

# The New Real as the New Order of the Virtual and Hyperreal Existence

## ABSTRACT

The essay is an innovative and original reflection of the problematics of the new virtual social reality and sexuality as re-instating and reinventing the real as the “New Real”, written in Baudrillard’s terminology, inspired by his works *Seduction, Simulacra and Simulation* and *The Transparency of Evil, Essays on Extreme Phenomena* for rethinking and deconstructing theories of social relationships, the philosophy of the postmodern society and sexuality in terms of simulation and hyperreality with significant references to Lacan’s conceptual system in his seminars “Love and the Signifier” in his *Seminar XX*.

The interpretation of the “new reality”, the real and the hyperreal will make significant comparisons of Baudrillard and Lacan, referring to similar concepts, but understood and illustrated in a different context of Baudrillard’s philosophy of the postmodern and post-social state, simulations and technological virtual life and Lacan’s psychoanalytical hermeneutics of social and sexual relationships between signifiers.

Theories and references studied and elaborated are used to provide and elaborate the idea and thesis of deconstruction of social and sexual relations in the “new order”, known as the “New Normal”, equivalently named the “New Real”, which signifies the “Real” in both Lacan’s, but primarily Baudrillard’s sense.

The main focus is on the phenomenon of Internet interaction, its simulated reality, hyperreal lives formed by illusions of personal and interpersonal omnipresence, conceptualizing and designing social and sexual relations in virtual communication.

In the current age, it is impossible to imagine the totality of life, consisted of work, entertainment, social contacts and sexuality without technology and virtual communication and relations as the only way of living and interacting with others.

Virtual reality inevitable not only implies but impose virtual interpersonal social and sexual relations as social interaction via the screen, visual and auditive socializing and relationships, without experiencing the live visage or a touch of another person.

*Key words:* Jean Baudrillard, body, hyperreal, existence, the Internet, the “New Real”, mind, real, reality, sexuality, simulation, virtual

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## THE “NEW REAL” AS THE SIMULATION OF LIFE REINSTATING THE VIRTUAL NEW ORDER OF SOCIAL INTERACTION AND HYPERREALITY

Phenomena such as simulation, virtual reality and hyperreality have been terminologically and theoretically best elaborated in the poststructuralist theory of Jean Baudrillard, and although they have been introduced as much earlier in various relevant philosophical and literary works (such as hyperreality in the work of Umberto Eco), they have acquired their true meaning and significance in the 1970s of the twentieth century was the starting point for understanding them as contemporary concepts in the new millennium and digital era context.

In the past two decades, with the development of digital media platforms and social networks, the industry of informational technology has provided us with a specific, most sophisticated form of simulation, the virtual space and a simulated world as a substitute for real life and real contacts by transforming live socializing into virtual social interactions and communication.

The new social organization has taken over the body and mind of the individual in relation to the self and the others, having altered all personal, interpersonal and social relations as a cognitive paradigm for development and exercise of a new perception of the self and the world, creating new private and public identities.

Categories of the body, the mind and the other, as constituents of sexuality and sexual identity, have radically changed, *reversed* to the *hyperreal* in a conditioned, simulated “reality”, the “New Real”, where human relations have not only adjusted to, but, in many cases, completely converted to a *simulated reality* and a significant number, if not the majority of the world population have conformed to it, embracing it as the “best choice”, having been both unconsciously and consciously “seduced” and “coerced” to do so in order to prosper, to achieve, to *exist*, live and survive in the present “new world” as the futurist world of seemingly limitless opportunities and rational, but clandestine and non-transparent visions of the technologically created reality and *conditioned future* that is *presently* taking its place in a dynamic process of intertwining reality with illusions.

Jean Baudrillard’s socio-philosophical theory of simulacra and relations of simulations within the hyperreal is the most important for depiction of the (un)bodily virtual and ultimately hyperreal contact we have been constantly encountering and experiencing as our everyday “reality” by an elaborate *reorganization* of our minds and bodies.

The reversal to the *hyperreal* as the “new order of things” is to the same large extent manifested in personal and interpersonal relations, both to the self

and to others, including and “manipulating” professional and business relations as virtual relations to *things*, not *persons* anymore and finally, sexual relations as virtual and cybernetic, even when experienced practiced in person by imposing the *hyperreal* as a specific “sexual climax”, by imposing and, paradoxically, *reinstating* the “*New Real*”, as the only possible and acceptable mode of social and sexual existence.

Human beings with the basic quality of individualism and proper identity have adopted a simulated, hyperreal personality and an analogical operational mode in their own perception of the self and interpersonal sphere and relations, especially regarding social and sexual relations, by experiencing themselves and others as “virtual-real” bodies, virtual objects and objects of the virtual, the difference being that the first concept is a non-physical, simulated body and the latter is the body subjected to the order of simulacra, simulation and the hyperreal.

This notion may be closely linked to Slavoj Žižek’s difference between “virtual reality” and “reality of the virtual”, known as a very determined, but materially misinterpreted and therefore misunderstood critique of Baudrillard’s philosophy, but only if we think of it in the ontological sense of the position of the body and mind, not merely a difference between state of affairs in a post-capitalist society.<sup>1</sup>

Virtual reality can therefore not be consistently be “opposed” to “the reality of the virtual” because the two philosophers are thinking about two different concepts; Baudrillard’s position is that of elaborating the hyperreality, while Žižek’s thought is based upon his contemporary vision of dialectical materialism, which denies the very idea of simulation, hyperreality, claiming it to be an “imitation” or reproduction of reality, which is indeed very distanced from a “philosophically correct” reading of Baudrillard’s works, a specific misinterpretation of his thought.

Discussing Baudrillard’s notions of the simulated reality, we first must understand and explain the concepts of simulated, virtual personalities, the interpersonal sphere of social life and sexuality where virtual bodies engage in their simulated and hyperreal social and sexual practices by their constructed identities and imagination.

The best elaboration of this, at first complex concepts and relations, are exquisitely expressed in Baudrillard’s *The Transparency of Evil, Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, explaining the contemporary virtual *man-machine*, their transformation and transcendence into an “artificial” being and actions:

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<sup>1</sup> For understanding the complete reference and context, see: Žižek, 2004; 2012.

If men dream of machines that are unique, that are endowed with genius, it is because they despair of their own uniqueness, or because they prefer to do without it – to enjoy it by proxy, so to speak, thanks to machines. What such machines offer is the spectacle of thought, and in manipulating them people devote themselves more to the spectacle of thought than to thought itself.

It is not for nothing that they are described as ‘virtual’, for they put thought on hold indefinitely, tying its emergence to the achievement of a complete knowledge. The act of thinking itself is thus put off for ever.

These Men of Artificial Intelligence will traverse their own mental space bound hand and foot to their computers. Immobile in front of his computer, Virtual Man makes love via the screen and gives lessons by means of the teleconference. (pp. 51–52)

The current order we live by, created and operated by digital technology and virtual life mediated by the Internet, namely social networks, live channels which have replaced television and other media as obsolete remnants of a certain historical period, is the key factor which signifies the present historical moment as post-historical, having made a major evolution in our beings as a virtual life, virtual world, our lives have progressed, transcended to a higher level of simulacra, a technologically conditioned, digitally hyperreal mode of life and therefore the present period of time is based on the structural law of value, controlled by codes, but also by the symbolic, since we live the virtual via the Internet, social networking and live broadcasting channels, which is the best indicator to what a large extent people have developed the need of constantly *watching* others and *being watched* themselves.

We could refer to this phenomenon, lasting for decades now, as a “new voyeurism”, a virtual participation in lives of others and exposing our lives to unknown others and the possibility of being present in others’ lives and at disposal to everyone everywhere, every minute as the best example of the hyperreal existence today as a ready-made voyeurism and exhibitionism, available to everybody at all times.

The issue raised by the analysis of the virtual reality phenomenon is the one of the Internet and surveillance, as an ontological and psychological phenomenon of observing and being observing, seeing and being seen, thus being both a spectator and a performer since the panopticon of the Internet we live in has transformed our lives and beings into subjects and objects of constant “voyeurism” and “exhibitionism” and the model of transparent surveillance because we know we are being watched, followed, observed and although deprived

of privacy, we have gained the “popularity” which we have basically created ourselves by playing the game by the rules.

We have imposed upon ourselves the imperative of *enjoying* being seen and observed and by reducing sexuality to active and passive voyeurism and exhibitionism as mutually intertwined, the “new sexuality” has come into power because by exposing everything, making everything visible and known, seen and heard on the screen via cameras and audio devices, we have entered the order of the new sexual reality, as one of the main products of the “New Real”, exhibitionism is the new sexuality, the lack of intercourse, of *rapport* has fictively become one, the *virtual* and *hyperreal* one.

The exquisitely sophisticated visual, auditive and cognitive simulations have replaced the real, live and physical contacts, so instead of seeing and feeling the presence of the other, listening to the interlocutor, touching the other person, friend or partner, we indulge in the virtual interaction, a non-intercourse, a *non-rapport*, especially as this mode of living affects even our real life and live encounters with real people, whom we treat, and are treated by them, by the rules of virtual communication.

Virtual life and real life have therefore become one integrated unit of existence, consisting in several dimensions, while at the same time, they have excluding some of the essential dimensional known by our *preliminary*, now *former* beings.

In order to explain the “real” and the hyperreal in the present technological and digital order and context, we have to distinguish between the dimensions of the “real” life and world as we knew it before the “new order” had taken place, and those belonging to the virtual world as the hyperreal, having in mind the dimensions of the physical, of the body as the dimensions of the *real* space, the tactile sensations, as well as the sensual, spiritual are the ones missing in the “virtual world”, only to be hyper-intensely reinstated in the order of the *hyperreal*.

As I am trying to point out, the virtual, preceding the hyperreal, is only a temporary state without sensations but established on the symbolic code and functioning by the visual and auditive, while the ultimate hyperreal is the final realization of sensations, in their purest, sensual and most violent forms, the space of uninhibited “*real*tionships” and the over-imposed unbound and transgressive sexuality.

Following the ideas and theses related to reality and hyperreality as its ultimate stage of progress, we can try to elaborate on the two basic questions: “What is *virtual reality*?” and “What is the *reality of the virtual*?”, in a way of understanding the virtual as our *new primal* mode existence, followed by the

inevitable development into the stage of manifestation of our full existential potentials, the hyperreal.

Virtual reality would be best characterized as our potential, our desires experienced in the unreal, beyond the real, established by the symbolic value, the virtual space of the Internet and our online communication and created identity, whereas the reality of the virtual is a mode of functioning by the rules of the productional and structural law of value, best examples being machines introducing us to the cybernetic existence.

Since everything is reduced to simulations, a limitless universe of simulacra, which gives us unlimited options and opportunities, but deprives of “everything” – *ourselves, our selfhoods*, natural sensations of our bodies and independency of our minds.

It is important to stress that the concepts of knowledge of truth are in a dubious position, since they have been transformed into either simulation or hyperreality and therefore, we cannot perceive them in their original sense and meaning, as Baudrillard concluded, simulation *is* the *real*, and hyperreal transgresses the real, which leads to a cognition that we indeed have surpassed reality in both present time and future and the New Real we are living in is a post-futurist state, beyond reality, truth or knowledge.

### THE REINVENTION OF THE VIRTUAL IN HYPERREAL SOCIAL LIFE AND SEXUALITY

Distinguishing and elaborating the three basic orders of simulacra throughout history and present time, Baudrillard has introduced the contemporary order of simulacra, the simulation, that has also developed and progressed from the stage of news, images, media, television to the virtual sphere of the Internet, where everything is *online*, and therefore virtual, without physical contacts, yet giving us the constant illusionary perception of active participation and interaction with “virtual others”.

The construction of virtual reality is far beyond the online space since virtual reality has expanded outside the Internet, into our lives and live or IRL interactions by directing the human communication and relations in the same pattern as the human mind in the first place, as distanced and alienated interpersonal relations in a way of conceiving people and the relation to them in a virtual way, overcoming and casting out all of the previous modes of human behaviour and replacing them with the virtual and, consequently, the hyperreal.

This kind of technologically produced discourse is of a paramount importance for the understanding and interpreting contemporary society, but even to a larger extent, the creation and position of the individual identity, its structure and alterations for the individual undergoes radical psychological processes

which include a transition from the *live*, tactile world to the *virtual* world, replacing the *real* with the *cybernetic* in order to finally transcend the *physical* body endowed with touch and sensuality as the body of *intercourse* to the *virtual*, visual body, the body as an untactile medium of cybernetic *discourse* as the ultimate body of the *hyperreal*.

The body, as an entity and identity is inscribed into the order of the virtual and therefore the whole understanding and experiencing of sexuality has been reinstated by the codes of the new digitally conditioned society in which sexuality has transcended the physical by becoming non-physical, even when there is a physical sexual intercourse, it at the same time *tactile* and *untactile*, the body can be aroused by physical sensations without being *touched* because it is instrumentalized to operate being operated by the same *virtual symbolic code* to reach its climax in the *hyperreal*.

In the domain of the virtual, Internet mediated intercourse, bodies have only the visible and audible dimensions and sexuality reaches its hyperreal stage by the *imagination* incited by the visual and auditive effects, from photographs and writings to communication via social networks and online video communication which, as a “virtually simulated intercourse”, can be considered hyperreal, since the totality of the interaction is created and played accordingly to our minds and the imaginary fantasy development and therefore, this effect has created the concept of an “omniscient subject”, who “acts out” their desires and fantasies in a simulation, without actual action and intervention, on the very border of the Symbolic and the “impossible Imaginary”.

They possess “knowledge” and “freedom”, aware or unaware that those concepts are dictated to them as “social” imperatives by the politics of the New Real, the dominant contemporary culture and world order, however, they do not know *how* to reinstate or learn the *truth*, because they have become overpowered by the omnipotent system which has excluded the body and bodily contacts and sensations from human existence, having replaced them by the “impossible Real”, an artificial life in an “unreal world” of “non-real bodies”, balancing in a virtual “non-space”, which provides with an abundance of visual, auditive illusionary mind sensations, imposing social contacts without experiencing *real* contacts with *real persons* and sexuality without *feeling* the *touch* of other bodies, a body of the *other*.

In that realm prevails the contingency of Baudrillard’s hyperreality, as a notion which directs individuals towards *thinking* that they govern their lives by creating virtual identities and simulated relationships without any physical contact, without the body being present and active, save in *thought* and in the dimension of sensual and sexual it is necessary to introduce the whole new

relational order signified by virtual touches and sensations as a replacement of physical and tactile, the simulated touch as the new paradigm of the New Real.

The New Real is, beside social relations or their *lack*, most evidently demonstrated in the sphere of sexuality, since sexuality has lost its contact with touching and is best described as “touching without a touch” of another person, intercourse without the other, intermediated by technological devices and left to pure or wild imagination of individuals, deprived of the both Real and Imaginary.

The New Real of sexuality is therefore signified by the lack of erotic sensations and enjoyment, the tactile is excluded from any interaction, only the visual and auditive remain to lead the mind towards imagination and fantasy and sexuality is mechanical, cybernetic, distanced as well as the persons and bodies are distanced, not only from other persons and bodies, but also from themselves, in a way that persons can no longer easily identify themselves with their bodies.

Instead of a *stimulating* touch of the body of the other, people have *simulating* screens presenting them with images, voices and videos of strange other bodies, whose existence is unknown, uncertain and dubious, and even if they are in any way real, their identity is a *fantasy*, a *created* image presented as *real*, a *virtual construct*.

This kind of virtual social interaction and virtual sexuality has developed into a “sexuality without sex”, overtly creating the effect on people that no touch or stimulation can lead them to excitement, they are left to their imagination, in an “imagined” world of illusions, the global space of *hyperreal simulations*.

As the main manifestation and consequence of virtual interaction regarding personal involvement is the situation that if and when persons should meet in real life, the conditions and preferences have already been previously discussed, negotiated and arranged, so the actors only have to follow the scenario or abandon the scene and therefore the factor of surprise and the previously standard of making acquaintance by getting to know the other no longer takes place or exists as such, and neither are the phenomena of expectation or desiring present in the minds of predestined individuals playing their part in the game of simulation.

Imagination and fantasy have established their positions in the virtual space and lives governed by the order of simulacra, so that individuals once having conformingly or voluntarily switched to a hyperreal state of mind and action need to permanently maintain their hyperreal desire living it out by a “simulated sexuality” indulging in the “hyperreal desire” which has changed its meaning, sense and significance from the classical concept of desire, the “new



desire” is the desire for the “known-unknown”, virtual contacts and interactions created via hi-tech digital systems and devices.

Simulated relations as intermedia to the hyperreal world may be illusions and creations of the mind, and yet, they may be more true than truth itself and, finally, more real than the real, as Baudrillard describes the very concept of the hyperreal because while communicating in the virtual space people have the feeling of omniscience, omnipresence and “superpower” because they also create their identities according to their *desires* and *mirror images* knowing what they want and in the process, they may lose the relation with and to their previous, “true” selves and we can clearly notice the paradox of “unawareness” of simulation, the simultaneously *knowing* and *not knowing*, *desiring* and not knowing *what* is desired because simulation is the “New Real”, the only *known* concept, place and desire.

People who communicate and make contacts exclusively or mostly online, in the virtual space, live the simulated reality, which is *the reality* they know, the reality that *is* real and in that mode of living, they *know* what they want, or at least, they know what they are expecting to experience, they know that what they are doing is the only real, and that the virtual space provides them with extraordinary opportunities, while they are not quite aware of how they should formulate or rethink the issue of the non-tactile, simulated real within their minds and cognitive systems.

We can understand this thought as a paradox in a way that people are “un-awarely aware” of their existence and actions, that they are “unknowingly knowing” the virtual world or simply as we live it – as the reality, our reality, without further rethinking:

Artificial intelligence is devoid of intelligence because it is devoid of artifice. True artifice is the artifice of the body in the throes of passion, the artifice of the sign in seduction, the artifice of ambivalence in gesture, the artifice of ellipsis in language, the artifice of the mask before the face, the artifice of the pithy remark that completely alters meaning. So-called intelligent machines deploy artifice only in the feeblest sense of the word, breaking linguistic, sexual or cognitive acts down into their simplest elements and digitizing them so that they can be resynthesized according to models. They can generate all the possibilities of a program or of a potential object. But artifice is in no way concerned with what generates, merely with what alters, reality. Artifice is the power of illusion. These machines have the artlessness of pure calculation, and the games they offer are based solely on commutations and combinations. In this sense they may be said to be virtuous, as

well as virtual: they can never succumb to their own object; they are immune even to the seduction of their own knowledge.

Their virtue resides in their transparency, their functionality, their absence of passion and artifice. Artificial Intelligence is a celibate machine. (Baudrillard, 1993: 52)

The *truth*, as the truth of simulation is somewhere in between these prototypical descriptions because it is at the same time hiding, but also *revealing* the *real* as the *hyperreal*, as I could understand from my reading of Baudrillard's works, and the hyperreal we are living is the overwhelming *ultra emphasized real*, manifested as the *universal existence* and being and therefore elaborated and presented as universally *true*, the reality we are consuming and being consumed by.<sup>2</sup>

Their identity and the identity of others, as previously mentioned, is predetermined by their creation, along with their preferences, approach to socialization and work and the mode of entertainment and enjoyment has also taken a totally different form from the previous one, before the beginning of the era of cybernetics and "virtual relation production" began, from the viewpoint of those old enough to remember the predecessor order of *real life*, tactile, person to person relations.

The main characteristic of the "New Real" regarding interpersonal relations is the absence of *real communication*, emotions and passions, for what we *knew* them and the realm of the sensual has transcended into the virtual by mechanisms of simulation and has been ontologically rediscovered as virtually discovered, simulated, newly created as virtual sexuality, without a touch, without feelings.

This is referred to as *hyperreal sexuality*, in accordance with the notion of *sex for sex* only and "sexuality without sex", its ultimate climax being the triumph of computers and the Internet virtual space over bodies and bodies act to rule by those very means, using digital technology instead of *themselves* and other bodies as *hyper-sexed*.

The social and sexual organization in the simulated, virtual order can be viewed from different perspectives, of which I shall point out the productive and progressive one, which conceptualizes people and bodies as machine and technology mediated, but also minds as *simulated governors* of the virtual order, the order of bodies and minds ruled by and ruling technology and the hyperreal as the only *possible real*.

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<sup>2</sup> The thoughts presented can be read mainly in Baudrillard's *Simulations*, *Transparency of Evil and Extreme Practices* and *Seduction*, but basically throughout Baudrillard entire opus.

As Baudrillard kept reminding us, simulacra and simulations *are* the *real*, insisting on the view of the simulation as the real life, only *apparently* unreal, by insisting elaborating the thesis that the hyperreality is the precursor of virtual reality.

His thesis must be understood within a broad context of technology development and time continuum which are both products of the and therefore, following the logic of the postmodern society, we need to read Baudrillard in the present context in order to interpret his theory as a paradigm of the functional contemporary society created by technologies, but also *creating* the order of technological mechanism which produce the simulation effect and introduce us into the virtual reality of existence.

This state of living in alienation from the self and others may lead to serious identity crisis and various (dis)orders, because the “new order” not only proclaims, but *orders* a specific isolation and minimalization of live, physical, tactile social and sexual relations *in persona* by imposing virtual ones, *ex persona*, in a virtual space as our new (un)natural habitat, causing loneliness and loss of *touch* with our own minds and bodies, since lives have become reduced to a simulation, which *is*, in fact, *real*.

Whereas decades ago, this sort of lifestyle, having become or imposed as *the order*, would seem a controversial idea opposing human nature and defying the natural order of existence, which is now considered the “primitive” way of living left far behind, but we have to the highest degree or completely abandoned the previous, *physical, touchable* mode of existence and constructed a “bodyless”, alienated life within a society of progress, which has liberated us from numerous difficulties caused by unpleasant situations in interaction with others, but has created a new sublimated life where hard labour and working with people is reduced to the necessary minimum.

However, the deprivation of real life friendship and estrangement from others and, finally, from the self has caused severe discontents of an unfulfilled life, dictated by the hyperreal, whilst the Imaginary and the “impossible-Real” have been repressed and rejected as anthropological categories belonging to history.

The problematics of personal relationships involving affection, such as friendship and the idea of “romantic love” have been prevailed by technology mediated, far less demanding and “easier to get” “equivalents”, which don’t require effort in adapting and accepting a *real other* person, compromise, nerve problems and obligations, which seems a perfect bliss to self-aware, self-centred individuals.

Sexuality in general and sexual relationships without boundaries and control with all its brutalities, “dirtiness” and “filth”, sexually transmitted diseases,

cultural stigmatization and the feelings of loath self-disgust developed in people with certain mental instabilities or disorders, in the new conceptualization of relationships, is still a way too expensive disposal to be put at stake or simply dismissed.

The price which the practice of “virtual sexuality” will have to pay is the absence of the invaluable physical sensations of touching, arousal, orgasm, the feeling of *the other* and of *the self*, experiences always thought of as the most intense and exquisite pleasures, in another words, in the world of virtual “touching” and virtual, imaginative, untactile “sexuality”, we can be free of numerous issues and consequences, free of responsibility and care for our bodies, but most of all free of ourselves, free of physical sensations and feelings and pleasures no technology can provide us with.

The inevitable question is can we and in what terms reach *satisfaction* in the virtual surroundings and how could the concept of satisfaction be defined or described in the present and future conditioned mode of existence?

What would be the meaning and practice of not only satisfaction as a very broad term, but other abstract concepts primarily happiness and enjoyment, since they are clearly very different from the “traditional” ideas of these abstract sensations, more precisely, they are the *negatives* and *simulations* in the virtual world.

Regarding sexuality, the very concept of “virtual sexuality” is a hyperreal transgression of sexuality in ontological sense because we have ceased to experience *bodies* and feeling others with either joy or disgust, enjoying or despising others, hating or loving them for we have learned to feel complete indifference.

We have replaced the “common” sexuality by hi-tech cybernetics and are enjoying others as virtual bodies by being virtual bodies ourselves, *bodiless*, *emotionless* and therefore carefree and relaxed, feeling comfortable and safe from the unpleasant issues of the “unsafe”, real world, in the comfort zone of the hyperreal one and at that very point, sexuality should be observed and understood as a “non-sexuality”, a virtual, simulated “video-erotic” exchange between images of bodies, without a touch, without a feeling of true or pain, mechanical sexuality as a present-futurist science fiction we are currently *living* as a part of our both essence and existence.

All the basic, elementary emotions have been “wiped out” and erased from our cognitive system and, while in the previous times, many people would consider that an “ideal state of happiness” or simply focusing strictly on one’s own life, ambitions and wishes as a form of *self*-centrism, however, at the present time, a central issue that arises is *how* do all the self-centered individuals succeed in social and personal relations, since all the interpersonal interactions

are Internet mediated, real relationships are extremely superficial, which leads people to being alone with themselves, living and *being the self with the self*.

This is how the new concept of the body in sexuality has been created, as a “lost”, body alienated from itself and other bodies, a body that cannot be merged with another, which directly implies that sex and orgasm as being *one* with the *other* is represented by a missing referent, the *lack* produced by *bodiless*, virtual, distanced signifiers operating as virtual bodies directed by technology and cybernetics.

Virtual bodies as *bodiless*, and thus “non-bodies”, endowed with all the technological abilities and possibilities, including all dimensions, are still missing the one dimension of the *tactile* which used to be one of the most important one and, what is more, possessing all the advantages of the virtual, the apparent existential “omnipotence”, their visual dimension is also simulated, hyperreal, but in the sense of the altered and “non-real”, since the images of others and themselves are produced simulacra, far from the real, obtained and controlled on the symbolic level.

From that point of view, today we can think about “sex and the Internet”, the locus being a virtual, World Wide Web *city*, because the whole world has turned into an online realm of *seeing* and learning about and knowing *everything* without actually being physically present anywhere with anybody or knowing anybody, including oneself because social networks, chat groups and forums for written, visual and video communication by multiple devices such as microphones, graphics such as picture enhancement programs and essential web cameras serve all the purposes and preferences the contemporary individual could need and wish for a fulfilled “online life”.

*Technologically*, why should anybody bother with real life encounters which, along with pleasure, brings many troubles such as dealing with one’s own, especially other people’s issues, when we can have it all ready made on a silver screen, relieved of senseless and disturbing emotions, spared of touching unknown, strange bodies, but enjoy the ones we like on video stream, non-obliged to listening to boring life stories of others *live* because we can simply delete or block user in this beautiful state of the new virtual mode of social interaction and existence?

Internet communication, in its beginnings, during the early and mid 1990s started as a new form of hi-tech entertainment, but, most important, as a media for learning and collecting information and a most relevant and a useful and study resource, its primary importance being acquiring knowledge in all areas, from computing sciences to social areas, some special subcultures emerged as a result of the new technology and its widespread availability, such as cyberpunk culture and the hackers phenomena and finally, the gaming culture, which

has remained one of the basic consumption products as one of the largest economies based on largest multinational companies.

The main aim is to make a comprehensive comparative analysis from the very beginnings of the Internet culture in the 1990s, based on excessive leisure time spent in chatrooms, playing online games to the final point of Internet mediated existence, focused on virtual reality we have been experiencing in the past decades, signifying a specific “point of no return” manifested by the continuum and progress of ultimate virtual existence as “hyperreal reality” and perhaps the only one we now know best.

From the beginning of the widespread Internet era, chat rooms and virtual cafes, various forums for discussing all areas from business, entertainment, personal life have been trying and, to a large degree, succeeded in replacing live, real life encounters and conversations, with the phenomenon of cybersex as the “creme on top” substitute for real sexual intercourse, later developing into a refined “online sex” and porn industry of commercial specialized porn websites, but also a vast multiplicity of forums, websites for direct “personal” sexual encounters, finding partners for special sexual preferences, hard or impossible to find in real life, with the intention either to meet live and continue the “virtual fantasy” by turning it into a hyperreal action, that may have even lead to the Imaginary or continued exchanging fantasies by chatting and displaying pictures and videos and receiving pleasure from *virtual bodies*.

According to the character and personality of an individual, everybody is free to choose what they want by articulating their desires and it has never been easier to get it, since the Internet, as the largest realm of the virtual and hyperreal offers infinite opportunities to everybody keen enough to search, to learn, to study oneself, to live the fantasy of the self as an illusion or as simulated reality, the “true real” of one’s being and existence and in comparison to the past several decades, when computing technology and the Internet was basically a *mode* of entertainment, as previously described, today it is a *world*, a *virtual world* and a *space* of and for life, a *place* of the totality of our complete working, informational, educational and leisure social and private existence.

We can therefore confront the previous use of technology with the current one, since there indeed is an enormous difference between playing computer and/or online games and online chatting with the sole purpose of entertainment and exploring new technologies and a whole “brave virtual world”, where all relations, interactions and communication as *rappports*, in Lacan’s words, are transmitted and conditioned by the Internet connection and the ultimate effect and result of the present online interactions can be best explained by the notion that the entire communication and interpersonal relations, along with

individuals' identities are no longer *personal, live and real*, but *virtual and intermediated* by the cybernetic, the virtual world and "virtual individuals".

The reinvention of human relations as the "New Real" is initially based on simulation transformed into the realm of the virtual and the hyperreal, which have expanded to the paradigm of our *live* encounters and socializing, our *real life* with the starting point of reinventing life from personal, social and sensual to simulated and virtual as virtual existence in the "New Real life", the sphere the virtual reality, its vanishing point being the ultimate conception and introjection of the hyperreal experience by transgressing the limits of *reality* and the *self*.

Living the *virtually* in *real life* including social interactions, interpersonal and sexual relationships as *virtual rapports* is the central and final moment of the technologically created "virtual real" having been introjected into our minds and beings as a new form of virtual realization of selfhood, personality and identity is the best representation that the *virtual order* has been adopted by and equalized with *real life modus operandi* as the *new order* which transcends all previously known reality, transcending it into the hyperreal by the phenomena of ultra intense experience, as it is depicted in Baudrillard's elaboration of the real and hyperreal in terms of the concept of hologram:

The closer one gets to the perfection of the simulacrum, and this is true of objects, but also of figures of art or of models of social or psychological relation, the more evident it becomes how everything escapes representation, escapes its own double and its resemblance. In short, there is no real: the third dimension is only the imaginary of a two-dimensional world, the fourth that of a three-dimensional universe.

Escalation in the production of a real that is more and more real through the addition of successive dimensions. Nothing resembles itself, and holographic reproduction, like all fantasies of the exact synthesis or resurrection of the real, is already no longer real, is already hyperreal. It thus never has reproductive truth value, but always already simulation value. Not an exact, but a transgressive truth, that is to say already on the other side of the truth. What happens on the other side of the truth, not in what would be false, but in what is more true than the true, more real than the real? Bizarre effects certainly, and sacrileges, much more destructive of the order of truth than its pure negation. Singular and murderous power of the potentialization of the truth, of the potentialization of the real. (Baudrillard, 1995: 73–74)

Furthermore, Baudrillard engaged in a far more descriptive narrative of extreme sexuality in his reference to the sexual pleasure derived from observing and taking part in violence and lethal accidents in J. G. Ballard's famous novel "Crash":

From a classical (even cybernetic) perspective, technology is an extension of the body. It is the functional sophistication of a human organism that permits it to be equal to nature and to invest triumphally in nature. From Marx to McLuhan, the same functionalist vision of machines and language: they are relays, extensions, media mediators of nature ideally destined to become the organic body of man. In this "rational" perspective the body itself is nothing but a medium.

On the other hand, in the apocalyptic and baroque version of "Crash" technology is the mortal deconstruction of the body – no longer a functional medium, but the extension of death – the dismemberment and cutting to pieces, not in the pejorative illusion of a lost unity of the subject (which is still the horizon of psychoanalysis), but in the explosive vision of a body delivered to "symbolic wounds", of a body confused with technology in its violating and violent dimension, in the savage and continual surgery that violence exercises: incisions, excisions, scarifications, the chasms of the body, of which the sexual wounds and pleasures of the body are only a particular case – a body without organs or pleasure of the organs, entirely subjected to the mark, to cutting, to the technical scar – under the shining sign of a sexuality without a referential and without limits. (Baudrillard, 1995: 75–76)

By exploring the most extreme and dangerous sexualities, we become completely subjected to the hyperreal, its domain becoming our place and mode of existence which manifests itself by the radical change of our minds, since we come into possession of a different conceptual system and this form of enjoyment is a product of a new, different set of mind that was unknown or rather *unconscious* to "pre-simulational generations" and may, in many aspects, appear "bizarre" in comparison to the traditionally idealized values of "human nature", relationships and sexuality.

The former lifestyles of a now obsolete world, preceding the "technological (counter)revolution" now belonging only to the oblivion, have vanished before the order of simulation, virtual reality and the *hyperreal world* and *life code*.

The "new humans" as the subjects of the "New Real" are in no way superhuman, much less subhuman, they are natural and genuine in being "mechanical



animals”, as a popular song and album by a controversial rock musician suggested back in 1998:<sup>3</sup>

We were neurophobic  
And perfect  
The day that we lost our souls  
Maybe we weren't so human  
If we cry we will rust  
And I was a hand grenade  
That never stopped exploding  
You were automatic and  
As hollow as the 'o' in god  
You were my mechanical bride<sup>4</sup>  
You were phenobarbidoll  
A mannequin of depression  
With the face of a dead star

This most amazing and popularly labelled an infamously “controversial” band has dedicated their entire musical opus, this album being the best example, to the critique of the contemporary post-cultural, mechanical society, with direct references to a technological post-culture and the post-social state we live in is best depicted by the operational mode of bodies transformed into “machines” as in their song “User Friendly”:

Use me when you want to come  
I've bled just to have your touch  
When I'm in you I want to die  
User friendly fucking dopestar obscene  
Will you die when you're high  
You'd never die just for me  
She says,  
“I'm not in love, but I'm gonna fuck you  
'Til somebody better comes along.”  
Use me like I was a whore  
Relationships are such a bore  
Delete the ones that you've fucked (Manson 1998)

<sup>3</sup> Manson, 1998; songs Mechanical Animals, User Friendly and basically the entire album is dedicated to the new state of existence I am trying to describe

<sup>4</sup> Marilyn Manson, excerpt from the song “Mechanical Animals”, from the previously mentioned same entitled album, the term “mechanical bride” is borrowed from Marshall McLuhan's study of popular, consumerist culture “Mechanical Bride”,

The representation of mechanical “feelings” appears so intense and sexually vivid, electrically charged and hyperreal, this is the essence of *hypersexed sexuality*, while the order of the hyperreal, as the ultimate order of simulacra is prevailing and exceeding all the possibilities of simulations and social order, there it is a post-social state in which people are turned into “limitless machines of desire” and mechanical beings, governed not by the innate, but programmed and learned instincts.

We function, act, operate like “human machines”, “man machines”, to borrow the term from the cult electro band Kraftwerk, that is to say, we no longer act, only function by an operational mode that is often predictably programmed or conditioned, or sometimes, simply, made to seem spontaneous and adventurous.

The whole spectre of machines, the concept equalized with “humans” from “desiring machines” to “production machines” was first introduced in 1970s poststructuralist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari whose elaboration of human machines in a capitalist society was a most interesting, intriguing and “subversive” manifest against two dominant orders of dictatorship-capitalism and psychoanalysis, the first controlling society and economy, the latter the individual, their personality, all aspects of life with the strongest focus on sexuality.

In Baudrillard’s works, machines are understood and interpreted in their original sense, in accordance with their primary meaning, as technologies controlling and directing *human lives*, not as *humans themselves*, but essential factors generating their *simulated, virtual reality* and this hyperreal “adventure” of “human machines” seduces us to embrace a technologically modified socializing and sexualizing, the *user friendly, ready-made* and *easy-to-get* one because in this mode to associate and socialize is to exist in a virtual *preprogrammed* controlled mode, to fantasize and sexualize is to cybernetically, virtually connect to the *virtual other* in a hyperreal intercourse and hyperintense pleasure of *user friendly* bodies.

What is being described as our new real is a specific post-historical, post-social, post sexual and, above all, post-human non-society as a generated order operated and governed by machines via sophisticated computer programmes, software that affects our lives to the degree of a complete subjugation of the physical to the virtual.

This connection of the body and the programming machines includes locating our physical residence, our previous locations, addressing us personally by advocating us in our everyday work and leisure activities and the most common examples of this sort of surveillance are the constant suggestions for spending our time, from educational and business opportunities to selection of

entertainment, ranging from recommended music according to *our* particular taste and a variety of “strongly addictive” video games and fantasy series provided by specialized channels, giving us an illusion of the sense of power, with the idea and purpose of controlling us in every sphere of our lives.

Finally, and perhaps most important, we are being “forced” into interactive websites, social networks and applications for finding “adequate” friends and sex partners, meeting our preferences, inciting and *creating* our desires – we are “provided for” in a ready-made virtual simulation, our lives *find* their *realization* in the hyperreal.

The mind is instrumentalized by technology which makes it a projection of the virtual order, a conglomerate of human reason and artificial intelligence by means of simulation since the former constituents of the mind, such as thought, will, psyche are still not completely extinguished, but rather subdued to the technologically conditioned hyperreality and psychology and ethics have therefore become obsolete and abolished from our conceptual system, our “virtually operated minds”.

Since the mind has been granted artificial intelligence, it has become a virtual, cybernetic mind within the sphere of simulacra, a “pure” mechanical reason, without psychological processes, without emotions or innate human feelings, but instead, developed by programmed behaviour and simulated feelings of pleasure where the self has become a new term altogether, founded as a virtual, non-human self, but still a major constituent of the “new humans”, who have replaced animality and emotions, for a technological, software mediated desire which encourages enhances indulgence in both violence and sexuality.

Both the essence and existence of the mind have been established and are being elaborately maintained by a *simulated perception* of the self, the *overemphasized*, virtual selfhood, transforming into a *hyperreal self*, where the psyche has ceased playing the emotionally cognitive role in our development and realization, it basically no longer *exists* in its previous form.

The body is no longer governed by “animal-human” instincts, but has instead adopted technologically preconditioned virtual sensations of the tactile.

Sexuality is doubtless one of the most powerful mechanisms in the order of simulacra of seduction and production, in Baudrillard’s words:

Sexuality as a discourse is, like political economy (and every other discursive system), only a montage or simulacrum which has always been traversed and exceeded by actual practice. The coherence and transparency of homo sexualis has no more existence than the coherence and transparency of homo economicus.

It is a long process that simultaneously establishes the psychic and the sexual, that establishes the “other scene”, that of the phantasy

and the unconscious, at the same time as the energy produced therein – a psychic energy that is merely a direct consequence of the staged hallucination of repression, an energy hallucinated as sexual substance, which is then metaphorized and metonymized according to the various instances (topical, economic, etc.), and according to all the modalities of secondary and tertiary repression. (Baudrillard, 1990: 41)

Our social behaviour, but most of all sexual desires are manifested by a strong desire and realization of violence, which is our basic instinct in achieving sexual pleasure, as Baudrillard exemplifies through his broad analysis of Ballard's "Crash":

Body and technology diffracting their bewildered signs through each other. No affect behind all that, no psychology, no flux or desire, no libido or death drive. The non-meaning, the savagery, of this mixture of the body and of technology is immanent, it is the immediate reversion of one to the other, and from this results a sexuality without precedent – a sort of potential vertigo linked to the pure inscription of the empty signs of this body.

Only the fetishistic metaphor is perverse, seduction via the model, via the interposed fetish, or via the medium of language. Here, death and sex are read on the same level as the body, without phantasms, without metaphor, without sentences.

The technology in *Crash* is shining, seductive, or dull and innocent. Seductive because denuded of meaning, and because it is the simple mirror of torn-up bodies. Bodies and technology combined, seduced, inextricable. (Baudrillard, 1995: 75–76)

When we think of individuals interacting and playing games as a part of the sexual intercourse, we can imagine and experience the reinvented sexual reality where we get involved into various activities, intercourses and sexual practices as total strangers and this approach and practice of sexuality highly resembles playing online video games, role playing games, which is exactly what they are doing – playing, acting intercourses like simulation games, their bodies and sexuality having become virtual projections on the screen of their minds as both fantasies and acts of performances.

Amongst the hyperreal phenomena established on the order of simulacra, sexuality is best elaborated and given most attention to precisely because of this specific limitless possibilities of simulation by playing an invented or spontaneous, but still virtually conditioned, scenario, starring it as a *virtual*

*character*, seduced by the simulational sphere of the projected sexual acts in the mirrors and screens of our *virtual selves*.

Staging a scene and playing the scenario rises us above human sexuality and as it becomes our only reality, as simulation is, we transform our experiences and our personalities into hyperreal ones, practicing various extreme sexual games, since we have the sensation of ecstasy, of not being *our selves*, but our *imaginary, virtual* counterparts, and the acts we perform seem simulative and therefore liberating.

Baudrillard, elaborating on this aspect, suggest a less radical point of view as an option of life in the simulacra – liberation is not simply a state within the sphere of the hyperreal as it may seem and, even more important, we are not machines in the Deleuzian sense, but rather *subjects* of the earlier introduced post-industrial, post-social and post-sexual, virtual and hyperreal world, a locus where sexuality and violence are intertwined to be united by a specific logic:

It is true that in our culture the sexual has triumphed over seduction, and annexed it as a subaltern form. Our instrumental vision has inverted everything. For in the symbolic order seduction is primary, and sex appears only as an addendum. Seduction works on the mode of symbolic, articulation, of a duel affinity with the structure of the other – sex may result, as an addendum, but not necessarily. More generally, seduction is a challenge to the very existence of the sexual order. And if our “liberation” seems to have reversed the terms and successfully challenged the order of seduction, it is by no means certain that its victory is not hollow. For revolutions and liberations are fragile, while seduction is inescapable. It is seduction that lies in wait for them – seduced as they are, despite everything, by the immense setbacks that turn them from their truth – and again it is seduction that awaits them even in their triumph. (Baudrillard, 1990: 14)

By becoming and being hyperreal we live our lives most intensely, *hyper-intensely*, since all the sensations we experience are elaborately programmed by technological mechanisms of power, causing the effect of the experiencing the *real*.

The *effect of the real* of this progressive process is accomplished through simulation, which makes individuals feel that their lives are their own minds’ constructs as if projected by their imagination and desires, whereas they are simulationally and virtually conditioned, but still to a high extent a product of their psychological and physical predispositions and often unconscious desires and this is precisely the main reason why we have so enthusiastically,

over-thrillingly embraced the virtual, because our minds are in pursuit of the hyperreal, the ultimate experience of existence in the form of complete and hyperreality as our irreversible reality.

## CONCLUSION

### THE HYPERPRODUCTION OF HYPERREAL EXISTENCE AND “SEXUALITY WITHOUT SEX”

Baudrillard emphasizes the strong cohesion and a socio-philosophical connection of human lives and the immediate influence of technology imposed upon them, creating a whole new world, from simulation to the hyperreal as the ultimate phenomenon of existence, the climax of postmodern civilization.

The New Real as the final hyperreal mode of existence has come into power after all the possibilities of the virtual have been exploited and, simultaneously, people as consumers and technological powers as creators had to make a radical progress or a transformation into the hyperreality, in order to provide the limitless enjoyment of experience, to enhance our senses and modify our minds to *desire* more and more of virtually social, observing and monitoring the ongoing situations in world, “enjoying” radical violence and extreme, deradicalized sexuality and never cease desiring more beyond the hyperreal itself, since we have transgressed life by entering the hyperreal.

Following from this could be two ideas, first, life as we knew it, pure human life was not enough and we should be proud to have virtually transgressed it in the order of simulacra, and developed into “new humans” or “posthumans” and, second, that the whole simulation of the hyperreal life is essentially what it was designed to be – a virtual existence, hyperreal being only a limited game of power, which has its logical end, as any extreme radical order does.

However, Baudrillard wanted to explain a situation in between, using the concepts of simulation, virtual and hyperreal to elaborate on the postmodern state order and in which life has transcended obsolete value and obtained certain liberation via technology, but also become subordinate to technological society and the order of simulacra, he made his best thesis in trying to elaborate a balance of several radical positions in the new order of the hyperreal mode of existence.

Having transcended from the virtual, in which we lived by the prescribed rules of simulations into the hyperreal, we now live all the social and sexual relationships by the single rule of no rules, we are *acting out*, arbitrarily by a script of our own moment and design, but structurally there still is a script, the one as described in “Crash”, a scenario of our primal, natural instinct, a break from cultural order and therefore unbelievable, hyperreal, violent and dangerous, our voluntary choice of pleasure.

The “new humans” could be defined by a virtual essence, being finally realized in the hyperreal existence, but there never is a finality, the process of development in the hyperreal is perpetual and everlasting, advancing into more refined and sophisticated mechanism of natural, brutal and *real* beings and personalities.

Life in the in the order of simulacra may have been devoid of personality, but the hyperreal brings out all the qualities we have kept under the technological constraint, our desires for violence and their fulfilment, our sexual motivations and their extreme practices, they are no longer questions of law, ethics, morality, and the self.

We have acquired all the necessary knowledge for living this newly created existence for we are no longer “humans” in a traditional way.

The term “new humans” does by no means imply either “superhumans”, or “sub-humans”, it is used for differentiation from biologically determined human animals to “mechanical animals” or “posthumans” for “new humans” are the postmodern, futurist beings of immense intelligence, creating their own hyperreal world and existence as a unique and sophisticated upgrade of the virtual world, following the new order imposed by technological mechanisms of power that rule the world.

The mode of our current and the “present-future” life and existence is determined by the fact of *reality* that we have already been inscribed into the order of the futurist and now we are living in a post-futurist “society”.

The only reality, option and alternative is to embrace the virtual and hyperreal life and to enjoy the role of simultaneous directors and performers, voyeurs and exhibitionists, to live the hyperreal to the fullest, our life as a film, a simulation to be seen, to seduce others as the virtually and arbitrary created, desired persona that is no longer the *self* and to be seduced by the simulacra of others, as mirages of a life long, endless game of fantasy and simulation.

We may go much further, beyond the hyperreal, to transcend it to the domain of the limitless, the unknown realm where no order exists, although the hyperreal has already transgressed all the possible boundaries of existence, rules, behaviour and left to us to our imagination, our instinctive and impulsive action, reaction and satisfaction.

Exposing bodies as mirror reflections or, more precisely, *screen reflections*, transfixes them into virtual four dimensional sex objects, figures meant to be observed, followed, enjoyed by the visage and the visual which by watching their acting out, they are perceived almost as actors in a film, and that is all they can be, since they lack the fifth dimension, the one of the tactile, of the *touch*, but this lack of the tactile will again be restored by their introduction into the (dis)order of the hyperreal, where touching becomes the ultimate expression of interaction, sexuality and violence.

The hyperreal as the “ultimate virtual” can be understood, should we draw comparisons of Baudrillard and Lacan, a transgression from the imaginary mirror stage into the endless and limitless space of the symbolic, it is a manifestation of a primarily insufficiently developed individual, followed by the progress by prevailing the infantile stage of self-centrism and entering the order of communication, social intercourses and sexual relationships.

Reading Baudrillard, we can understand the imaginary stage as a superficial digital correspondence with images, without perceiving oneself as independent and detached from the characters in a computer game or a social network, whereas the symbolic could be described as an advanced technological, virtual communication with virtual persons and creating a virtual identity of the self, striving toward the hyperreal by means of enhancing social skills and developing a prescribed mode of behaviour.

This mode of behaviour is nothing but the order of simulation and simulacra, as described in Baudrillard’s works, as the “new order” and the “New Real”, characterized by the *fear of the real* and of *being real* and the only way to overcome that fear is to engage into extreme practices of the tactile dimension, like the ones described by Baudrillard’s interpretation of Ballard’s “Crash”, or perhaps, by accepting the virtual version of *jouissance* by finding significant others or sex partners in the realm of the Internet, which may “indict” the individual of personal incompetence or unwillingness to engage in developing one’s own personality and identity via self-cognition and socializing in real life, time and space with real people and *being one*.

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