

Student name: Stav Shoval

Student number: 2209142

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Tutor: Alex Duncan, Holly Slingsby

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Figure 2 = No Erotic Them Say, Meek Gichugu 1992 oil on canvas

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Title: Reality Crisis: The existence of simulacrum and simulation in a hyperreal state.

Introduction

The main intention within this proposed piece of work is to further explore and define the conceptual theory of simulacrum, while making sure to acknowledge that the terms of both simulacrum and simulation are used interchangeably in the theory despite that these are clearly different as simulacrum states it is “not a thing that's hides the truth but the fact that it was concealed was never there in the first place as the simulacrum is the truth.”¹ While simulation is defined be something which imitates the process of how the real world is operated by applying models which impersonate specific key behaviors and characteristics.²

These concepts will be further investigated by using artwork description as well as individual analysis which show how the different levels of simulacra are simulated, which then results in the hyperreal state that they exist in, this will be achieved by using the works of Micheal Armitage and Hieronymus Bosch while taking into consideration the work of Meek.

Additionally, this essay will aim to show how the substance of this simulacra is something that can extend beyond traditional taught versions of art whether historical or contemporary representation that can even go to our day to day lives.

¹ Poster, Mark; Baudrillard, Jean (1988). *Selected writings*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. [ISBN 0-7456-0586-9](#)

² TWI (n.d.). *What is Simulation? What Does it Mean? (Definition and Examples)*.

As previously mentioned, this essay will introduce what hyperreality and simulacrum is, according to various sources. Hyperreality is mainly focusing on the idea of something being in a hyperreal condition that produces an “exaggerated idea while being compared to reality”³ According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is defined as an “accumulation of images and simulations”⁴ that “can either alter the reality it supposed to depicts or doesn’t depict anything that has any real existence, but nonetheless it comes to establish a reality”⁵. On the other hand, despite the objective, understanding that “simulacra use both images and representation.”⁶

The focal point of simulacrum is:

“Said to be true and shows that there are no such things as an authentic, direct truth as the hyperreality state is what makes it real which has a concrete impact on life.”⁷

The simulacrum is a concept that came to existence from the post modernism timeline, which is a Twentieth Century historical movement that was “first entered to the philosophical

³ www.dictionary.com. (n.d.). *Definition of hyperreal* | *Dictionary.com*.

⁴ Oxford University Press (2023). *Oxford Reference*. [online] Oxfordreference.com.

⁵ Mambrol, N. (2016). *Baudrillard’s Concept of Hyperreality*. [online] *Literary Theory and Criticism*.

⁶ Merriam-webster.com. (2019). *Definition of SIMULACRUM*.

⁷ www.yatesweb.com. (2019). *Baudrillard and Simulacrum* | *Yatesweb*

terminology in 1979 which resulted due to the publication of *The Postmodern condition* by Jean Francois Lyotard.”⁸

This approach is known for breaking away from and rejecting modernism concepts such as “realism, innovation and experimentation”,⁹ as those ideals came to be deeply influenced from people's reaction towards the end of the Second World War, which has then lasted for the duration of twenty years, during the years of 1937 until 1957. The postmodern movement main ideologies circles around concepts of “skepticism, relativism and general distrust towards theories”, while in addition has also given birth to additional intriguing notions such as “Difference, Repetition, Simulacrum, Trace and even Hyperreality.”¹⁰

⁸ Wolny, R.W. (2017). Hyperreality and Simulacrum: Jean Baudrillard and European Postmodernism. *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(3), p.76. [Ryszard.pdf](#) ([revistia.org](#)) jaun Baulliard details = hyperrealism and theory

⁹ nvaluable (2020). *What is Modernism? A Guide to Art, Literature and Design*

¹⁰ www.britannica.com. (n.d.). *What are some general characteristics of postmodernism?* | *Britannica*.

Main Body:

The publication of *Simulacra et Simulation* in 1981 is a formal writing that was created by the philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard, that his main purpose was to examine the relationship between reality, symbols and society, while focusing on the importance of signification and culture within the media that builds our understanding to what reality is.¹¹

This was presented to be as the first important step towards “theorizing the postmodern which has influenced various generational French thinkers such as Jean Francois Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Micheal Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Laca, and was developed to defy proposed approaches in regards Marxist and Freudian theories that links with semiotics ideas.

In his work to Jean Baudrillard the simulacrum is defined to be a copy of a copy, which basically stated “a copy of something that not itself is an original and hence forth is inferior” as it proposed certain limitations of postmodern, this concept of the simulacrum is used to null the possibility of anything having a “singular resource or an original concept that applies to both an idea or a subject matter such as an item or an image” . Based on this statement, the author states that anything which is Identified to be an original idea or a creation, is in fact a mirage or an optical illusion that is the same as a cinema projection.

There are different levels to simulacrum and according to the thesis of “Simulacra and Simulation” it can be categorized into four different stages which is a, than I am going to use to evidence how this concept appears in my chosen artist analysis

¹¹Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. [online] *Google Books*. University of Michigan Press.

Level one: The Simulacrum of the real, this focuses on whether the image or copy that was produced is something that we believe to match our state of existing reality, which Jean Baudrillard named as “the sacramental order”^{12 13}

Level two: The Simulacrum of the model is a “preservation of reality” this is where we believe the creation to be “an unfaithful copy” that masks and ruins our idea of reality by giving it an “evil appearance to create maleficence.” In this context the signs that the image portrays do not create the same idea as what it was based off, however it can hint an existence of an undiscovered reality that the sign cannot encapsulate.

Level Three: The Simulacrum of the Hyperreal is where the creative process hides to reality by pretending to be a faithful or a perfect copy similarly to stage one, however in this case they apply the signs and visuals that claims that something exists without being based on any reality at all.

Level Four: The simulacra of a Simulacra which when the copied projection becomes an autonomous existence from its origin to the point it has no real relationship to reality.as the idea of it doesn't refer to anything as being real as they are experienced becomes artificial from a hyperreal perspective.

However, simulacrum without the context of being related to Jean’s theory of work can be simply defined in a different way, as it refers to the notion of an image that is created to

¹² Wikisource.org. (2017). *Bacon’s Essays/Of Simulation and Dissimulation - Wikisource, the free online library.*

¹³ Zvi (n.d.). Simulacra Levels Summary. www.lesswrong.com

“represent something or someone”.¹⁴ This can be executed and shown in different ways through Art mediums such as: Photorealism or hyperreal art which is a painting style that copies a photograph.

Copy of a photograph in an overly accurate manner, is a version of simulacrum as the produced image is a perfect copy of what it based on, which is classified as level one simulacrum. Another example is when artist use the specific French technique of Trompe Loieil, that is then identified by utilizing its “highly photorealistic details and obscures them to create an illusion that deceiving the senses” of the human brain¹⁵. When using this point it is possible to see a resemblance to level two simulacra as the work objective is to distort and mask our sense of faithful reality, which means the theory is relevant to certain artists. For example, “Jan Van Eyck, Leonardo De Vinci, De Scott Evans and William Harneet.”¹⁶

An additional third example how a simulacrum can appear is the concept of a fantasy place, which focuses on places like Disneyland and paradise as when compared to the theory those can be classified as a level three simulacra because the signs and objects used in those recreated places are used to simulate something that looks and feels so hyperreal that has nothing to do with existing reality.

¹⁴ Cambridge Dictionary (2023). *simulacra*.

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

¹⁶ Anon, (2018). *How to use trompe l’oeil in interiors and exteriors spaces - Pigmentti*.

I decided to explore how the concept of simulacrum appears in by applying different concepts of what a paradise is by originating my research on Micheal Armitage exhibition work of Paradise Edict as a base and then expanding on the concept by using some historical artwork as well. This specific piece of work is a part of a fifteen oil painting series that was produced alongside other Eastern African Artist, that was then exhibited in 2019 at the Royal Academy of Art and aims to “challenge cultural assumptions that happens in Africa”.



Figure 1 = Paradise Edict, Michael Armitage. 2019 oil on Lubugo bark cloth

However, what does it truly mean to take up the concept of Paradise? according to the book of Michael Armitage *Paradise Edict* it is a “primal state of perfect peace that’s gives freedom from hunger, pain and death” ¹⁷. His work illustrates at first glance even dreamlike setup with a luminous idyll that is abounding with flowers birds and exotic animals to Armitage he thought about portraying a contemporary idea of what paradise is, which is often “some kind of island, beautiful white sands, palm trees something tropical with a bit of sex thrown for a good measure”. Yet upon a taking a closer inspection the works unfolds a more violent presentation than expected, the “disembodied collection of legs suspended in the sky, while hands are forcefully pulled by the ankles and serpents coiling up the ghostly figure that suggests a fallen Eden”.

The paradise artwork is a level two simulacrum because the piece is trying to preserve reality as a paradise, which is an imaginative idealized place of harmony and peace between animals and peoples. However, it is an unfaithful copy because of the grotesque visuals and symbolism that could be felt from the piece's main examples, such as the coiled-up snakes and disembodied legs that gives the uneasy or maleficent intentions. Additionally, it doesn't try to capture the context of the garden of Eden, but tries to incapsulate the hidden reality, which the artist sees that is influenced from his own background and culture that is not necessarily captured by the visual. Enforces the artists’ strong feeling across gives it’s his simulated hyperreal impact and may have influence on people thinking and imagination.

¹⁷ Schneider, A. and Der, V. (2020). *Michael Armitage. Paradise Edict Ausst. Kat. Haus der Kunst, München*. Köln König, Walther



Figure 2 = No Erotic Them Say, Meek Gichugu 1992 oil on canvas

While looking on the piece of work *Paradise Edict* origin was based on the creation of Meek Gichugu's art piece of *No Erotic them say* consists of an "unnatural collection of elongated figures that combines characteristics of both humans and animals that are entwined in a sexual embrace. The piece has deeply impacted and traumatizes Micheal's imagination from a young age because it disrupted his ways of life of how one should behave in society.¹⁸

Despite this imposing encounter, it has gravely influenced his growth as an artist, it "opened his eyes to the power that art holds" due to the impact the piece had on him even though it was so repulsive, at the same time he was drawn to it. In this distinctive case the simulacra, even though it applied to the same piece is shown in a different context that is presented like a hybrid form by combining different elements of both level two and three.

This is because Gichugu's artwork caused such an intense repulsive feeling towards his creation that made him question his values, Therefore, possibly to infer that it created an unfaithful copy to what he thinks a reality is that resulted in such a negative reaction, which made it feel so hyperreal.

This influence unintentionally provides, and references post modernism ideas because it caused Micheal Armitage to question his own sets of believes that he was given from childhood to how one should exist within society realm. This is due to postmodern times being known as a time

¹⁸ Artuk.org. (n.d.). *Paradise lost: Michael Armitage's layered depictions of Africa* | Art UK.

when people start to suspect, and doubt given information and theories, that can then be further expanded upon through Jean Bulliard writings of simulacra et simulation.

In Jean Bulliard's writings he discusses that society has the obsession of searching for the meaning in things to have a sense of total understanding of the world "due to its elusive existence". The theory was inspired from Micheal Foucault stated theory regarding knowledge and the way that we gain it is influenced from relationships and power gain. Meanwhile Baudrillard thinks that the entire process of searching for this idealized knowledge is a "fruitless and excessive process" that is in some ways delusional. However, it is very clear that implementation of simulacra theory helps society to close some gaps of suspicion and unknown.

When referring to his mindset, human beings try to understand the objects that are around them, however objects can only be understood through association to signification. As people cannot except the fact, they can't understand certain things they attached a meaning or signification to it.

"The earliest images of paradise that appear in relation to European art history go all the way back as far as the sixth century". A well-known example is The Garden of Earthly delights by Hieronymus Bosch which shows a "bewildering result of unique imagery between human and animals' interaction which goes beyond the boundaries of the utopian space" ¹⁹

¹⁹ Cumming, R. (2015). *Art. A visual history. Rev. ed.* London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd



Figure 3 = Garden of Earthly Delights, Hieronymus Bosch 1415 – 1516

A well-known example is The Garden of Earthly delights which can be seen in Figure 3 by Hieronymus Bosch which shows a bewildering result of “unique imagery that portrays a space that is populated by prehuman creatures both real and imagery”, in relation to simulacrum it can be categorized as a level one because of the illumination technique that the artist used which is believed to “reflect his belief that he was depicting certainty and reality” that creates a perfect copy which aligns with the artist belief of reality.

When comparing the pieces of Meek Gichugu’s work to Hieronymus Bosch ,there is a combined use of both level two and four of simulacrum presentation this is because both pieces have a similar depiction of the ruined harmony in heaven that matches the level two simulacrum of an art piece that creates an unfaithful copy of reality that implies a negative impression depicting similarly depicted in both of the figures as they play around with the context of animal in the piece which “prompts and enhance the sense of uneasiness”.

In way both of those works can be considered a simulacrum of one another because the terms of simulacrum and simulation are used together in a similar way which makes it hard to define but it is a collective use of a simulation that can be categorized as a level 4 simulacrum according to the theory. The reason for that, when the pieces were created by using “the imaginative and existing creatures”, it possible to infer that they have no relation to reality because they are made up and because of that separation, they then became their own autonomous creation that simulated what is heaven through using similar subject matter but applying it in different ways. Despite that when not relating the concept of simulacrum to the theory its basically image that is created to “represent something or someone” why doesn't that make it a simulacrum?

Even though it appears in contemporary and historical forms of art what about day-to-day modern “artificial items that created in an unnatural way”²⁰ for the sake of convenience. For example, if applying the concept behind fake grass is used to create a resemblance or a copy of the real things to preserves reality but has this sense of fakery due to the influence of plastics that hides more than what it seems which answers the category of level two work.

Conclusion

My conclusion of this essay leads people to question then what is this reality that we live in, because the definition nulls the theory, when creating a resemblance towards something then anything in this universe can be a simulacrum. Despite that if the simulacra states that

²⁰ Collins (2019). *Collins Online Dictionary | Definitions, Thesaurus and Translations*

everything that we experience is an illusion then what are we existing in an empty space or a blurred line of boundaries.

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