaken.

The dominant geopolitical imagination still assumes that power occupies

space. Political maps remain the sacred texts of modernity. Borders, corridors, trade routes, strategic regions, maritime passages—these continue to structure how power is imagined and measured.

Yet contemporary reality increasingly behaves as though geography has become secondary. States preserve their borders yet lose social cohesion. Institutions retain their architecture while losing legitimacy.

Digital networks connect billions while producing unprecedented fragmentation. The paradox is striking. The map remains stable. Society does not. Something more fundamental than territory is being transformed.

Jean Baudrillard repeatedly suggested that modern civilization survives through increasingly elaborate simulations of stability. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he argued that signs no longer represent reality but replace it. Reality persists as a model of itself.

The same observation may now be extended to geopolitics. The territorial state increasingly functions as a simulation of sovereignty. Its borders remain visible.

Its temporal coherence disappears. The emerging crisis is not spatial. It is temporal. We are entering an era in which the primary strategic object is no longer territory.

It is collective time.

BAUDRILLARD AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HISTORICAL TIME

Baudrillard's work can be read as a long meditation on the collapse of temporal continuity.

In *America*, he described a civilization fascinated by speed, movement, circulation, and disappearance. The American desert becomes not merely a landscape but a metaphor for a society liberated from historical density.

History appears increasingly unnecessary.

Memory becomes optional.

Acceleration itself becomes the dominant cultural principle.

In *The Illusion of the End*, Baudrillard proposed an even more radical hypothesis. History had not ended. Rather, it had ceased to function historically. Events no longer generated consequences in a linear sequence. Instead, they accumulated within an expanding present.

The future ceased to emerge from the past. It became a field of discontinuous simulations.

Likewise, in *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard argued that modern systems increasingly dissolve distinctions rather than producing stable structures. Expansion becomes implosion. Commu-

nication generates noise. Connectivity generates isolation.

These observations suggest a broader conclusion. The crisis of modernity is not merely political, economic, or cultural.

It is temporal.

Modern societies no longer share a common rhythm of duration. The symbolic order that once synchronized collective time is disintegrating.

BEYOND IDENTITY:

CULTURAL CODES AS TEMPORAL TECHNOLOGIES

Traditional anthropology has generally interpreted cultural codes as mechanisms of identity.

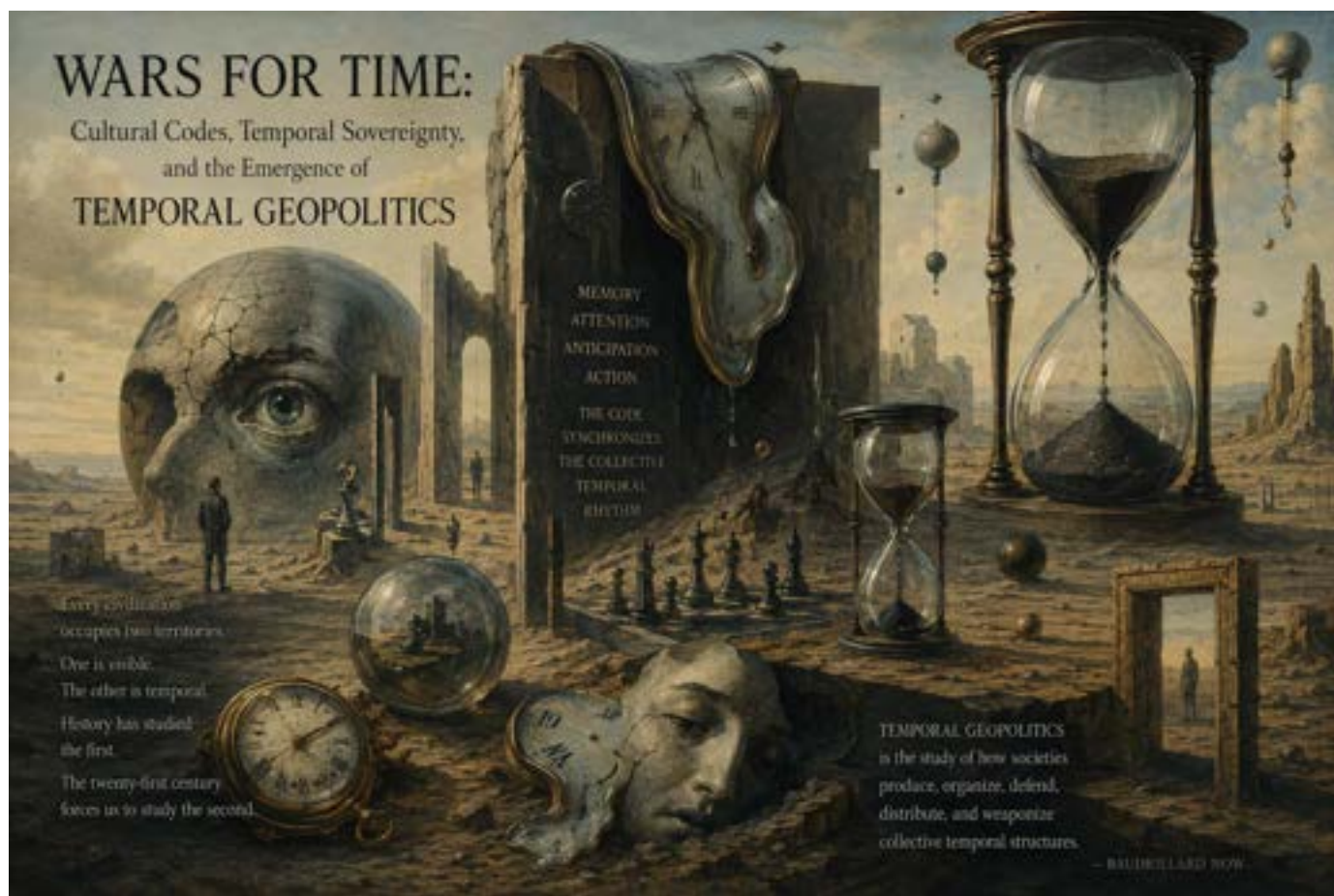
Cultures use myths, rituals, symbols, narratives, and institutions to answer a fundamental question:

Who are we?

This interpretation remains incomplete. A deeper analysis reveals another function. Cultural codes answer a more fundamental question: In what time do we live?

Every cultural code organizes a specific relationship between memory, perception, and expectation. Through this organization, a culture creates its own temporal density.

Its own rhythm. Its own speed of adaptation. Its own horizon of anticipation.



A cultural code therefore functions less like an archive and more like a temporal operating system. Its purpose is not merely to preserve identity. Its purpose is to synchronize collective time.

This perspective resonates strongly with Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange.

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, symbolic systems connect generations through reciprocal circulation. Meaning moves between past, present, and future. The symbolic order creates temporal continuity.

When symbolic exchange collapses, temporal coherence collapses with it.

Signs remain. Rituals remain. Institutions remain.

But the temporal architecture that once connected them disappears. **Culture becomes simulation. Memory becomes data. History becomes content.**

THE EMERGENCE OF TEMPORAL GEOPOLITICS

This article conceptually proposes a new field of inquiry:

Temporal Geopolitics.

Temporal Geopolitics may be defined as:

The study of how societies produce, organize, defend, synchronize, distribute, and weaponize collective temporal structures.

Classical geopolitics studies control overspace. Temporal Geopolitics studies control over time.

Classical geopolitics asks: Who controls territory?

Temporal Geopolitics asks: Who controls duration? Who controls memory? Who controls anticipation? Who controls the rhythm through which reality becomes meaningful?

The emergence of this field becomes necessary because contemporary conflicts increasingly occur between incompatible temporal regimes rather than competing territorial formations.

A state may possess a unified territory while containing multiple temporal civilizations. Digital elites, traditional communities, religious networks, criminal structures, algorithmic systems, global financial actors. Each operates according to a different temporal logic.

The result is not merely social diversity. It is the temporal fragmentation.

THE CORE CONCEPTS OF TEMPORAL GEOPOLITICS

TEMPORAL TERRITORY

Every civilization occupies two territories. One is geographic. The other is temporal.

A monastery, a samurai school, a Sicilian clan, a frontier settlement, a university, a scientific tradition—all constitute temporal territories. They preserve a particular rhythm of memory and expectation.

Their boundaries are temporal rather than geographic. They are defined by duration rather than location.

TEMPORAL BORDERS

The most consequential borders of the twenty-first century are increasingly invisible.

They do not separate countries. They separate temporal worlds.

A traditional family and a social media platform may inhabit the same city while existing in radically different temporal realities. A university and TikTok. A monastery and cryptocurrency network. A military institution and a digital subcul-

ture.

The physical distance may be negligible. The temporal distance may be immense. These are temporal borders.

TEMPORAL SOVEREIGNTY

Temporal sovereignty is the capacity of a society to maintain its own rhythm of memory, attention, and anticipation despite external acceleration.

A temporally sovereign civilization possesses:

1. shared memory,
2. stable symbolic systems,
3. sustainable temporal rhythms,
4. collective expectations regarding the future.

Without temporal sovereignty, territorial sovereignty becomes increasingly symbolic.

The state survives. Its future does not.

TEMPORAL COLONIZATION

Classical colonialism conquered land. Industrial colonialism conquered resources.

Contemporary colonialism increasingly conquers time.

Temporal colonization occurs when external systems restructure the rhythms through which a population experiences reality.

- Algorithms.
- Streaming platforms.

- Information infrastructures.
- Educational systems.
- Digital ecosystems.

These mechanisms do not occupy territory. They occupy duration. They colonize attention. They reorganize memory. They restructure anticipation.

They *transform* collective temporal experience.

TEMPORAL INSURGENCY

Every form of temporal colonization generates resistance. This resistance may be described as a temporal insurgency.

Temporal insurgency consists of preserving independent rhythms of memory, ritual, education, and transmission.

- Religious orders.
- Scientific schools.
- Traditional communities.
- Cultural minorities.
- Local knowledge systems.

All may function as insurgent temporal structures. They defend not territory but duration. Not borders but continuity.

THE GREAT TEMPORAL FRAGMENTATION

The defining process of the twenty-first century may be described as the Great Temporal Fragmentation. Industrial society was organized around synchronized time.

- National education.

- Mass media.
- Industrial work.
- Political institutions.
- Shared calendars.
- Shared narratives.
- Shared futures.

The digital age systematically dismantles these synchronizing mechanisms. Every individual increasingly inhabits a personalized temporal environment.

A personalized information stream. A personalized memory archive. A personalized future. The consequence is profound. Society loses its common duration.

Baudrillard anticipated precisely this development. His notion of hyperreality describes a world in which shared reference points dissolve into competing simulations.

Today we witness a parallel phenomenon. Not merely hyperreality. Hyper-temporality.

A condition in which multiple temporal realities coexist without a common framework of synchronization. Civil conflict increasingly emerges from temporal incompatibility. Groups no longer disagree within a shared future. They inhabit different futures altogether.

THE NEW WEAPONS

If time becomes the central strategic

resource, then the instruments of power must also be reconsidered.

The decisive weapons of the twenty-first century are temporal technologies. Education programs temporal expectations. Language regulates temporal perception. Media accelerates collective attention. Architecture stabilizes memory. Algorithms fragment duration. Entertainment industries manufacture future imaginaries. Digital platforms regulate social rhythms.

Baudrillard argued that simulation precedes experience.

Today temporal architectures increasingly precede historical experience itself. The battle is no longer fought over what reality is. The battle is fought over how quickly reality changes.

The battlefield is time.

ANALYTICAL IMPLICATIONS:

WHY STATES LOSE COHERENCE

Temporal Geopolitics offers an explanation for a phenomenon that classical political science struggles to explain.

Why do states lose coherence without losing territory? Since territory is no longer the primary variable. Temporal synchronization is.

A society remains governable only

while its institutions, memories, expectations, and symbolic systems operate within compatible temporal rhythms. When temporal fragmentation exceeds a critical threshold:

- trust declines,
- institutions weaken,
- identity fragments,
- parallel systems emerge,
- future orientation collapses.

The crisis is therefore not primarily political. Politics merely reveals it.

The crisis is temporal.

CONCLUSION:

TOWARD A THEORY OF TEMPORAL GEOPOLITICS

The central argument of this article is straightforward. The fundamental struggles of the twenty-first century are increasingly struggles over time.

Cultural codes must therefore be reinterpreted. They are not primarily mechanisms of identity. They are mechanisms of temporal synchronization.

They organize memory.

They stabilize attention.

They coordinate expectation.

They transform duration into collective action. Through these functions cultural codes become infrastructures

of temporal power.

The article has proposed a new conceptual framework — **Temporal Geopolitics** — to analyze this emerging reality.

Temporal Geopolitics expands classical geopolitical thought by introducing time as a strategic dimension equivalent to, and increasingly more significant than, territory.

Its key concepts—temporal territory, temporal borders, temporal sovereignty, temporal colonization, and temporal insurgency—provide an analytical vocabulary for understanding contemporary transformations that conventional geopolitical models cannot adequately explain.

The most important conclusion follows naturally. Future conflicts will continue to involve territory. They will continue to involve resources. They will continue to involve information.

Yet beneath these visible struggles lies a deeper contest. A contest over collective duration. A contest over memory. A contest over anticipation. A contest over the rhythm through which societies experience reality itself.

The twenty-first century may ultimately be remembered not as the age of information.

But as the age in which humanity discovered that time had become the

ultimate geopolitical resource.

Temporal Geopolitics is proposed as the discipline capable of studying that reality.

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

1. Development of metrics for temporal sovereignty.
2. Comparative analysis of temporal regimes across civilizations.
3. Temporal resilience and cultural code preservation.
4. Algorithmic governance as temporal colonization.
5. Shadow systems as alternative temporal infrastructures.
6. Digital acceleration and temporal fragmentation.
7. Temporal dimensions of organizational strategy.
8. Temporal geopolitics of emerging AI systems.

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■ A YOUNG SCHOLAR'S VOICE

BAUDRILLARD – THE MOST USEFUL PATAPHYSICIAN



EADEM MUTATA RESURGO

— Motto of the Collège de 'Pataphysique



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ABSTRACT:

This article wishes to place 'pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions, as a major component of Baudrillard's thought, as the theory that enabled the Baudrillardian philosophy. First, this article defines the core maneuvers of excess, contradiction, absurdity, and shows how they differ from straightforward critique. It then surveys the genealogy of these motifs, from Jarry's 'pataphysics through Baudrillard's early works, and into the hyperreality of simulation, pinpointing key terminological shifts and theoretical blind spots in existing criticism. Next, the article offers a way of reading Baudrillard pataphysically, using a concise overview of scholarly debates and highlighting divergent interpretations among researchers and pataphysicians. Finally, the article assesses the use of Baudrillard's work, and outlines promising directions for further exploration, inviting readers to join the next wave of pataphysical inquiry.

«In 'pataphysics, all phenomena are absolutely gaseous"¹, So writes Jean Baudrillard in a way that exemplifies not only recognition of the esoteric philosophy known as '*Pataphysics*, but also the heart of his thought. The Baudrillardian world is filled with later generation simulacra, cloaked in hyperreality, and built upon complex systems of signs. That world works under principles of excess, imagination, and emptiness, clear indicators of the science of imaginary solutions. Unlike Baudrillard, who rarely addressed himself as a pataphysician, this article presents a reading of him as such. Forget the Baudrillard that foretold the collapse of meaning. Instead, here's the one who built a new logic out of the world's absurdity.

It's borderline impossible to define 'pataphysics, so let us start with genealogy. The term was first brought up by Alfred Jarry, a late 19th century French writer, in his book *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll*, Pataphysician. The book tells the story of a fictional scientist, a story filled with contradictions, and meaningless, unexplained concepts. Doctor Faustroll conducts absurd experiments, Such as making himself smaller than himself². Jarry's work, in general, and pataphysical thought in the book in

particular, considered by many as precursors to surrealism and Dada. The book itself defines 'pataphysics in a few different ways, two of which will be employed in this article:

1. 'Pataphysics is the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics.
2. 'Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments³.

Baudrillard's first contact with 'pataphysics was as a high school student via Emmanuel Peillet, Baudrillard's philosophy teacher and the future founder of the Collège de 'Pataphysique in Paris, who taught Baudrillard about 'pataphysics⁴. Baudrillard was recognized as an Baudrillard, Jean. *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonnet*. New York: Routledge. 2004, pp. 4 honorary member of the college in 2001 and received the title "Transcendent Satrap". It's important to note that the familiarity with 'pataphysics was not a superficial one, as Baudrillard wrote about 'pataphysics himself. In his early twenties, he self-published a handwritten booklet titled '*Pataphysics*⁵. This booklet

¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Conspiracy of Art*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e). 2005, pp. 214

² Jarry, Alfred. *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll*, Pataphysician. Boston: Exact Change. 1996, pp. 24

³ Ibid, 21-22

⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *Fragments: Conversations with François L'Yvonnet*. New York: Routledge. 2004, pp. 4

⁵ The booklet later became a chapter in the book *The Conspiracy of Art*.

is evidence that 'pataphysics was around from the very first stages of Baudrillard's thought, as he writes "[...] nothing stops this katabasis towards the knock-off and the blah from starting well before the form now taken by so-called true objects – and that everything was before being born, in its cancerous and imaginary state – can only be born in the cancerous and imaginary state – which does not prevent things from being less false than you think [...]"⁶. This quote heralds Baudrillard's explanation of 'pataphysics, as a science of imaginary solutions. His attitude in this quote aligns with his diagnosis, regarding reality and its excess, something that clearly has been bothering him even as a young man.

Furthermore, in the same chapter there's another connection between 'pataphysics and Baudrillardian thought, and that's the name at the beginning: Ubu. Ubu, the titular character of Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*, is a grotesque individual – Fat, rude, cowardly, stupid, greedy, and vile. The play, a satire of Shakespearean plays, presents Ubu's flaws in all their glory. For Baudrillard, Ubu symbolizes something important, as he's starting that chapter with "Ubu, the gaseous and lampooned state, the small intestine and the grandeur of emptiness"⁷.

Ubu symbolizes excess and emptiness, he's an unqualified king and as utterly gaseous as a hot air-filled puppet. Ubu is the object's doomsday device, he's the object disguised as a subject as a main character in a play. And he enacts his own acts of terror.

Later in the same chapter, Baudrillard claims that 'pataphysics is the philosophy of the gaseous state⁸, and thus, though not explicitly, there's somewhat of a declaration – Ubu is the ultimate pataphysician. 'Pataphysics is the study that examines all phenomena as gaseous, fictional, empty. Ubu is a weightless balloon, but he is a king, a position abundant with symbolic power. He's more than just a parody of Shakespearean royalty, he's an extreme form of an object, a terrorist that proves the pataphysical absurdity in the world simply by existing. The object's power is a pataphysical fact that shows how far and ridiculous reality has become such that an entity like Ubu can not only exist, but rule.

A thesis cannot be built on the merits of just one chapter. There's a need to see where and how pataphysical thought takes form in Baudrillard's later work. At the end of the article *The Height of Reality*, in which Baudrillard talks about the relation between objective reality and the feeling of the same reality missing, he claims that the real will only respond to

⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Conspiracy of Art*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e). 2005, pp. 213

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid, 214

objective irony and pataphysical description. “Pataphysics is the imaginary science of our world, the imaginary science of excess, of excessive, parodic, paroxystic events — particularly the excess of emptiness and insignificance”⁹. Baudrillard viewed ‘pataphysics as a relevant science in our world precisely because it is imaginary. ‘Pataphysics is humanity’s way of explaining the excess and radicalness associated with the object, the fatal strategy that is lunging at the extremes. If the object is extreme and unprecedented, and physics and metaphysics can only explain what is anchored in reality, then ‘pataphysics is needed to explain that which isn’t, the imaginary.

In *The Vital Illusion*, Baudrillard claims that our state of living, characterized by alienation due to technological evolution and the subject’s impending doom, is entirely pataphysical. “Scientists are not far from admitting this point today, and this irony of the object is the very form of a radical illusion of the world — an illusion no longer physical (illusion of the senses) or metaphysical (illusion of the mind) but pataphysical, in the sense Jarry gave the word when he spoke of pataphysics as ‘the science of imaginary solutions’”¹⁰. Baudrillard views our reality as uncharted territory, and thus, our old tools are of no use.

⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Perfect Crime*. London: Verso Books. 1996, pp. 70

¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Vital Illusion*. Columbia University Press. 2000, pp. 54

Physics and metaphysics can no longer explain reality, so we must look to the next stage, the one that lies beyond, and that’s ‘pataphysics.

In *Fatal Strategies*, Baudrillard uses the term “Pataphysics” while discussing nuclear weaponry, as well as the situation that made discourse regarding nuclear weapons even possible. The situation where every country with nuclear capabilities cannot back down, retreat, or slow down the race against other countries. Thus, we reached “[...] a pataphysics of systems. This logical going beyond, this escalation, incidentally offers some advantages as well, even if it always assumes the form of a catastrophe in slow motion, as is the case for destructive and strategic weapons systems”¹¹. Nuclear weapons, in this case, are imaginary solutions, but humanity lacks the means or the perception to conceive of the gravity of that solution. This fatal strategy, of nuclear usage, brings fiction into reality.

The concepts of third- and fourth-generation simulacra are concepts with pataphysical characteristics. When the object belonged to the symbolic order, its meaning was physical. The things the object symbolized, whether they were concrete or ceremonial, served clear objectives. As first- and second-generation simulacra began to emerge, the meaning

¹¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Fatal Strategies*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e). 2007, pp. 33

of the sign became metaphysical, representing reality as something that does not rely on presence or measurable existence. A thing could be imitation, forgery, reproduction of something — like money or a brand. For modern humans, the value of an object is somewhat like Plato's Forms, something that exists but is unapproachable. But when we got to third- and fourth-generation simulacra, when there's no relation between the sign and anything concrete, the sign becomes pataphysical, imaginary, created ad hoc and ex nihilo. The sign pops out of nowhere and fits in the order of things, despite the lack of an anchor in reality. Entities such as reality TV that alters the perception of reality, or cryptocurrency that has no intrinsic value, are pataphysical memes, with reproduction and survival capabilities like never before.

The concept of hyperreality is also pataphysical. On the backdrop of later generations simulacra, a new reality has emerged. It came out of nowhere, unnoticed, and in utter silence has murdered the old reality. This new reality is filled with signs and objects; it forces humanity to become objects rather than subjects to survive. This reality is more real than reality, this is hyperreality. Its components are new simulacra, imaginary and cancerous entities that fight to exist, survive and spread. Unlike the models proposed by Bishop Berkeley of Nick

Bostrom, the point is not that the things we see are illusions or immaterial entities, and that reality is out there, with God or the alien race that built this simulation. The Baudrillardian claim is that, even if it's contradictory, reality itself is fictional. Baudrillard himself exemplifies it at the beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he opens the book with a quote from Ecclesiastes¹², that never existed in Ecclesiastes. Because the new world is both imaginary and real, the only field that can aptly explore such a reality is 'pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions.

Scholars have explored the connection between Baudrillard and 'pataphysics. Gary Genosko has attributed a major influence of Jarry's 'pataphysics on Baudrillard's philosophy. Genosko suggests that Baudrillard has never forgotten his pataphysical roots, and that his philosophy contains methodologies that were characteristic of Jarry's writing, such as scientific rhetoric to explain their views. Genosko claims, "In the spirit of pataphysics, Baudrillard presents us with a universe which, in the words of Jarry, 'perhaps must be seen in the place of the traditional one'"¹³. In other words, Genosko claims that Baudrillard's thought coincides with 'pataphysics due to its iconoclasm,

¹² Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 1994, pp. 1

¹³ Genosko, Gary. *Baudrillard and Signs: Signification Ablaze*. London: Routledge. 1994, pp. 110

the irregular views of Baudrillard, and his metaphysical model, that is more metaphysical than metaphysics.

In poet and pataphysician Christian Bök's book *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science*, he addresses Baudrillard in his comprehensive research into global 'pataphysics. In this book, Bök notes that Baudrillard claims in his essay *The 'Pataphysics of the year 2000* that history and our comprehension of the world have already crossed reality's escape velocity and now floats in the void of simulacra. But, Bök adds, "of 'pataphysics responds to these absurdities with a genre of science fiction that shows science itself to be a fiction. It narrates not *what is*, but *what might have become*"¹⁴. And so, the portrayal that Baudrillard shows us, that reality is no longer real, is not so grim, because 'pataphysics exclaims that reality was always fictional. On the same essay, the philosophers Adam Lovasz and Mark Horvath write in their article, *Baudrillard as Pataphysicist: Unknowledge Production for the Pluriverse*, that "Instead of truth and falsehood, or good and evil, Baudrillardian 'pataphysics measures in terms of inertia and acceleration"¹⁵. Regarding Baudril-

lard's system that uses scientific concepts, and his forecast on the 'pataphysics of the year 2000, one can try and talk only about the movement, that won't stop and won't slow down, but will continue to evolve due to its excess, and thus could only be described using rhetorical excess and applied 'pataphysics.

After showing how Baudrillard could be read through a pataphysical lens, a fair question may arise – So what? What does pataphysical reading in Baudrillard offer? Well, one could claim that the pataphysical lens doesn't have to add anything, and that the striving for practicality is subject to ridicule in 'pataphysics. But that's not a particularly satisfying conclusion. Instead, pataphysical reading in Baudrillard grants his philosophy something we don't see very often in his writings, and that's hope. In our day and age, there's a lot of discourse regarding AI, the good scenario in which we'd all be replaced by it, and the bad scenario that's more akin to the Matrix of Roko's Basilisk¹⁶. But in Baudrillard's writing on the idea of artificial intelligence, he writes, "Freed from all rationality (now developed by intelligent machines) [...] thought becomes free to

¹⁴ Bök, Christian. *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press. 2002, pp. 8

¹⁵ Horvath, Mark and Lovasz, Adam. *Baudrillard as Pat-*

aphysicist: Unknowledge Production for the Pluriverse. https://baudrillard-scijournal.com/baudrillard-as-pataphysicist-unknowledge-production-for-the-pluriverse/#_ftnref5 April 22nd, 2023

¹⁶ If you don't know what it is, don't google it. I'm saying it to protect you.

lead nowhere, to be the triumphal effectuation of the Nothing [...] Relieved of value, things are free to circulate without passing through exchange or the abstraction of exchange. Words and language are free to correspond without passing through meaning”¹⁷. Baudrillard recognizes a certain potential in AI and in the promise that it will sustain the necessary conditions to maintain human life. With it, the human mind will be free from the productive and survivalist need, and thought will evolve, becoming free to imagine with no limitations. In many ways, this contingent future of AI, as a utopic support of humanity, is in itself an imaginary solution that might not exist. But Baudrillard’s focus on freedom that could be from such a scenario, is major evidence for hope, and for the transformative force of unburdened imagination.

It’s easy to read Baudrillard as a fatalist, some might even say as a nihilist. But the aforementioned quote shows his faith in the human potential to break the shackles and fly towards the uselessness and pure imagination, that is the essence of ‘pataphysics. A pataphysical reading, that focuses on the imaginary, singular, and fictional, could give us some hope for a more liberated future. If there is an

AI that oversees all means and modes of production, there’s no need to struggle to survive, and humans could allow their minds to wander, to imagine other worlds and imaginary solutions to nonexistent problems. Hope, much like ‘pataphysics, is something that doesn’t have to exist to exist. We can believe in them and strive for ‘pataphysics as well as hope in such a hyperreal world. Thus, Baudrillard changes from the mad oracle that has prophesied the impending apocalypse, to a child that embraces both the fictional and the real. Baudrillardian ‘pataphysics transforms reality from an incurable verdict to a sandbox, where we could play around with the signs and their systems all we want.

¹⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *Impossible Exchange*. London: Verso. 2001, pp. 157

RECLAIMING BAUDRILLARD

EVALUATING THE RELEVANCE OF *FATAL STRATEGIES*
TO LEFTIST YOUTUBERS





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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the contemporary relevance of Jean Baudrillard to left-wing cultural and political discourse on YouTube. It argues that Baudrillard's theorisation of 'fatal strategies' is a means by which popular leftist critique can be formulated at a time when right-wing populism has successfully exploited the propensity to circulate 'fake news' and (mis/dis)information via the Internet and social media, as personified in Donald Trump's double-election to the presidency of the United States. By the publication of *Fatal Strategies* in 1983, Baudrillard had abandoned historical materialism as an emancipatory political project, rejecting the left's Enlightenment humanist presumptions and socialist critique on account of what he later described as the "implosion of the social in the media" (1985). Instead, Baudrillard used the 'figures of the transpolitical', such as the obese, hostages, and the obscene, to highlight the object's 'revenge' over the subject. Although Baudrillard's death preceded the popularisation of social media, this paper contends that for the left to effectively counter right-wing hegemony, it must recognise the normalisation of 'post-truth' culture in a late-capitalist

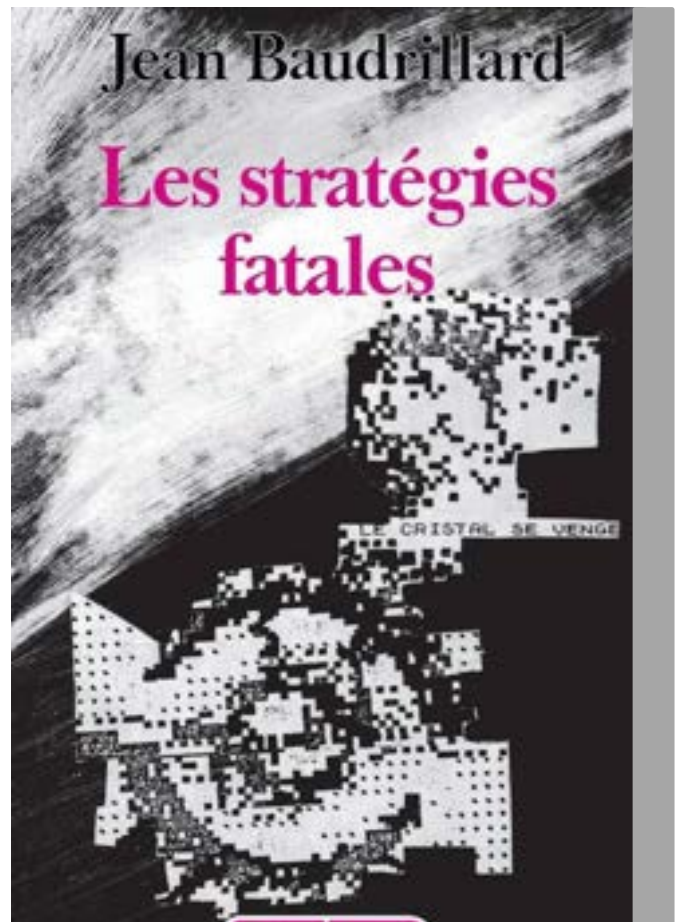
condition permeated by simulation and the hyperreal. To this end, it reveals the communicative and discursive methodologies of contemporary leftist YouTubers that strongly resemble Baudrillard's fatal strategies, regardless of their direct familiarity with Baudrillard's work.

KEYWORDS

Baudrillard; fatal strategies; postmodernism; social media

INTRODUCTION

Once described as the “high priest of postmodernism” (Gane, 1991b), and a key reference point for discussions of late-capitalist hyperreality, Jean Baudrillard was, according to Poole's obituary in *The Guardian*, able to anticipate, “by a decade or two, later arguments about ... human society (as) a simulation designed by malign machines to keep it enslaved” (2007). Despite the prescience of the French philosopher's ideas, which, at least initially, drew heavily from a Marxist critical and historical materialist framework, in the intervening period since his death, Baudrillard has been largely overlooked in leftist discussions about the impact of media digitalisation – especially the emergence of social media and online video sharing platforms – on the relationship between reality, politics



Les stratégies fatales (Fatal strategies)
(1983) by Jean Baudrillard

and power in late capitalism. While Baudrillard's assertions concerning the absorption of reality into simulation appear more relevant than ever, revitalised leftist politics in an age of austerity following the 2008 global financial crisis have made what Davidson (2023) refers to as the “performative radicalism” of much of his later work – accompanied by dismissals of Marxism and any form of emancipatory politics – appear empty and unsatisfying to the leftist aim of

radical or revolutionary praxis. However, the US presidential victories of Donald Trump and the ability of his conservative and right-wing populist supporters to weaponise what Kellner (2021) describes as “intensified media noise” and deploy “perverse explosions of aggression and hate in social media” has led to a renewal of interest in Baudrillard’s ideas in leftist and post-leftist online influencer spaces, to the extent that “(p)ost-leftists”, according to McWhinney, “adore Jean Baudrillard ... the prince of postmodernism” (2021). In acknowledgement of Davidson’s thesis, this essay will avoid extensive discussion of the performative aspects of Baudrillard’s writing in favour of a consideration of the critical potential of his later work for contemporary leftist discourse – especially in *Fatal Strategies*, first published in French in 1983 – in the context of political commentator and influencer channels on the social media and online video sharing platform YouTube.

DISCUSSION

Founded in February 2005 by former employees of the online payments company PayPal, YouTube, now owned by Google, has become a bulwark of conservative populism. Right-wing media channels and individual creators

have used YouTube to build a formidable echo chamber that reverberates with outrage and culture war content, exploiting the ease with which misinformation (unintentional) and disinformation (intentional) can be disseminated across social media and the Internet (Herrman, 2017). Aided by the platform’s inconsistent implementation of its own moderation guidelines, the platform frequently recommends right-leaning, culturally conservative videos by media channels like Fox News and male lifestyle influencers from the ‘manosphere’ – spaces in which rigid masculinities are propagated in unrestrained and often crass ways – to accounts that do not show an interest in such topics (Shapero, 2024). More broadly, right-wing content continues to dominate online media spaces, with the journalism watchdog *Media Matters for America* finding “substantial asymmetry” across YouTube, Rumble, Twitch, Spotify, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, with right-leaning online shows accounting for roughly 82% of assessed programming, permeating “sports, comedy, and other supposedly non-political spaces” (Gogarty, 2025). Such evidence points to a correlation between the standardisation of right-wing ideology in western political systems and the increasing prevalence of social media and online video sharing platforms like YouTube for the dissemination of political commentary.

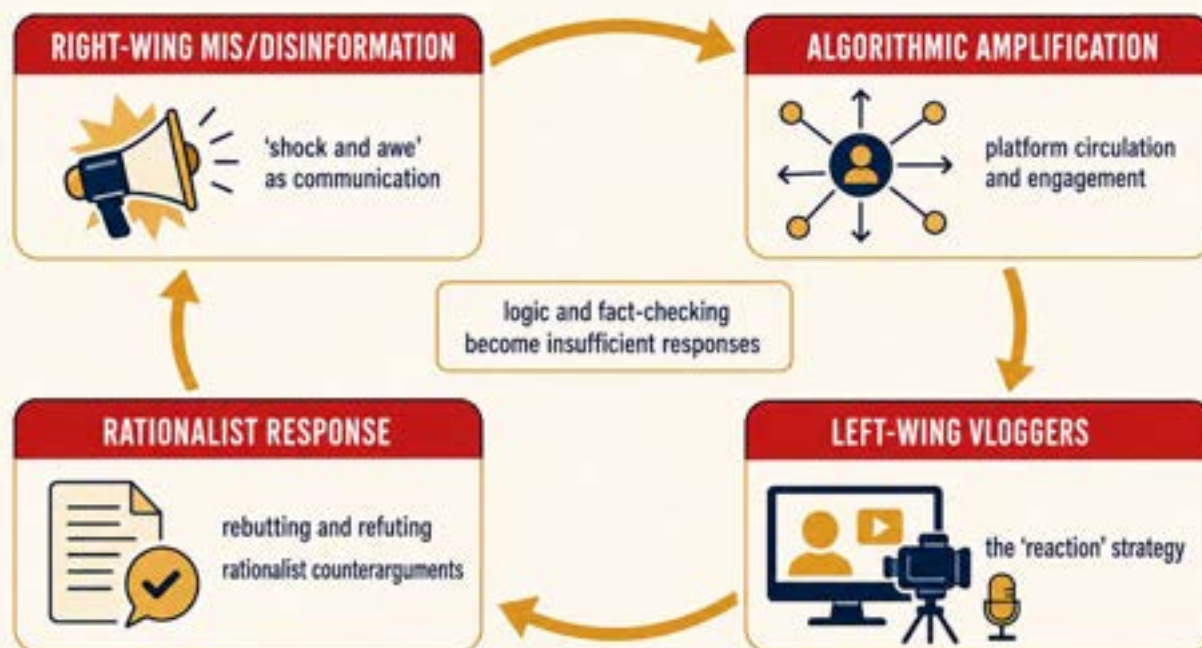
A key issue for leftist political commentators and ‘vloggers’ (video bloggers) is the creation of content that challenges the normalisation of right-wing ideological propaganda and (mis/dis)information as “common sense” (Lydon, 2020: 34). According to Törnberg and Chueri (2025), far right-wing politicians and influencers are much more likely than those on the left to spread (mis/dis)information on social media and online video sharing platforms, highlighting a “symbiotic relationship” between the radical right and “alternative media ecosystems that amplify their viewpoints”. Additionally, right-wing and conservative content creators deploy an anti-elitist rhetorical style that opposes democratic norms, legitimate hierarchies of knowledge, and tends to cast mainstream media as part of a corrupt elite, offering “fertile ground” for misinformation; conversely, misinformation is less useful to the left, who tend to use a rationalist mode of argumentation to focus on the social impact on structural and economic inequalities inherent to capitalism (Törnberg and Chueri, 2025). Buckingham frames the hegemony of conservative online content in terms of “trolling, flaming, and hate speech ... covert surveillance and invasion of privacy ... propaganda and online radicalization; and ... filter bubbles that restrict rather than promote genuine political debate”

(2019: 16). Similarly, Suiter describes a “post-truth” context in which the media landscape in liberal democracies is being increasingly “dominated by reality TV, social media and filter bubbles ... where appeals to emotion are dominant and factual rebuttals or fact checks are ignored on the basis that they are mere assertions” (2017: 25). Thereby, the left’s traditional dependence on rationality and predictability as inevitably beneficial to a materialist perspective of history, with truth and reality experienced in stable, empirically observable ways, is substantially disrupted by the combination of right-wing ideological manipulation and the platformisation of political engagement.

Admittedly, it seems paradoxical that a company that is as much at the forefront of “informational capitalism” (Fuchs, 2010) as YouTube could be an appropriate site for the articulation of progressive or radical leftist politics. After its acquisition for 1.65 billion American dollars in November 2006, YouTube became a subsidiary of Google parent company Alphabet Inc., making it part of one of the world’s largest technology companies by profit (Forbes, 2025). By January 2025, the platform had at least 2.53 billion users, equating to around 30.9% of the world’s total population (Datareportal, 2025). Fuchs (2010) argues that, in its integration of the

REACTION STRATEGY: AN INEFFECTIVE COUNTERSTRATEGY

mis/disinformation, 'shock and awe', and rebutting / refuting



Traditional rebuttal is ineffective as a leftist political counterstrategy.

“decentralised structure of the Internet”, YouTube exploits its users by capitalising on the previously social process of creative and knowledge production; the user-generated “commodity does not signify a democratization of the media toward a participatory or democratic system, but the total commodification of human creativity”. Similarly, Jenkins (2014) claims that participating on social media platforms “is not the same thing as ... participating in the democratic governance of a state ... Participation is about power, and no matter how ‘open’ a platform is, participation will reach a limit

circumscribing power and its distribution”. By allowing its users “to engage in permanent creative activity, communication, and community building” (Fuchs, 2010), albeit in a way that precludes real or authentic participation and democratisation, content producers are transformed into just another exploited class, following traditional industrial labour. While YouTube’s tendency to commodify human creativity and offer its users only a limited degree of participation would seem to counter the left’s traditional support for economic redistribution and the democratisation of political power,

the possibility of mass engagement offered by the platform's "many-to-many communication" (Fuchs, 2010) structure points to its considerable potential for leftist political action outside the hierarchies of traditional mass media. For the purposes of my argument, YouTube needs only to be effective to the extent that it allows content producers to challenge right-wing hegemony and engage in the articulation and dissemination of leftist ideology.

With his death in 2007, Baudrillard did not experience social media and online video sharing platforms in their current form or level of ubiquity. Nevertheless, many of Baudrillard's discussions of the intertwining of politics, power and communication systems have a prescient applicability unmatched by other recent thinkers of media culture. Donald Trump's election victories in 2016 and 2024, and the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (widely referred to as 'Brexit') suggest that politics and their representation, particularly in western English-speaking media, seem to have been considerably disrupted by social media. For example, Morris (2021) asserts that the "infamous '£350 million a week for the NHS' advertisement on the side of a bus promoting a Leave vote during the UK Brexit campaign was clearly aimed at those who share for emotional reasons without

considering the facts properly" while "US Republican politicians similarly aimed to harness this phenomenon for the Trump campaign". Thereby, Baudrillard "was already recognising ... the phenomena of 'fake news' and 'post-truth' that are allegedly the side-effect of social media... in the 1980s" (Morris, 2021). In response, leftist YouTube influencers addressing Baudrillard have focused on the central concepts of simulation (the condition in which signs go beyond representations to precede and construct reality) and the hyperreal (the more real than real, a world in which images and representations have no real-world referents), originally set out in his 1981 book *Simulacra and Simulation*.

While leftist YouTuber discussions of Baudrillard promote his conceptions of hyperreality and simulation, they often do so at the expense of revolutionary hope. For example, Adam C. Jones of the *Acid Horizon* channel introduces the 'Baudrillard, Techno-Fascism and the Tyranny of Advertising' episode as follows: "Content warning: this episode contains discussion of the rise of techno-fascism which will be proven correct inevitably to the ongoing and generating schizophrenia of the co-host talking right now" (00:02-00:13). In this analysis of the *Simulacra and Simulation* chapter 'Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising' from (1994: 87-94), potentially radical or

culturally resistant actions and language are co-opted and transformed by capitalism into commodified signs and messages at source, with no fertile ground left on which to develop truly revolutionary ideas. Baudrillard claims that all resistant or radical signs are “absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten”; instead, all “original cultural forms, all determined languages” are trapped in a “degree zero of meaning” (1994: 87). Further, logic and fact-checking become insufficient responses to the advertising industry’s reality-changing power of disinformation; “advertising is no longer (was it ever?) a means of communication or of information” (1994: 90).

While *Simulacra and Simulation* extended Baudrillard’s critical analysis of everyday life in late capitalism, it also affirmed his theoretical trajectory away from the possibility of radical thought and action based on a historical materialist perspective. Baudrillard’s first three books (dated by their original publication in French) – *The System of Objects* (1968), *The Consumer Society* (1970), and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972) – were a sustained effort to update Marxist critical theory to address the commodification of social and cultural experience in the late-twentieth century, reflecting the contradictions involved in trying

to revitalise Marxism for the post-war period in which productivity increased, wages rose, and the middle classes grew. Nevertheless, Davidson (2023) argues that Baudrillard eventually “lost sight of the material structures on which capital’s power depends and drifted into a political dead end”, failing to provide an adequate Marxist critique of the material basis for the apparent shift away from precarity, poverty, and social instability. McWhinney goes even further by claiming that the concepts of hyperreality and simulation introject the ecstatic flows of capital as critique, diminishing the radical potential of Marxist analysis, while failing to offer an effective critical alternative:

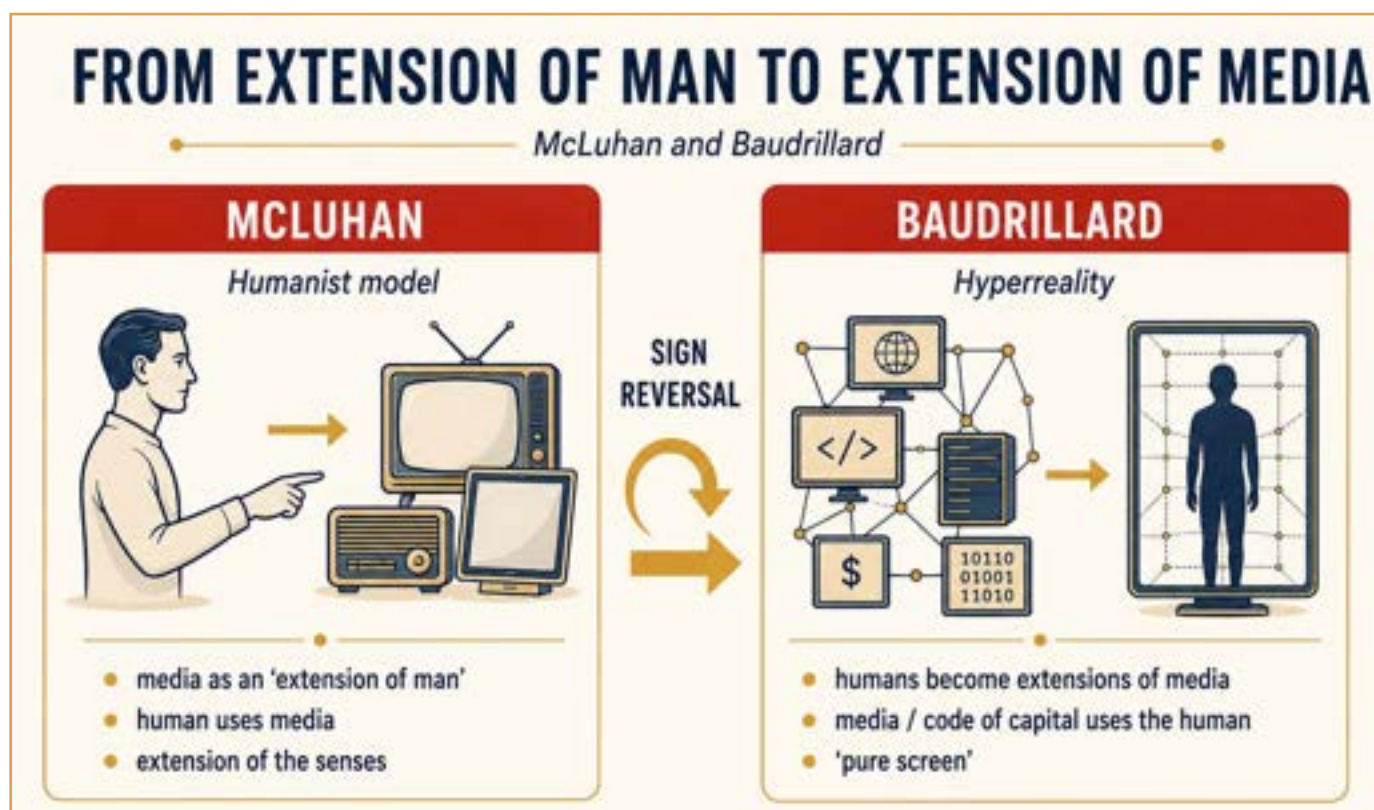
Exploitation of labour and the labour of consumption under late capitalism are both significant and central experiences of the subject in advanced capitalist societies; consumption on its own is not. In his sign fetishism and monolithic conception of the code, Baudrillard ended up taking the side of capital, erasing any potential for resistance against capitalism. (2021)

With the deepening of consumer society into the twenty-first century, Baudrillard’s critique suggests that only the negation of commodification can offer the possibility of emancipation.

However, the prospect of political action based on the disavowal or negation of consumption as a monolithic code seems to institute a starting position of ideological weakness. Meanwhile, the conservative right has been able to posit 'solutions' that draw significantly from leftist responses without challenging the systemic basis of those problems in capitalism. For example, decommodification could just as easily be a project of compelling women to return from the workplace to their 'natural' domestic sphere as 'Tradwives', as right-wing political influencers such as Matt Walsh of the *The Daily Wire* have promoted (*The Majority Report with Sam Seder*, 'Tradwife War Ripping Conservatives Apart', 07:00-08:36).

Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that Baudrillard's project was to defend the real against the combined accumulation of signs and capital, and as he noted, his detractors often seemed to be "confusing message and messenger" (2005: 23). Baudrillard sought to de-commodify culture by introducing "symbolic exchange", which refers to any social practice that defies the "repressive, reductive, rationalizing metaphysics of utility" (1981: 141). From this perspective, symbolic exchange develops when the logic of the sign is abandoned, thereby acting as the radical negation of sign value in commodity exchange

and allowing for the emergence of other forms of exchange. The difference between sign value (linked to commodity exchange) and symbolic value (linked to gift exchange) came to play a more important role in Baudrillard's work up to his death. In an ironic reversal of McLuhan's (1964) humanist theorisation of the media as an 'extension of man', Baudrillard claimed that, in hyperreality, humans have become extensions of media; the only resistance to the sign value of commodity exchange is symbolic exchange with its "uninterrupted cycle of giving and receiving" (1975: 143). In the case of the election of a 'non-politician' like the businessman and reality TV star Donald Trump to the highest office in American politics, the right has successfully exploited the hyperreal – not least in the form of what Kellner describes as the daily posting by the President on social media platforms, including his own Truth Social, of "flat-out lies, absurdities, outrages, and outrageousness" (2021) – by claiming to disrupt 'elites' on behalf of working class voters, thereby manipulating the electorate into misrecognising the hegemony of economic capital – such as in the form of large corporate tax cuts, thereby intensifying existing concentrations of power and wealth – as symbolic de-commodification. To effectively challenge right-wing hegemony, Baudrillard implies that the left must



adopt the 'fatal strategy' of abandoning its humanist and rationalist presumptions for the disruptive logic of symbolic exchange, whereby:

... the limit point in which all alternative values spasm into their opposite: such as life and death, good and evil, chance and fate, male and female, human and inhuman ... As such, reversibility can also be considered a strategy emerging from within any given arrangement: the immanent potential for subversion or metamorphosis." (2008: 12)

Baudrillard here evokes an accelerationist strategy that diverges from the Marxist oppositionality adopted in

his first three books, dismissing decelerative, humanist solutions in favour of what Mackay and Avanessian describe as "an affirmation that the increasing immanence of the social and technical is irreversible and indeed desirable ... in a concrete transition to another life beyond the iniquities and impediments of capital" (2014: 8). For Baudrillard, the aim is to strategically disrupt the seamlessness of simulacra in the hyperreal, which, if successful enough, will gain the status of an event and become a "poetic singularity" (1996: 103).

Baudrillard's later work points to a stage in which the hyperreal has been pushed to its limits and where all frames of reference have dissolved, to the

extent that, as Gane observes, “all the previously secure categories of social knowledge which have guaranteed the articulated spheres of being are undermined: economic, political, religious, sexual, cultural, as well as the human itself” (2000a: 43). Baudrillard refers to this stage as “transpolitical” (2008: 45), in which critical engagements with knowledge, society and reality must be transformed to correspond with the decline of Enlightenment assumptions about truth and rationality. Now, the only way for engagement to be effective is to produce ‘radical thought’:

Radical thought is a stranger to all resolving of the world in the direction of an objective reality and its deciphering. It does not decipher. It anagrammatizes, it disperses concepts and ideas and, by its reversible sequencing, takes account both of meaning and of the fundamental illusoriness of meaning ... Cipher, do not decipher. Work over the illusion to create an event. Make enigmatic what is clear, render unintelligible what is only too intelligible, make the event itself unreadable. Accentuate the false transparency of the world to spread a terroristic confusion about it, or the germs or viruses of a radical illusion. (1996: 104)

Producing radical thought in hyper-reality involves making events “unreadable” by accentuating their “illusoriness”, resulting in a disruptive irony. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, ‘irony’ is not only the sarcastic use of words to imply the opposite meaning, but also the revelation of a fundamental incongruity between that “which was intended to have a particular result (but) has the opposite or a very different result”. For example, the ironies involved in efforts to ‘clean-up’ politics in America reveal the fundamental hypocrisy of power in late capitalism and weaknesses in its hyperreal structures. While referring to the impeachment of Bill Clinton, Baudrillard’s statement below can be readily applied to the multiple attempts to dethrone Donald Trump on moral grounds:

By managing to condemn a perversion of justice that verges on the betrayal or a solemn oath, the judge is contributing to building the image of a ‘clean’ America. And one, therefore, which benefits from an enhanced moral power to exploit the rest of the world (even if it does so democratically). (2003: 34)

Soon after Trump’s first election win, women, segments of the media, and political rivals launched an attack on the

President by exposing his sexual vulgarities and misdemeanours, including the covering up of a hush money payment to the adult film star Stormy Daniels (Morgan, 2025). Around the same time, revelations of wide-scale sexual assault and harassment by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, and others in the film, television, and other media industries, as well as politicians, were circulated, reinforced by coverage of the social justice movement #MeToo through which women felt able to publicly recount their experiences of sexual abuse. Yet, unlike Weinstein, the President escaped significant criminal and political penalty, despite the image of a 'clean' America having long since passed in the public imagination, partly resulting from Trump's, Weinstein's, and their entourages' historic misbehaviour. In a Baudrillardian context, radical thought on the part of Trump's opponents would involve going beyond the normalised expressions of outrage at his actions to ironically highlight the systemic procedures that have allowed him to retain power.

In a critique of Baudrillard's performative text, *Fatal Strategies*, Levin argues that:

... the fatal strategy is not a political strategy in the sense of a subject 'position' in relation to an object or goal ... The fatal strategy is

in a way neither active nor passive, but a kind of magical identification with the actions of things ... one's 'opposition' comes out of the system itself" (1996: 271-272).

In Baudrillard's analysis, "magical identification" as an oppositional strategy is not defined in terms of its representational value. As Patton noted in his translator's introduction to *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Baudrillard "believes that writing should be less a representation of reality than its transfiguration and that it should pursue a 'fatal strategy' of pushing things to extremes" (1995: 6). In this spirit, this article invites readers to use Baudrillard as a means by which online and leftist YouTubers can cipher rather than decipher; that is, to strategically use language beyond traditional leftist discourse to challenge and disrupt capitalism from within its linguistic and communicative structures.

Baudrillard's theorisation in *Fatal Strategies* falls within a leftist critical framework, in which leftism is defined (ironically) from a Marxist critique of cultural hegemony. Baudrillard rejects the humanist presumptions of Marxism, such as the origin of 'the social' drawn from Thomas Hobbes' theory of the contractual binding of the state and the people, whereby, from a Marxist perspective, such a 'social contract' develops out

of the relationship between the ruling and working classes. However, as Shanyi argues, “Baudrillard claimed that there has never been ... a responsible collective subject, and no social project ... has ever really existed” (2023: 290). Forgoing even the notion of a critical political economy of the sign, Baudrillard later comes to believe that the reproduction of society no longer centres on reproducing the mode of production, but on the overproduction of the real, the hyperreal:

The other production, that of values and commodities, that of the belle époque of political economy, has for a long time had no specific meaning. What every society looks for in continuing to produce, and to overproduce, is to restore the real that escapes it. That is why today this ‘material’ production is that of the hyperreal itself. (1994: 23)

There is no longer a ‘real’ base where production takes place. There is only the hyperreal, which appears more real than the real world itself; for Baudrillard, we live in a world where apparent contradictions merely exist to simulate the differentiation of subjectivity. Taken to its most extreme conclusions in *Fatal Strategies*, this theory asserts that objects have come to rule subjects and the social has disappeared. While, as

Gane identifies, this is not to say “society has been dissolved; what has changed is the idea of a society with a systematic overdetermined complexity, or a society in depth, having a separated structure of economic basis and political, cultural, and social spheres” (1991: 126). We as subjects must accept this dissolution and adopt objecthood ourselves.

According to Baudrillard, a transpolitical objecthood would be able to simultaneously internalise and critique the:

... transparency and obscenity of information in a universe emptied of event, the transparency and obscenity of space in the promiscuity of networks, transparency and obscenity of the social in the masses, of the political in terror, of the body in obesity and genetic cloning ... the end of the scene of the body – irruption of the obscene. The end of the secret – irruption of transparency. (2008: 45)

The “transparency and obscenity” of information, the social, space, terror, and the body have accelerated since Baudrillard’s death, notably demonstrated in the intensification of media (mis/dis)information, perverse ‘irruptions’ of aggression and hate in social media, and the ‘obscene’ overexposure of politicians and celebrities by themselves or their detractors, as well as social networking

promotion by individuals whose ‘personal branding’ often involves sharing the most intimate and sometimes shocking aspects of their private lives. President Trump and others on the right venerate the use of social media to mis/disinform the public and to distract and deflect from their attacks on the legal and democratic institutions that could constrain their objectives. For example, President Trump’s former political adviser Steve Bannon referred to this accelerationist strategy as one of “shock and awe”, whereby “(a)ll we have to do is flood the zone. Every day we hit them with three things. They’ll bite on one, and we’ll get all of our stuff done, bang, bang, bang” (Gagliardi, 2025). In addition, with the death of the social, society becomes overexposed to media events that replace the spectacles of consumer society with the obscenity of the screen that transmits content instantaneously: “Obscenity begins precisely when there is no more spectacle, no more scene when all becomes transparency and immediate visibility when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication” (1988: 130). Without defense or distance, we become “a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence” (1988: 133). Gane highlights that overexposed politicians and celebrities “are transpolitical figures in a society in which

the social is no longer a vital principle” (1991: 126). In the transpolitical, the era of interiority, subjectivity, meaning, privacy, and inner life is over; a new era of obscenity, instantaneity, and transparency begins.

Fatal Strategies articulates the possibility of a critical response to the hyperrealisation of the social; a position from which leftist social media influencers and YouTubers have considerable strategic agency. Having grown up with the Internet, instantaneous communication and streaming content as everyday experiences, feelings of alienation for screen-savvy young people are more likely to be framed by the ecstasies of speed and simulation rather than material absence. The Marxist tradition seeks to explain, in a humanist manner, the needs and desires of the masses. It assumes, theoretically, the alienation of the masses from themselves and their labour, which has demonstrably created a schism between the critical commentator and the masses. Baudrillard argues that traditional left-wing critique based on “objective information, the increase of collective happiness, the understanding of facts and causes” is ineffective as a form of political intervention, “except in reply to opinion polls” (2008: 100). In the context of online political discourse, such a strategy offers a sense of intellectual superiority and complacency, invit-

ing participants to respond as expected to algorithmic processes. However, this approach is far from effective in the sense that it is based on ‘factual’ humanist and rationalist biases inherited from Enlightenment modernity. Instead, as Baudrillard argues, what “fascinates everyone is the debauchery of signs, that reality ... is debauched by signs” (2008: 100). In response to right-wing misinformation and ‘shock and awe’ as communication, left-wing vloggers and YouTube commentators have tended to opt for the ‘reaction’ strategy that provides rationalist counterarguments to the announcement of conservative policies and the commentary of right-wing social media counterparts. This process of rebutting and refuting has played a central role in online left-wing narratives and is firmly located within the humanist sign systems of modern political discourse but is ineffective as a leftist political counterstrategy. Baudrillard’s theorising of the transpolitical shows the need for new critical and communicative strategies to contend with the ongoing proliferation of hierarchical sign-systems as forms of ideological hegemony, entrenched by the power of material institutions in the late-capitalist mode of production. Thereby, a Baudrillardian leftism would be one not based on the “illusion” of the social, but on reversibility, irony, obscenity and challenge. It is in

these approaches the hope for a transpolitical reversal of the hyperreal lies.

For Baudrillard, the erosion of the social in late capitalism has introduced a series of “transpolitical figures”, defined by Baudrillard in *Fatal Strategies* as: the ‘obese’, an informational overflow that perpetuates its own logic; the ‘hostage’, whose fate is aleatorily determined outside their control, and the ‘obscene’, through whom every ‘secret’ is exposed as non-existent (2008: 45). While these figures are distinctly substantiated as adaptable for both left-wing and right-wing causes (they are, after all, transpolitical), below, I apply their ideologies and methodologies to the communicative strategies of some of the most effective leftist YouTuber vloggers and video essayists, based on subscriber counts at the time of writing (June 2025).

OBESE: THE TRANSPOLITICS OF SPACE

In *Fatal Strategies*, ‘obesity’ is defined by Baudrillard as the characteristic of over-consumption in western societies. While he correlates overeating and the excessive consumption of media, the term is not necessarily intended to be abusive or defamatory. Rather, Baudril-

lard draws on the Lacanian notion of the mirror stage of infantile development to define obesity as an obscene form of abundance that indicates systemic collapse in the social permeation of a regressive orality. Thereby, the “secret form of the mirror, by which the body watches over itself and its image, is abolished, yielding to the unrestrained redundancy of a living organism” (2008: 47). If obesity is defined as “taking up space” (2008: 47), the obese are not separate from the world, nor do they have a sense of totality; they are driven simply to occupy space incessantly. As such, space refers to the basis on which boundaries are drawn; ‘taking up space’ denotes the passive cancer-like disappearance of limits and the indiscriminate intake of information.

The strategic value of the transpoliticisation of space is strongly evoked by Turkish American streamer Hasan Piker, who also uses the ‘HasanAbi’ pseudonym. Piker’s main channel has a subscriber count of 1.62 million and uploads videos around 3-4 times per day that vary in length from around 15 minutes to over an hour, with the latter usually consisting of joint streams with fellow leftist vloggers and political commentators. Piker’s YouTube content addresses traditional leftist and social justice issues such as gun control; LGBTQ+ rights; universal education and health care; worker

power and autonomy, and anti-Zionism. However, in antithesis to the right-wing caricature of the left-wing campaigner and ‘social justice warrior’ (SJW) who fixates on a single issue linked to identity politics, Piker has a significant presence on the livestreaming video games platform Twitch, where, at the time of writing, he is the platform’s fourth most-subscribed channel (Twitchtracker, 2025) and is considered its “de facto political commentator” (Foxman et al, 2024). While gaming is still considered a male-focused activity, Piker’s appearance and persona in his YouTube videos align with the physical and communicative attributes valued by those who populate the manosphere spaces in which rigid masculinities are propagated in unrestrained and often crass ways by largely young male participants, even if Piker’s leftist politics diverge from the right-wing ideologies these audiences typically espouse. Piker is exceptionally tall, regularly visits the gym, and has the idealised physical characteristics of an ‘Alpha’ male in his early-30s. Temperamentally, he is agentic and assertive, often extolling self-improvement strategies to detoxify the behaviours of young men vulnerable to the gender essentialism and social isolation that often characterises manosphere participants (van Valkenburgh, 2021). Thereby, introjected feelings of romantic and interpersonal

failure are reframed as consequences of neoliberal hyper-individualism and the alienation of deindustrialised working-class men. Those attracted to manosphere content for its irreverence, frank debate, and open discussion, could feasibly fall into the orbit of an iconoclastic leftist who disdainfully critiques conservative and right-wing ideology while lampooning the strategic ineffectiveness of mainstream progressive political discourse. For example, in the video ‘WHY IS THIS STILL AN ISSUE?’ (16th June 2025), which addressed leftist discourse on the role of self-determination in the hyper-sexualisation of female pop stars like Sabrina Carpenter, Piker claims that:

Gen Z has become hyper-puritani- cal ... It comes from a place of pow- erlessness ... You go out there to protest, but then nothing changes, so you look to your favourite influ- encers where you can have some semblance of influence ... This is the kind of thing that happens all the time with the ‘woke’ SJWs, and so-called ‘cancel culture’ ... I think it’s wholly unproductive at the end of the day ... It’s infantilising to act like she (Carpenter) is a victim of the exploitative and perverse forc- es of capital.

In this editorial commentary, Piker

is critiquing the apparent tendency of young leftists – namely those identified as belonging to Gen Z and “woke SJWs” – to overemphasise identity politics as a defeated strategy of resentment that has the unintended effect of deflecting attention from structural considerations associated with economic inequality. His unapologetic ideological positioning and rhetorical style seems to affirm his perceived authenticity among follow- ers. In this context, Marantz (2025) describes Piker as the “Joe Rogan of the left” – referencing the comedian and sports broadcaster’s eponymous *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast, which is hugely popular among right-leaning young men – based on Piker’s tolerance of controversy and ‘Alpha’ male appeal.

Piker’s interaction style consists of him streaming from his Los Angeles- based hybrid bedroom-office where he multitasks on a computer while followers identify news items and fandom-specific memes for his commentary. Unlike tradi- tional journalists, whose work is guided by objectivity and editorial oversight, political vloggers like Piker build a sense of trust through interpersonal affinity, transparency, and connected- ness, affirming Burgess and Green’s view that vlogging is “the emblematic form of YouTube participation” (2018: 53). Additionally, an ideologically driven rhetorical style is used to deflect

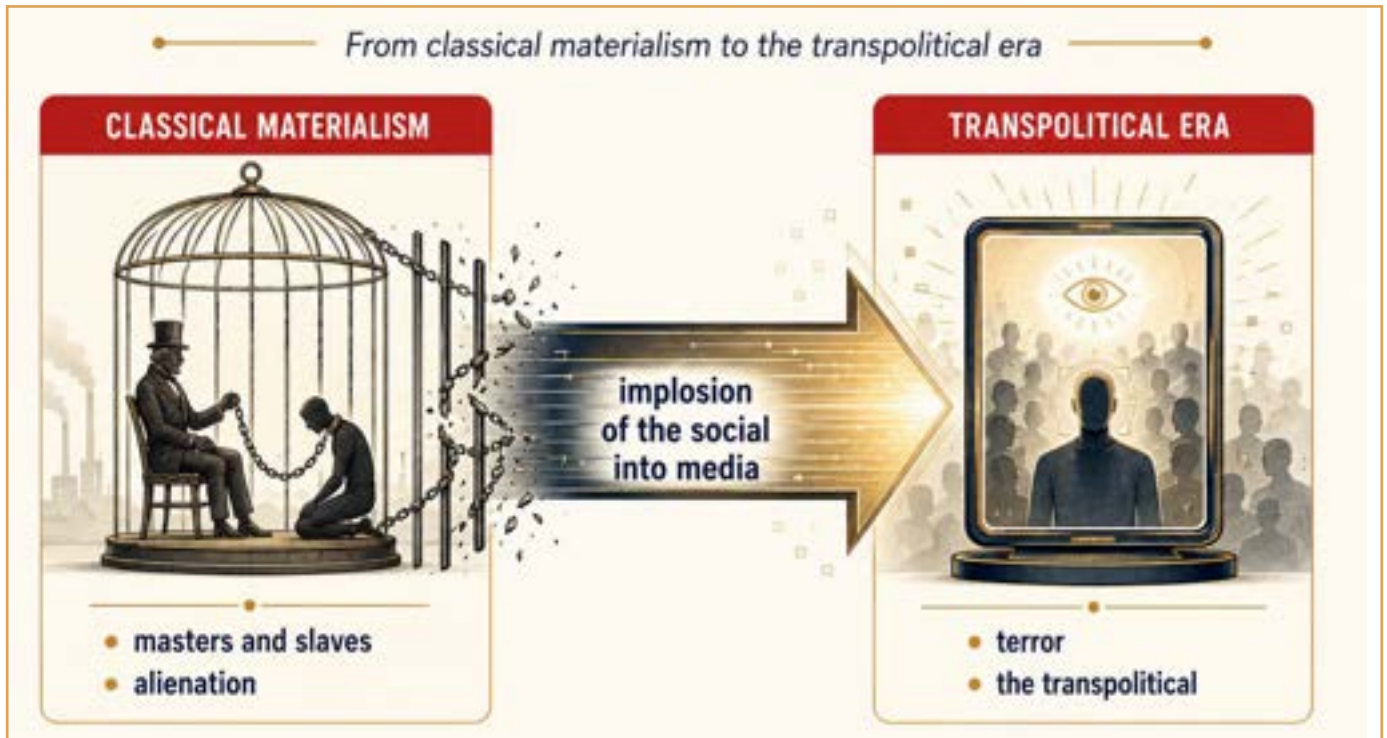
potential accusations of complicity with the corporate ownership of online platforms. For example, on Twitch, Piker will occasionally role-play as 'Hank Pecker', an ethno-political caricature of a conservative 'redneck' – a derogatory term typically applied to rural white American conservatives perceived to be crass and unsophisticated – while, in political commentary on YouTube, Piker frequently refers to the same group as 'hogs', with elderly politicians referred to as 'vampires'. In this respect, Piker reframes from a socialist perspective online 'Edgelord' discourse in which far right individuals on platforms like the anonymous forum site 4chan intentionally seek to deride or shock leftist targets. Having occupied so much space and absorbed so much information, such obese participants tend to deny a coherent ideological basis in fear of being ridiculed as 'right wing', while forcefully defending forms of 'free speech' that attest to their extremist beliefs. Neubaum (2024) illustrates a discrepancy between right-wing forum participants who reject any political affiliation, and the large number of vloggers and social media influencers who explicitly identify with a right-wing political stance, such as conservative, Republican, or pro-Trump. Thereby, as Piker demonstrates, a leftist approach can benefit from exploiting

the ironies of obesity in online culture, strategically combining the 'edgy' visual and linguistic signs with open demonstrations of a consensus-driven political consciousness more consistent with socialist values.

THE HOSTAGE: TERRORISM AND CANCELLATION

"The hostage" is the second transpolitical figure that offers a fatal strategy for leftist political critique via 'new' information and communications systems. In his exploration of the oppositionality between symbolic and simulation cultures, Baudrillard examines how hostages of terrorism experience the absence of agency while intensified counter-terrorism strategies ironically undermine wider societal structures in their deployment. He argues that terrorists have adapted to simulation; their acts are staged for the media and become part of the world of self-referential signs in hyperreality:

We are all hostages, and we are all terrorists. This circuit has replaced that other one of masters and slaves, the dominating and the



dominated, the exploiters and the exploited. Gone is the constellation of the slave and the proletarian: from now on it is the hostage and the terrorist. Gone is the constellation of alienation: from now on it is that of terror. It is worse than the one it replaces, but at least it liberates us from liberal nostalgia and the ruses of history. It is the era of the transpolitical that is beginning. (2008: 61)

For Baudrillard, there is no hostage-terrorist dichotomy; in the transpolitical era, everyone is responsible for terror, and everyone can behave like a terrorist. At the same time, everyone is held hostage by terror.

In a culture of simulation, the responsibility for creating a 'toxic' online environment that propagates fake news and (mis/dis)information is often framed as a form of collective behaviour. Taking responsibility for others' irresponsibility is generalised and everyone is made complicit with power. Such is the basis of 'cancelling' and 'cancel culture', whereby everyone in a group or 'safe space' becomes a hostage at risk of blackmail. For Žižek:

... (c)ancel culture, with its implicit paranoia is a desperate (and obviously inefficient) attempt to compensate for actual troubles and tragedies ... the violence and exclusion to which (marginalised groups) are permanently subject-

ed. The answer to this violence cannot be the retreat into a cultural fortress; a pseudo 'safe space' whose discursive fanaticism leaves intact and even strengthens the resistance of the majority to it (2023: 105).

The "discursive fanaticism" of cancel culture can be understood as a form of extortion or intimidation, where individuals or groups use the threat of public shaming to silence or control others, often using new forms of media technology, either in the shaming of individuals on social media and instant messaging platforms, like *X* and *WhatsApp*, as well as through the circulation of AI-generated 'deep fakes', where images, videos or audio recordings are maliciously or surreptitiously manipulated to mimic a likeness. Žižek's analysis of the paradox of 'safe spaces' affirms Baudrillard's view that power in hyperreality permeates society through the circulation of signs, rather than via direct control; "terrorism is only the executioner for a system which itself also seeks both total anonymity and, at the same time and contradictorily, total responsibility for each of us" (2008: 57). While hostages are made responsible for systematic violence, terror cannot be diffused through cancellation. Terror is aleatory, defined by challenge, chance

and randomness. The terrorist, who is also a hostage, has no responsibility for their fate.

The transpolitical terror-hostage dynamic of cancel culture is enacted across the ideological spectrum. Conservatives and conservative-adjacent spaces such as the *manosphere* advocate a return to pre-modern and often religious values against postmodern decadence. In Western societies, these calls from the right are combined with the espousal of individualised economic abundance at the expense of state-led and centralised services that can mitigate the socially and morally deleterious effects of economic inequality as the accumulation of private wealth increases. At the same time, the right has enacted, as Sarkar illustrates, a spurious "culture war" against marginalised groups and their allies, denoted by race, gender and sexual orientation, as a means by which to deflect accountability for grievances rooted in iniquitous material and economic circumstances:

... the right's strategy is this: to subvert, diffuse and redirect class conflict ... which along with technology is the most powerful engine of social transformation in our history ... All the while those in power get away with imposing the economic policies which have impoverished

the white working class in the first place (2025: 18-19).

Conversely, the left typically preaches permissiveness regarding issues of cultural, gender and sexual identity. However, in its attempts to guarantee this tolerance, it requires the escalation of rules, with more 'cancelling' and regulating, that introject anxiety and tension in these ostensibly 'safe' or permissive spaces, whether physical or virtual. In these spaces, we have, according to Sarkar, "nurtured a culture that's deeply individualistic, where to be seen as a victim, to be able to claim a marginalised identity position, gives you social capital" (2025: 26). Thereby, a late-capitalist culture is one where all individuals are potential terrorists, and all can be held hostage, with permissiveness transformed into the fundamentalist terror of universal prohibition; in a 'woke' regime, it is difficult to know when participants in permissive spaces will be blackmailed or cancelled for their acts or words, as the rules of engagement are often unclear.

By eschewing a version of cancel culture that supports the accumulation of social capital in the context of late-capitalist individualism, Kyle Kulinski – the host and producer of *The Kyle Kulinski Show* on his YouTube channel *Secular Talk*, which has 1.85 million subscribers at the time of writing (June 2025), and

co-host with his wife Krystal Ball on the podcast *Krystal, Kyle & Friends* – shows how the terror-hostage dynamic can be adopted as a fatal strategy of the populist left; the *Secular Talk* YouTube page contains the caption the "home of news and politics commentary from the populist left perspective". Like Piker, Kulinski is in his 30s and presents a wide range of cultural and political content using a confrontational and sometimes profane tone. However, unlike Piker, Kulinski's style of presentation adopts the semiosis of mainstream news broadcasting, often appearing in smart suits and facing the camera directly in his multiple daily uploads, while his youthful looks, carefully groomed beard and short-cropped hair give him the allure of an 'all-American boy' or upper-class 'prep' student.

The 'Jon Stewart TORPEDOES MAGA 'Cancel Culture' (7th January 2025) episode employs the *Secular Talk* format of intercutting editorial commentary with clips from news, broadcast and online media, in this instance, from the comedian Jon Stewart ridiculing conservative politicians and commentators who claim to have been de-platformed by the 'woke left' while censoring any criticism of Donald Trump's MAGA ('Make America Great Again') ideology. However, while Kulinski uses the episode to mock the right's apparent hypocrisy,

he also uses it to suggest opportunities for the left's strategic deployment of the communicative discourses of social media that have hitherto mainly benefited right-wing cultural hegemony and conservative political success:

This is just social media in today's age ... Outrage is gonna get the anger and the energy ... The idea is to take that the anger and the 'cancel culture' (narrative) and direct it at ... the war criminals, the robber barons ... and the corrupt politicians. That's where the outrage has to go.

Together with arguing for the importance of engaging those with political beliefs not informed by leftist thinking, in a transpolitical culture where everyone can be both a hostage and a terrorist, Kulinski is seeking to forge alliances between disparate factions of 'angry' progressive and working-class groups to establish one ideologically cohesive unit against the 'real' enemies of the people, namely the "war criminals, (corporate) robber barons ... and the corrupt politicians". Kulinski is critical of leftist tendencies to exclude dissenting views in the apparent support of minority groups, as some of these dissenters may be sympathetic to socialism's historic class struggle, and which have the unintended effect of prolonging these groups'

positions as victims, or hostages.

OBSCENISM: DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SCENE

Baudrillard's etymology of the obscene is based on the 'scene' as the prerequisite space of meaning; "(f)or something to be meaningful, there has to be a scene, and for there to be a scene" (2008: 90). For Baudrillard, scenes can be defined in terms of God, reason, truth, the political, or the social; primary spaces from which meaning and the real originate. In the West, the obscene is realised in the terrorism of excessive appearance that brings about the loss of "an illusion, a minimum of illusion, of imaginary movement, of defiance to the real" (2008: 90). The illusion is not to be equated with the idea of the false, and the real must be humiliated, just as it has humiliated illusion, for only in this way can obscenity itself be unhinged.

The election of a businessman, reality TV star and convicted criminal to the American Presidency suggests that humiliating the West's political reality cannot merely involve the debunking of falsehood to reveal the 'truth', thereby restoring the illusory performativity of

truth and meaning. Rather, the obscene itself must be realised as illusory in the performative spaces of Western media and social media. Perhaps the most well-known and obscene of the YouTube leftists is Cenk Uygur, host of the popular YouTube news show with Ana Kasparian, *The Young Turks* (6.13 million subscribers), and Chief Executive Officer of the TYT network of left-wing news channels. Along with alluding to Uygur's Turkish American background, the channel's name is evocative of his bombastic and antagonistic rhetorical style. In addition, Uygur has shown the ability to organise his followers towards radical political ends. In 2011, he founded the political action committee Wolf PAC to lobby for the limiting of corporate donations within the United States' political system and the public financing of all United States elections. In the episode 'Cenk Announces Wolf PAC.com at Occupy Wall Street' (20th October 2011), Uygur dramatically announced the creation of Wolf PAC, filming himself near the site of the September 11th World Trade Centre terror attacks, asserting that:

Tonight, we're going to start a fight to take back our democracy. Our politicians are bought. Who bought them? Corporations did. Corporations are not immoral. They have no morality. Corporations are

profit-making machines. We must not let the machines take over our government.

Like his nephew Hasan Piker and Kyle Kulinski, Uygur is critical of the Democratic Party's dependence on corporate donations and its inability to substantively counter the Republican Party's prioritisation of the interests of the rich and privileged, despite its historic progressive and social democratic commitments to the redistribution of wealth. For example, Uygur responded to Donald Trump's first presidency by announcing on YouTube the creation of a new wing of the Democratic Party, the 'Justice Democrats', which he co-founded with Kulinski. In the video 'The Democratic Party Takeover HAS BEGUN' (24th January 2017), Uygur explained that Justice Democrats are an answer to what he sees as a corrupt and ineffectual Democratic Party, and begins the video by asserting "the Democrats used to represent something wonderful – the voters", but after "realising they could take corporate cash like the Republicans ... the Democratic Party slowly became the 'establishment Democrats'. The 'corporate Democrats' you know now". Uygur ends the video by arguing for the repurposing of corporate tactics to orchestrate a hostile takeover,

challenging incumbent congressional Democrats by running “strong progressives” who pledge to refuse corporate donations.

The strategic repurposing of reactionary right-wing discourse by Uygur and *The Young Turks* is an example of Baudrillard’s claim that radical thought can benefit from the “reversible sequencing” that “takes account both of meaning and of the fundamental illusoriness of meaning” (1996: 104). In this example, meaning is correlated with ‘establishment’ politics in which the Democratic and Republican parties are seemingly interchangeable in their transpolitical corporatism and indifference to most voters’ rational interests, and whose systemic performativity is based on a scene of oppositional illusoriness. Thereby, the US political system’s dependence on signs of corporate power to suppress or redirect anti-corporate sentiment offers the possibility of the reconfiguring of such signs into a progressive messaging that introjects the ‘politics of business’; for example, the deployment of language referring to ‘strong’ goal setting, information control, and the forming of acquisitive strategic alliances for socialist ends. Such a reversal illustrates the extent to which traditional left-wing campaigning based on debunking and lamenting the loss of the

social have become ineffectual against reactionary trends in the age of social media, as leftist methodologies are often unwilling to acknowledge the obscenity of ecstatic sign exchange that is already devoid of rationality.

Baudrillard’s philosophical trajectory can be delineated from prescient Marxist critic of ubiquitous sign systems in late-capitalist consumer culture to pessimistic harbinger of socialist irrelevance in a transpolitical condition of simulation and the hyperreal where political action is doomed to failure on account of the implosion of the social with the desires and impulses of capital. In particular, the intertwining of the social with digital communications in the form of social media illustrates how the convergence of ideological, political and technological changes has strongly benefitted conservative and right-wing political interests, especially in the profusion of (mis/dis)information and fake news. In this sense, the twice-elected US President Donald Trump personifies the hegemony of contemporary transpolitics, where the line between the media and political discourse has been elided to the extent that the President’s lies and indiscretions did not derail his electoral ambitions, but instead affirmed the contiguity between his politically intemperate ‘shock and awe’ communi-

cative style with post-truth norms in the social media age. This involution of the technical and the discursive reinforces Baudrillard's claim in *Fatal Strategies* that objects have come to rule subjects, and the social has been displaced by simulation. The only possibility for leftist resistance is to accept this defeat and adopt objecthood; more specifically, the strategic use of language beyond the humanist and rationalist presumptions of Marxism to challenge and disrupt capitalism from within its linguistic and communicative structures, thereby fomenting opposition from the "magical identification with the actions of things" (1996: 271). As the examples of Hasan Piker, Kyle Kulinski and *The Young Turks* suggest, the shrewdest Marxists, socialists and social democrats in the social media ecosystem understand the limits of using facts and logic to achieve their progressive and revolutionary aims. A more transpolitical framing of truth and reality that can circumvent accusations of Marxist elitism is thereby needed to reveal effective spaces for instigating political action based on the creation of reality as it is experienced.

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