

# Review of: "Beyond the Physical Self: Understanding the Perversion of Reality and the Desire for Digital Transcendence via Digital Avatars in the Context of Baudrillard's Theory"

Bin Yin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fujian Normal University

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

The manuscript "Beyond the Physical Self: Understanding the Perversion of Reality and the Desire for Digital Transcendence via Digital Avatars in the Context of Baudrillard's Theory" by Lucas Freund is an ambitious attempt to apply Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulacra, simulation, and hyperreality to our contemporary digital landscape shaped by augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI). The paper tackles complex philosophical concepts and attempts to relate them to very current technological trends. Below is a critical review of the manuscript's sections:

## **General Observations:**

The manuscript is timely given the rapid technological advancements in AR, AI, and VR, and the societal implications these technologies carry. It is relevant to scholars in philosophy, technology studies, and psychology. On the other hand, the manuscript is generally well-structured, although it could benefit from a more explicit outline of its argumentative progression and an expansion of certain key points for clarity.

## **Abstract:**

The abstract provides a comprehensive overview but could benefit from specifying the methodologies or data sets used, if any, for the explorations.

## **1. Introduction:**

**Contextualization:** The introduction effectively contextualizes Baudrillard's theories in the digital age. It mentions the importance of understanding societal transformations due to AR and AI but doesn't articulate why Baudrillard's theories are the best lens for this investigation.

**Research Question:** The central research question is clearly stated, which gives the reader a lens through which to understand the paper. However, it could be improved by being more specific about the aspects of "implications" that will be explored.

## **2. Baudrillard's Theory: Simulacra, Simulation, and Hyperreality:**

### **a) Structure and Clarity**

**Thematic Cohesion:** While the four subsections (Simulacra, Simulation, Precession of Simulacra, Hyperreality) offer a

good division of Baudrillard's complex ideas, the transition between them could be smoother to create a more cohesive narrative. Bridging sentences at the end of each subsection could help guide the reader through the progression of thought.

**Technical Terms:** Although the author does provide definitions, some terms like "hyperreal world" or "precession of simulacra" could benefit from examples that are more relatable to a lay audience. This could make the manuscript more accessible to readers unfamiliar with postmodern philosophy.

#### b) Depth of Discussion

**Counterarguments and Critiques:** The section would benefit from addressing criticisms or limitations of Baudrillard's theories. This can provide a more balanced view and can also allow for a richer, more nuanced discussion.

**Historical Context:** Baudrillard's ideas didn't develop in a vacuum. Mentioning the socio-political climate or key events that influenced or were influenced by his theories could provide useful context.

#### c) Interdisciplinary Approach

**Psychological Implications:** Integrating perspectives from psychology and neuroscience could add a unique layer of depth to the discussion. For example, what does the idea of hyperreality imply for human cognition or behavior? What do experiments or studies in psychology reveal about the ability of simulations or representations to replace or alter our perception of reality?

**Application in Contemporary Issues:** The section touches on social media as a form of hyperreality but could extend this to other areas like politics, economics, or technology. For instance, how do Baudrillard's theories apply to the phenomenon of "fake news" or economic models that are disconnected from the real assets they represent?

#### d) References and Citations

**Current References:** The section is well-cited but could be improved by incorporating more recent scholarship to show the ongoing relevance and debates surrounding Baudrillard's theories.

**Primary Sources:** While secondary sources like Wolny (2017) and Kozicki (2023) are cited, more direct citations from Baudrillard's own works could strengthen the arguments.

#### e) Concluding Thoughts

The section ends with a strong conclusion that ties together the complex theories discussed. However, a summarizing table or framework could be a useful addition to help the reader consolidate the multi-tiered concepts of simulacra, simulation, and hyperreality.

### 3. The New Simulacra: AR, AI, and Mixed Reality in the Age of Hyperreality

#### 3.1. Augmented and Mixed Reality: The Overlay of the Virtual

The section adeptly discusses the evolution of AR and MR, offering rich examples and applications across various sectors like gaming, education, and healthcare. The conceptual grounding in the theory of simulacra is coherent. The Pokemon

Go example serves as an effective illustration of how virtual entities in AR assume a reality of their own. However, the section could benefit from discussing the ethical implications—such as data privacy, the digital divide, and potential for disinformation—of blurring the lines between the real and the virtual.

### 3.2. Artificial Intelligence: The Simulation of Human Intelligence

This part serves as a comprehensive primer on AI, explaining its functions, types, and impacts. The discussion around AI as simulacra, particularly in the realm of chatbots and AI-generated art, is illuminating. However, the section would gain depth by addressing the topic of AI ethics, including questions around bias in machine learning, potential job displacement, and the "black box" nature of AI algorithms. Additionally, incorporating psychological theories on human-machine interaction would enrich the analysis.

### 3.3. Digital Avatars

This section provides an exhaustive treatment of digital avatars, from their historical evolution to their contemporary relevance in various spheres like e-commerce, education, and esports. The notion that avatars serve as new forms of simulacra, representing and even transforming our identities, is compelling. However, the section could further delve into the psychological aspects of avatar use. For example, how do avatars affect self-perception, social interactions, or even talent development in virtual settings?

#### 3.3.1. A Short History of Digital Avatars

This subsection serves as an insightful historical journey of avatar development. It aptly brings the reader from the text-based representations of the '70s to the AI-powered entities of today. However, a discussion on the potential future of avatars, especially in light of rapid advancements in AI and AR, would be a valuable addition.

#### Conclusion:

Overall, the section presents a thorough and scholarly investigation into the new forms of simulacra being shaped by advancements in AR, AI, and MR. It succeeds in linking these technological developments to broader philosophical and societal contexts, a connection that is often overlooked. While the section is commendable for its breadth and depth, incorporating discussions on ethical considerations and psychological impacts could offer a more rounded perspective.

## 4. Digital Avatars: The Simulacra of Self in Hyperreality

The section on digital avatars as entities embodying Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is both well-thought-out and timely. In a society where the boundary between the real and the virtual is increasingly blurred, the author's analysis is especially relevant. The author expertly weaves in the idea that these avatars are not mere copies but entities with their own existence and rules, which indeed can become more 'real' than physical reality in some contexts.

### 4.1. Digital Avatars and the Precession of Simulacra

The exploration of the "precession of simulacra" in the context of digital avatars is insightful. The emphasis on how avatars are not just digital representations but entities that shape and define our virtual experiences is compelling. This goes beyond superficial interactions and delves into how avatars can pre-condition our understandings, expectations, and

behaviors—both online and offline.

However, the author may also consider introducing the psychological implications of this shift, especially how it affects our self-concept and social interactions. For instance, does this shift in locus from the physical to the virtual world affect our psychological well-being? What does it mean for our identity when the avatar precedes and even replaces the physical self?

#### 4.2.1. Transcendence of the Virtual World: A Philosophical Perspective

The philosophical discourse on the transcendence of the virtual world is a significant contribution to the paper. By questioning traditional definitions of 'reality' and 'identity,' the author opens the door to a much-needed discussion.

However, this section could benefit from an analysis grounded in empirical evidence or case studies. For instance, how do people like Alice, who are deeply engaged with their avatars, navigate the complexities of a dual existence? How do these virtual experiences translate to their understanding of the self, their social relationships, and their behavior in the real world?

#### 4.2.2. The Impact of AI and Mixed Reality/Virtual Reality on the Hyperreal

The points on the impact of AI and MR/VR technologies are a valuable addition, connecting the theoretical discussions to the rapidly evolving technological landscape. These technologies indeed serve as catalysts for the "hyperreal," making the virtual experiences not only more immersive but also increasingly indistinguishable from physical reality.

#### Additional Thoughts

a) Ethical Implications: Given the almost boundless capabilities of digital avatars and the technologies that support them, a brief discussion on the ethical implications would be enlightening. For example, can these avatars be misused in ways that are socially or morally problematic?

b) Cultural Perspectives: Since digital avatars and virtual worlds are a global phenomenon, how do different cultures interpret and interact with this form of hyperreality? Is the blending of the real and the virtual perceived similarly across diverse societies?

c) Future Trends: Finally, a brief speculative section on future trends could offer readers a glimpse into how these phenomena might evolve. For instance, could blockchain technology give these avatars a form of 'digital sovereignty,' further complicating the real-vs-virtual debate?

### 5. Digital Dualism Transcendence

This section successfully tackles the evolving complexities of how we perceive and navigate the digital and the physical. The term "Digital Dualism Transcendence" aptly captures the blurring boundaries between these realms, propelled by technologies like AI, AR, VR, and MR. The treatment of the philosophical implications is particularly compelling, asking readers to grapple with what constitutes 'reality' and 'identity' in this blended world. In particular, the philosophical implications of Digital Dualism Transcendence ties well with earlier discussions on hyperreality. It would be intriguing to further explore how traditional philosophies about reality and existence need to adapt to include these digital dimensions.

Can there be a unified framework to understand this hybrid reality?

On the other hand, the brief touch on ethical and moral considerations is well-placed. However, this could be expanded into a full subsection, given the severity and complexity of the ethical questions that arise in these intermeshed realities. For example, are there new ethical frameworks needed for accountability in a world where the digital and physical are inseparable?

Finally, the existential questions raised at the end of the section serve as an excellent segue into the subsequent discussions on "longing for transcendence" and the "Transcendence Dilemma."

Here're some further comments regarding each subsection within this section.

#### 5.1. A New Hybrid Hyperreality and the "longing for transcendence"

The treatment of the notion of "longing for transcendence" is intriguing and aligns well with the paper's overall thematic focus. It's particularly insightful how the author discusses this in the context of virtual influencers and the rise of VR and MR technologies, providing concrete examples that readers can relate to.

However, this section could benefit from an examination of how this "longing" manifests differently across different demographics and cultures. Additionally, the psychological aspects of this "longing" could be further explored. What does this say about human needs and desires? Are we replacing or augmenting our basic human needs of connection, achievement, and exploration through these digital realms?

##### 5.2.1. The Transcendence Dilemma and the Escape to the Virtual

This is perhaps one of the most potent sections, delving into the psychological and existential crises that could arise as individuals find neither realm fully satisfying. The author has termed this as the 'Transcendence Dilemma,' which is apt. However, It would be useful to further elaborate on the psychological impacts of this dilemma. Could it lead to issues like digital addiction, detachment from physical reality, or even existential despair?

Furthermore, the ethical implications are touched upon but could be expanded. If individuals increasingly escape into the virtual, what are the societal and ethical implications? Are we heading towards a future where we need "digital ethicists" to guide behavior in these blended realities?

Additional Thoughts:

- a) Cultural Context: The impact of cultural context on Digital Dualism Transcendence could offer another layer of complexity. How do different cultures experience and navigate this blurring of realms?
- b) Technological Advancements: Future technological advancements could make these dilemmas even more complicated. A subsection speculating on this could add a forward-looking perspective to the paper.
- c) Behavioral Ecology: A discussion on how environmental factors (both digital and physical) affect these dilemmas could provide a unique angle.
- d) Mental Health: The discussion could be enriched by diving deeper into the mental health implications of living between

these two realms, possibly incorporating existing research or theories in psychology.

## 6. The Perversion of Reality: Exploring the Impact of Digital Transcendence Dualism in the Context of the Experience Machine

This section serves as a compelling crescendo to the paper's overarching themes. By incorporating the concept of the experience machine, the author delves into the moral and ethical implications that arise as we move closer to a reality where the lines between the physical and digital worlds are increasingly blurred.

In particular, the author tackle the "perversion of reality" as the culmination of the digital and physical worlds' blending. The definition of "perversion" as a distortion of authentic human experiences and values due to an over-reliance on digital technologies is clear and well articulated. It sets the stage for the reader to understand how such a perversion could occur and what it means for individual and collective human experience. By discussing this in the context of the experience machine, the author is asking readers to deeply ponder the quality of the lives they are choosing in this hybrid reality. The use of Nozick's thought experiment as a lens to scrutinize current and future trends is especially potent.

The author has also delved into the ethical implications of this perversion, particularly in how it relates to issues of consent, exploitation, and objectification. This is a crucial addition, but it may be beneficial to link this to existing ethical theories or frameworks, providing a more grounded discussion.

Here're some further comments regarding each subsection within this section.

### 6.1. A Dystopian Vision of the Future

The dystopian vision serves as a vivid warning of what might come if the perversion of reality continues unchecked. By painting this picture, the author provides a concrete scenario that readers can easily grasp. On the other hand, the author successfully highlights the societal ramifications of this dystopian future, from the erosion of empathy to a breakdown in social cohesion. However, the discussion could be enriched by considering potential countermeasures or safeguards that society could put in place. What roles might governments, tech companies, and individuals play in preventing this future?

### 6.2. Seeds of Dystopian Realities

By pointing out that the seeds of this dystopia are already present, the author makes a compelling case for immediate concern. This adds a sense of urgency to the paper, emphasizing that these aren't just theoretical musings but issues we need to address now. On the other hand, the concrete examples provided, from social media to online dating platforms, serve to bring the discussion back to the current day and make it relatable to the reader. This reinforces the argument that we are already on a slippery slope toward the perversion of reality. Finally, the author's revisiting of the "Transcendence Dilemma" in this contemporary context effectively ties back to earlier sections. It brings full circle the problems and questions raised earlier, emphasizing their immediate relevance.

Additional Thoughts:

a) Psychological Dimensions: Given the author's focus on the Experience Machine, it might be interesting to delve deeper into the psychological implications. Would people's awareness of being in a simulation affect their psychological well-

being? How does this tie into existing psychological theories or research?

b) Technological Solutions: While the author outlines a potentially grim future, it might be useful to discuss if technology itself could offer solutions to mitigate the perversion of reality. Could AI or other technologies be designed to foster genuine human connections rather than erode them?

c) Human Behavior: An examination of how different behavioral inclinations might affect individuals' susceptibility to the perversion of reality could add another layer to the discussion.

d) Global Implications: The discussion is quite universal, but considering how different cultures might experience the perversion of reality differently could add nuance to the arguments.

e) Policy and Regulation: Given the ethical concerns raised, a section on potential policy measures could be a valuable addition. This would move the paper from a diagnostic to a more prescriptive stance.

In conclusion, the sections significantly deepen the paper's scope, making it a comprehensive, thought-provoking discussion that grapples with complex moral and ethical questions. I would recommend weaving these new insights more fully into the existing narrative structure. This would ensure a cohesive, integrated argument that takes the reader on a journey from understanding the individual aspects to grasping the sum of all these parts.

## 7. Conclusion

The author's conclusion serves as a compelling capstone to the argument, effectively tying together the complex threads of the paper into a coherent whole. Here's a breakdown of how the conclusion adds value:

### Philosophical Integration:

The author's alignment with Jean Baudrillard's theories of hyperreality and the precession of simulacra strengthens the theoretical grounding of the paper. The author eloquently explains how Baudrillard's ideas provide a framework for understanding the perversion of reality that arises from advanced technologies like AI, VR, and AR. This philosophical integration elevates the paper from a mere exploration of technological trends to a deeper discourse on the human condition.

### Ethical Responsibility and Mindfulness:

The call to approach these technologies with mindfulness and ethical responsibility is a strong and necessary point. It not only highlights the critical ethical dimensions but also urges readers to engage proactively with these transformative technologies. It aligns well with the earlier sections discussing the moral and ethical implications of a hyperreal future.

### Addressing the Real vs. Simulated Dilemma:

The author neatly summarizes the core dilemma of the paper: the blurring lines between the real and the simulated. This serves to remind the reader of the critical questions that the paper raises and emphasizes the urgency of finding answers.

### Preserving Authentic Human Connections

The call to preserve genuine human connections and shared realities is poignant and serves as an effective rallying cry.

This aligns well with the earlier discussions on the dystopian visions and ethical considerations of a hyperreal future.

#### Additional Thoughts:

- a) Future Directions: The author might consider including a section on future research directions. Given the paper's multidisciplinary scope, highlighting areas where more research is needed could be beneficial.
- b) Practical Applications: The paper could be enriched by a brief mention of practical steps that individuals, communities, and institutions can take to mitigate the risks the author has outlined.
- c) Public Policy: A suggestion for policy recommendations or guidelines to govern the ethical use of these advanced technologies would move the paper from a diagnostic to a prescriptive stance.
- d) Comparative Analysis: Given that the author has delved into philosophical theories, a comparison with other philosophical or ethical frameworks could add another layer of depth.
- e) Cultural Considerations: The paper is quite universal in its scope. A brief nod to how these issues might vary across different cultural or societal contexts could add nuance.
- f) Psychological Well-being: A final reflection on the psychological implications of living in a hyperreal world could tie back to earlier sections on human behavior and psychology.

In sum, the conclusion serves as a powerful ending to the paper, synthesizing the arguments and urging thoughtful and ethical engagement with advanced technologies. It leaves the reader with a clear sense of the stakes involved and the ethical considerations that must guide our way forward.

#### Concluding Comments

In conclusion, Lucas Freund's manuscript provides a timely and ambitious exploration of the implications of digital avatars and advanced technologies through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's theories. The paper succeeds in weaving complex philosophical concepts with real-world technological trends, offering a multidimensional perspective on the subject. While the manuscript is laudable for its breadth and depth, there are areas for improvement that could make it more rigorous, accessible, and comprehensive. By incorporating a more explicit argumentative structure, addressing ethical and psychological considerations, and expanding on cultural and future-oriented aspects, the paper has the potential to be a seminal work in this multidisciplinary field. Overall, it serves as a thought-provoking contribution to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of technology, philosophy, and human behavior.