



Baudrillard says that process, and the comforting message it leaves us with, is the real simulacra. That in reality the comforting image of Western democracy (as symbolised ultimately by American democracy) is an image with no real substance behind it.

It is hard to explain Baudrillard's point without constantly making reference to stuff that is obviously fake – but his point is that staying at that level (the level of the clearly fake) is to miss his point entirely. He wants to make it clear that our world itself is a simulacrum, that all of the institutions we hold as the foundations of our understanding of how the world works are, in essence, not real. So, Baudrillard is both like and unlike Plato – he is like Plato in so far as neither of them believed that the world we take as being real is anything like real. And he is unlike Plato in that for Baudrillard, there is no 'real' world sitting behind this apparent world waiting to be made understandable by the application of reason. As he says early in this book, \"it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them\".

Once you hear about this idea of the simulacrum it is really hard to not see it everywhere. This is particularly true when you think about this idea of Baudrillard's in relation to his ideas in *The Consumer Society*. There is a similar desire for the 'real' to be the 'ideal' in what consumption involves. More than this, consumer society wants there to be the real 'us' and that reality depends on how we will be transformed into our 'true' selves once we buy something that will help us become who we 'already are'. We live in a world of mirrors – each reflecting back at us distorted images, and desire is the force that manipulates what we are so that we confuse what we want to become with what we already are in our essential selves. Baudrillard's point is that there is no 'real' image – no undistorted representation that is true. There is only these desires and these twisted representations.

The idea that people inject botulism, a toxin that can (and does) kill, into their faces to make themselves look young

strikes me as being essential to understanding this idea. We are prepared to risk death so as to look young. Except botox doesn't really make you look 'young', it makes you look like someone who is trying to look young. And not even really young, there is no 60 year old with botox that looks like they are really 20 – instead they look, I presume, like an idealised version of what a 60 year old 'should' look like. This relationship between the ideal and the real – much the same as Plato's – has now been turned on its head, because of the loss of reality the world itself suffers from.

French dialectics can be annoying. All those reversals and inversions and contradictions get tediously and mind-numbingly repetitive rather quickly. And yet in this post-Trump era its relevance and prescience seems remarkable. Consider what Baudrillard has to say in the context of the last five years of American politics: *"Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."*

Hyperreality is a set of signs with no referent except themselves. But think about it: what is language but just such a set of signs - words that refer only to other words. Hyperreality has been with us (and within us) as long as we have been a species that uses language. Perhaps Trump's greatest (only) triumph has been his insistent revelation to the world that this is the case. Not only does hyperreality exist; it can also be exploited systematically for personal gain.

Baudrillard knows this:

"All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange - God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circuit without reference or circumference."

The idea of faith promoted by Christianity was a direct attack on the principle of reality. In Christianity the real is proven through the imaginary. Doctrine, that is, fixed words referring to themselves, is the source of hyperreality. Faith has a logic which now dominates the world: *"we are in a logic of simulation, which no longer has anything to do with a logic of facts and an order of reason. Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all the models based on the merest fact - the models come first, their circulation, orbital like that of the bomb, constitutes the genuine magnetic field of the event."* Isn't it clear that the imperviousness of American evangelical Republicans to arguments about election validity, vaccine effectiveness, and the necessity for racial sensitivity is the result of living in hyperreality?

Liberals too inhabit hyperreality. Their arguments directed to the Right are not just fruitless but counter-productive. They presume that their opponents are lacking some crucial information. But liberals also have their own faith, faith in information. Left and Right share an idolatry of words. And what we have learned through our experience with the internet and it's so-called social media is what Baudrillard already knew about words, the more of them there are, the less they mean: *"[I]nformation is directly destructive of meaning and signification, [in] that it neutralizes them. The loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving, dissuasive action of information, the media, and the mass media... Information devours its own content. It devours communication and the social."*

Could it be that Baudrillard was also right about power, that it too is now an illusion? Ask yourself, for example, whose side is the media on, that of established power or of the masses? Does it make any difference whatsoever? It turns out that Trump was subject to the power of the media-technology he thought he could control. Could the notorious 'Deep State' merely be code for the fact that power is so widely distributed that no one's actions have predictable consequences. Could it be that the relative sense of quiet in the world is simply down to a reduction in the activity of the political twittersphere?

* Umberto Eco called hyperreality 'faith in fakes.' He was right but only to the extent that public confession defines faith in America. I doubt many Americans would bet the family fortune on the Virgin birth or the arcane theology of the Trinity.

Influenced as they were by Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language and synchronic studies of linguistic systems, it seems as though post-structuralists like Baudrillard were very careful in their choice of words. They seem to have been especially precise in construction of sentences wherein the synchronicity is most visible and words are placed

in relation to each other to form a coherent whole. But this makes the writing more abstract and difficult to decipher, because the coherent whole does not appear to us naturally and words are now imbued with meanings that depend on other words within the particular framework of writing. I often had to dig deeper to even get a fleeting understanding of the text. The task of understanding is rendered even more difficult through the invention of new words like 'hyper-reality' whose definitions are not provided in exactitude, but are only conveyed through relational writing and cross-references.

As far as I understood it, 'hyper-reality' is a process of inversion, an extension perhaps of Marx's theory of essence and appearance. A simulation extends 'reality' by distorting and threatening the difference between true and false, real and imaginary. When signifiers themselves take the place of signified such that the signified no longer holds any meaning of its own, and the simulation envelopes all of representation, then we have a crisis of hyper-reality. And so the objects disappear in their very representation.

Baudrillard examined the value of images in a postmodern world through an examination of images in contemporary society and a criticism of cultural constructs like the media, disney-land, war propoganda, fear of nuclear power and most importantly for us, the modern avant-garde industry of reality tv. Postmodern society seems to have been insistent on destruction of meaning as the earlier modern society was insistent on the destruction of appearance. And here is the crux of it all: we are in the midst of an implosion. At least Baudrillard's postmodern society was. So where does that place us? Perhaps in what lies at the centre when the implosion has reached its own saturation, the point of singularity, the 'virtual' that does not obey known laws and has no anchorage.

***The simulacrum is never that
which conceals the truth-it is
the truth which conceals that
there is none.***

The simulacrum is true. -Ecclesiastes

Baudrillard states, ***"Simulation is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal... 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...perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short- circuits its entire vicissitudes"***

Similar to someone who feigns an illness can make believe that he is ill and may even produce imaginary symptoms; is Alfonso's assertion about the "largeness" a result of his penile obsession. Reminiscent to the television thrusting endless hours of Miley Cyrus's twerking in your face and then you being to wonder whether it is your ass that gyrates on Robin Thicke's crotch. Is it a simulated bulkiness or a generous contribution to penile literature?

Furthermore, Baudrillard claims that Watergate was not a scandal but a mere trap set by the CIA and other governmental authorities to catch the adversaries. Are then Alfonso's monstrous penile claims a mere trap to attract the unknown female species or a real scandalous sexual entrée? Is Alfonso's penis an Enchanted Land with magic rides? Are the pompous claims "real" or a simulacrum like Disneyland? No matter how much fearless fun you might on those magical rides, at the end of it you have to pimp the goat for an ounce of weed. When the lines between the real and unreal blurs one enters the world of simulation. Is the celebrity status of Fonso's penis moving into the same direction? And what would happen when the real is no longer stiff it used to be? Will nostalgia assume it flaccid meaning?

The self-serving circular logic of self-referential meaning sounds like it is an amazing and complex concept, its not. It is a denial of reality, and not just a denial but an outright perversion of the concept of things happening. It is a snobby, first-world centric discourse which denies importance to the lives and shared histories of the under-developed world. Baudrillard may put on airs of being a visionary, but his vision falls woefully short.

Baudrillard's basic idea is that we don't live in reality—that is, in the common sense use of the word, there is no thing-in-itself. He doesn't even talk that way, as though the thing-in-itself is unnecessary. Following Quentin Meillasoux, Baudrillard is an absolute correlationist: the relationship we have with language is what also determinates any outside of language. Thus, for Baudrillard, we live in a world of simulacra. That's easy so far. But there's a catch. For Baudrillard, reality has already been exceeded because the processes that we buy into. These processes are unthinking, mechanical means that produce the simulacra which we then take for the actual thing. The easy examples of postmodern malls in America come to mind, or Disneyland.

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation (12 – 13).

But such simulations only act to hide the fact that we can't get back to reality because we've lost it. So this explains why Baudrillard drops us into the mix. He can't explain why this happened. Once we've gotten sucked into hyperreality we're here. It's a traumatic event. The sheer force of hyperreality obscures any possibility of a central signifier. There is no metaphysics of presence; in fact he doesn't even mention such a concept because it's not important. Instead, he talks of what remains when the model has exhausted itself. "When a system has absorbed everything, when one has added everything up, when nothings remains, *the entire sum turns to the remainder and becomes the remainder* (144, original italics)." One of the key sections, philosophy-wise, in this book has to do with the remainder, which is another way of talking about emptiness as a thing. The remainder is the excessive real, "in a strict sense, it cannot be defined except as the remainder of the remainder (143)"—that is, left over after processes have stopped. You might say hey, wait, isn't everything real? And yes, that's how language is, but the model for what is real and what is hyperreal have become the same. For instance, in talking of diplomas, their ubiquity and the ease at which they can be acquired—for whoever goes through the process gets one—signifies nothing but their meaninglessness. What makes diplomas meaningless is that it's not about knowledge; it's about process. Diplomas connect in a system of simulacra that only point to other simulacra. Similar to Derrida, with Baudrillard, we end with a passed reference that is always missed. What's left over is the reality we deal with, the remainder that we must recycle back into a process for it to be what we think it is, which is a problem we have today with things that are "meta," that the meaning of a thing today is often exactly what it is, a simulation, a context that determines our locus, not what it should be for us. For example, if we go to say, Paris, that trip will be like "a family trip," with all the clichés and potholes of a family trip, which might as well be a sitcom simulating a family trip. The process of going through replaces the reality of a family trip, so that really, you're just "doing" the "family trip." You can't otherwise because we are trapped in hyperreality. This is like how fake internet money in a game treated like real money in an economy becomes real money. The caveat is that real money then is just as fake as fake money because it's just another simulation due to a formal process. Baudrillard notes that, like the Borges story, the territory itself decays when the map of the territory replaces the territory by being the territory itself. The simulacra of simulation, the pattern itself, the hyperreality has taken over reality by replacing reality. In hyperreality, the map meant to represent reality becomes a simulacra of reality itself so that we don't get real, we get the map qua real qua map.

Meaning, truth, the real cannot appear except locally, in a restricted horizon, they are partial objects, partial effects of the mirror and of equivalence. All doubling, all generalization, all passage to the limit, all holographic extension (the fancy of exhaustively taking account of this universe) makes them surface in their mockery (108 – 109).

Thus, the curve of meaning making is in fact what is created through the distortion of the absent remainder, leaving us only sensible sense, the trace that makes sense. In other words, when speaking of truth, or ideology, Baudrillard is able to show us how adding the unnameable nothing (the social totality, the remainder) back into the mix gets us the totality that we cannot exceed. The simulation always over-codes totality by naming its void, leaving us always within the wake of its own logic. Baudrillard writes: "As the social in its progression eliminates all residue, it itself becomes residue. In designating residual categories as 'Society,' *the social designates itself as a remainder*. (144, original italics)." This is another way of saying that in trying to split a totality like the social, we name parts of it also things, so as to make a thing out of its parts. But the social as a totality, as a bare named signifier, persists because the social always remains as a residue to mark the situation we are in. With the naming of any void, the absent remainder, we can never get away from conditions like being in society, whatever ideology or other kinds of hyperreality. Hyperreality is the kind of situation presupposes the very topography that we are trying to define, to get away from! If anything, what is confusing about Baudrillard is that he does not allow us any access, imaginary or real, to what we are talking about. What he calls simulation is also the very naming of a given set of the conditions that allow us to talk about anything at all, simply because such terms act as null reference points to its own generic logic.

The real, the real object is supposed to be equal to itself, it is supposed to resemble itself like a face in a mirror—and this virtual similitude is in effect the only definition of real—and any attempt, including the holographic one, that rests on it, will inevitably miss its object, because it does not take its *shadow* into account (precisely the reason why it does not resemble itself)—this hidden face where the object crumbles, its secret. The holographic attempt literally jumps over its shadow, and plunges into transparency, to lose itself there (109, original italics).

And in this way, you can say that each time you process Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation you've actually miss-encountered it. Whatever process of reading you have, you inevitably create a conception of it, and in that

conception, blur the totality of everything else around it, to make room for this conception. So in a twist of Baudrillardian logic, perhaps we read Simulacra and Simulation in order to claim everything is a simulation. In finding simulacra everywhere around us—we dig extra deep in order to hide the fact that we already don't really live in reality, that our very response in naming and determining differences around us for orientation—to get at reality creates the very condition we want to escape from.

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: "Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms"
- Littré

Baudrillard sometimes fascinates me. Examining popular culture and its signs as taking over reality and replacing it, leaving only an unreliable reference to the original which no longer exists, this philosophical treatise looks into the postmodern condition that leaves the line between the real and the simulation blurred.

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.

In a vein very much similar to Walter Benjamin, who in his amazing, amazing essay **The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction** (I was glad I wasn't the only one who thought of Benjamin here, Baudrillard did too!), talks about the furor over the sanctity of the original work of art with new developments in photography – now that everyone could have a cheap imitation of Mona Lisa, who cares about seeing the original; the aura of mystery is lost with mechanical reproduction – Baudrillard too ruminates over the nature of simulation and reality.

What is lost in the work that is serially reproduced, is its aura, its singular quality of the here and now, its aesthetic form (it had already lost its ritual form, in its aesthetic quality), and, according to Benjamin, it takes on, in its ineluctable destiny of reproduction, a political form. What is lost is the original, which only a history itself nostalgic and retrospective can reconstitute as "authentic." The most advanced, the most modern form of this development, which Benjamin described in cinema, photography, and contemporary mass media, is one in which the original no longer even exists, since things are conceived from the beginning as a function of their unlimited reproduction.

I like Baudrillard's concept of *Hyper-real* – a simulation that is more real than reality itself, which clouds reality and surpasses it to the extent that the real does not exist anymore, and the simulation becomes reality itself; it creates an impressive larger-than-life figure, whether in political or social scenarios, overpowering the real. (historical depictions in cinema, Jurassic Park, Disneyland, Watergate)

I did enjoy this essay a lot, especially his deconstruction of how popular media saturates the mind so easily, clogging it with simulations, and his observations on war, architecture and science fiction with reference to simulations.

However, I do have a bit of issues with Baudrillard, both stylistically and in terms of content.

I do not really agree with everything he says – his reactions to some phenomena seem just as essentialist as those he critiques. Sometimes, he comes across as paranoid in his zeal to impress upon us how unreal the real world is – I agree with him on his ideas, but not to the extent he takes his ideas.

While he acknowledges in the very beginning that the line between the real and the simulated is no longer clear as before, and what is real and what is not is now nearly inseparable – things can be both, and simultaneously. GR itself seems to be a wonderful example of this phenomena – it is a real world, for many of us. Impossible to think of a life without it. But then, do we really know anyone behind those avatars, photos and reviews? I bet some of us would not even have looked eye to eye in real life, no matter how wonderful reviews we wrote. And yet, it is all real and simulated at the same time.

But Baudrillard, in the latter part of the essay seems to insinuate more and more that nothing we see is real, everything about our life is simulated, especially communication on virtual platforms. I really don't think *everything* around and about us is unreal. I think it is real and simulated, all at the same time.

Another issue I have with him are on his ideas of Fascism;

Fascism can already be interpreted as the "irrational" excess of mythic and political referentials, the mad intensification of collective value (blood, race, people, etc.), the reinjection of death, of a "political aesthetic of death" at a time when the process of the disenchantment of value and of collective values, of the rational secularization and unidimensionalization of all life, of the operationalization of all social and individual life already makes itself strongly felt in the West. Yet again, everything seems to escape this catastrophe of value, this neutralization and pacification of life. Fascism is a resistance to this, even if it is a profound, irrational, demented resistance, it would not have tapped into this massive energy if it hadn't been a resistance to something much worse. Fascism's cruelty, its terror is on the level of this other terror that is the confusion of the real and the rational, which deepened in the West, and it is a response to that.

I find it difficult to accept such simplistic explanations.

If Althusser is too oblique, too opaque with his dense, technical style, Baudrillard is too colloquial, too disorganized. If Althusser condenses an unbelievable number of concepts in a short essay, Baudrillard lets his essay run watery, diluted. Couldn't he just say we're being interpellated? Or something easier on the mind if he doesn't like this term?

Images on television and in the movies and in other media are "floating signifiers," having no real connection to concrete referents. The key concept associated with Baudrillard is simulations and the simulacrum. He begins by quoting Ecclesiastes: "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth--it is the truth that conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (by the way, this quotation may be a simulacrum; I could not find it in Ecclesiastes!). Simulations began historically as replicas of the real, as reflections of "reality." However, with time, simulations have become increasingly detached from concrete "real" references. Simulations do not have reference points or substance or any tie to "reality." Simulations have become "a real without origin or reality"--a hyperreal. We face a procession of images and simulations, and lose sight of the simple fact that they are "floating signifiers." The simulacra become real for us.

Put in post-structural (or postmodern) terms, the models created are floating signifiers (simulations in Baudrillard's terms) which structure people's discourse with one another and shape their behavior. Images become crucial in politics. After presidential debates or major policy speeches or elections, the "spin patrol" gets going. These are the spokespersons of the parties or candidates who try to convince the audience that their simulations of the event are better than their opponents' simulations. In the process, no one particularly cares what actually happened or what was said. It is the simulations pushed by the various actors that become the news.

Baudrillard's writing is challenging; many will write him off as an unreadable crank. Nonetheless, the underlying concept of the simulacrum is fascinating and generates much reflection. This is a postmodern work that may actually speak to some real world issues. . . .

Simulacra and Simulation is very wordy and obtuse, but holds some really interesting ideas about culture and society as a whole. A quick way to explain the topic of the book is by looking at The Matrix (which actually featured this book in one scene and used many of Baudrillard's ideas as a basis for its story). In The Matrix, people live in a world that seems real, but is actually a simulation manufactured by robots so they can feed on our energy. The "real world" doesn't exist any longer and the journey of Neo is realizing this and breaking out of the matrix to fight the robots.

Baudrillard says that this is the case for all of us right now. We live in a simulacrum, a world of images without reference, a world without meaning or purpose (worse, a world that wants desperately to convince you of its meaning and purpose). What's most interesting is how he says this system that we created (that of capitalism, hierarchies, universities, culture, technology etc.) is perpetuated by our rebellion against it. All striking does is legitimize the idea of work. All the childishness of Disneyland does is legitimize the "realness" of everyday life. All prisons do is make everybody else think they are free. In this way the system we created has turned against us (like the robots in The Matrix).

Everything has this nature of doubling back and perpetuating itself. Everything is strange and absurd (as is the case with most postmodern philosophy). It's so strange that our science fiction, once the pinnacle of strange and imaginative thought, falls into a state of nostalgia that pales in comparison to reality. I could go on, but if any of this

is interesting to you, you might as well just read the book.

Simulacra and Simulation is very strange and tangled, and truth be told I didn't understand most of it. His writing style is unforgiving (and surely lost in translation), he casually references many movies, books, and events without introduction or explanation, and has many other idiosyncrasies in style. The first and last few sections are really strong, the middle ones a bit mediocre. Overall, the ideas presented are really interesting and will change the way you view culture and reality itself. 3.5/5

That is, we are in a logic of simulation, which no longer has anything to do with a logic of facts and an order of reason. Simulation is characterized by a *precession of the model*, of all the models based on the merest fact—the models come first, their circulation, orbital like that of the bomb, constitutes the genuine magnetic field of the event. The facts no longer have a specific trajectory, they are born at the intersection of models, a single fact can be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation, this precession, this short circuit, this confusion of the fact with its model (no more divergence of meaning, no more dialectical polarity, no more negative electricity, implosions of antagonistic poles), is what allows each time for all possible interpretations, even the most contradictory—all true, in the sense that their truth is to be exchanged, in the image of the models from which they derive, in a generalized cycle" (Baudrillard, pgs. #16–17).

"Because what, ultimately, is the function of the space program, of the conquest of the moon, of the launching of satellites if not the institution of a model of universal gravitation, of satellization of which the lunar module is the perfect embryo? Programmed microcosm, where *nothing can be left to chance*. Trajectory, energy, calculation, physiology, psychology, environment—nothing can be left to contingencies, this is the total universe of the norm—the Law no longer exists, it is the operational immanence of every detail that is law. A universe purged of all threat of meaning, in a state of asepsis and weightlessness—it is this very perfection that is fascinating. The exaltation of the crowds was not a response to the event of landing on the moon or of sending a man into space (this would be, rather, the fulfillment of an earlier dream), rather, we are dumbfounded by the perfection of the programming and the technical manipulation, by the immanent wonder of the programmed unfolding of events. Fascination with the maximal norm and the mastery of probability. Vertigo of the model, which unites with the model of death, but without fear or drive. Because if the law, with its aura of transgression, if order, with its aura of violence, stills taps a perverse imaginary, the norm fixes, fascinates, stupefies, and makes every imaginary involute. One no longer fantasizes about the minutiae of a program. Just watching it produces vertigo. The vertigo of a world without flaws" (Baudrillard, pg. #34).

"All around, the neighborhood is nothing but a protective zone—remodeling, disinfection, a snobbish and hygienic design—but above all in a figurative sense: it is a machine for making emptiness. It is a bit like the real danger nuclear power stations pose: not lack of security, pollution, explosion, but a system of maximum security that radiates around them, the protective zone of control and deterrence that extends, slowly but surely, over the territory—a technical, ecological, economic, geopolitical glacis. What does the nuclear matter? The station is a matrix in which the absolute model of security is elaborated, which will encompass the whole social field, and which is fundamentally a model of deterrence (it is the same one that controls us globally, under the sign of peaceful coexistence and of the simulation of atomic danger)" (Baudrillard, pg. #61).

"After the fantasy of seeing oneself (the mirror, the photograph) comes that of being able to circle around oneself, finally and especially of traversing oneself, of passing through one's own spectral body—and any holographed object is initially the luminous ectoplasm of your own body. But this is in some sense the end of the aesthetic and the triumph of the medium, exactly as in stereophonia, which, at its most sophisticated limits, neatly puts an end to the charm and the intelligence of music" (Baudrillard, pg. #106).

"Nothing resembles itself, and holographic reproduction, like all fantasies of the exact synthesis or resurrection of the real (this also goes for scientific experimentation), is already no longer real, is already *hyperreal*. It thus never has reproductive (truth) value, but always already simulation value. Not an exact, but a transgressive truth, that is to say already on the other side of the truth" (Baudrillard, pg. #108).

"The Accident is no longer this interstitial bricolage that it still is in the highway accident—the residual bricolage of the death drive for the new leisure classes. The car is not the appendix of a domestic, immobile universe, there are only incessant figures of circulation, and the Accident is everywhere, the elementary, irreversible figure, the banality of the anomaly of death. [...] It is the Accident that gives form to life, it is the Accident, the insane, that is the *sex of life*. And the automobile, the magnetic sphere of the automobile, which ends by investing the entire universe with its tunnels, highways, toboggans, exchangers, its mobile dwellings as universal prototype, is nothing but the immense

metaphor of life" (Baudrillard, pg.# 113).

Baudrillard's character comes through wonderfully in his writing too. It's not always easy, and sentences at times feel endless. I do love it for that - the text's oblique style feels deserved.

"Through I don't know what Möbius effect, representation itself has also turned in on itself, and the whole logical universe of the political is dissolved at the same time, ceding its place to a transfinite universe of simulation, where from the beginning no one is represented nor representative of anything any more, where all that is accumulated is deaccumulated at the same time, where even the axiological, directive, and salvageable phantasm of power has disappeared. A universe that is still incomprehensible, unrecognisable to us, a universe with a malefic curve that our mental coordinates, which are orthogonal and prepared for the infinite linearity of criticism and history, violently resist. Yet it is there that one must fight, if even fighting has any meaning anymore. We are simulators, we are simulacra, we are concave mirrors radiated by the social"

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, through a series of short essays, Baudrillard unveils this model of the hyperreal, a world in which the the precession of simulacrum (a copy without an original), leads to postmodern landscape where the medium is confused as the real. According to Baudrillard, in our coming world, the sovereign difference between the real and its symbol have dissolved, and the charm of abstraction has dissolved along with it.

Drawing inspiration from Borge's 'The Empire', these essays paint the philosophical grounding for the the world simulation - in which the map flips, and becomes the new center of gravity for the reality of the territory (40 years later, this is Google Maps). From Holograms to the Holocaust, and Cloning to Nihilism, everything is reexamined through camera lens of the hyperreal (which like a laser, comes to pierce lived reality to put it to death).

In the hyperreal, the simulation begins at the indetermination between the active and the passive. This is the point of the cybernetic collective, which drives the simulation.

Thus, we find our selves in an accelerating world where there is more & more information, and less & less meaning. A world sick from surplus value where empire of meaning, the sharing of meaning has collapsed.

According to Baudrillard, "Every strategy of the universalization of differences is an entropic strategy of the system". And when we look back, the abstraction of all utility into the form of capital was the first mechanism by which every referential was consumed, where every human objective and shattered every distinction between good and evil, true and false, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange.

8/10) Baudrillard is one of those guys who gets dismissed a lot as an obscure French academic, and he is all three of those things. But I think there's a kind of beauty to his writing that makes it more than just jargon. Baudrillard describes the world around us in terms of apocalyptic science fiction, drawing our eye to the way the horrific and the banal intersect in a world of illusion. The kind of juxtapositions and forceful rhetoric that he uses remind me more than a bit of J. G. Ballard, who Baudrillard explicitly cites as a prophetic author.

As far as the actual theory goes, it isn't much more than a rearticulation of Guy DeBord's ideas, but Baudrillard goes a bit further in describing the implications of the simulacrum in our contemporary society. *Simulacra and Simulation* is a series of essays, but it manages to both avoid redundancy and come together as a coherent work. Each essay refracts the core idea of simulation in a different context, ranging from the military-industrial complex to sci-fi novels.

Now's the point where I feel like I should disclaim that this book will probably be too difficult for those not used to the jargon of the humanities, but I'm not sure that's true. The language has a kind of beauty that meaning hides behind, but that makes it all the better. Baudrillard's core theories can be summed up in a paragraph. It's the journey to them that's entrancing.

Jean's writing culminates in what he believes as the reason for the premodernist aversion to representation:

"This way the stake will always have been the murderous power of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model, as the Byzantine icons could be those of divine identity. To this murderous power is opposed that of representations as a dialectical power, the visible and intelligible mediation of the Real. All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange - God of course. But what

if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."

I quickly realized that Jean wasn't going to define anything, so that made this unnecessarily complicated at first. I eventually found others who defined the most important terms (Real, Hyper-Real, Simulacra, Simulation, Representation, etc.). Regardless, the book started off very strongly and continued by talking about an issue I've grappled with myself: preservation of the past:

"In the same way science and technology were recently mobilized to save the mummy of Ramses II, after it was left to rot for several dozen years in the depths of a museum. The West is seized with panic at the thought of not being able to save what the symbolic order had been able to conserve for forty centuries, but out of sight and far from the light of day. Ramses does not signify anything for us, only the mummy is of an inestimable worth because it is what guarantees that accumulation has meaning. Our entire linear and accumulative culture collapses if we cannot stockpile the past in plain view."

He then launches into some boomer talk of TV, but this quote was great: *"Power is in essence no longer present except to conceal that there is no more power."*

Jean eloquently put into words what I knew all along about nuclear war being a virtual impossibility:

"This is why nuclear proliferation does not increase the risk of either an atomic clash or an accident - save in the interval when the "young" powers could be tempted to make a nondeterrent, "real" use of it (as the Americans did in Hiroshima - but precisely only they had a right to this "use value" of the bomb, all of those who have acquired it since will be deterred from using it by the very fact of possessing it). Entry into the atomic club, so prettily named, very quickly effaces (as unionization does in the working world) any inclination toward violent intervention. Responsibility, control, censure, self-deterrence always grow more rapidly than the forces or the weapons at our disposal: this is the secret of the social order. Thus the very possibility of paralyzing a whole country by flicking a switch makes it so that the electrical engineers will never use this weapon: the whole myth of the total and revolutionary strike crumbles at the very moment when the means are available - but alas precisely because those means are available. Therein lies the whole process of deterrence."

There is an entire chapter on Apocalypse Now and it's so good that I ended up highlighting the entire thing. The book is worth the price of admission just for that one chapter.

He next talked about suburban culture and disneyland and other obvious simulations, but also thankfully makes some cute little swipes at fellow leftists:

"One must applaud this success of cultural deterrence. All the antiartists, leftists, and those who hold culture in contempt have never even gotten close to approaching the dissuasive efficacy of this monumental black hole that is Beaubourg. It is a truly revolutionary operation, precisely because it is involuntary, insane and uncontrolled, whereas any operation meant to put an end to culture only serves, as one knows, to resurrect it."

"To choose the wrong strategy is a serious matter. All the movements that only play on liberation, emancipation, on the resurrection of a subject of history, of the group, of the word based on "consciousness raising," indeed a "raising of the unconscious" of subjects and of the masses, do not see that they are going in the direction of the system, whose imperative today is precisely the overproduction and regeneration of meaning and of speech."

"Power is being lost, power has been lost. All around us there are nothing but dummies of power, but the mechanical illusion of power still rules the social order, behind which grows the absent, illegible, terror of control, the terror of a definitive code, of which we are the minuscule terminals. Attacking representation no longer has much meaning either."

"But we also have to fight against the profound fascination exerted on us by the death throes of capital, against the staging by capital of its own death, when we are really the ones in our final hours. To leave it the initiative of its own death, is to leave it all the privileges of revolution. Surrounded by the simulacrum of value and by the phantom of capital and of power, we are much more disarmed and impotent than when surrounded by the law of value and of the commodity, since the system has revealed itself capable of integrating its own death and since we are relieved of

the responsibility for this death, and thus of the stake of our own life. This supreme ruse of the system, that of the simulacrum of its death, through which it maintains us in life by having liquidated through absorption all possible negativity, only a superior ruse can stop."

"It is also why we were trapped, we trapped ourselves, after 1968, into giving diplomas to everybody. Subversion? Not at all. Once again, we were the promoters of the advanced form, of the pure form of value: diplomas without work. The system does not want any more diplomas, but it wants that - operational values in the void - and we were the ones who inaugurated it, with the illusion of doing the opposite."

In addition to pointing out uncomfortable truths like those (uncomfortable to the leftists with savior complexes), he also puts in some pithy observations (always bolstered with quotes much too long and complex to include here):

"We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning."

"Information devours its own content. It devours communication and the social."

"INFORMATION = ENTROPY. For example: the information or knowledge that can be obtained about a system or an event is already a form of the neutralization and entropy of this system (to be extended to science in general, and to the social sciences and humanities in particular). Information in which an event is reflected or broadcast is already a degraded form of this event."

"The commodity is buried, like information is in archives, like archives are in bunkers, like missiles are in atomic silos."

"I observe, I accept, I assume, I analyze the second revolution, that of the twentieth century, that of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. He who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning."

"The more hegemonic the system, the more the imagination is struck by the smallest of its reversals. The challenge, even infinitesimal, is the image of a chain failure. Only this reversibility without a counterpart is an event today, on the nihilistic and disaffected stage of the political. Only it mobilizes the imaginary"

"If it is nihilistic to be obsessed by the mode of disappearance, and no longer by the mode of production, then I am a nihilist. Disappearance, aphanisis, implosion..."

"God is not dead, he has become hyper-real"

That last remark comes right near the end of the book, and by it he means that we cannot ever tell if God is real or not, the certainty of God's existence or his death are both obfuscated. It's only right at the end that the depth of postmodern philosophy is unmasked. While the ending was phenomenal, there was a chapter in the second half which I had to skip for how unsettlingly clinical and constant its talk of sex was. Really bad.

He made a comeback after that point, at one point making a point reminiscent of flatland (using dimensions as a metaphor):

"Three-dimensionality of the simulacrum - why would the simulacrum with three dimensions be closer to the real than the one with two dimensions? It claims to be, but paradoxically, it has the opposite effect: to render us sensitive to the fourth dimension as a hidden truth, a secret dimension of everything, which suddenly takes on all the force of evidence. The closer one gets to the perfection of the simulacrum (and this is true of objects, but also of figures of art or of models of social or psychological relations), the more evident it becomes (or rather to the evil spirit of incredulity that inhabits us, more evil still than the evil spirit of simulation) how everything escapes representation, escapes its own double and its resemblance. In short, there is no real: the third dimension is only the imaginary of a two-dimensional world, the fourth that of a three-dimensional universe . . . Escalation in the production of a real that is more and more real through the addition of successive dimensions. But, on the other hand, exaltation of the opposite movement: only what plays with one less dimension is true, is truly seductive."

By the end of the book he somewhat circles back to the premodern focus he started on, this time talking about human-animal relations (thankfully he's not stupid enough to doubt the uniqueness of human beings in the animal kingdom):

"Whatever it may be, animals have always had, until our era, a divine or sacrificial nobility that all mythologies recount. Even murder by hunting is still a symbolic relation, as opposed to an experimental dissection. Even domestication is still a symbolic relation, as opposed to industrial breeding. One only has to look at the status of animals in peasant society.

"In particular, our sentimentality toward animals is a sure sign of the disdain in which we hold them. It is proportional to this disdain. It is in proportion to being relegated to irresponsibility, to the inhuman, that the animal becomes worthy of the human ritual of affection and protection, just as the child does in direct proportion to being relegated to a status of innocence and childishness. Sentimentality is nothing but the infinitely degraded form of bestiality, the racist commiseration, in which we ridiculously cloak animals to the point of rendering them sentimental themselves.

Those who used to sacrifice animals did not take them for beasts. And even the Middle Ages, which condemned and punished them in due form, was in this way much closer to them than we are, we who are filled with horror at this practice. They held them to be guilty: which was a way of honoring them. We take them for nothing, and it is on this basis that we are "human" with them. We no longer sacrifice them, we no longer punish them, and we are proud of it, but it is simply that we have domesticated them, worse: that we have made of them a racially inferior world, no longer even worthy of our justice, but only of our affection and social charity, no longer worthy of punishment and of death, but only of experimentation and extermination like meat from the butchery."

"They, the animals, do not speak. In a universe of increasing speech, of the constraint to confess and to speak, only they remain mute, and for this reason they seem to retreat far from us, behind the horizon of truth. But it is what makes us intimate with them. It is not the ecological problem of their survival that is important, but still and always that of their silence. In a world bent on doing nothing but making one speak, in a world assembled under the hegemony of signs and discourse, their silence weighs more and more heavily on our organization of meaning."

In the end, the book was very refreshing in its willingness to kick some dirt in the face of his fellow leftists. It did end on a very bleak and pretty philosophically explicit note, i.e. he finally used straighter language to say what he meant. Postmodernism doesn't taste as bad as claimed by that one yelp review left by some Canadian psychologist. Perhaps it's a sign of JBP's immaturity that he cannot see any good, any interpretive interest in postmodernism, but instead rages at what he thinks it is.