

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"

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The is an interesting take on several relatively new technologies both in the areas of visulization (AR, VR, MR) as well as on aspects of avatars, artificial intelligence and social media, through the lens of Baurdillard's theorizing of the real and hyperreal. However, as the paper turns out it is a quite value-laden critique of current technological developments in society and Baurdrillard's theories are mainly used for labeling the authors experiences, but falls somewhat short of developing the analysis. Some of the challenges that I would propose working further on with the paper are: framing, conceptual clarity, repetitive writing, objectivity and finally refraining from using imaginary examples.

In terms of framing the paper covers too many distinct and different technologies to be able to cover any of them sufficiently. There is only space to do very little to explore and explain each of the technologies, and I would argue that bringing them all into the paper is not necessary for making the arguments in the paper. In particular if the attempt is to discuss the "contemporary society" as a whole, I would advice to focus on more fundamental technological changes (rather than particular technologies or services). In particular the discussions around avatars might be an exploration in itself and could be excluded here.

In terms of clarity a more limited framing would also make it possible to explain what is intended with AI, mediation, empathy, but maybe most centrally discussing Baudrillard's concepts in relation to the societal and technological observations made in the paper. The discussion of the blurring of the physical and virtual is somewhat difficult to marry with the argument that we are now living in the hyperreal. If it is blurred, is this not an alternative to an either/or position? Are real activities in a virtual world part of hyperreality?

The paper overstates some aspects, making it repetitive read. I think this also connects with the wide frame of the paper.

In terms of a more nuanced discussion the author should either more open about the purpose: a critique of current digitalized everyday lives, or open up for both positive and negative aspects in the discussions. I would also argue that there is an almost romantic understanding of pre-digital life, portrayed as free from such aspects as unempathetic behavior, self-promotion, and so on. I would rather argue that these are central traits in many human cultures, and that there are other, and specific, aspects of new digital tech that potentially makes contemporary interaction "perverse". In terms of nuance the author also, somewhat paradoxically, have to both emphasize the transformative and suggestive

power of new technologies, and then take a quite critical position. Many studies of AR, VR and so on have shown that these do not deliver as suggested by the proponents. Rather many empirical studies show quite little in terms of experienced immersion and presence in these virtual worlds.

This also connects to the highly curated examples used in the paper. They are maybe to most clear proof that the author is not attempting to understand people's engagement in the use of different activities, but rather using the examples to make a point. I would also argue that some of the examples for example the use of MR, would be difficult if not impossible to accomplish practically and technically. As a reader it is sometimes hard to see what I am supposed to understand from the examples. For example, the dystopian fantasy of the future.

Concluding, I think that there would be value to revisit Baudrillard's concept in relation to the setting, and to me the most interesting discussion would be around the clearcut difference made between the real and the hyperreal, and the observations of blurred lines made in the paper!