

Jean Baudrillard's Hyperreal and its Implications for Responsibility and Accountability

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Abstract

The present study investigates Baudrillard's philosophical framework regarding technology and examines its consequences for the notions of responsibility and accountability within the context of the digital era. This paper examines the phenomenon of reality and simulation merging, as conceptualized by Baudrillard in his theory of hyperreality. It explores the implications of this phenomenon for ethical decision-making in the context of technological creation and utilization. This work contributes to the scholarly discourse by conversing in the discussions on Baudrillard's studies concerning responsibility, especially Introna and LaFountain's conception of Baudrillard's work. I argue that there are implications of internet presencing, artificial intelligence, and driverless vehicles on humans' accountability and responsibility. I would employ case studies to exemplify the ethical dilemmas linked to duty and accountability in technological development. These case studies are afterward examined from Baudrillard's philosophical perspective. Furthermore, an assessment is conducted on the roles and duties assumed by different stakeholders in each respective case study. The subsequent analysis will examine the ramifications of Baudrillard's philosophical framework, especially in his work: "*Simulacra and Simulation*" and "*Fatal Strategies*." I argue that Baudrillard had implicitly discussed ethical decision-making in the online realm and its capacity to shape public policy and regulatory strategies on the notions of responsibility and accountability in one's digital presence. I emphasize the importance of engaging in critical introspection and actively opposing technology systems to counteract the pervasive influence of algorithmic herd behavior resulting from online mental indoctrination.

Keywords: Baudrillard; Artificial Intelligence; Current Technological Advancements; Ethics in Technology

I. Introduction

The advancement of technology has significantly impacted the human experience. The utilization of communication and work technologies facilitates engagement, offering the potential for enhanced ease, efficiency, and progress. Technology can improve several aspects of human existence in numerous ways. Nevertheless, the expeditious rate at which technological developments are occurring has concurrently engendered a plethora of ethical quandaries. These difficulties include a wide range of issues, including apprehensions regarding privacy and security and inquiries into the ramifications of technology on our political and social frameworks.

Amid these challenges, philosophers have increasingly turned their attention to the study of technology, seeking to understand its impact on society and its relationship to human values and ethics. One thinker who has significantly impacted this field is Jean Baudrillard, a French philosopher and cultural critic best known for his contemporary culture and media critiques. He designates contemporary culture as

dominated by “hyperreality,” where there is a collapse in the distinction between reality and simulation.¹ Baudrillard says that the proliferation of simulations and signs has detached themselves from the original referents and replaced the real world.² He argues that this simulated reality is a product of the media and consumerism. He says:

A simulation [which] can go on indefinitely, since – unlike “true” power which is, or was, a structure, a strategy, a relation of force, a stake - this is nothing but the object of [a] social demand, and hence subject to the law of supply and demand, rather than to violence and death. Completely expunged from the political dimension, it is dependent, like any other commodity, on production and mass consumption. Its spark has disappeared; only the fiction of a political universe is saved.³

Baudrillard targets the media that creates a hyperreality that replaces the real world, producing a simulation of social interaction that becomes more real than actual interaction. Baudrillard says it is a “speech without response,” the mass media “are opposed to mediation, intransitive, that they fabricate non-communication – if one accepts the definition of communication as an exchange, as the reciprocal space of speech and response, and thus of *responsibility*.”⁴ Baudrillard, then, portrays that responsibility is achieved through discourse and interaction between individuals. However, with the advent of new media, one cannot find this authentic interaction.

Baudrillard also mentions that “we are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war just as we were once led to believe in the revolution in Romania, and confined to the simulacrum of war as though confined to quarters.”⁵ Arguing that it was a simulation of war rather than an actual war, humanity, through the media, is confined to an illusion of war. The media’s coverage of the war created a hyperreality that bore little resemblance to the actual events. Conversely, consumerism produces a simulation culture, where the consumption of goods and services is more important than their use value.

Baudrillard’s philosophy provides a unique viewpoint on the ethical concerns of technological development and use. Technology can create hyperreality, blurring the barrier between reality and simulation and making our experiences increasingly mediated by technical systems. Traditional conceptions of responsibility and accountability become increasingly difficult in this setting as technology’s potential to modify our experiences and perceptions grows more powerful.

Technology is a powerful force that impacts our experiences and views of the world, not a neutral tool. As a result, responsibility for the ethical implications of technology extends beyond individual users to include the larger social and political systems that construct technology as it exists now. Here, I will traverse the question of accountability and responsibility through online presencing.⁶ The question permeates online presence as *presence*, posing whether online presence is an authentic presence or an absence that revokes human accountability in online interactions. So, are we accountable and liable for our online behavior?

¹ Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2001), 167.

² Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” 167.

³ Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” 181.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media,” *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2001), 207.

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War did not take place*, trans. by Paul Patton (Indiana University Press: Indianapolis, 1995), 25.

⁶ Presencing will be in a Heideggerian term of “*anwesen*.” It is the dynamic and temporal character of being itself (*Sein selbst*). Presencing is the “coming-into-presence” where there is engagement and correspondence with being as manifestation and emergence. See Richard Capobianco, “Presencing (Anwesen).” Chapter. In *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, edited by Mark A. Wrathall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 603-605, doi:10.1017/9780511843778.163.

Hyperreality generates a sensibility that shields mankind from ethical commitments to others.⁷ Similarly, I argue that there is a separation between the “unethical” and hyperreality technology creates. Unlike Introna’s work, however, this research concentrates solely on Baudrillard’s ideology. Through engagement with his thoughts, the consequences of developing technology will lead to a denial of responsibility and accountability. Without face-to-face engagement, online presence would imply a rejection of face-to-face obligation.

This paper will address the challenges of accountability in artificial intelligence, social media, and autonomous cars, in addition to the concerns of online presencing and engagement. This investigation will strive to establish a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of technology’s ethical components and uncover ways in which the “ethical” is promoted. Thus, the study will follow an argumentation where two sections are followed: (1) the first section will discuss Baudrillard’s philosophy of technology and how he implies responsibility and accountability for one’s actions. This section will emphasize Baudrillard’s view of technology as a tool for creating hyperreality where reality and simulation are blurred. Here, we will examine how one’s social media presence relates to one’s humanistic presence and, at the same time, analyze how Baudrillard’s thought challenges the traditional notions of responsibility in the face of new technology. There will also be an emphasis on examining the tension between the human desire for control and the power of technological systems, drawing on Baudrillard’s ideas about the potential for technology to create a state of total simulation and obliterate any sense of reality.

Moreover, through the case studies that will be presented, there will be an analysis that will highlight how Baudrillard’s critique of hyperreality will shed a new light that would evaluate the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including but not limited to the technology developers, policymakers, and end-users.

The succeeding section will discuss the implications for ethics and public policy, where Baudrillard’s philosophy will be implored to highlight ethical decision-making in the online sphere. This analysis will emphasize the limitations of current approaches to responsibility and accountability in technology and examine how Baudrillard’s philosophy offers and implies ethical insights into these limitations. Finally, an evaluation is required to see the potential of Baudrillard’s philosophy to inform public policy and regulatory approach to responsibility in one’s online presence.

This study would then conclude by summarizing the key findings highlighting the impact of Baudrillard’s implied ethical theory on technology and use. This study aims to answer whether Baudrillard implies ethics and responsibility since most of his works and scholars revolve around technology, hyperreality, and simulation. If so, this work contributes to a broader conversation about technology in society, hoping to provide insights into how a person can navigate the complex ethical challenges that arise as there is a heavy reliance on current technological advancements.

II. Baudrillard’s Philosophy of Technology and the Implications for Responsibility and Accountability

To start, the power of technology to create hyperreality relates to its ability to create “perfection” that could not be found in the real world. Such as Baudrillard’s thoughts on Disneyland as a perfect model entangled by the orders of the simulacra.⁸ Similarly, virtual reality can create immersive experiences that are

⁷ Lucas D. Introna, “The (im)possibility of ethics in the information age,” *Information and Organization*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2022): 73, doi:10.1016/s1471-7727(01)00008-2

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (The University of Michigan Press: Michigan, 2010), 12.

more real than the real. The distinction between the real and the imaginary disappears in the hyperreal world. This creates a world where it is difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is not. Technology is a tool that creates the hyperreal, where there is a blurring line between reality and simulation. He says:

The hyperreal represents a much more advanced phase insofar as it effaces the contradiction of the real and the imaginary. Irreality no longer belongs to the dream or the phantasm, to a beyond or a hidden interiority, but to the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself.⁹

Reality itself is embedded with an illusion created from the presentation of hyperreality; here, the hyperreal springs through technology from the media, the internet, social media, and the web archive.¹⁰ In this structure, technology also creates an “implosion” of reality. Baudrillard says this implosion “traverses through and through – incessant circulation of choices, readings, references, marks, decoding.”¹¹ This implosion occurs when simulations and signs replace the real when reality loses its power to determine what is true. Due to the diversity of choices, references, and signs, it is hard to decide what is real and what is not. In the hyperreal world, reality becomes simulation itself, and the world experience becomes mediated by technology.

In the blur of reality and simulation created by hyperreality, our social media presence is no longer just a representation of our real-world self. Instead, it becomes a new reality where humanity cannot know if the one behind the screen is real.¹² Personal identities are shared across digital platforms and social media channels. In this line of thought, Baudrillard writes that essence and identity cannot be reconciled anymore because “they have mocked and surpassed their own definition.”¹³ It is the instance where the social becomes “more than the social (the masses), fatter than the fat (obesity), more violent than the violent (terror), more sexual than sex (porn), more real than the real (simulation), more beautiful than beautiful (fashion).”¹⁴ Social media presence becomes a performance disconnected from humanistic presence in the real world.

Furthermore, Baudrillard suggests that the constant stream of information that humanity is exposed to can lead to disorientation and loss of self. He writes:

‘Information’ is orbital, for example - a form of knowledge which will never again go beyond itself, never again achieve transcendence or self-reflection in its aspiration towards the infinite; yet which, for all that, never sets its feet on the ground, for it has no true purchase on, nor referent in, reality. Information circulates, moves around, makes its circuits (which are sometimes perfectly useless – but that is the whole point: the question of usefulness cannot be raised) - and with each spiral, each revolution, it accumulates. Television is an image which no longer dreams, no longer imagines, but nevertheless has nothing whatsoever to do with reality. An orbital circuit.¹⁵

Information overload, therefore, is the first effect of globalization, and it produces a sense of

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death 2nd Edition*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant, (Sage Publications: LA, 2017), 267.

¹⁰ The word “archive” and “archiving” from the web is taken from Arthur Kroker’s thoughts on the Archive Drift. Where he says that the archive emanated from the world-wide-web makes its presence felt and brings the past into presence. The archive, however, will continually drift becoming a “data trash” or “link rot.” [See: Arthur Kroker, *Exits to the Posthuman Future* (Polity: Cambridge, 2014), 85-87.

¹¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 67.

¹² Baudrillard, “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media,” *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, 213.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. by Bernard and Caroline Schutze (Semiotext(e): Brooklyn, NY, 1988), 82.

¹⁴ Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 82-83.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, trans. by James Benedict (Verso: NY, 1993), 29-30.

disorientation, a loss of bearing, and a crisis of identity. The result would make maintaining a coherent understanding of online and offline identity easier. Social media presence, therefore, leads to the disconnection of humanistic reality.

On a different note, Poster addresses the issue of the discourse on ethical devices and whether the identity in real life conforms to the identity in cyberspace.¹⁶ He draws on Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, arguing that social media and other digital technologies are changing our understanding of reality and our sense of self. Poster mentions that the internet "makes possible a new ethical concern: deception about identity."¹⁷ Thus, one can never know if the person behind a particular photo or conversing with is a reliable source of information.

Building from what we have discussed thus far, Baudrillard's thoughts on technology challenge traditional notions of responsibility and accountability by pointing to how technology creates complex and nonlinear feedback loops that resist the simple attribution of responsibility or blame. In hyperreality, technological systems increasingly mediate experiences and perceptions of the world. For example, algorithms designed to increase user engagement and generate advertising revenue in social media can have unintended consequences, such as spreading misinformation and amplifying extremist views. In such cases, it is not easy to attribute responsibility or accountability to any single actor, as the feedback loops created by the technology can create complex and diffuse networks of influence and responsibility.

One concrete example is the Cambridge Analytica scandal. In 2018, it was revealed that Cambridge Analytica, a data analytics firm, had obtained the personal data of millions of Facebook users without their consent. This data was used to create targeted political ads during the 2016 US presidential election, designed to influence voters by spreading false information and promoting extremist views.¹⁸ The scandal revealed that social media platforms like Facebook (now Meta) could be used for political propaganda, allowing political campaigns to spread false information and manipulate public opinion.

Baudrillard's philosophy on technology also points to the creation of a sense of inevitability or determinism, making it difficult to imagine alternative futures or possibilities. Nick Perry explores the implications of Baudrillard's ideas for understanding the impact of globalization on culture and society. He argues that the "real fake," a result of the simulation of hyperreality, exhibits a society that is "on the move." The term pertains to a utopic distinction provided by Disneyland, which also resulted in seeing America as both "pre-cultural and post-cultural, both natural and artificial."¹⁹ This sense of simulation created from hyperreality contradicts the traditional notions of responsibility and accountability, making it less relevant as the power of technology continues to shape experiences and perceptions.

Additionally, Baudrillard mentions that uncertainty is more or less aggravated through reliance on technology, information, and communication systems.²⁰ This reliance has led to losing critical distance and blurring moral boundaries. Ethical decision-making is thus complicated because it can be difficult to determine right and wrong in a world in which technology has become ubiquitous. The *Murder of the Real*, on the other hand, a concept closely related to hyperreality, refers to the erasure of the boundary between reality and simulation. It is the result of the proliferation of signs and images in modern society, which has led to the simulation becoming more real than the reality it presents. Baudrillard says at the beginning of the essay:

¹⁶ Mark Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of digital machines* (Duke University Press: London, 2006), 155-156.

¹⁷ Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of digital machines*, 156.

¹⁸ Carole Cadwalladr and Emma Graham-Harrison, "Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach," *The Guardian*, March 18, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election> (accessed May 6, 2023)

¹⁹ Nick Perry, *Hyperreality and Global Culture* (Routledge: NY, 1998), 79.

²⁰ Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, 43.

Murder of the Real: it sounds like Nietzsche proclaiming the death of God. But this murder of God was a symbolic one, and it was going to change our destiny. We are still living, metaphysically living off this original crime, as survivors of God. But the Perfect Crime no longer involves God, but Reality, and it is not a symbolic murder but an extermination ... “Ex-terminis”: it means that all things (and all beings as well) pass beyond their own end, beyond their own finality, where there is no reality anymore, nor any reason for being, nor any determination (that is why I call it “ex-termination”). Extermination means that nothing is left, no trace, not even a corpse. The corps(e) of the Real—if there is any—has not been recovered, is nowhere to be found. And this because the Real is not just dead (as God is), it has purely and simply disappeared. In our virtual world, the question of the Real, of the referent, of the subject and its object, can no longer even be posed.²¹

The constant stream of images, information, and simulations can eventually lead to the complete erasure of the virtual and the boundary of the real. In turn, a state of total simulation is created, where the distinction between the real and virtual is entirely lost, and reality becomes indistinguishable from its simulation.

Simulation is not just a simple denial of the real but a radicalization of modern culture to simulate reality, where “an unreal is made real, a set of meanings is communicated that have no meaning.”²² Thus, Baudrillard’s thoughts are a fundamental challenge to traditional notions of reality. However, his thoughts, like any other, are still subject to criticism. Baudrillard’s critique of the real may be overstated, and there are still ways in which we can differentiate between reality and simulation. Reality should not be dismissed altogether. Instead, new ways of understanding must be developed in light of societal and technological changes. Poster argues that Baudrillard “transgresses the line of critical discourse in sweeping, gloomy pronouncements as if he knows the outcome to a story that has not yet been imagined, much less written.”²³ There is, therefore, a necessity to engage with the potential of technology to enable new forms of social and political transformation. In line with this thought, I would argue, however, that Baudrillard’s hyperreality is close to the engagement of social change, primarily responsibility and accountability. Baudrillard presents the dangers of technology, which I also think that technology may lead to losing one’s ethical premise.

In exploring the concepts of scene and obscene, Baudrillard argues that the mass media and communication technologies have created a state of hyper-communication that has led to the obliteration of the boundaries between public and private spheres and the distinction between reality and simulation. He says the scene is where “there is a domestic scene, a scene of interiority, a private space-time (correlative, moreover, to a public space). The oppositions subject/object and public/private were still meaningful.”²⁴ While the obscene is “when there is no more spectacle, no more scene, when all becomes transparency and immediate visibility when everything, is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication.”²⁵ Information and communication, he says, are like pornography where there is no longer hidden, obscure, or forbidden.²⁶ Everything is made visible and more visible than the visible. The obscene, traditionally kept private, has become part of the scene; it is now openly displayed and made visible through media – especially in social media. Such is the case for ethics.

²¹ Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, 61-62.

²² Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007), 63.

²³ Poster, *The Mode of Information*, 66.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (Bay Press: Washington, 1983), 146.

²⁵ Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” 150.

²⁶ Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” 151.

Baudrillard's ethics, however, as the locus of this study, is seen as an ethics of excess, which is the heart of his thought on "fatal strategy."²⁷ Baudrillard says that contemporary society is approaching a catastrophic endpoint: hyperreal. He says, "The real does not efface itself in favor of the imaginary; it effaces itself in favor of the more real than real: the hyperreal. The truer than true: this is simulation."²⁸ Baudrillard argues that in the age of simulation, reality is no longer a stable reference point but a constantly shifting, unstable realm. It is when the object has complete control over the subject.²⁹

In this sense, technological systems have become autonomous and are no longer under the control of human beings, and technology has developed its trajectory and logic. Humans are caught up in technology's trajectory and can neither resist nor escape it. Adding this thought to presencing, Baudrillard mentions, "presence does not efface itself before *emptiness*, but before a redoubling of presence which effaces the opposition between presence and absence."³⁰ When he says emptiness, he refers to both simulation and the hyperreal. Therefore, one's presence is both an absence and a presence in simulation and the hyperreal. Humanistic presence is present in the virtual presence and, simultaneously, absent because no one can determine the reality of the person's presence behind the screen. Humanistic presence, therefore, is tautologous with a virtual presence. In this sense, a person's virtual act must resonate with their accountability and responsibility. He says:

Our paradoxical situation is this: because nothing any longer has meaning, everything should work perfectly. Because there is no longer a responsible subject, each event, even a minimal one, must be desperately imputed to someone or something—everyone is responsible, some maximal floating responsibility is there, waiting to be invested in any kind of incident. Every anomaly must be justified and every irregularity must find its guilty party, its criminal link. This too is terror and terrorism: this hunt for responsibility without any common measure with the event—this hysteria of responsibility that is itself a consequence of the disappearance of causes and the almighty power of effects.³¹

Responsibility, therefore, is lost because reality is murdered. The obscene has now penetrated the scene. Baudrillard considers responsibility to be a meaningless concept in the hyperreal. He suggests that human beings live in a world where the consequences of actions are so complex and diffuse that it is impossible to determine who or what is responsible for them. Technology manipulates, it imputes an "affective blackmail," taking humanity as hostages. He says to "not be taken, take others hostage. Don't hesitate" since "in [the] taking [of] a hostage there is no message; it has no meaning or political efficacy. It is an event without consequences (and always lead to a dead end)."³² Humans are forced to take others hostage since technology moves them to respond to its affective blackmail. This is the "implosion" of responsibility.³³

The fatal strategy of technology has created a situation in which there is no longer any clear distinction between cause and effect, action and consequence, subject and object. Instead, everything is caught up in a complex web of interrelationships that defy traditional notions of responsibility.

In 2015, it was discovered that Volkswagen had equipped their diesel cars with software that allowed

²⁷ Marc J. LaFountain, "Obscene Ethics: A Baudrillardian View of Spurlock's Super Size Me," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 2008), <https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/obscene-ethics-a-baudrillardian-view-of-spurlocks-super-size-me/>

²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (Semiotext(e): LA, 2008), 29.

²⁹ Marc J. LaFountain, "Obscene Ethics: A Baudrillardian View of Spurlock's Super Size Me," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 2008).

³⁰ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 29. (Italics mine)

³¹ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 58.

³² Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 62.

³³ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 39.

them to cheat emission tests. The software detected when the vehicle was being tested and altered the performance to meet emission standards, but then reverted to higher emissions levels during regular driving. This situation resulted in significantly higher levels of air pollution than was allowed by law.³⁴ This scandal raises questions about the responsibility of Volkswagen executives, engineers, and regulatory bodies. Some have argued that the engineers who developed the software are responsible for designing a system allowing cars to cheat emissions tests. In contrast, others say that the executives who approved the software and allowed it to be used in their vehicles are responsible.

Additionally, there are questions about regulatory bodies' role in ensuring emissions standards are being met. This scandal raised critical ethical questions about the responsibility and accountability of the individuals and organizations involved. It also highlighted the complex interplay between technology, regulation, and corporate interests. While Volkswagen eventually accepted responsibility for the scandal and paid substantial fines and compensation, the case demonstrates the need for greater transparency and accountability in the development and use of technology.

Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality suggests that the distinction between reality and simulation has become blurred in contemporary society. He argues that the constant proliferation of media and technology has led to a situation where reality is no longer a fixed, objective entity but a simulated experience created by media and technology. In this context, holding anyone responsible or accountable for their actions becomes difficult, as reality has become unstable. Baudrillard's hyperreality provides a new perspective on the ethical issues surrounding the scandal. The VW emissions scandal can be seen as an example of hyperreality in action. I argue that this is the proliferation of the "hypermarket: hyperreality of the commodity."³⁵ As described by Baudrillard, the hypermarket is where consumers are bombarded with endless products, each promising to fulfill their desires and needs.³⁶ Here, truth becomes a commodity, and images and signs replace reality.

The company's engineers and executives were more concerned with creating an image of environmental responsibility than with reducing emissions. The defeat devices installed in VW's diesel engines can be seen as simulations of compliance with environmental regulations. The devices created a false image of compliance by manipulating emissions tests, while in reality, the vehicles were emitting significantly more pollutants than was legally allowed. In this way, the scandal illustrates the potential for technology to create a state of total simulation, where simulations become more real than reality itself.

The engineers and executives involved may have believed they acted responsibly by creating an image of environmental compliance. Still, their actions negatively affected the environment and public health. The scandal raises questions about the responsibility of individuals and organizations in a world where images and simulations replace truth. Baudrillard's thought on hypermarket also highlights the role of the consumers where VW's management placed profits and consumer demand above environmental concerns, creating a hyperreal world in which the desire for a particular image and lifestyle was prioritized over ethical considerations.

In another case, Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) is a rapidly developing field with the potential to revolutionize various industries, including law enforcement, marketing, and security.³⁷ However, FRT poses significant ethical challenges concerning responsibility and accountability. One primary concern is the

³⁴ Russel Hotten, "Volkswagen: The scandal explained," *BBC News*, December 10, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-34324772> (accessed May 11, 2023).

³⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 67.

³⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 77.

³⁷ Brad Smith, "Facial recognition technology: The need for public regulation and corporate responsibility," *Microsoft On the Issues*, July 13, 2018, <https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2018/07/13/facial-recognition-technology-the-need-for-public-regulation-and-corporate-responsibility/> (accessed May 11, 2023).

potential for FRT to perpetuate biases and discrimination.³⁸ FRT relies on machine learning algorithms to recognize faces, which can be biased if the data used to train the algorithm needs to be more diverse and representative. The issue would result in false positives, where innocent individuals are mistakenly identified as suspects, and false negatives, where suspects are not identified due to bias in the algorithm.

Another ethical challenge is the potential for FRT to violate privacy rights. FRT can be used to track individuals' movements and behavior, which can be used to monitor and control their activities.³⁹ This raises concerns about government surveillance and the potential for abuse of power. There is a need for increased transparency and accountability in FRT development and regulatory frameworks that ensure the technology is used ethically and responsibly. Baudrillard's Beaubourg effect proves to be essential in determining the significant ethical concerns of facial recognition technology. Named after the Pompidou Center in Paris, the Beaubourg effect is:

The final impulse to translate a structure that no longer has a name, the structure of social relations given over to superficial ventilation (animation, self-management, information, media) and to an irreversibly deep implosion. Monument to the games of mass simulation, the Pompidou Center functions as an incinerator absorbing all the cultural energy and devouring it – a bit like the black monolith in 2001: insane convection of all the contents that came there to be materialized, to be absorbed, and to be annihilated. 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*.⁴⁰

The Beaubourg effect reflects on technology transforming reality into a spectacle, where images and simulations are more accurate than the tangible experiences they represent. In the context of FRT, the Beaubourg effect highlights how technology can potentially transform the perception of reality and humanity. FRT systems create digital profiles of individuals based on their facial features, which can be used for identification and tracking. The process makes a digital representation of the individual, which can be shared and stored without their knowledge or consent. As a result, individuals may lose control over their digital identity and become subject to constant surveillance.

The implosion of culture, the Beaubourg effect, is where culture is “crushed by its [own] weight.”⁴¹ Baudrillard sees Beaubourg as the metaphor of saturation of culture (even power) in society, to the point that too much saturation causes it to implode.⁴² Simulation and reality are indistinguishable in this hyperreal world, leading to a loss of agency and accountability. FRT creates a hyperreal world in which individuals are reduced to digital profiles that can be manipulated and used without their knowledge or consent. This raises questions about who is responsible for creating and using FRT systems and who is accountable for their impact on individuals and society.

Technology developers have the responsibility to design and develop facial recognition technology ethically. This includes considering the potential consequences of the technology, such as the violation of

³⁸ Katam Raju Gangarapu, “Ethics of Facial Recognition: Key Issues and Solutions,” *Guest Post*, January 25, 2022, [https://learn.g2.com/ethics-of-facial-recognition#:~:text=Seems%20complicated%2C%20doesn't%20it%3F&text=The%20top%20six%20ethical%20concerns,breaches%2C%20and%20inefficient%20legal%20support.\(accessed%20May%2011,%202023\).](https://learn.g2.com/ethics-of-facial-recognition#:~:text=Seems%20complicated%2C%20doesn't%20it%3F&text=The%20top%20six%20ethical%20concerns,breaches%2C%20and%20inefficient%20legal%20support.(accessed%20May%2011,%202023).)

³⁹ David Leslie et al., *Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law: A Primer* (The Alan Turing Institute: The Council of Europe, 2021), 16.

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 61. (Italics mine)

⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 61.

⁴² Gerry Coulter, “The Conspiracy of Art/Utopia deferred: Writings for Utopie (1967-1978).” *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 44, Iss. 4 (November 2007): 496. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/conspiracy-art-utopia-deferred-writings-utopie/docview/234926609/se-2>

privacy and the potential for misuse. In addition, they are responsible for ensuring that the technology is accurate and reliable and does not perpetuate bias or discrimination. Policymakers are responsible for regulating the use of facial recognition technology to protect the rights and privacy of citizens. This includes developing guidelines and regulations that address issues such as data collection, retention, and sharing and ensuring that the technology is used fairly and transparently.⁴³

End-users, including law enforcement agencies and businesses, are responsible for using facial recognition technology ethically and responsibly. This includes ensuring that the technology is used only for legitimate purposes, such as public safety or improving customer service, and that it is not used to violate the privacy or rights of individuals.

It is essential, then, to recognize that facial recognition technology has the potential to create a state of hyperreality where there is a blurring of the line between reality and simulation. For example, in a hyperreal world, the accuracy and reliability of facial recognition technology may become less important than its perceived effectiveness or ability to create a sense of security. In addition, the use of technology may become so widespread that it is seen as an inevitable and inescapable aspect of everyday life, limiting individuals' ability to challenge its use or assert their rights and privacy.

III. Implications for Ethics and Public Policy

What we have established in the previous discussion develops Baudrillard's thoughts following the case studies that we consequently presented. That technology, in Baudrillard's context, denies individuality and our agency. In online ethical decision-making, Baudrillard's ideas about simulation and hyperreality suggest that the very notion of ethical decision-making may be illusory. He says:

Choice is an ignoble imperative. Any philosophy that assigns man the exercise of his will can only plunge him into despair. For if, on the one hand, nothing is more flattering for consciousness than to know what it wants, on the other hand, nothing is more seductive for the other consciousness (the unconscious?), that obscure and vital one which makes happiness depend on the despair of the will, than not to know what it wants, to be at the same time delivered from choice and diverted from its own objective will. It makes more sense to give in to some insignificant whim than to be suspended on your own will or on the necessity of choosing. Brummel had a servant for that. Before a splendid landscape constellated with lakes, he turns to his valet to ask: "Which lake do I prefer?" Not only do people surely not want to be told what they want, but they don't even want to know it, and it's not even certain that they want to want. Faced with such a solicitation, it is their evil genie that whispers in their ear to leave it to the advertising or information systems to "persuade" them, to make a choice for them (or to leave to politicians the job of making things better), just like Brummel with his servant... So who is being trapped?⁴⁴

Baudrillard refers to this as the "fatal strategy" of symbolic exchange. Humans are constantly drawn into a game of symbolic interaction that humans cannot escape, and the symbolic order always predetermines humanity's choices. In particular, he argues that choices and decisions are often predetermined by the cultural codes and symbolic systems that humans are embedded in.

⁴³ Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014), 126-127.

⁴⁴ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 126-127.

Furthermore, Baudrillard's critique of the power of technology and its potential to control human behavior suggests that individuals may have limited agency in the face of technological systems. The idea is that people not only do not want to be told what they want, but they also want to be persuaded to make them want what they want or sometimes do not want. This instance replaces reality (and the illusion of reality) with meaninglessness, where fatal strategies replace banal strategies.⁴⁵ This raises questions about the extent to which individuals can be held responsible for their online actions, mainly if they are heavily influenced by the technology they are using.

Banal strategies, as the exact opposite of fatal strategies, constitute a relationship of causality. It is living "in a system in which everything is connected to everything else, everything is exchangeable for everything else. We live in a world of total order, total determination, in which every event must have an explanation or cause."⁴⁶ In contrast, Baudrillard uses the term 'banalization' to refer to how everyday life and culture become standardized, homogenized, and reduced to repetitive and predictable routines. He says, "we thought we discovered something subversive when we affirmed that the body, sports and fashion were political. We have only precipitated their indifferenciation into an analytical and ideological fog—a little like discovering that all illnesses are psychosomatic."⁴⁷ Baudrillard understands this as the new scene of the obscene.

Here, Baudrillard argues that this process of banalization has significant social and political implications, as it erodes our ability to think critically and imaginatively about the world around us. This also indicates that the banalization of culture is closely related to the rise of hyperreality, which is characterized by the obliteration of distinctions between the real and the simulated and the loss of any sense of depth or meaning in our experiences.

In analyzing the current approaches to online and technological responsibility and accountability in technology, the existing policies tend to rely on legal frameworks and ethical codes of conduct. Other methods would also be limited to individual actors and their actions, and there is a need for more attention to the broader socio-technical systems. While these approaches have merits, they must be revised to address the complex ethical issues in technology development and use. Baudrillard's thoughts here offer new insights into these limitations in this context.

Baudrillard argues that technology is a complex system that has its logic and dynamics, which individuals and organizations cannot fully control. He says that technology has created a "virtual" world that operates according to its laws, which are separate from the laws of the physical world.⁴⁸ Baudrillard suggests that this virtual world is a complex system constantly evolving and adapting to new stimuli. It is beyond any individual's or organization's control – the virtual world creates its own meaning.⁴⁹ He argues that attempts to control or regulate this system are doomed to fail, as trying to exert control further reinforces the system's logic and dynamics. Furthermore, as I have discussed, Baudrillard suggests that the power dynamics in technology development and use are complex and not easily discernible, which may complicate efforts to assign responsibility.

One of the limitations of current approaches to responsibility and accountability is that they often focus on individual actions and ignore the broader context in which technology operates. For example, in the case of autonomous vehicles, current approaches to responsibility and accountability focus on assigning responsibility to the driver or the manufacturer in the event of an accident. However, this approach ignores the broader societal context in which autonomous vehicles operate, including the role of regulatory bodies,

⁴⁵ Xiang Liu, "Materialism as a fatal strategy: Jean Baudrillard's critical path of modernity," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 54, No. 11 (2022): 1812, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2073216>.

⁴⁶ Rex Butler, *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real* (Sage Publications: London, 1999), 90.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 82.

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 80.

⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 81.

infrastructure, and other actors. Baudrillard's thoughts suggest that responsibility and accountability are not solely the responsibility of individuals or organizations but rather the result of complex societal and cultural systems.

Baudrillard argues that contemporary society has become too complex and interconnected for any individual or organization to fully understand or control its consequences. He says:

We live in a culture which strives to return to each of us full responsibility for his own life. The moral responsibility inherited from the Christian tradition has thus been augmented, with the help of the whole modern apparatus of information and communication ... This, however, is an absurdity: no one can be expected to be entirely responsible for his own life. This Christian-cum-modern idea is futile and arrogant. It is also a utopian notion with no justification whatsoever. It requires that the individual should transform himself into a slave to his identity, his will, his responsibilities, his desire ... How much more human to place one's fate, one's desire and one's will in the hands of someone else. The result? A circulation of responsibility, a declination of wills, and a continual transferring of forms.⁵⁰

He suggests that responsibility and accountability are diffuse and can only be understood in the context of the larger systems in which they are embedded. Baudrillard emphasizes the need to think beyond traditional notions of individual and collective responsibility and instead consider the systemic and cultural factors contributing to social and political issues.

Another limitation of current approaches to responsibility and accountability is that they often focus on the intentionality of actions rather than their unintended consequences. For example, in the case of social media, the intention of the platforms' creators may have been to connect people. Still, their unintended consequence may be the spread of misinformation and the amplification of harmful content. Baudrillard's philosophy highlights the importance of unintended consequences and how technology can have unforeseen effects that cannot be fully anticipated or controlled. He argues, when he speaks of what remains as a remainder in the hyperreal, he says that "*one never knows which is the remainder of the other*. In no other structure can one create this reversion, or this *mise-en-abyme*: the masculine is not the feminine of the feminine, etc."⁵¹ Hyperrealities in contemporary society have created a situation in which reality becomes unstable and unpredictable. Baudrillard's view, therefore, challenges the dualistic interpretation of reality, where there is a clear distinction between reality and the simulated.

IV. Conclusion

What has been discussed so far are Baudrillard's thoughts concerning hyperreality. The hyperreal blurs the distinction between reality and simulation; this primary concept attends to the ethical issues on artificial intelligence, such as facial recognition technology, mass consumerism, autonomous vehicles, and online presencing.

Baudrillard's ideas about hyperreality have significant implications for ethical decision-making in developing and using emerging technologies. As we have seen, the blurring of reality and simulation that characterizes hyperreality can complicate traditional notions of responsibility and accountability and challenge our understanding of what it means to be human. The limitations of current approaches to responsibility and accountability in technology have become increasingly evident as we grapple with the ethical implications of technologies such as AI and autonomous vehicles. However, Baudrillard's philosophy offers new insights into these limitations, providing a unique perspective on the relationship between

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, 165.

⁵¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 143.

technology, society, and ethics.

As technologies continue to develop, it is crucial that, as consumers, people must engage with the ideas of Baudrillard and other thinkers to understand better the complex ethical issues that arise. By doing so, technology will be developed and used responsibly while preserving the understanding of what it means to be human in a world increasingly characterized by hyperreality.

While Baudrillard's philosophy offers valuable insights into the ethical challenges associated with responsibility and accountability, there are still several areas where further research is necessary to understand better and address these challenges. Firstly, as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and language models becomes more prevalent, there is a need for further research into how AI systems can be designed and programmed to ensure greater transparency and accountability. AI systems are often opaque, making it difficult to determine how they arrive at particular decisions, and this opacity raises essential questions about who is responsible when things go wrong.

Secondly, there is a need for more research into the impact of hyperreality on individual and collective ethical decision-making. Baudrillard's theory suggests that the hyperreal blurs the distinction between reality and simulation, and this blurring can make it difficult for individuals to make moral decisions. Further research is needed to explore how this blurring impacts our ability to recognize and respond to ethical issues, particularly online.

Baudrillard's critique of hyperreality calls for *critical reflection and resistance* to the dominant technological systems. I argue that in the approach to these technological systems, we provide an answer that is a "yes" and a "no." "Yes," since we need technology and its advancements for better comfort, since comfort, nowadays, is undeniably a necessity. "No," since technology and technological advancements create these signs and images that condition thought to the "blurring" of reality. Baudrillard argues that the proliferation of images and the blurred distinctions between reality and simulation have created a world where the real is no longer distinguishable from the virtual. Baudrillard argues that this state of hyperreality has led to a loss of meaning and a dangerous detachment from reality. He warns, to which we must be wary, that technological systems are not neutral tools but are instead part of a more extensive system of power and domination. To resist this power, Baudrillard calls for a critical reflection on the nature of technology and how it shapes our lives – that resistance must be a refusal to participate in the dominant technological system and a willingness to challenge its assumptions and values. Through this schema, I say: *that appropriation amidst (and in) technology is key.*

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