FINDING REALITY IN HYPER REALITY
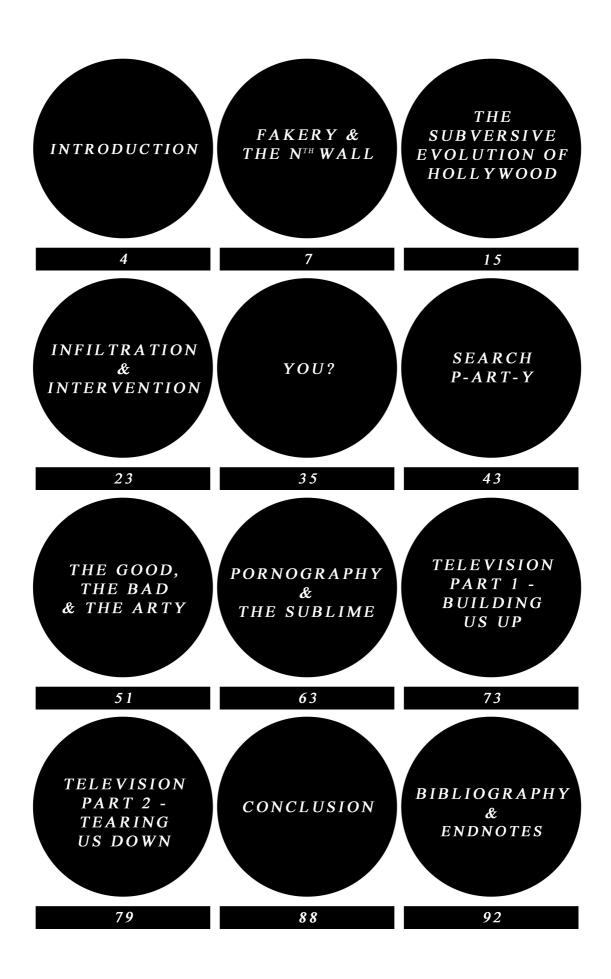
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Graduation Thesis

Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam - 2012

INTRODUCTION

There's a charlatan amidst the everyday, it has surreptitiously superseded knowledge of the real by blaring and shouting its way into the limelight - Reality seems to have been replaced by hyperreality. From the banal to the metaphysical, hyperreality has permeated modern culture to an extraordinary degree, things like gardens, e-mail, window shopping, professional sports, supermarkets, phone sex, ATMs, clothes, man-caves, the zoo, EU regulated straight cucumbers and looking at your own house on Google street view are just few instances of hyperreality that will not be explored in this thesis because the hyperreal canon exceeds far further and deeper.

Due to the ingrained nature of these now normal events in post-modern culture which have personally led to my own derealised state, unable to distinguish what is and what is not real, I want to ask and explore one thing – Is there a reality in hyperreality?

We live in a world where there is more and more information but less and less meaning and despite efforts to reinject message and content, meaning is lost and devoured faster than it can be reinjected. Rather than creating communication, it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication. Rather than producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning. People say that they know something is happening in the world such as famine or genocide, but they cannot 'connect' to it emotionally; the same also happens with cinema, the audience believes but doesn't –

they react towards both with ambivalence. Information dissolves meaning and the social to the point of entropy.

Perhaps children know the purest form of reality but are sullied by established modes of perception meaning that we as adults limit our capacity of understanding. We could be like a chimp trying to grasp the theory of relativity or an ant walking round a piece of looped paper (∞) going round the seemingly flat plane unaware of the parallel universe beneath it. It's possible that we've created limitations to such an extent that we keep rolling around, not progressing in a hyperreal world full of traps and snares or perhaps it's the opposite, and hyperreality is a way to extend beyond our fallible limitations, to sublimate human existence.
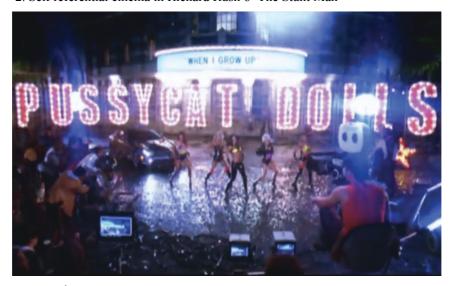
In this thesis, I will test the relationship between reality and hyperreality by exploring specific prototypical instances that flaunt this relationship. I plan to scrutinise the most permeable interactions practically, philosophically and scientifically to see if there truly is a reality amongst the deviating pomp of the hyper and if the real object is equal only to itself in a mirror.

1. Video game footage mistaken for real footage of the IRA on ITV news (UK)

2. Self referential cinema in Richard Rush's 'The Stunt Man'

3. The Nth wall in the Pussycat Doll's music video 'When I Grow Up'

FAKERY & THE NTH WALL

There are only two choices – Either everything is fake or nothing is.

Either nothing is fake because everything is made from natural substance - plastic, microchips and planes are all made from the substance of the earth; or everything is fake because it's just a series of signs that never permeate the real. Yet there is a notion that there really is a *true real* that is masked by a fake facade in everyday life, but by removing the fake, is the real underneath truly there? For example, sweets and candy mimic the appearance, smell and taste of fruit but they are not fruit. They do not hold any of the health giving properties of fruit, nor do they actually taste like the fruit they resemble, the only thing that holds any resemblance is the name (strawberry laces etc) yet no-one bats an eyelid.

By removing the fake elements that make up the candy, is the true fruit beneath? No, these sweets use the recognised signs, such as curvaceous contours, primary and vivid colours as indexes of health and ripeness but the prime purpose of the candy is unhealthiness, the opposite of the thing it mimics. It has exapted a new function and the fake becomes real.

"The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices and memory banks, models of control – and it can be produced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it

anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without an atmosphere." [1]

This means that without any true real to compare the fake against, the fake can thrive and take on a new existence, regardless of whether it admits itself as fake or pretends to be real. It's similar when you believe in Father Christmas as a child, only to learn that he was a fallacy but up until that point, he was undoubtedly *real.*

Today, it is very hard to distinguish between the real and the fake because iconic knowledge has been sullied by hyperreality. The prolificacy of the digital medium has made iconic knowledge of the real and fake particularly murky. For example, the British ITV news showed footage of men with a rocket launcher shooting down a helicopter that was supposedly IRA propaganda. It transpired that the footage was actually taken from the video game 'Arma 2' with the developer of the video game saying "We consider this as a bizarre appreciation of the level of realism incorporated into our games. The game looked so real that it could pass as something better than a fake." [2]

Computer generated imagery (CGI) is responsible for a huge amount of misinformation whether it's used for entertainment or more nefarious purposes. In the entertainment industry such as cinema and television, CGI can be used to construct environments, people and events that never existed: 'Boardwalk Empire' [3] is one such television show that implements a heavy amount of CGI in it's content.

For the purposes of historical accuracy, it uses CGI to construct an ostensibly accurate Atlantic City in the 1920's but with such intricate detail that it is near impossible to distinguish what has been filmed on set and what has been digitally constructed. Furthermore, the fact that the audience watch the scenes unfold on a television already indicates to them that the entire narrative on screen is fake, therefore it does not matter how authentic it may look, it only becomes a spectacle. The fake is acknowledged but ignored because just as with the narrative of a film or program, the viewer nonetheless suspends disbelief. [4]

With Adobe offering the option to seamlessly paste a smile onto someone's face with their program Photoshop and billboards displaying David Cameron looking ten years younger after being digitally touched up, it's no surprise that the public are less likely

to trust what they see. Such distrust occurred in June 2011 during the riots in Vancouver after a hockey match: A photograph was taken of a couple, lying on the floor, surrounded by riot police and broken glass, but they were tenderly kissing amidst the hubbub. The image became known because of its questionable authenticity, it looked too good to be true – the atmosphere was misty, the lights were diffused and the romanticism was reminiscent of a Hollywood film. The consensus was that the image must be a fake simply because Hollywood is fake; Hollywood fabricates scenarios based on reality but because they are hyperreal events, it's hard to acknowledge them in the 'real world'. The image was real, the kiss was real, the situation really happened but the digital post-modern age of hyperreality has made iconic knowledge a thing of the past.

'Everything is metamorphosed into its inversed order to be perpetuated in its purged form." [5]

If we extrapolate Baudrillard's theory, then we can prove truth with scandal, the law by transgression, and the real with the fake, we can also prove the fake with the fake (which thereby tangentially proves the real).

Now let's take an instance of the fake – cinema. If the fake proves the real then cinema proves the real, but if the cinema (the fake) has permeated today's hyperreal culture then cinema also proves cinema. An instance of this occurrence is self-referential cinema like 'The Stunt Man' [6] in which a fugitive becomes embroiled in the making of a film about World War I in which he becomes the stunt man, not knowing if he is partaking in fiction or reality. Or 'I'm Still Here' [7] which is even more in the zeitgeist because the star of the film, Joaquin Phoenix, plays a parodied version of himself. Phoenix plays the celebrity, something that will always be a character to the public, in or out of a film – the celebrity surfs the fine line between the fake and the real until the line can no longer be recognised. Phoenix (the character in the film) questions his own role (in the real world) and therefore the role of the viewer. The fake thing that mimics the real becomes a real thing in itself.

"Cinema not only tries to replicate with greater and greater accuracy, the absolute real but it also replicates itself, constantly plagiarizing, recopying itself by remaking its

classics and retro activating its myths such as remaking the silent film more perfectly than the original." [8]

This couldn't be more apt, just with the release of 'The Artist' [9] a silent film mimicking all the nuances of a 1920's silent but made in 2011 with greater perfection than could have ever been dreamed. The popularity of The Artist is not down to its plot but rather the accuracy in which it replicates the dimensions of film itself – Film fakes the real, morphing real people into characters – When the public are used to the idea of film faking reality, film fakes the film, morphing film itself into a character. It's a familiar pattern, just like history in cinema no longer resembles history (how can it?), now it only resembles the resemblance of history.

But how is such a dense weave of epistemology constructed? Where does this leave the viewer? The construction of film is built using walls and the one that informs the viewer that they are removed from the proceedings is the 4th wall. An instance of breaking the 4th wall is if a character looks directly into the camera, ergo, at the audience. An example of a film that manipulates the idea of the 4th wall is 'Synecdoche New York' [10] where a playwright starts to write his own life as a production, but his life also includes writing a play about his life, creating a feedback loop of blurred boundaries between the walls of the cinematic medium.

Cadence – "Sammy! What are you doing?"
Sammy – "I'm you; you like Hazel, I like Hazel."
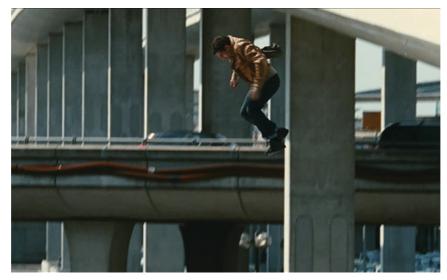Cadence – "If you're going to like a Hazel, like that Hazel, not this one."

When the cameras and background set is shown in a video filmed by camera with a background set, it becomes self-referential and intertextual and is used extensively in pop culture to expose the attainability and culpability of the artists in front of the camera. The reason that this fake set is shown, a set within a set, is rather like a magician revealing his trick; to relay to the viewer the achievability of fame and that just because the artist looks impossibly perfect on camera, it's all an illusion. However, by revealing the illusion within, the pop video or film itself becomes paradoxical: it's depicting an illusion and revealing nothing. If anything, it becomes

more convoluted because the fake set and cameras depicted become too perfect, the artist does not look any more real and the scenario is perpetuated. Western society is so used to these kinds of faux-decontructional 'behind-the-scenes' scenes, that it no longer registers as 'real' when a set is shown. On the contrary, the production of videos and films itself has become a desirable world in which to live, that is to say – the depiction of real world within a fake one has become desirable in itself. Over years of indoctrination of a fantastic world of imperfections through film and television, the information on screen that is purported as 'real' has become ineffectual. The viewer in a manner of words, 'knows' that what they see is not a true representation of their existence so a new device was implemented to subjugate the viewer into a new transgressive state by using something I call the 'Nth wall'.

This Nth wall is a ploy to dupe the viewer into believing a didactic truth within a lie. It plays exactly the same role as the pop video used to; the pop video served as an ideal of a particular emotion, an ideal of the real. But now as the idealisms fade into ineffectuality because they seem too hard to attain (i.e. wealth, fame), the industry making these videos needed a new mechanism to let the viewer know that they can still attain the dreams displayed in the videos. This is where the reveal of the Nth wall enters the shot. By revealing, or rather, depicting the set complete with cameras and lighting but omitting certain aspects such as gaudy duct tape, the world of the hyperreal is entered once more. Just as in numerous depictions of everyday locations in films and television, many aspects are changed within the location in order to convey an emotional response with greater acuity. For example, in the film 'Bugsy Malone' [11] the sets are simplistic and inaccurate, but with purpose. The aim of the set, costume design, music and even acting is not to accurately depict reality, instead the reason the inaccuracies are laid bare is to display the fact that they are unimportant, so that the viewer need not focus on them. The viewer does not need to scrutinise these details in the film because they only serve as signifiers and icons and not as the core message of the film, for that is reserved for the paradigm of the narrative story. In this instance, the locations of the film (made up of painted sets) have indexical relationships to a 1920's prohibition era Chicago, they do not connote the real 1920's Chicago. With this in mind, there is no need to construct sets of concise intricate detail, the budget of the film may allow for more elaborate sets but they're not

required. This allows for omissions of grand proportions such as streets with no drainage systems or cars with no engines or furthermore, children in replacement of adults. By recognising the functionality of the semiotic system, every conceivable element can be altered if the story remains intact. The lead character Bugsy, can get in trouble with gangsters and win the heart of a woman despite the fact that Bugsy is played by a child, meaning the audience can still emotionally respond to the raison d'être of his character.

The Pussycat Dolls' music video 'When I Grow Up' features the set of a construction site on which the girls perform a dance routine, so the primary function of the set itself is to elevate the girls at varying heights to produce a pleasing visual result. The secondary function of the set is to be an index of labour work, which in turn acts as a signifier of reality. The index can be anywhere between ultra-realistic scaffolding with added rust and fruit stickers from the workman's lunch to a simplistic white edifice, but both need to indicate the same thing – the construction site. When this portion of representation has been completed, then the Pussycat Dolls can dance to their hearts content, fulfilling their primary function as well as tertiary functions of being famous within the everyday life, which turns a construction site into a disco. This is what Bugsy Malone manages to do so well: the primary function of the narrative story can continue untouched whilst the signifiers of the characters can be altered to such an extent that children can be used to play adults. Similarly, the Nth wall of television and film uses these principles. The primary function of showing the artist in a set is to re-dupe the viewer into believing what is real so the icons do not necessarily need to be accurate. The cameras do not have to actually film, the lighting does not actually have to light and the director does not have to direct, but all of the above have to act as if they fulfil the function they imitate – to state an idealism of the real.
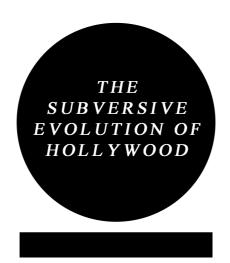
4. Exponential escalation of (real life) events in the film 'Taken'

5. The replication of a McDonalds for the purpose of a film set in 'Mac and Me'

6. The literal parables in cinema laid bare in Alex Kendrick's 'Courageous'

THE SUBVERSIVE EVOLUTION OF HOLLYWOOD

There is a new dictator.

"Our desires are artificial, we have to be taught what to desire. Cinema is the ultimate verbal art, it doesn't just give you what you desire, it tells you what to desire." [12]

Cinema or more to the point, Hollywood, not only feeds off the hyperreal like pigswill, but it also perpetuates and augments it; it takes what it dishes out by regurgitating it. Hollywood's primary goal (like the music industry and pop videos) is to accrue profit, so it created a formula that pushed certain neurological buttons within the brains of its audience that kept them coming back for more, thus pumping more money into the 'dream machine'. Hollywood is a master at making reality a suffix, it extracts elements of the real from beauty, colour, emotion, situation, morality, classism, health, language and then adds the prefix of hyper. It cuts through what it deems to be extraneous or boring elements of life to highlight elements that aren't.

"The hyperreal is a series of signs that replicate the real exactly but short-circuits all of its vicissitudes." [13]

In one instance, the ideal of 'beauty' is amplified to its extreme. The physical beauty of a man or woman, both body and face depends on symmetry, strength, longevity and a host of qualities that make a person attractive. Hollywood identifies many of

these traits and constructs its own archetype of the perfect man and woman, yet by doing so, it simultaneously constructs the 'antitype', another indispensible tool. This formula uses exaggerated versions of physiognomy, physique and anatomy etc. Faces become so exaggerated with use of make-up, lighting and post-productive editing that they don't resemble any face seen in day-to-day life. This method of the hyper creates a visually exaggerated form of the normal but of course, the normal is always changing, it is warped by the escalating change that Hollywood adds to it. But this constant model of exaggeration leading to the hyper is just an appendage to another comprehensive model, one that illustrates the rise and domination of the hyper quite clearly - I call it the 'Banana Model'.

Bananas are delicious, we love what's inside and not only that, they are visually handsome, they are an indication of something your body and mind wants. The body in cinema is a banana and it has been exploited, but in the eyes of the public and Hollywood, it has been acceptably exploited. Like a half peeled banana, much is seen but not everything, yet there are no surprises as to what's underneath the rest of the peel - the body reveals breasts, legs and stomachs, just narrowly avoiding showing a nipple or pubic hair but regardless if these key elements are viewed, the intention is there. What was once a prudish society became something quite the opposite in less than a century. Cinema changed this, it gave its audience a banana and when that became the exemplar, it peeled it a little bit more for provocation to draw in more of an audience. The exemplar of just a plain unpeeled banana was too banal, and the public did not want to see a simple representation in the cinema of what they already knew. But when that slightly peeled banana hung around long enough, it too became the exemplar, meaning the banana needed to be peeled just a little more to provoke a reaction (but not too much so it will banned). This cycle has continued, drawing more and more people to witness the body beyond the current model and constantly peeling that banana to a scant level whilst always (or in the majority of cases) being within the realms of public acceptability.

The titillating thing about the Banana Model is that we know what the rest of the banana looks like because half the peeled banana already implies it. Officially you cannot see the rest of the banana but unofficially, you can. The imagination and implication is enough to thrill but concealed enough to moderate. This is how ratings

can get away with more and more than in the past, this is how new audiences are drawn in and every new generation is subjected to a slightly more peeled banana that doesn't necessarily numb them or limit imagination, it just creates a new exemplar from which to launch from.

The Banana Model can be extrapolated into other areas of Hollywood's focus groups. Language for example has been directly affected through the medium of cinema, exclamatory words like 'crikey' and 'blimey' were used until they became camp when 'bloody hell' worked its way in (probably one of the most evocative phrases in use) which too paled into innocuousness. An incessant overlapping of profanities in commonplace and acceptable usage became exponential as Hollywood's influence spread far and wide. 'Bitch' and 'bastard' found their way into films for the under 12's, 'bullshit' and 'B.S' became anodyne and everyone's favourite word 'fuck' became ubiquitous. 'Cunt' seems to be the only trailblazer, still not being recognised as a word on my computer's spell check but at this rate, what does it matter?
The regulations for profane language usage just can't seem to keep up with the rapid rate of docile profanity. It's as if the worst words will lap their own profanity, oscillating between offensive and inoffensive before the regulatory body has time to even make a decision how to categorise it. Applying the Banana to the banal everyday sees the same escalation of circumstance. Everyday scenarios can become super fuel injected car chases, or perfectly orchestrated facades that again, resemble what you know and live among but it is grossly over-dramatised. The escalation from reflection of reality to hyper-narrative over-dramatisation goes a little something like this:

- Father and daughter share a bond and the father, like any parent finds it hard to say goodbye to his daughter as she leaves for a trip to Paris, her first trip abroad without parents.
- Father and daughter share a bond and the father is slightly paranoid when his daughter leaves for a trip to Paris because of his past work in the government.
- Father and daughter share a bond but that bond is stretched when the daughter's rich step-father seems to possess more stability for her, and the father's paranoia is overcoming when his daughter leaves for Paris because of his past work as a secret government agent.

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- Father and daughter share a bond but the daughter is taken captive in Paris by an Eastern European sex trafficking gang and father has to save her with his secret service ninja skills by killing anyone with a dodgy accent and a Kalashnikov by stabbing them in the neck and driving an Aston Martin onto a boat on the Seine where his daughter is being sold nude at auction to rich Saudi businessmen until the father kicks everybody's throats in, and when he saves her, they go home with a stronger bond that emasculates his daughter's step-father.

The last bullet point is a description of the film 'Taken' [14] starring gruff voiced Liam Neeson, but it just goes to show how far this escalation has come, it seems absurd when you read it but to watch it seems oddly natural.

What was once a cautionary tale replicating the real evolves into an explosive, violent, explicit affair that would almost fit the constructs of a fairy tale or fable but the difference between the two is that the fairy tale declares its fantasy from the outset. This is the joy of cinema, it mimics the real but the audience suspends their disbelief - "Fictions *are* our reality. If you take away the symbolic fictions that already structure our reality and regulate it, you lose reality itself." [15]

This exaggerated reality on the silver screen in turn, affects and influences the everyday reality of the audience watching it. Hollywood's reign over the public's spare time permeates society as the masses aspire to act accordingly to what Hollywood declares is right and wrong. A prime example is the gargantuan quantity of moralistic and allegorical content in films purporting to be the right and wrong way to behave. Almost pedagogic lessons are fed to children in kids films, or to couples in rom-coms etc, changing the way people conduct themselves and interact or more accurately, how they would like to be perceived that they conduct themselves. America produces a vast amount of overtly moralistic films including the quite astounding modern day biblical fable 'Courageous' [16]. Courageous doesn't lump itself in the fable category but rather as a true, honest, religious depiction of the everyday lives of American Christians. It teaches morals in the biblical sense but using the Hollywood medium, where lives are lost and babies are saved (in remarkable ways) but this time, there's an ostensible reason for it all. Regardless of what the morals that

are being sold are, they are all being sold in the same box – a huge capitalistic money making machine called Hollywood that creates blockbusters masquerading as parables and allegorical ways of living. This is the way that it seeps in, audiences pay attention to them unwittingly, children grow up with twisted morals without any interaction between their primary educator, they cannot question what they are being told. Hollywood morals are not like the old morals that children in the past grew up with because they were based on past knowledge for the improvement of the next generation but now it's based on hyperreality and profit.

Divisions between cultures and classes are broadened instead of bridged as even more subdivisions are made within sects of society – the geeks, the jocks, the bohemians, the snobs, the chic, the yobs, the businesspeople – are these subsections of society pre-existing, or are they being multiplied by reinforced stereotypes that creates increased tension between them? Hollywood (supposedly) merely represents these cliques as pre-existing nodes of society but also highlights certain good and bad aspects of each clique dependent on the target audience of the film. When making a film targeting the jock demographic, it may portray geeks as the weak, irritating underbelly of the school, therefore reinforcing the jock's perspective: But similarly, a film catered towards the geek demographic will do the opposite, meaning the geeks come away with a reinforced view of their adversaries being wankers, widening the gap between the two demographics. The split differs from film to film but none of which can be objective (an impossible concept), because if it were, there would be no friction and therefore nothing for the audience to buy in on.

In the past, nations held disputes between each other because of their insular attitudes and sense of righteousness, but that has accelerated now and spread to the masses as it plagues an increasingly more fractured social strata of intolerant superiority. Where in the past the winners wrote their history, Hollywood allows every societal group to have their own film and their own personally written history book. The populous acknowledge these enforced notions of stereotypes but just as importantly, they conform to the stereotypes that represent who they are. It's heartening to know who you are and that is something that Hollywood really nails into the public, it tells them who they are by relaying the notion that it's the only way to be happy. It tells them

what they should look like, how they should act and to which rules they should abide by in social conduct. It becomes a one-way street of being told who you are and therefore knowing which group is your antipode.

"If you look at fakes all day and you finally see the real, it bores you, you cannot distinguish, nor does it matter between them because it's only *your* perception that matters, the line is blurred, the line is gone." [17]

The peculiar thing about this is that reality can be such a bore that when something exciting does occur, it is likened to a film, a real situation that bears resemblance to a constructed real situation. This is truly hyperreality where "..the sign has become reality by masking the fact that there is no basic reality; the reign of the hyperreal as a major symptom and simultaneously contributing cause to the post-modern moment." [18]

It is experiential reality that allows the viewer to understand what they see on film because they can attain the correct references, meaning the lived experience provides the viewer with the fundamentals of understanding a reconstructed lived experience. What is now becoming part of experiential reality however is watching films and living in film locations such as Los Angeles "where reality and representation get muddled." [19]

McDonalds and motels are built with every detail tended to its authenticity yet they never serve any *real* customers and are only used exclusively for films. Freud also surmised that one must never realise a fantasy because if it is realised, all seduction is gone. So it could be that when faced with a situation that's beyond our normal realm of experience, we exclaim that it's 'like a film' because actually living the act in question means passing over to the double and losing that fantasy.

So what will happen to society if this cycle continues to escalate? Is reality actually hyperreality and therefore there is no self-reference? People already wear extravagant make-up, have boob jobs, use internet dating systems and socially conduct themselves in the way film characters do (in short, acting out hyperreality) but if that is how they live and that world is what they know, doesn't that become their reality? But where

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does this leave Hollywood? If hyperreality is reality then doesn't Hollywood simply becomes a depiction of realism? If Hollywood needs the mundane to make into the spectacular just so people can pay money to watch a fantastic version of their life, then does Hollywood need to go a stage further if people are already living the lives akin to the ones in the movies? Does this mean Hollywood needs to create a new archetype and antitype of the human, perhaps one that doesn't burp or defecate and is just the ideal of 'perfection' and 'anti-perfection'.

Jesus and Judas are just these ideals and the masses aspire to be like Jesus and dislike Judas so they can finally ascend to heaven beyond mere human existence. The stories and characters in the bible are even more perfect, archetypal and set in stone than those of Hollywood films; perhaps Hollywood is a rudimentary form of transcendence where the ongoing escalation of hyperreality leads to a religious perfection in film and the public aspire to live out the lives they see on screen to become angelic and holy beings. On the other hand, the capitalistic and ever growing empire of the Hollywood sphere could permeate society to such a degree that the convoluted self-referential dilemma of intertextuality leads to a shattered identity and schizophrenic break down of humanity. On the other other hand, neither may happen.

7. Josh Harris taking part in his own installation 'Quiet: We Live in Public'

8. Reaching the limits of experiential knowledge in 'The Truman Show'

9. The first recognised instance of reality TV with 'An American Family'

INFILTRATION & INTERVENTION

In 1999, the unorthodox 'dot com kid' mogul Josh Harris created a huge human terrarium art installation called 'Quiet: We Live in Public' underneath some New York offices buildings. It was created as a supposed pre-cursor to how Harris saw the world heading and consisted of 100 volunteers being locked in a basement complex whilst their lives were captured on hundreds of cameras.

It was a Big Brother-esque Orwellian concept that scrutinised and recorded every individual second of the inhabitant's lives. The result was a series of Japanese style pods that each participant lived in created by the artist Jeff Gompertz. The volunteers were not just recorded but also streamed as they could also observe others by watching monitors and choosing which cameras to access to see their fellow participants. Harris' installation questioned the boundaries of privacy, human rights, social conduct and surveillance but also questioned the supposed concept of freedom. The volunteers were allowed to do whatever they wanted, free sex, free drugs, free food; there were no restrictions to these people's lives whatsoever whilst living in the installation (apart from leaving the premises) but their freedom was limited to a hierarchical power structure that set boundaries within so-called 'freedom'. Harris' installation was a living, breathing, primeval Internet, it mimicked the life that a user can have online before similar online strains even took off. Quiet: We Live in Public was a pre-manifestation of the access that the public have today into each other's lives, it managed to capture a snapshot of the future scarily accurately.

The Internet provides its users with a host of possibilities of living out their fantasies in a number of ways, they can create online avatars in gaming communities such as 'World of Warcraft' or even start life again by creating themselves and living out their desires in 'Second Life', which I'll go into more detail in the next chapter. The main difference between life online and life inside Josh Harris' social experiment is that online, anyone can create an avatar for himself or herself whilst still retaining their 'actual' life in the outside world. They can live out their fantasies with greater accuracy because there is always a safety net called 'reality' whereas with Quiet: We Live in Public, there was no safety net and everything that was acted out no matter how fantasmatic, was definitely real. There was no way back because these volunteers had laid their cards on the table, stated who they were and then proceeded to destroy any semblance of the self by realising their dreams which of course, created a nightmare.

The success of the experiment cannot be fully gauged because it was shut down on January the 1st 2000, an apt and abrupt ending of one of the most intriguing studies of future generations and their social conduct, it was shut down quite literally on the dawn of a new millennium. It was safe to conclude however that although these people were living out their dream and had new boundaries of freedom, it was never truly real. The environment of the terrarium itself became their Internet, its freedom was boundary-less but only within its confines, meaning that they could only play out their fantasies (which is the ideal, which is the real) in that one space and nowhere else. The real was confined only to that space therefore creating a paradox because the real was simultaneously in and outside.

This is the basis of the Internet, to be the '*real* you' inside and the 'real you' outside, but the distinction is clear, one is virtual and the other is not. The definites are clear and allow a constant oscillation between the two but in Quiet: We Live in Public, there was no clear division between virtual and non-virtual, they co-existed with each other creating an implosion of the Id, Ego & Super-Ego. There was one body in one space with no option of 'going back to reality', they had signed that away before entering and therefore had to come to terms with themselves, who they were, who they wanted to be, what they wanted, what they wanted to do and Freud's model of the psyche intermingles and merges as the volunteers develop split personalities to

deal with the fact that they can't facilitate the already split personality of the human on the internet. Some inhabitants of the experiment broke down and others were just merely heading towards a breakdown.

It's difficult for somebody who watches television, goes to cinema and surfs the internet to really connect with the notion of split realities and view the gulf between themselves in different contexts but there was a film that did give people an awareness of this gulf – 'The Truman Show' [20]. The Truman show is about the life of Truman Burbank, a man who is unwittingly filmed 24/7 in a self-contained land built solely for the purpose of creating a show for viewers outside. Truman lives in a town where every single person he's ever met including his parents and wife are actors, and cameras are installed in every conceivable place to film his every move resulting in a 24/7 drama for the public to pour over. What's most intriguing about this film is that the concept truly permeated the lives of the audience that watched it, with its use and display of unbridled technology, rote consumerism but moreover, the powerful indictment of privacy and voyeurism. This unsettling thought of permanently being watched paves the way for a more objective look at ones own life in hyperreality, for starters – the consumerism.

Within the frameworks of the film, there is no time for commercial breaks, therefore the TV channel decide to employ product placement as blatantly and undisguised as possible, giving the viewer at home a clear and concise indication that the product on display is a publically consumerable. Truman's best friend will conspicuously turn up with a six pack of beer in his hand, whilst taking a swig and delighting in its flavour, or Truman's wife will do an almost 'to camera piece' where she delivers a monologue about the benefits of the 'Chef's Pal' kitchen utensil. It's these things that make the viewer aware of their own consumer habits and the moulded environment that they live in, the ease and essence of products being shoved under their noses went by seemingly unnoticed was now being boiled down and displayed in a format so understandable. Truman is you, you are Truman, and the products being thrust in front of him are being thrust in front of you.

This is where Professor. Ramachandran's 'mirror neurons' come in - when you eat cheese, a synapse fire, when you watch someone else eat cheese, a synapse fires which is why it can be so satisfying to watch someone else doing something because

it feels like you are doing it. It's as if we justify or only acknowledge our own existence by likening it to others so being real is dependant on confirmation of other realities. So when the viewer identifies with Truman, they identify with themselves but in a turn of perceptions, Truman is an unaware puppet so what does that make the viewer?

The consumer culture, which does not just mean a consumption of produce but also a consumption of mere signs and images is summed up quite neatly by Mike Featherstone, "the term consumer culture points to the ways in which consumption ceases to be a simple appropriation of utilities, or use values, to become a consumption of signs and images in which the emphasis upon the capacity to endlessly reshape the cultural or symbolic aspect of the commodity makes it more appropriate to speak of *commodity signs*. The culture of a consumer society is therefore held to be a vast floating complex of fragmentary signs and images, which produces an endless sign-play which destabilize[s] long-held symbolic meanings and cultural order." [21]

If consumer culture can be illustrated so iconically and the audience can understand their place in such a world better, then what about the audience as an audience itself? The film also depicts an audience watching Truman's every move, they are the ones that tune in regularly to see the ongoing drama unfold but to an audience in a cinema watching the film, they are characters. These characters represent the audience in the cinema, they are glued to the TV screen and are captives of the mediated experience who gobble up anything the TV has to offer. It's quite a statement to make, and it was only made stronger by the sheer numbers of people that watched the film. The interesting way in which it was done was by depicting a sedate 50's town called 'Seahaven Island', a spotless and idyllic residence that never existed looked as if it should. The people are always smiling, the sun always shines but then this world is shown as a fake to the audience within the film and they sit in their bath tubs and living rooms watching this TV show in the 'real world' but this 'real world' is but another mere mirage, a simulation.

Baudrillard states – "Ideology only corresponds to a corruption of reality through signs. Simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and its duplification through signs. It is always the aim of ideological analysis to restore the objective process; it is always a false problem to want to restore the truth beneath simulacrum. The real is confused with the model." [22]

These hypodiegetic levels viewing dietetic levels inside and outside the film test the existential questions that all characters have on all levels– Michael Kokonis theorises threefold on the topic of re-representation, "First, reality is a staged, social production. Secondly, the real is now judged against its staged, cinematic-video counterpart. Third, the metaphor of the dramaturgical society or 'life as theater' has now become international reality. The theatrical aspects of the dramaturgical metaphor have not 'only creeped into everyday life' they have taken it over. Art not only mirrors life, it structures and reproduces it." [23]

 Truman finally reaches the limit of the constructed 'Seahaven' and is stupefied to find that the sky is merely a wall. Truman is searching for existential knowledge that the characters have on the dietetic level but he does not. He is persuaded to stay by the voice of the creator because "There is no more truth out there.. than the world I created for you. The same lies, the same deceit. Only in my world, you have nothing to fear." Not only is this the limit of 'Seahaven' but also the limit of Truman's universe unearthing an epistemological revelation.
The creator of the show itself, Christof, and its viewers know what lies beyond those limits, they know the physical and emotional elements that make up the world as they know it, such as Christof states, fear. This audience within the film are jubilant when Truman escapes, they lived his life and want emancipation from the artificial constructs that he has been imprisoned in because they too live within such constraints.
But where does this leave the actual audience, the one sitting in a cinema or at home who are not played by actors? They see super star Hollywood actors playing the everyday man, they see a Hollywood blockbuster film, they see the screen, the seats and the popcorn, all indicating that what they just witnessed was not real and did not or will happen. But nonetheless, they put that aside and see Truman escape his fate

beyond his existential understanding and they see an ecstatic audience in a similar position, unable to escape theirs. The real audience is left in an ontological limbo, questioning the borders of their universe with a peculiar 'What if I am Truman?' moment.

To expand on this modal framework and explore the relation between The Truman Show with Quiet: We Live in Public we need to delve into the recesses of a genre called 'Reality TV'. Reality TV began in 1971 as an ambitious documentary experiment from American broadcasting company PBS, which centred on an average family, the Louds, hence the name of the show, 'An American Family'. 12 episodes were whittled down from 300 hours of footage but this in itself became a bone of contention because the camera became a character. "For the viewing public, the controversy surrounding *An American Family* doubled as a crash course in media literacy. The Louds, in claiming that the material had been edited to emphasize the negative, called attention to how nonfiction narratives are fashioned. Some critics argued that the camera's presence encouraged the subjects to perform. Some even said it invalidated the project. That line of reasoning, as Mr. Gilbert has pointed out, would invalidate all documentaries. It also discounts the role of performance in everyday life, and the potential function of the camera as a catalyst, not simply an observer." [24]

The series saw the disintegration of the family as the parents divorced citing the show as the reason for the fracture. The viewers loved the ideology of the lived experience and the real in its fundamental banality but for the Louds to live as if the cameras weren't there is a paradox that can neither be true nor false. But the seeds had been sown and the question of television permeating reality, therefore creating hyperreality was never at the foremost of anyone's thoughts, something more fundamental was driving people in the reality TV genre, something that warped the public's view of the real.

"The camera cuts ordinary reality like a laser. You no longer watch TV, TV watches you and the distinction between active and passive is abolished. TV is made about you, you are TV. The real is confused with the model....There is a dissolution of TV into life and life in TV" [25]

This is exactly why nowadays reality TV is not about accurately documenting events, because TV has influenced reality itself. TV idolises not only people but also concepts and the concept that creates idols, is fame. On a primal level, fame is attractive: fame can be filtered down to stand for the leader of the pack, the one that is strongest and has the best genes, the one that mates with the most females to continue those genes. In other words, the leader of the pack was famous and it served the rest of the pack to be around him because if they copied his actions, they too would be able to mate with the best females or get a good meal or groom themselves to one day be leader. By repeating this copycat process, humans learned to innately follow the same procedure, resulting in fame as we know it and people wanting to ascend to a higher status level. The thing is, this methodology has infiltrated our every day to the extent that it's hard to distinguish between copying the leader for the benefits that come of it or trying to *be* the leader despite whether or not you possess the skills, looks and intellect. In today's society, people will desperately claw for fame with no real justification for it, in the past, the strongest and most attractive were famous but now, the reason for becoming famous has been bypassed with just *being* famous.
In the past, moths that flew towards the moon were better at navigating, but now, they fly towards anything resembling the moon such as a light bulb, which hinders their original cause. The result is a moth banging its head against a bulb with tenacious futility until it inevitably stops because something called death decided that it couldn't watch its idiocy any longer. Today, the moths are people, the bulb is fame and death is the realisation that the reality they long for, doesn't exist.

The general public trying to ascend the ladder of fame has become more and more apparent in recent times. The constant barrage of ego inflating media inflates the idea that anyone can attain fame (therefore success and money) and publicists look to extract the right kind of average Joe or Joette, and shoot them as high into the metaphorical starry sky as possible. Tangential reality TV shows such as 'America's Got Talent' or 'X-Factor' look to search for the next emerging talent in a competitive format (something humans thrive in) and exploit everything about them that is fit for public consumption. This means that the entertainment industry looks for marketable (not giving the public what they want but rather telling the public what they want)

traits in wannabes and then manipulates and exploits them to make money whilst simultaneously making the winner's life seem like a dream come true but making their actual life a living nightmare. These types of competitive shows proliferate the hyperreal loop by tantalising and enticing the public into believing that they can be a star whilst reinforcing that belief by making one person out of million into one. By depicting the lives of 'real people', that depiction becomes immediately hyperreal because it implies and exploits a false belief system that was not there before watching such a show. These shows tell the populous that they live in utter banality but *could* have it differently, but interestingly, if such a show isn't watched then that idea of living a banal life never existed.

If these competitive shows depict real people trying to attain stardom in the old fashioned way by having 'talent', then they almost seems legitimate in comparison to 'proper reality TV'. One such reality TV show is the worldwide phenomenon 'Big Brother', a direct reference to Orwell's 1984 but with a twist; surveillance is displayed as a positive commodity. This show takes a dozen contestants and imprisons them in a house for 12 weeks with 24-hour surveillance. Edited footage is then broadcast to the public who then vote off a contestant week by week until a winner of who the public like the most is announced. This unabashed voting system is a satisfyingly dissociative affair that plays on human qualities relating to interaction and freedom of (limited) expressive distaste with little punitive measures. It allows the viewer to state that they dislike a person without fear of reply. But moreover, the way people vote is directly influenced by the edit of the show they watch.
'Big Brother' seems to be an amalgamation of 'Quiet: We Live in Public' and 'An American Family', it combines the artificial freedom of We Live in Public that only exists within the walls of the complex and the editing of 'An American Family' where footage is condensed into a one hour show with the ebbs and flows of an exciting story. Together they combine to create a completely constructed but ostensible reality of verisimilitude. It is a reality that adheres to hyperrealism in that, moments of dispute seem to be more fracturous and hate filled than normal or on the other hand, happy moments seem to be so ecstatic that it makes you question why you never come across such moments of ecstasy in your life. They are constructed moments

edited in such a way to manipulate the viewer into feeling whatever the director wants them to feel.

Director? Of reality? But of course, there's a director behind every media that purports to be 'real', no documentary, no photograph is truly objectively real because the person that perceives it, is the one that makes it real. In other words, reality is shaped by how you personally perceive something, just by knowing that a rock is really there means that you have subjectively chosen to believe that to be true, the rock may quite as easily not be there at all. What the director does however is to try and make the viewer believe in a reality that never was by limiting what the viewer sees, or positioning the camera at a certain angle or splicing in shots of people looking bored when someone talks even if there were no bored people present at that particular time. There are a myriad of ways to manipulate the viewer but this is the case in point; everybody manipulates every part of their existence in order to acknowledge the real, but by calling a heavily edited version of events of a group of people that do not represent the average human in a restricted environment with dictatorial compliance a 'Reality TV' show seems farfetched and misleading.

This multilayered nightmare of what is real and what is not take on another dimension with this completely surreal paradox: There are also now 'Reality TV Schools' such as the 'NYC Reality TV School' that actually teach people how to act and behave in a natural but marketable way to gain a place on a TV show as Big Brother.

"If you say – "I want to be famous" – that won't work. If you say – "I want to piss my parents off" – that will." [26]

To behave naturally is quite a contradiction because in order to behave, you need to be conscious of your actions but when it comes to nature, the inference is that it does not need to behave, it just needs to be. To behave in a certain manner implies that you are knowingly altering your usual tendencies in favour for others, it implies that you are acting. When an actor acts, they embody a role but they know that once the role is complete, they can go back to being themselves, back to being natural. So when this school advocates behaving or acting naturally, it seems to defy logic. Something must
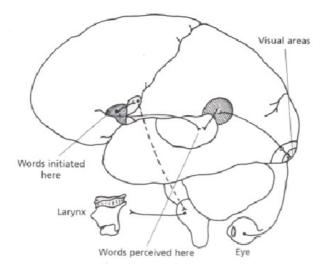
have gone awry for such a school to exist. It seems impossible to teach someone how to behave naturally but on closer inspection, such as with the quote above, the 'natural' that is being taught is not the natural that you already embody, no, it is the marketable natural. This special kind of natural is the one that TV executives like because it creates inflammatory television with preposterous characters under the guise of 'reality' therefore promising a greater rate of return from the ratings. This school exists to teach a fake-natural, where people conform to an edited version of themselves, a hyper-you that corresponds to a hyper-reality, which viewers then take as real. They watch 'Hyperreality TV' posited as 'Reality TV' but believe the latter, in a twisted feedback loop, they crave the real because "The real can be seen as if 'you were there' but it can be seen as it never existed, the fascination of the real is more metaphysical than living it." [27]
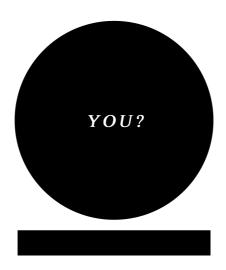
10. The blog 'A Gay Girl in Damascus' made by a U.S straight white male

11. Disidentification digitally manifested in 'Second Life'

12. The active areas of the brain during the 'Blindsight Experiment'

YOU?

Despite the quandary of whether or not the world you inhabit is real, at least you know that there is one saving grace: that no matter how turbulent the environment around you gets, virtual or otherwise, at least you know that you are real right? The question of a unified self is particularly cogent with the zeitgeist of ever more integrative technology such as the Internet that serves as a new virtual realm where you can become not just whoever, but whatever you want.

"The frantic desire for the Almost Real arises only as a neurotic reaction to the vacuum of memories; the Absolute Fake is offspring of the unhappy awareness of a present without depth." [28]

A modest instance of the self breaching the idea of a unified entity is 'sockpuppeting', where you create a pseudonym online for purposes of deception. It comes from putting your hand in sock to create a character that is not yourself, therefore allowing you to say what you really want to without fear of reproach. Sockpuppeting is not a new concept but has surged online with gusto because users can mask themselves so easily with complete anonymity.

A fairly anodyne example would be of historian Orlando Figes who wrote positive reviews about his own books on the online department store Amazon but wrote disparaging reviews about the books of his rivals under the pseudonym of 'Historian'. [29] A detrimental incident of sockpuppeting however was during the Arab Spring of

2011 where a blog emerged called 'Gay Girl in Damascus' purportedly written by Amina Abdallah, an openly gay half Syrian, half American 25 year-old living in Syria. Amina wrote movingly about the government's treatment of homosexuals in Syria and the brutal crackdown on Arab Spring protesters but when Amina stopped blogging apparently due to being taken away by government agents, there was a media frenzy. It transpired that Amina was a concoction, sockpuppeted by a heterosexual 40 year-old American man living in Edinburgh called Tom MacMaster. [30] Sockpuppeting allows people to create online personas in order to fulfil a role they would not be able to otherwise. In the case of Tom MacMaster, he became a lesbian Syrian to (unsuccessfully) bring a positive light to gay rights in the Middle East, something he could have never tried to accomplish as a 40 year-old male westerner. Yet these examples provide benefits to the lives of those who do the sockpuppeting, Orlando Figes was pushing for a boost in book sales and Tom MacMaster wanted to bring about awareness in the Middle East. Both instances are physical manifestations of the fractured self that in some way alter the physical world in which that self lives.

However, there are realms within the online sphere that cannot be materialised outside of its parameters, things that defy physical manifestation and only serve to project the desires of the inner self, to live out fantasies beyond corporeal reach. Such a platform to play out these projected desires is 'Second Life', an online program that allows its users to create hyperreal avatars of themselves with 20 inch waists and 24 GG breasts or with laser canons and a penis the size of Norway, something which Slavoj Žižek calls 'disidentification'. The digital age facilitates such creations and gives them a place to be realised, "The 'real' upon which cyberspace encroaches is thus the disavowed fantasmatic 'passionate attachment', the traumatic scene which not only never took place in 'real life,' but was never even consciously fantasized.... the much celebrated playing with multiple, shifting personas (freely constructed identities) tends to obfuscate (and thus falsely liberate us from) the constraints of social space in which our existence is caught" [31]

It's as if all the weights and drags to life are lifted as soon as this hyperspace is entered, allowing total liberation from the shackles of the corporeal self but as Žižek writes: "there is the much more unsettling opposite idea of the domination of my

screen persona over my "real" self. Our social identity, the person we assume to be in our social intercourse, is already a "mask" that involves the repression of our inadmissible impulses. But it is precisely in the conditions of "just playing" - when the rules regulating our "real life" exchanges are temporarily suspended - that we can permit ourselves to display these repressed attitudes. Take the proverbial impotent shy person who, while participating in a cyberspace interactive game, adopts the identity of an irresistible seducer or sadistic murderer. It is all too simple to say that this identity is just an imaginary escape from real-life impotence. The point is rather that, since he knows that the cyberspace interactive game is "just a game," he can "show his true self" and do things he would never have done in real-life interactions. In the guise of a fiction, the truth about himself is articulated. The fact that I perceive my virtual self-image as mere play thus allows me to suspend the usual hindrances which prevent me from realising my "dark half" in real life. My electronic id is given wing." [32]

Virtuality is much like Photinus' (*205-207 AD*) idea of the mind trying to escape the body and embrace the unity of the real. This is the 'Neoplatonic Concept of Ecstasis', which is the release of the soul from the body, virtuality is the realm of unity in cyberspace.

"The ascension to virtual reality is analogous to the pathway for the individual and imperfect world to the unified and idealized world of cyberspace." [33]

"We are not angels, we are merely sophisticated apes yet we feel like angels trapped in the bodies of beasts craving transcendence, and all the time trying to spread our wings and fly off." [34]

This electronic id seems to have more friends (on facebook), is able to speak its mind (on blogs), and generally function better and closer to how I want it to function than me myself. It's as if the projected self is closer to the true self and it's justifiable to believe in that projection because it is your creation, it is a part of you. The inner space seems more real than the physical world because the creators of avatars can be more themselves than they can otherwise, yet it seems to be a fantasy to seize reality

live. According to Freud, one must never pass over to the other side of the double because then the dual relation disappears and with it, all it's seduction. So this fantasy must never be realised, it cannot. The constant and quixotic pursuit for the real that defines 'you' must never be reached, meaning that the real has always been virtual as it is never fully present or actual.

"If virtual reality is all surface, with no actual access to substance and the real, then we find this is also the case in real outside virtual reality, the real is surface and it does not permit access to the 'true real'." [35]

Connecting these two realms of thought however, the virtual and physical is McLuhan, "Sociality has historically been lost, because media has not just extended human sense beyond their immediate unified domain, but divided human sense and fragmented human identity. But new media has the chance to piece them back together to a pre-linguistic state. New media is not a bridge between man and nature, it is nature." [36]

The lack of license to the real provides a similar dilemma to an unattainable definition of the self. It seems that by creating a hyperself in a hyperspace in order to define who we want to be, seems to be just one of many fragmentations of the self. Another instance of this fragmentation is what constitutes 'you'. Well it would make sense to say that you are the one that believes in a certain faith, you are the one that has memories of something or has views on a certain topic, and you are the one that decides what choices to make in life. This idea however doesn't seem to stand up to interrogation because if that definite 'you' already existed, then why have your views changed over time? Why does your 14 year-old self not correspond to the you now? Why do you change from day to day if the unified you in the centre of all of these experiences apparently is a constant? There doesn't appear to be a unified self that makes all these decisions and is a constant throughout, on the contrary, the thing that makes up a seemingly unanimous entity is actually these collections of experiences. These experiences together make up who you are, not the other way around, these constituent parts are the fabric that patchwork their way together to create the personality, views and ideals that make up 'you'.

It could be argued that because all of these sensations are experienced in one body and one mind, it must be you, but neuroscientists alike admit that "..neuroscience shows that there is no centre in the brain where things do all come together." [37] and on top of that, the body totally regenerates itself every seven years meaning that you are never the same atoms and cells for your whole life so your bones and brain are in a constant state of flux.

Julian Baggini concisely addresses the constituent parts that make up a unified you in his TED talk 'Is there a real you?' "There's no mystery about my watch, we say the watch has a face, and hand and a mechanism and a battery but we really mean is that we don't really think that there is thing called 'the watch' to which we then attach all these bits. We understand very clearly that you get the parts of the watch, you put them together and you create a watch." [38]

Looking further into these constituent parts, the brain itself seems to be yet another substructure to a vast network that composes an individual as a whole. For every emotion or sensation that a person experiences there is a particular part of the brain that produces it, and then acknowledges it. For example, the cerebellum controls movement, the amygdala deals with emotion, the thalamus is responsible for all sensory information and memory is dealt with in the hippocampus. These substructures of the brain make sure that you know what you're perceiving is real, it is the crux of all experiential sensations that make up who you are, but sometimes not even the mind can be trusted to either deal with or acknowledge these experiences. If the mind cannot fully comprehend a given situation, then in your mind, that situation may not seem real, for example -

'The Blindsight Experiment' saw a man that was clinically blind but because his retina was still intact, an older pathway in the brain could subconsciously perceive images without him actually seeing them. This meant that he could be shown a picture and not be able to recall what it was but when he was able to draw what he saw. Something similar happens to anyone driving on the motorway, it becomes a subconscious act that is so second nature that it's like being on autopilot, yet when you're being creative, you are consciously aware of your actions. So where can the distinction be drawn between what is truly you and what is subconscious you?

Oliver Sacks has also described numerous cases of the brain not fitting to the self; one such case was 'Witty Ticcy Ray', a patient with severe Tourette's syndrome and this debilitating condition was perceived as just that, a condition, something that was supplementary to him a whole, it was deemed as something unwanted. Yet when medicated, the patient not only lost the syndrome but also lost a part of himself because it has been there for so long that it had become just another one of those experiential sensations that add to the individuality of being someone. [39] Another rather frightening concept is that of having amnesia or where the brain cannot recall past memories, if this amputation of one of the key sensations that make up who you are, then it must result in a you-asectomy. Similarly, Alzheimer's disease can degrade and deteriorate vast areas of the brain resulting in portions of the self being eradicated therefore eradicating portions of you. There seem to be substructures within substructures within substructures in a never-ending system that creates a constantly evolving fractal map of who you are.

To add even more to this fractal map, Professor. V.S Ramachandran in his 2003 Reith Lectures for the BBC describes the consonance between the self, and the qualia the self experiences. Ramachandran describes qualia as "Internal subjective component of sense perceptions arising from stimulation of the senses by phenomena" [40] meaning that qualia, the substance of objects can only exist, if there is something to perceive it, the self. The self is the thing that expresses these qualia and one relies on the other to *feel* it, so without it, the self can't feel anything and qualia don't have anything to feel it. The notion of a true you and therefore a true real seems to escape comprehension the more it is scrutinised, especially when faced with the fourth dimension of time and space. In this fourth dimension, there is never simply one but innumerable metaphysical versions of the self –

There is you, now, at this moment.

There is you, tomorrow, the one that has to deal with tomorrow's problems.

There is you, yesterday, the one that never be truly remembered or documented objectively.

There is you, now, the one that treats the tomorrow you as a separate entity, the one that lets the tomorrow you deal with today's problems.

There is you, tomorrow, the one that has to deal with the problems that yesterday you left.

There is you, now, saying that in ten minutes, you'll start getting ready to go to work because that you, now, wants to finish watching a fun program.

There is you, in ten minutes, the one that has to go to work.

It seems that it is impossible to pinpoint any true or real you, so how on earth is it possible to hang onto a true you in the hyperreal when there is no true you in the real? This quandary just adds another branch to the 'you fractal', just a progression in a pattern that already existed; it's a logical step from real to hyperreal because you exist in neither one. You - now, you - tomorrow, you – with amnesia, you – in Second Life: All are real and none are real.

13. The head of a gull used during Niko Tinbergen's 'Red Spot Beak Study'

14. The Wile.E Coyote careering head first into his own trompe-l'œil painting

15. Meticulous reconstruction of the 1982 World Cup in 'Refait'

SEARCH
P-ART-Y

"The brain's record of everything – everything alive – must be iconic…
The final form or cerebral representation must be, or allow, 'art' – the artful scenery and melody of experience and action." [41]

Experience is not possible until organised iconically. Action is not possible unless organised iconically. There are no images in the brain, but merely symbolic representations of objects and events in the external world. Just like letters in a word, the letters by themselves mean nothing but when they come together and are read as a word, then it conveys an idea. There are 30 areas in the brain that perceive images, not just the visual cortex, meaning that different parts of an image are perceived simultaneously and are then assembled to create a whole. The way that images are comprehended reads something like this – Iconicity – Subjectivity – Intentionality – Dramatisation. It's no wonder that humans have played with these perceptions and tested and stretched them since the beginning of existence.

"In order for people to *innovate* or actually *add something* to a pre-existing order or system of a tribe or nation, they need to be allowed the freedom to do so. If not allowed by the leaders of such parties, they will have to act outside of social norms and will either resort to poetry or criminality." [42]

Taking the poetry and creative side of Russell's argument would mean that it was also laterally beneficial for the tribe if one member was left to draw on the cave walls in order to become better than others at drawing. This meant that in order for that member of the tribe to become more proficient in drawing accurate representations of animals, they would be exempt from hunting or cooking or numerous other responsibilities. There was reason for this artistic member of the tribe to develop their skill even if it did not directly benefit the rest of the tribe in terms of survival. Their role was to provide cognitive food for the rest of the tribe, to fulfil the human need of breaking out of restrictions of normative reality. This very deep, fundamental need of explorative representation of life to test the metaphysical matter of being has of course flourished into what we know as art. We continue to this day to push the boundaries of the mind to learn more about the mystery of the human condition, but why?

"Art is the lie that reveals a truth" [43]

Humans like amplified versions or things we're already fond of, such as the caricatured puppets in 'Spitting Image' or Ralph Steadman doodles because they look more like the people they depict rather than the people themselves. In one of Professor V.S Ramachandran's 2003 Reith Lectures, 'The Artful Brain', he strived to study the reasoning behind why humans and animals alike are drawn to hyper versions of objects. Taking an example of classic Indian nudes in painting, the breasts and hips were so much larger than those of real human ladies; according to Ramachandran, if you take the average female form and minus the average male form, you're left with big hips and big breasts. So the difference between male and female form is exaggerated and the proportions of that difference are overstated. The same applies to posture in painting, take the average female posture and minus the average male posture and amplify the difference. This only works because of the difference between the male and female form, when men like Rubens paint something like 'Perseus Andromeda' (*1639-40*), they do not paint a women but only the elements of a women that he does not possess – long flowing hair, smooth skin, corpulent posture.

An ethnological study about young gulls pecking at the red dot on their mother's beaks [44] also illustrates a similar desire for the hyper. The beak of the mother gull was yellow with a red dot in the centre and her chicks would peck this red dot when they wanted food to be regurgitated from the beak. Tinbergen used a disembodied beak with no mother attached as a surrogate and the chicks responded in the same way, by pecking the red dot. Taking this principle one step further and configuring the elements that the chicks responded to – yellow beak, red dot – Tinbergen simply used a yellow stick with not one red dot, but three red stripes on it to gauge a response: The chicks went wild for the new implementation, much more so than with the real mother and a real possibility of food. Ramachandran calls this occurrence a 'Peak Shift' and its effects cross over into human art, so if you are shown a cubist face, the brain will break it down and exclaim that it is the most facey face ever. We all respond to ultra stimuli, which is why we all like non-realistic art and according to Ramachandran, we're all in denial about liking cubism because as humans we all respond to those peak shifts.

Art's reach however, extends far further than mere peak shifts of delight and intrigue, the peak shift principle can be quite as easily reversed with minimalism, but this too has purpose – to limit the amount of erroneous information so the brain can do as little computational processing as possible. In Auguste Rodin's nude studies in the 1910's for example, the colour of the nude's hair or skin tone becomes irrelevant, as does the scenery around the model which would draw the attention away from where it is critically needed, so Rodin instead focuses solely on the flowing linear forms that a moving nude creates.

Primary and secondary functions develop in art just as they do in everyday objects, for example, a chair can be seen primarily as a practical device to simply sit upon but a chair has many more secondary and tertiary functions. The perception of a mere chair becomes warped when including cultural conventions and semantic associations, it can become a throne for example, replete with dense ideologies.

"The history of civilisation influences the history of architecture in such a way that objects in which the two functions were harmoniously integrated are in time deprived

of one of the functions (primary or secondary) so that one or the other becomes dominant or the original functions change so it becomes a different object." [45]

A good example of integrative functionality is synaesthesia, a blending of the senses. Synaesthesia can be seeing a different colour for every number, or experiencing strong smells in conjunction with certain words. 99% of people experience something similar with the words 'Kiki' and 'Booba', when asked to draw what kind of shape would represent these words, 99% of people would draw a sharp, angular shape for 'Kiki' and a smooth, bulbous shape for 'Booba'.
Synaesthesia is much more common with creatives and in the arts because it broadens out to metaphors, so abstract shapes can stand for concepts beyond the primary function of the paint. Those in the arts are much better at making these synaesthetic connections than others and with every generation, new artists are dealing with their current environment, including hyperreality itself.

"Art, or the graphic transition of a culture, is shaped by the way space is perceived. Since the renaissance the Western artist perceived his environment primarily in terms of the visual. Everything was dominated by the eye of the beholder. His conception of space was in terms of a perspective projection upon a plane surface consisting of formal units of spatial measurement. He accepted the dominance of the vertical and the horizontal – of symmetry – as an absolute condition of order. This view is deeply embedded in the consciousness of western art." [46]

This 'absolute condition of order' has been recognised and thus manipulated as early as the first drawing was etched: An old Greek yarn *(464 BC)* about such manipulations of the absolute order saw Zeuxis challenging Parrahisius to a competition to see who could paint the most life like painting. Zeuxis produced a still life painting so convincing that birds came down from the sky to peck at the painted grapes, but his rival Parrahisius won when he went to pull back a pair of tattered curtains but was unable because they were part of the painting itself.

"The third dimension is only the imaginary of a two-dimensional world, the fourth is that of a three-dimensional universe. Escalation is the production of a real that is more

and more real through addition of successive dimensions. Everything that plays with one less dimension is truly seductive. When an object is exactly like another, it is not exactly like it, it is a bit more exact." [47]

There are so many nuances to accurately depicting objects as closely as possible, such as in a 'trompe-l'œil', which is French for 'deceive the eye'. It's a technique involving extremely realistic painted imagery in order to create the optical illusion that depicted objects and figures are truly three-dimensional. Pete Borrell Del Caso for example made 'Escaping Criticism' (1874) where a boy exits the frame of the artwork itself. Originally however, the technique was used give the illusion of depth in a confined space. The Pompeians used the technique called 'quadratura' to make a room seem larger than it was by painting a mural of a hallway or window to create a chimera of non-existent space that not only deceived the eyes but the body. A humorous instance of trompe-l'œil implementation is in a cartoon sketch with Looney Toons characters 'Wile E. Coyote' & 'Road Runner'. It sees Wile E. Coyote painting a realistic tunnel on the face of a rock so Road Runner would confuse the real with the fake and crash into the wall but instead he runs straight through the painting as if it were a real tunnel leaving Wile E. Coyote banging his head against the rock when trying to follow. [48] This simple sketch is redolent of the entirety of hyperreality, it serves as a perfect metaphor for the way hyperreality has infiltrated ordinary lives, masquerading as the real but a mere trompe-l'œil which leaves us banging our heads against the rock of reality as we try to chase our desires. It feels like we're running through that fake tunnel and simultaneously through the real painting in hyperreality, it feels good to watch films and see terrific feats of incredible situations because it feels like you're doing it. The reason why it feels so good to identify with the protagonist in film or artwork because of the mirror neuron; when you drink a cup of tea, synapses fire in the brain but when you watch someone else drink tea, some of those very same synapses fire off, giving you some sort of sensation of drinking tea.

Football is good example of passionate mirror neural activity, the engagement of the audience is palpably electric, so when a player doesn't perform well, the crowd are bitterly vexed with an 'I could do better than that!' attitude and similarly, if their team wins the World Cup then the crowd is in seventh heaven.

This pure need to not only paint the tunnel on the wall but to wallow in it also was executed by a company called 'Pied la Biche' in a filmed called 'Refait' – Refait is a remake of the football World Cup match between France and Germany (Seville, Spain, 1982). Shot by Pied La Fiche in Villeurbanne (France), every aspect of the fifteen last minutes of the match was carefully reconstructed; players, positions, gestures, intensity, drama etc. It consists in shifting the traditional game area into the urban environment. Each sequence takes place in one or several locations and then the city temporarily becomes the lab for unusual experiments. The soundtrack is made up of the original commentaries mixed with interviews of the audience recorded during the shooting." [49] Refait takes the mirror neurons and trompe-l'œil wallowing to a remarkable level, the painstaking effort to recreate 15 minutes of a football game which is also shown side by side of the original footage as proof to the viewer that everything truly is accurately fabricated. Yet no matter how precisely they attend to every minute detail, the fact of the matter will always be that they are banging their heads against that rock, chasing a desire into a world that is merely painted.

"When faced with a totally new situation, we always tend to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear view mirror. We march backwards into the future. The future will be based on a remodeled or reinterpreted version of the new...Artists reverse the rear view mirror effect. They are antennae, attuned to shifts in the media, and thus behave as early warning systems pushing the boundaries of consciousness. Art is a process through which sensory awareness expresses itself in its most acute form." [50]

To some extent, contrary to McLuhan, the rear view mirror is actually very applicable to art where every branch of artistic movement evolves from the previous. Photo Realism, a precursor to Hyperrealist Painting evolved from Pop Art as a counter to abstract expressionism and minimalism. Photo Realism evolved from photography which in itself was a huge break in art history where photographs were produced in such quantities that by the mid 20th century, it was threatening to lessen the imagery in art. The advancement of Photo Realism did give way to Hyperrealist Painting however: Where Photo Realist painters painted only the photograph, nothing more, omitting emotions in people, politics and narrative elements, Hyperrealist painting

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entails more complex focus on subject, presenting it as a living, tangible object to create an illusion of a reality not seen in the original photograph which couples with Baudrillard down to a T, "Hyperreality is a simulation of something that never existed." Hyperrealists usually focus on pieces of information that are usually unseen by the human eye to create something that either doesn't exist or the eye cannot see alone. Some element of digital photography such as 'fractilisation' can be emphasised in these paintings. These methods of exploiting the digital medium still ring true to the 'rear view mirror' mentality, the digital photographs that the hyperrealists use employ the same principle of analogue photography but the only thing that's new is the quality of the image. So if the hyperrealists are simply white collar workers of the 'rear view mirror' regime, then where are the artists that are acting as 'antennae' as McLuhan writes? I think hyperreality is a far more complex system than the hyperrealist painters have been able to tackle and although it uses some of the new digital mediums of the zeitgeist, it is not used to plumb the depths of the hyperreal world that is emerging at quite a tremendous pace.

'The Weather project' (Olafur Eliasson, Tate Modern London, 2003) is an installation that goes beyond the limited medium of paint and instead uses an interactive environment that envelops members of the public. The piece consisted of a giant mirror in the ceiling of the turbine hall of the Tate, one huge semi circle of yellow light laid adjacent to it and then fog was pumped into the room. The people in the space below started to see themselves reflected in the mirror above but were not entirely sure if they were looking at themselves or not. They became aware of being within a constructed, virtual environment but at the same time, almost accepting it as a real sun with all of its benefits.
People would lie down underneath the fake sun just as they would if it were real; Elisson asks, "How do we configure our body in a space? How do we reconfigure it?" which can also be expanded to our minds, how do our minds reconfigure our bodies in a space? We need to construct useful simulations and virtual realities of the world that we can act on; Eliasson's 'Weather Project' is a prime example of a physical manifestation of that trompe-l'œil tunnel on rock, a tangible yet ungraspable manifestation of hyperreality

16. Dancing in a womb - Tim and Eric's surreal comedy sketch 'Bub Bubs'

17. The overwhelming hyperreal video work of Ryan Trecartin

18. Money, gold, misogyny and ass in Nelly's video for 'Tip Drill'

Firstly, here is a concise description of the visual elements of 6 Western pop music videos, ranging from **1**3,048,163 views to 225,605,272 views on youtube (the new litmus test of popularity) – an analysis will follow -

Nicki Minaj – 'Super Bass' - *225,605,272 views on youtube as of Feb 2012* [51]

Items of desire are boiled down to their essence. These include a plane, a Ferrari, glasses of champagne, a swimming pool; all of which are rendered as an ideogram of the item they represent but all are simplified simulacrums that are smoothed over and pink. The windows of the car are not there, the aeroplane has no cavities and the champagne has no bubble. They are ideograms with supplementary significance because they all carry the gender-stereotyped colour of pink and the diminutive stature of these items resembles that of a toy, something attainable and palpable. The first half of the video also revolves (literally) around an ice sculpture of a motorbike that Nicki Minaj clambers upon from time to time, simulating the functionality of the motorbike. It almost seems vaguely poetic and apropos that the motorbike is made from ice, something both evanescent and vacant.

Lil' Kim – 'How Many Licks?' Ft. Sisqo - *13,048,163 views on youtube as of Feb 2012* [52]

Lil' Kim is depicted as three dolls called 'Candy Kim', 'Nightrider Kim' & 'Pin Up Kim' that are all assembled in a (computer generated, futuristic) factory. 'Candy Kim' is depicted as a colourfully dressed, blue wigged doll that continually walks down a never-ending catwalk parading herself as a product en masse, ready to administer sexual acts and realise male fantasies. 'Pin Up Kim' is displayed half nude, covered in golden diamonds on televisions in prisons, sexual provoking the male prisoners who are working out at the gym together, also semi naked. 'Nightrider Kim' is dressed in tight black PVC and is seen in the back of an impossibly long limousine (simultaneously driving the limo and being the passenger), this doll picks up men and again, sexually gratifies them. With each act of debasement masquerading as dominance and prowess, a small caption is displayed on screen akin to those found on the sides of children's toy boxes such as 'Some Fantasies May Vary' and 'Ring Not Included'.

Katy Perry – California Gurls ft. Snoop Dogg - *39,226,826 views on youtube as of Feb 2012* [53]

The video is set in a fictional landscape called 'Candyfornia' which also serves as the setting of a game which has the tagline of 'Face the Sugar Daddy's dice to free the Queen of Candyfornia'. 'The Queen' serves as a pseudonym for Katy Perry and 'Sugar Daddy' for Snoop Dogg (yet even their real names are pseudonyms themselves). Candyfornia is a land made from brightly coloured confectionary that is grossly exaggerated in size, so one item of candy is equal to size of human head and the colours are saturated in order to simplify the overall image which is quite visually dense. Perry wears a dress made from candy and candy wrappers as she eats ice cream symbolically replacing the act of smelling flowers. She clambers a phallus like straw until sitting atop a cloud purportedly made from cotton candy as she lips syncs the words to the song about euphemistically 'licking popsicles' to the camera. She is nude but her breasts and buttocks are covered by the cloud and the entire scene has a similitude to a baroque painting of angels and cherubs if she didn't pull a face synonymous with ejaculatory pleasure every 3 seconds. Perry also wears cream pies in replacement for her breasts complete with cherry nipples combining the primary desire of the breast as nourishment with an actual piece of food. Yet this scene is

superceded when Perry attaches spray cream canisters to her breasts and squirts the cream with a face of maniacal intent into the camera.

Benny Benassi – Satisfaction - *13,048,448 views on youtube as of Feb 2012* [54]

The premise of the song and accompanying video is quite simple, sex from the male perspective. The reiterated lyrics of the song are as follows, "Push me, and then just touch me, until I can get my, satisfaction". The video is depicts a handful of bikini clad girls using power tools such as a drill, saw, and pneumatic power breaker in a sparse studio so the only visual information (using both the plain setting and camera angles) are breasts and bottoms. In a shallow visual analogy using tools, the girls mimic fellatio, male masturbation and sexual intercourse. It's similar to Lil' Kim's video, however it's the tools that are displayed as the products, they're displayed in a similar manner to a shopping channel so that text is displayed, detailing information about the product on screen. The format is reversed as the onus is on the girls as models, rendering the descriptions superfluous. Both the desire for the girls and the tools enhance each other so in this instance, the power tools (desirable phallic symbols in themselves) are literally masturbated on screen in high-saturated colour, high fidelity sound and highly erotically charged slow motion jiggling breasts.

Pussycat Dolls – When I Grow Up - *82,683,696 views on youtube as of Feb 2012* [55]

A girl group advocating the objectivity of being a doll again are seen in this video; the group of five is initially subjected to the tedium of the everyday by being trapped in a traffic jam, but they proceed to vacate their convertible car and mount other cars in the jam, which are also shiny new convertibles. What is prominent here however are the lyrics that accompany the imagery to the song, "When I grow up, I wanna be famous, I wanna be a star, I wanna be in movies. When I grow up, I wanna see the world, drive nice cars, I wanna have boobies. When I grow up, be on TV, People know me, be on magazines. When I grow up, fresh and clean, Number one chick out on the scene." Everyday scenes such as the traffic jam and a building site are then transformed into stages where the Dolls can dance and perform. Careful reconstructions of the banal are transposed into studio lit platforms similar to those in

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strip clubs. Details such as cement are omitted but other details such as the scaffolding are highlighted to denote the setting. As the scenes become less about a cityscape and more about lights and stages, the girls themselves are seen covered in dirt and oil that are carefully smeared over their bodies to highlight their cheekbones and breasts. The fourth wall is then broken when the camera recedes revealing another series of cameras and a crew filming the Dolls dancing in front of 10-foot high letters covered in bulbs saying 'Pussycat Dolls'.

Nelly ft. The St Lunatics – E.I. (The Tip Drill Remix) – *Uncensored video disabled on youtube*) [56]

In this quite astonishing video, a spate of African American rappers throw wads of $100 bills over the buttocks of women. The only male presence in the video are the rappers themselves, they wear oversized American Football clothing which conceals their body and are emblazoned with diamond studded gold watches, necklaces and teeth; they are the only ones to interact with the camera. The women on the other hand have no clothes to conceal their bodies, they wear bikinis but at times also wear nothing at all. They do not interact with the camera and are looped in repetitive acts of jarring movements mainly centered on the buttocks. They shake and gesticulate their hips rapidly, resulting in their buttocks shuddering, which the camera then zooms into over and over again. The face of any woman on camera is completely obscured by their buttocks and genitals, transforming any form of identity into objectification which is solidified by the male protagonists repeatedly slapping and throwing wads of $100 bills at their buttocks and genitals. (N.B – 'Tip Drill' is when a man inserts his penis between a the buttocks of woman without actually penetrating the anus. This is demonstrated when Nelly, the chieftain rapper, swipes a credit card in between the buttocks of a woman. "Now baby girl bring it over, let me spit my pimp juice, I need a tip drill, I need a tip drill")

<center>*</center>

The attributes described in these videos are ubiquitous hallmarks of western hyperrealism but they can be used for a number of different reasons. I have described

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these videos because they display so many elements of numerous strains of hyperrealism ranging from television to cinema to commerce to morals and the list goes on. They are three minute nuggets of multi sensory narratives, aesthetics and sounds that span the cosmos of information but have been boiled down to pith. They are the embodiment of a hyperrealist state – short, fast, edited, saturated, over-exaggerated, pithy, vacuous, didactic, and inane. These videos serve as a reference point and give a good overview of a number of other hyperreal channels that explore more niche areas such as commerce, comedy and art.

Firstly, commerce: As examples, I shall use the videos themselves. The primary function of the music video is financial profit; it serves as a platform to access the music in another way, which increases the percentage of encountering the music, thus the likelihood of buying the music or related products of the performer(s). Hyperreal uses of scenarios, colours and expressions are extracted and scrutinised almost scientifically in order to find the perfect combination of signs and indexes that would register with a 'particular' audience. The 'particular' audience is dictated by the video itself and masks a demand in the form of a question – to which group do you belong? You belong to this group - conform to the stereotypes and iconography we display. This may seem like a stark notion but in any case – it's true. By splitting the watchers of the videos into separate camps, the idea of "You are different, You are unique" is fed to the viewer, to which the viewer replies "I am different, I am unique" which can be expanded into – "Make sure you fulfil your role as a unique person, make sure you buy the clothes and adhere to the styles of clothes you see in this video, make sure this style of music is always uniquely yours, make sure you act and behave in this way, fulfil your role – it will make you happy", to which the viewer will recite and fulfil. By force-feeding these behavioural changing commands using the medium of television and pop songs and by manipulating the real into the hyperreal, these corporations sustain financial profit spurred on by power and greed. This is one of the cornerstones of the practice of hyperrealism in the west.

An example of another usage of hyperrealism using the aesthetics in the above videos to a new degree can be found in comedy. Humour is one of the most flexible and wide-ranging concepts in human behaviour. It can be used and is often used in any

given scenario and no matter how grave or serious a topic can be, humour is always there to broach it. Comedy also needs tools to transmit the message of humour and this has changed rapidly with the introduction of radio, television and cinema. It's not surprising that in a rapidly changing world of technology, perception and the hyper, comedy is at the forefront utilising those tools at its disposal to spread humour. The funniest jokes throughout the ages have always been the 'in joke', a gag that you understand instantly because it directly involves your knowledge about that subject. So in a world where hyper is the king of the jungle, where it infiltrates your daily life, it's logical that humour addresses such a personal interaction. There is one particular show that not only makes light of the world of hyperreality but also uses the same medium that it makes light of, the show is 'Tim & Eric's Awesome Show, Great Job!' [57]

Tim Heidecker & Eric Warheimer use the medium of hyper-commerce, hyper-sexual and hyper-real that is seen in day-to-day life on television and billboards, as a medium itself. A succinct description of an average sketch from the Tim & Eric Show should illustrate their agency: A computer-generated animation of a platform floats above a sea of red lava; on the platform are an animated palm tree and three (real, not animated) men and one pregnant woman in a blow-up chair. The computer-generated animation is of a kitsch, degraded style, using saturated, bold colours and shapes. A techno dance sound bed is played and the pregnant woman in the chair begins to sing "Make my Bub-Bubs bounce, just make my Bub-Bubs bounce, try'n make my Bub-Bubs bounce, come and make my Bub-Bubs bounce. Make 'em bounce now." The first of the three men walks over, a tall Native-American looking chap and says in time to the music "I'm gonna make your Bub-Bubs bounce, right now" and he then proceeds to dance in front the woman whilst she looks at him with disgust and distain which results in a platform opening up beneath his feet so he falls into the lava as punishment for his displeasing performance. He explodes when he hits the lava. The next man is an African-American and he too displeases the woman and falls through the platform into the lava, as does the third man, an Indian-American. As the third man falls into the lava and explodes, an overweight Caucasian man with rather effeminate facial features parachutes onto the platform and says "I'll make your Bub-Bubs bounce, I'll make your Bub-Bubs bounce, let's go!" He then performs some underwhelming dance moves whilst wiggling his tongue to a very pumped up

soundtrack but the woman seems impressed. Then the plump balding man becomes very small and jumps into the woman's womb and starts dancing around with the twin babies (Bub-Bubs).

He is a real man superimposed on an animation of two babies with handlebar moustaches and he dances in the womb until the babies burst out of the woman and begin dancing on the platform. The soundtrack disappears when the babies hit the platform but they continue to dance with the sound of slime and slipping being overemphasised whilst the little fat man is left poking out of the woman's open womb and he is still dancing, there is no music and they dance for a further 7 seconds. [58]

This sketch may sound disgusting and regardless of whether it is actually funny or not, the fact remains that it has been constructed for comedic purposes. What Tim & Eric do is isolate the already isolated areas of pop culture (make-up, colours, stereotypes) and stretch them which would usually exaggerate it, but in the case of exaggerating a hyperpop culture, it does the opposite, it makes it low-pop by employing kitsch animations, grotesquely make-upped hermaphroditic caricatures and extending the sequences of aspects of pop culture to make them seem surreal. Surreal is the right word to use for this show but why? By exaggerating the already exaggerated and arriving at the surreal may seem funny but that is exactly why it is funny – because it takes elements of hyperpop and stretches them to such a radical extent that they begin to reveal what they really are - surreal. We can't help but laugh at our own predicament, to laugh at something so far from reality that it seems all too real.

In early January 2012 I visited the Museum of Modern Art in Paris (*Museé d'Art Moderne de la Ville Paris/ARC*) to see the exhibition 'ANY EVER' by Ryan Trecartin & Lizzie Fitch. The show was an amalgamation of videos, installed home furnishings to watch them from, and also sculptures made by Trecartin & Fitch. I think Fabrice Hergott, director of the gallery, sums up the show quite concisely as '...the social, economic and individual sense of the self; the collapse of hierarchies through a dense stream of thoughts, images and references..'' [59] In the exhibition, there were numerous rooms and in each one was a video where the viewer or audience would take a seat on bricolage constructions of sofas, benches, wardrobes,

gym equipment and hammocks to watch the large projected videos. The videos themselves are very hard to define as each one differed from the last but on the whole, they (like Tim & Eric) take pre-existing facets of hyperpop culture and stretch and deform them by exacerbating the pixels so they become purposefully visible, they run at an incredibly fast pace whilst simultaneously displaying numerous videos on one screen so the eye and eye can barely keep up. These videos do not only blast the medium of internet, television, magazine aesthetics into outer space, but the character's traits are also blown up beyond perception, they are walking, talking embodiments of the medium itself whilst spewing the societal views of a turbocharged America. Trecartin himself says: "When organizing content, I enjoy playing games.... a kind of subjective math – a swapping or substitutioning... An example might be attempting to make a relevant news story into a personality trait, a careerist goal into living room furniture, an accent into a hairdo or an ideology into a body language, a designer skin tone." [60]

Coupled with these videos however are the installations and one of the most peculiar and powerful moments was after pure immersion in the videos (which demanded your complete and undivided attention) you suddenly realised where you were. As clichéd as it may sound, there's a point where that immersion ends and you come back to reality but there you are, sitting on an IKEA sofa, surrounded by more IKEA sofas and wardrobes built on top of garden tables which are covered in mirrors which are still in their packaging. This kept happening with every video in every room, there was a state of pure attentiveness on the video itself and the universe inside it until you realised that you couldn't remove yourself from that universe even when looking away from the screen; the armchairs with built in speakers and pillows and cabinets connected to cabinets were still very much part of this universe and it became inescapable because every room was connected to the next. Even when outside the exhibition space, there was an underlying feeling that you have not escaped. The lack of physicality with the videos and their aesthetics leads to a dissociative state of unrest but to be confronted with the physicality of the home environment is quite shocking, possibly even more so than the videos themselves because your environment directly affects you, and this, where you sat, was your environment, your home. Not only was it your home, but it was a disgusting and grotesque amplification

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of your home - a by-product of who you are, the surroundings were caricaturing –
you. Everybody became an embodiment of this sickening sensation and I personally
projected the emotions onto the people around me, I disliked the people sitting in
these chairs, looking so slouched and relaxed like at home, they were products and
puppets. This projection of distain was even harder to bear because I myself was one
of those people, and I was looking and judging and disliking myself.

This very real sense of physical interference in your life was so direct and stark that it
fed back into the work and elevated it to a much more intrusive level. I found it close
to unbearable, the hyper hooked me and threw me around because I was just putty in
its hands and I surrendered because I'd accepted that I too, was just another element
in the video, I was just another pawn in this twisted milieu. The text that streamed at
an almost unreadable pace alongside the videos became so much more potent and
apparent paradoxically because of its vacuous inanity.

"I just saw my ENDing, and I'm cool with it – So I check out early" (*K-CornealNC.K
(Section a)*)

"Putting my butterfly effect in finger quotes, as if one layer of me is gonna mean
something to me, is wrong." (I-BE-AREA)

"We must implement a new system that specializes in placementation. I designed the
most awesome beach, it's a fucking parking lot. And after this meeting I'm going to
take Vacation and Goal the Flench from within. It's a well deserved Sample and I'm
gonna take it royally." (*P.opular S.ky (Section ish)*)

"What you want isn't what you need; what you need is right in front of you...
But you have to feel it. Yeah you have to feel it! Whatever! What Ever! Why did you
do that!? I did it for Fun! No! I did it for Fun! No, Not FUN. I did it for Fun! No! I
did it for Fun! It's not Fun! I did it for Fun! Its funny. No it's not Funny, Its Funny,
Its not Funny... Yes it is! Yeah... Yes It Is."
(*A FAMILY FINDS ENTERTAINMENT*)

Trecartin's videos are an intense critique of our current social strata but they're also weirdly warm and exude a hint of affection and it's peculiar how comfortable some people are when watching, they let it wash over them like an intense hot shower, but not hot enough to get out. The viewer goes through a series of stages ranging from intrigue to boredom to disinterested pleasure to a stupor and back to engagement again.

"In the beginning there was a void. There wasn't a lot of a void, and it didn't last for long, but there was enough vacui to create a horror vacui and, conversely, to find great pleasure in the banishing of that void." [61]

Trecartin's films and characters defy the staples we abide by, they defy gender, race, sexuality and time yet they are treated like receptacles, like a empty plastic bags that are filled with the idea of an emotion, but only the idea: They are more like trains of thought that flit from thing to thing regardless of how little or large those thoughts may be. The intense pace of it all means that deep and shallow thought merge as they spill forth from foamy pixelated mouths quicker than they can be registered, remembered or digested. These homogenous, indefinable characters that spew this existential discharge with no regard for anybody or anything embody something fundamental that hooks you from the get go, something that you cannot tear your eyes away from – they live in a utopic dystopia that both attracts and repels you.

19. An 2000 year-old example of pornography in a Pompeiian wall painting

20. The culmination of fantasy and reality - women in western pornography

21. The hypersexual/fetishistic world of 'Hentai' that supercedes pornography

PORNOGRAPHY
&
THE SUBLIME

The primary reason for Homo sapiens to engage in sexual intercourse is to reproduce and therefore sustain the human race. In order for humans to have a proclivity for procreation, sexual intercourse utilises erogenous zones on the body, which trigger the dopamine receptors in the brain resulting in the sensation of pleasure. In early developmental stages of life, these erogenous zones are explored and probed which allows the brain to remember these pleasurable experiences thus perpetuating the need to satisfy an urge by stimulating these dopamine receptors. Certain erogenous zones on the human body are indications to the other gender of desirability but these 'desired' zones vary from culture to culture. In terms of attractive physical traits for example, females with large breasts can be found desirable by males due to their ability to store a greater amount of nutritious milk that therefore increases the lifespan of their offspring, and males with broader, muscular shoulders have a tendency to be found attractive by females due to their apparent physical strength, indicating fighting and hunting prowess.

Inclinations such as these have evolved alongside the human race and have manifested themselves as transgressive incarnations of the 'hyperreal' and can be found in abundance in the world of pornography. The term pornography is loosely defined as the explicit portrayal of sexual subject matter for the purposes of sexual arousal and erotic satisfaction rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings. The oldest pornography on record is a 35,000-year-old ivory figurine of a woman with

exaggerated sexual characteristics found in Germany and instances of pornography have been documented from every civilization from Pompeian paintings to Japanese woodcuts. What has changed however is the technological advances of sexual depiction from cave drawings to video to computer-generated sublimations of virtual reality. The ubiquitous stream of 'XXX' pornography in circulation today is predominantly on the Internet and a quick scan of its contents reveals various 'ideals' of sexual partners and sexual acts, yet the vast majority are enacted without the precursory notion of reproduction. It would be impossible to analyse pornography in its entirety because it covers innumerable substrata, but a popularly applied blanket image of pornography (that is conjured among the western populous) is as follows – A man and woman simulate sexual intercourse on a plush bed/sofa or thematic location in a number of positions, they moan almost robotically (due to the length of their scenes, their ecstatic howls sound painful and regurgitated) and their expressions are twisted contortions of pleasure mixed with pain. This is not sex, this is simulated stimulation that serves the sole purpose of prolonging the (predominantly male) viewer's ejaculation. The actors on screen are exactly that, actors, they re-enact a fantasmatic scene, which refers on the one hand to the fictive nature of the sexual signifier, and on the other hand to the effect that that signifier has upon the viewer/listener. It evokes both what Christian Metz would call the "imaginariness" of the filmic object and the desires which it causes within the viewer. [62]

A brief description of the appearance of the said generic 'actors' sees the male with a narrow waist, broad shoulders, a clean haircut (mainly short), angular jaw, very toned muscle definition, no facial hair, little to no pubic hair, no back or chest hair and a very large circumcised penis. A brief description of the said female character sees her with a narrow waist, tall, slim, large round breasts, long hair, hairless legs and armpits, no pubic (or very little, well pruned pubic) hair, vagina with small labia, straight teeth, big eyes and large buxom lips. Practically all of these features point to vitality, health and (sometimes pre-pubescent) youthfulness, yet each trait is grossly exaggerated for the purposes of intense arousal. An instance of a perpetuated exaggeration is of the 'bedroom eyes' which is to say the 'sexy look' where the eyes of the woman droop which according to Paul Ekman occurs moments before an

orgasm, thus by replicating the relaxed muscles in the upper eyelids, the appearance of sexiness can be displayed with the verisimilitude of real sexual pleasure. [63]

With the porn industry predominantly catered toward men, women become caricatures of themselves and realisations of the cartoon desires of men. From the neoteny of Betty Boop in the 1930's to the Barbie dolls of the 1960's, these caricatured idols with impossible female proportions have added to the simulacrum of the sexually attractive woman, leading to breast implants, cosmetic surgery and the incessant airbrushing and digital fakery in magazines. It creates a cycle of unattainable perfection that women (and more recently men) strive for and the media represents this yearning whilst simultaneously intensifying it by bombarding people on a day-to-day basis with invective beauty. However, this supreme illusion of age-defying beauty seemingly stumbles out of hyperreality into reality from time to time such as in a recent magazine advert for 'L'oréal Revitalift' anti-wrinkle cream in which Oscar winning actress Rachel Weisz was digitally altered to remove her wrinkles giving the appearance of flawless skin of a 20 something on a 40 something. [64] The product of the cream was purportedly the reason why her skin was so smooth but the advert was pulled when Advertising Standards Authority ruled that it "misleadingly exaggerated the performance of the product". Yet interestingly, on the original advert, Rachel Weisz did in fact look twenty years younger and without any wrinkles whatsoever and if the question posed here was 'Does she look younger?' the answer would unequivocally be yes.

With this in mind and pornography displaying, younger, healthier, fitter, sexier, more virile, vivacious actors which supercede that of reality, it begs the question, is there any need for substandard 'real' sexual relationships with common folk? In Dave Monroe's book '*Porn: Philosophy for Everyone*' he ponders on the future obsolescence of real women as they compete with pornographic versions of fantasy, "The danger of the hyperreal ideal will increase as pornography becomes immersive, interactive and veridical in the virtual world. When there is no longer and carnally gratifying advantage to sex with a real woman as opposed to sex with a virtual woman, males may no longer expect their current or potential girlfriends to look or sexually perform like porn star; instead they may find no desire to have real romantic

relationships in the first place." [65] This view also correlates with anti pornography campaigner Gail Dines who states "the hyperreal destroys all value in the real, and men who inhabit the hyperrealistic world of pornography either attempt to persuade "real" women into imitating the simulacra (now there's a mind-boggling concept), or they become incapable of interaction with the "real" because she isn't exciting enough." [66]

In terms of our 'real' reality, this would be dangerous as the enticement of reproduction which sustains the human race is reassigned to the new task of purely solitary recreational carnal pleasure. Its primary function could be lost as the precursor to impregnation simply because humans abuse the dopamine receptors in order to create the most pleasure possible and to chase a reality beyond their capabilities. The chase for satisfaction regardless of primary mating functions leaps over reality and into hyperreality. This is where the link between the two realities is almost visible, the bodily functions of the 'real' that requires copulation, has become self aware and simultaneously ignorant of its own purpose, as it surpasses the reproductive real sex and fruitlessly searches for purity of pleasure in the hyperreal. This almost never-ending search for an ideal beyond comprehension is comparable if not dissimilar to Immanuel Kant's theories of aesthetics and of the sublime. "Beauty is not a property of an artwork or natural phenomenon, but is instead a consciousness of the pleasure which attends the 'free play' of the imagination and the understanding. Even though it appears that we are using reason to decide that which is beautiful, the judgment is not a cognitive judgment and is consequently not logical, but aesthetical." [67] This seems to ring true with the description of a generic pornographic film with every facet of the characters being smoothed, toned, pink, clean, shined and warmly lit versions of ourselves. They are not preened cognitively in that way but rather aesthetically with the utmost care take to even the minutest of details as the cameras zoom and envelope near macro shots of the body and its pores. "A pure judgement of taste is in fact subjective insofar as it refers to the emotional response of the subject and is based upon nothing but esteem for an object itself: it is a disinterested pleasure, and we feel that pure judgements of taste, i.e. judgements of beauty, lay claim to universal validity. It is important to note that this universal validity is not derived from a determinate concept of beauty but from common sense." Kant also identifies

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the sublime as an "aesthetic quality which, like beauty, is subjective, but unlike beauty refers to an indeterminate relationship between the faculties of the imagination and of reason." [68] Kant's theories can be used to address the aesthetics (or rather the progressive phenomenological aesthetics) of pornography but moreover, the aesthetics of the human form and the sexual representation of it. It's intriguing to see what can be done with the aesthetics of the human body in reality in order to try and reach some 'sublime' but there are limitations. The body can only be manipulated to a certain degree so our aesthetical depictions of our sublimations turn to art to *realise* our desires.

Pornography has been represented countless times in art by the likes of Jeff Koons' 'Made in Heaven' series and the joy of pure aesthetic human beauty has been represented by Matisse's series of 'Blue Nudes' but nothing comes close to the all-encompassing hyper-aesthetic, hyper-pornographic, hyper-real animation and art of Japanese 'Hentai'. Hentai is a term used to describe sexually explicit Japanese comics and animations in the forms of Manga (a Japanese cartoon style of drawing), Anime (the animated cartoons of Manga) and computer games. Hentai is a shortened term of 'Hentai Seiyoku' (変態性欲), which roughly translates as 'strange sexual perversion'. Jean Baudrillard says, "The nature of pornography is to simulate sex. More specifically - the act of watching pornography. This does not necessarily include masturbation, but unless you have a specific fetish that relates to the viewing of pornography, you are engaging in hyperreality." [69] This is an interesting point to proceed from because Hentai is almost exclusively fetishistic and can delve possibly deeper into the human psyche because it is animated, making it possible to realise absolutely any conceived fantasy of any nature. If viewing (real human, non-cartoon) fetishistic pornography replete with leather clad, arse-whipping dominatrixes is engaging with hyperreality, then viewing fetishistic Hentai replete with extreme violence, rape, paedophilia and monster sex (sex with monsters) reveals itself as a highly suppressed form of hyperreality where the search for the sublime collides full throttle with 'disinterested pleasure'.

First and foremost, art has a metaphysical ideology that allows us to relay concepts that are otherwise out of our reach because of limitations in our language, laws and societal structures. Hentai serves one purpose as an art form; to sexually arouse a certain fetish, and it does so quite freely as it only depicts sexual and violent acts, and does not involve real people 'simulating' getting their legs cut off; because semiotically, when simulating an action, the signs cannot distinguish between simulation and actuality. If the pornographic version of a man or woman is the idealised depiction of a sexual being (which is the hyperreal sexual version of a real person), then Hentai takes this principle and inserts its own brand of 'even more perfect than the perfect pornographic woman' or 'even more perfect sexual intercourse than the pornographic sexual intercourse'. Hentai simulates real people simulating real events but all of it is a simulation in itself by being an animation. It has become a densely woven intertextual hyperreal tapestry that has been built upon over time and self-referentially perpetuates itself to the point of a complete void of emotion (an incongruity that I call the 'Zone Zone').

A concise summary of the vast majority of female characters in Hentai sees Caucasian looking Japanese adolescent girls with tiny waists but huge glistening eyes that are roughly a third the size of their head. They are completely hairless except for the long flowing hair on their head, despite their anorexically skinny physique, they have ballooning swollen breasts about as big as their heads that shine in the light and they often wear very skimpy clothing resembling a school uniform. A man or dominant figure usually forces the women or girls into a sexual act, they scream and cry almost incessantly but the differentiation between pleasure and pain is indistinguishable. The men are also usually very tiny waisted with very broad muscular shoulders, their facial features are small and are without the large emotionally charged eyes that the females have. They are ostensibly older than the females but are usually kept out of shot or are obscured by shadow or a pair of breasts that usually take centre stage in the frame. The functionality of keeping the men bland featured and obscured in the back of the frame is to let the viewer assimilate the role of the male, so they can mentally remove themselves from watching a screen to positing themselves into an all encompassing sexual fantasy.

These hyperreal fantasies are not just focused on the actual act of sex but also on the male dominance and female subservience. It seems to be a reoccurring fetish and sexually arousing element that has been exaggerated beyond all proportions in comparison to human pornography. The servility by which these forced encounters occur is severe but again, it is ambiguous (in the majority of cases) whether it a scene of rape or not. The indistinguishable screams of pleasure or pain could seemingly indicate rape, but simultaneously, it is possible that the ambiguity is also part of the pleasure of watching. The reasoning behind such misogynistic actions is unclear but there is a possibility that it is an innate male influence of dominance which harks back to mating conventions in an earlier stage of human development where the male needed to sow his seed in any way possible, regardless of using force or not. It could also be other due to stifled societal structures and has manifested itself as sexual violence, but the possibilities are innumerable. What remains however is that fact that again, this franchise is made by men, for men and thus, a whole host of male fantasies spill forth like water from hot spring. Also, if this trend of pornography hyperising real sex and Hentai hyeperising pornography then the next logical step is the next generation of dissatisfied viewers of Hentai will go on to make a new, even more hyperised version of that.

One of the many peculiar elements of Hentai is that the viewer is watching representations of real people but still deriving pleasure from cartoons. This would indicate that the presence of a real person is not necessary for the said viewer to derive pleasure, so the system of human reproduction starts to break down and the signs of sexual pleasure are only focused on, thus ignoring the reproductive elements associated with it. This system also runs amok when faced the imagery displayed in some of Hentai episodes such as 'Imma Youjo' (*Kazuma Muraki, 1995*) where a woman has sexual intercourse with a gigantic spider that penetrates her with its long spindly legs or in 'Advancer Tina' (*Green Bunny, 1997*) in which a woman is raped by a monster with green tentacles. The graphic quality of animation does two things in these instances: it either simplifies the components that make up the picture so that skin is tonally flat and breasts are impossibly round, which strikes to the core of the initial desire. It can cut through visual interference and imperfections such to give the viewer their hyper desires in an essentially 'purer' form. Or secondly, animation can hyperbolise any given detail to an impossible level such as with the two previous

examples; it can make impossible amounts of liquid pour from genitals and make people explode from penetration or make tentacles pulsate inside a woman with such sickening consequences that the viewer is left exasperated by such vulgarity or left numb by a superabundance of unregisterable sights and sounds.

The previous examples were slightly outside of the realm of the everyday human desire but 'Bondage Game' (*Pink Pineapple, 2003*) may just correspond to the backbone of psychosexual development leading to a direct relation to hyperreality and reality via the medium of art. Bondage Game is an incredibly obscene short film but it does involves some of the fundaments of pleasure; the visual aesthetics are less relevant than the content which it sees a series of women being tied up by men that purr orders at them in an almost paternalistic way. The woman are forced to provide fellatio and sexual intercourse which soon devolve into urinating on each other, defecating in each other's mouths and being ejaculating into until they are so full that the ejaculate comes out of their eyes etc. It is not pleasant viewing but it does intertwine with Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stages of development. When deconstructing the reasoning behind making and watching such hyperfetishistic animation, the question arises, how would this cartoon's representation of such disgusting acts arouse a human? Freud states that "A child's libido goes through a developmental process centered around three or so erroneous zones, the mouth, the anus and the genital region, which the child focuses on one by one, only moving onto the next stage when the previous is resolved. Both frustration and overindulgence lock some amount of the child's libido permanently into the stage in which they occur; both result in a *fixation*. If a child progresses normally through the stages, resolving each conflict and moving on, then little libido remains invested in each stage of development. But if he fixates at a particular stage, the method of obtaining satisfaction which characterised that stage will dominate and affect his adult personality." [70] These early stages of human sexual development may give an indication to why or how these fetishes manifest themselves and furthermore, why pornography explicitly moulds these fundamental building blocks into hyperreal scenarios involving caricatured ideals. From birth, humans are hardwired to procreate but as they grow up they're exposed to a myriad of mind-altering noise such as Barbie, magazine adverts and movie stars that convolute their initial stages of sexual
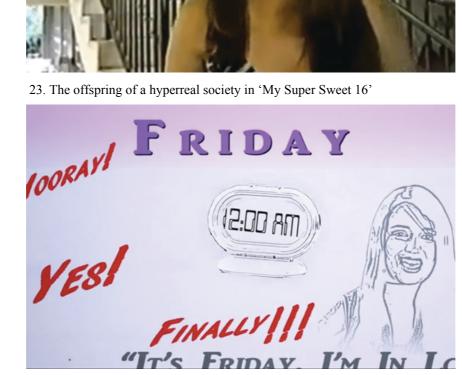
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development. This convolution alongside our hardwired desires has created pornography which in turn has created Hentai will create that new hyperised unfathomable unattainable sublime which if we're not careful could put us in the 'Zone Zone', a place void of any emotion due to an overabundance of self-inflicted stimulation.

22. Nature = Change in Pixar's talking rat animation 'Ratatouille'

23. The offspring of a hyperreal society in 'My Super Sweet 16'

22. Rebecca Black's tortuous ascent into fame with her song 'Friday'

TELEVISION PART 1 - BUILDING US UP

"Television completes the cycle of the human sensorium. With the omnipresent ear and the moving eye, we have abolished writing, the specialized acoustic-visual metaphor that established the dynamics of western civilization. Television demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being. It will not work as a background. It engages you. Perhaps this is why so many people feel their identity has been threatened. This charge of the light brigade has heightened our general awareness of the shape and meaning of lives and events to a level of extreme sensitivity. You are the screen, you are the vanishing point. This creates an inwardness, a sort of reverse perspective which has much in common with oriental art." [71]

"Character is no longer shaped by only two earnest, fumbling experts. Now all the world's a sage." [72]

Television, films, social networking have become your brother, friend, aunt, mother. They mould and shape you, they teach and unteach you, they manipulate and betray you in ways you can't necessarily perceive. "Nature = Change" [73] This may be true but this quote comes from one such character changer in a film called 'Ratatouille' by the hugely proliferous animation studio Pixar, I am quoting a talking rat. This talking rat taught me something, but I don't even stop to question the fact that *a talking rat is teaching me something*. Surely that's too bizarre to even accept, a rat, a little animal, not only talking, but actually teaching me something – and it's an animated rat, it's a

fake talking rat teaching me something. But the rat is right and what it says is so applicable and apropos for today's post-modern hyperreal society, "Nature = Change".

Children soak up television like sponges, they are perfect unmanned puppets that are subjected to a multitude of shows spanning every conceivable denomination of existence, but a recurring theme that has propelled society into the hyperreal is 'the celebrity'. Aspirational television shows such as 'Hanna Montana' inform children from an early age how easy it is to become a celebrity and advertisements tell them how attractive and desirable they can be when they say 'because you're worth it.' Children grow up expecting to be treated like celebrities themselves, they become self obsessed and television is there to represent their frustrations in such shows as MTV's 'My Super Sweet 16'. My Super Sweet 16 is a show that documents the 16th birthday of affluent, American teenagers and the extravagant, puerile demands they make or rather shriek at their parents who dote on them. In one such episode, a 15 year-old holds an 'X-Factor' style audition in his school to decide who is cool enough to come to his party. Children watch these programs, copy them and in turn, the programs copy them, reigniting the cycle once more. Bizarrely, people on the whole treat celebrities as they are portrayed on television, for example, Adam Woodyatt is one of the most recognisable faces on British television from the soap 'Eastenders' but because he plays the owner of chip shop, a very banal everyday job, he is treated as an everyday kinda bloke. Yet on the other hand, George Clooney is treated like a King as he portrays similar benevolent characters in his films but even more worrying is the power that comes with simulation because "if George Clooney asked his fans to kill someone to spend a night with him, no doubt scores would die." [74]

If there are celebrities to love then there are celebrities to hate - Such an unfortunate case of pure vitriolic hate is that of Rebecca Black, a teenager who had grown up with aspirational television and media which gave her the idea of making a music video with a small production company as a birthday present from her parents. The song she made was entitled 'Friday' and was about looking forward to the end of the week, it was critically unpopular but became a viral sensation due to the icons and indexes that did not quite match those of a professionally produced pop video. "The dominant

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organ of social orientation in pre-alphabet societies was the ear – 'hearing was believing'. The phonetic alphabet forced the magical world of the ear to yield to the neutral world of the eye. Man was given an eye for an ear." [75] In this "eye for an ear" visual society where people are raised from birth on complex imagery from a range of media, the nuances within each media can be detected more easily, such as a fake newspaper article can be noticed if the font doesn't correspond to those of other articles. Or in this case, a fake pop video, so with Rebecca Black's Friday song, the video was not made for the purpose of promotion which is the first sign to the audience that it should not be taken seriously. Secondly, the visual elements used within the video were visual effects generated on commercially available and widely used software such as Adobe Photoshop and After Effects and even though the effects may serve the same purpose with the same lens flares and graphics as professional videos, the viewer's eye is sharp and can differentiate them almost immediately. Thirdly, the content of the words in the song may not differ greatly from the inanity of other pop songs (Pussycat Dolls – "When I grow up, I wanna be famous, I wanna have boobies") but the inanity of Rebecca Black's lyrics was seemingly too obvious for the listener with lyrics such as "yesterday was Thursday, today is Friday, we we we so excited, we so excited, we gonna have a ball today. Tomorrow is Saturday and Sunday comes afterwards."

With the everyday viewer's razor sharp detective powers aside, this doesn't explain however the barrage of hate and slurry that proceeded Rebecca Black's youtube viral 'success'. The mere fact that she made a video and gained infamous notoriety allowed people to believe that they could bully her with death threats and publically defame a 14 year-old girl with comments such as "I hope you cut yourself and get an eating disorder so you'll look pretty." [76] It seems that when someone perforates the sphere of the celebrity by imitating all the signifiers of stardom, they themselves become an object of the unreal and somehow dematerialise. A simile to this situation would be road rage; the drivers of cars can become furious when someone accidentally changes lane in front of them cutting them off but this would never happen if that person walked in front of them on the street for one simple reason – face to face interaction. It seems that this face to face interaction plays a huge role in our facilitation of each other's emotions so when a person walks in front of another on the street, they can just as easily turn around and apologise whereas in car, this is nigh impossible. In the

case of Rebecca Black, the justification of hate from the public stemmed from the detachment from a dematerialised object (like a car) and thus, their hate could not be returned, a pure one way street of hate with no fear that it could be thrown back. Celebrities usually just appear on the pedestal of fame without any lineage to indicate how they got there but in the case of Rebecca Black, her lineage (cheap production company) was clear, her 'wannabe' status was clear. Humans are thoroughly competitive creatures and as soon Rebecca Black's self-initiated ascent was publicised, the public tried to drag her back down to their level by using vitriolic youtube comments or emails urging her to commit suicide, and they felt safe to say so because there was no chance or danger of reply. In a turn of events however, all this hot air that the digital hate mob generated actually elevated Rebecca Black to true mega stardom status where she appears on chat shows and actually produces and sells music as a bona fide pop star.

Negative press is also a fascination for the masses because it teaches them how to avoid danger and therefore how to get to the top of the crop. This is why people can be so obsessed with the negative in the world of the celebrity and a prime example of this scrutinised negativity can be found in glossy magazines catered for female readers. Celebrities of every nature are poured over and examined to the nth degree with high quality photographs being enlarged to show the creases of skin that occur when someone bends over to pick something up or that a certain celebrity has shown their underwear when stepping into a car. The sheer unbelievable volume of these details (that occur to every single person on the planet) are so pervasive that it begs the question – If the most beautiful people in the world are subject to such scrutiny than how can the average plain Jane compete? The simple answer is that she can't compete and thus, complexes emerge, psychological conditions of inferiority and self-hatred which are then further exploited on television in a swirling vortex of exploitative, abusive, reductive debasement. One such exploitative show is called 'Style By Jury' [77] in which a jury of Canadians sit behind a one-way mirror and a volunteer is displayed on the other side for the jury to judge. The jury can judge unscrupulously and unashamedly because the volunteer can neither see nor hear them and therefore the volunteer becomes just an object behind yet another screen. This removal of interaction between the viewer and viewee results in a disconnection of

the real and produces the hyperreal in which the viewers can say that the viewee "looks like a sad little girl with emotional problems!" or "Eeeew, she looks horrible in those jeans, she looks like a fatty that will never get a husband, she'll never be happy." The show then takes the volunteer and moulds and shapes them into what the jury deems to be socially and aesthetically acceptable. They change a person into what they should *really* be, yet the burning question here is: Why does changing someone's appearance not just make them more socially acceptable but also more real? It's intriguing to note that there is a consensus view within the juries on this show of what a person should *really* be, yet they themselves do not conform to any concrete form themselves, let alone realising that their reality is a complex system of intertextual matrices.

"In this existence, there's nothing to fight against, there's no revolution to fight. All there is, is happiness, we're condemned to happiness." [78]

Television plays a large role in a comprehensive unhappiness in society because it creates a huge collective delusion which pumps air of apparent happiness into the balloon of dreams and then it one day, it pops (one such pop is the recent recession/s). People try to live like the TV says they can live and therefore have no grip on reality, it eludes them because they are focused on what they call the 'real reality' (the one constructed on TV) yet when everything goes sour, people question why and how, until the penny drops that they don't live in the 'real reality' but rather the constructed reality of illusory happiness gratified by consumer goods which is controlled by mega corporations which are obsessed with wealth and greed and ...where does it end? It doesn't end, because there is no 'one iconic reality', at least not one that we can grasp.

25. The first televised presidential debate between JFK and Nixon in 1960

26.50 years on, the British election debates adopted the TV talent show format

27. Which to cheer for? The Vietcong of Waffen SS in 'Deadliest Warrior'

"It's dangerous to unmask images since they dissimulate the fact that there's nothing behind the mask." [79]

To dissimulate this reality by unmasking it (in order to create a new structure of perception) may have unforeseen consequences however. "All media works us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as an environment." [80]

If such structures are in place and the role and need of the celebrity is so drummed into real life to such an extent that politicians have to bide for the public's confidence by using this medium, then in what other way could society function without these neo-structures? It began in 1960 with the Presidential debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy which was split between television and radio – those that heard the radio debate said that Nixon won and those that saw the debate on television said that Kennedy had won. The dawn of the medium of television and its power over the masses had begun. This influence has come on leaps and bounds – British Politicians for example in the 2010 election went up against each other in an 'X-Factor' style debate in order to utilise the medium of TV and the format of competitive celebrity

aesthetics to reach their audience. The leaders of the three main parties in British politics were placed on a stage in front of a live TV studio audience and were introduced like pop stars as bombastic visuals flashed across the screen notifying the audience of the TV show that was beginning, except this one really mattered because the winner of this TV show would govern their country and change their life. A presenter not too dissimilar from a reality TV show would arbitrate and shout them down if necessary, as they bickered and argued. It was a televisual spectacle that beared no resemblance to reality but instead, it arrested public attention by fictionalising the very world they lived in by using characters that stood as human manifestations of political ideologies. The content of their rhetoric was ancillary, but way they carried themselves (including physical appearance, body language, engaging with the audience) to seem more likeable as a character, was foremost. Television is no longer a medium to simply relay information, it is now a manipulative tool and he who knows how to use it, has the power.

The pervasive web of television is embedded in today's society and it's hard to know or care whether something is definitely real. Documentaries for example create 'filler shots' which consist of the presenter walking around town or sitting on a bench and producing a taut look of puzzlement on their face as if deep in thought, pondering the seriousness of whatever it is they're documenting. They reconstruct how they think their face should look regardless of whether or not it is actually genuine. By at least pulling a laboured and exaggerated face of deep thought (even if they are not actually thinking of anything puzzling), it is much more representative of the content of the documentary than a blank face. A blank face would indicate that the content of the documentary is boring so despite doing several takes on camera (where the first may be truly representative of the presenter's interest) they have to consistently seem engaged on every take, even if they're not. The documentary format can be stretched to breaking point without so much as a bat of eyelid within the neo-structure of reality. 'Deadliest Warrior'[81] is an American documentary(ish) show that takes historical data about the world's most feared warriors and armies and simulates a battle to the death every week between two factions. In simplistic terms, who can kill the other team better and faster, for example, The Nazi S.S or the Vietcong? The team from this show test out all manner of ways of killing and murder by shooting or

blowing-up animal carcasses and dummies and then finally recreating a battle in real time with actors. They take the tragic futility of war and stylise it into a sports event where the viewer has to pick a side and to cheer on either the Nazis or the Vietcong. This is the epitome of relative disassociation, where a modern day American audience, who fought neither the Nazi's nor the Vietcong in their lifetime but have been taught to despise them for reasons of national safety, then cheer on their favourite evil because they had flame-throwers.

The seams of hyperreality are fraying, yet no one seems to notice. It's the nurture of television that cultivates imperceptions and blindness to the most sacrosanct truths. The lineage seems clear however, when at school, it's boring to listen to a real human being, but as soon as TV is wheeled out, the class would pay attention without talking regardless of whether or not the content was even more boring than the content from the real teacher but simply because it's a television, it's inherently more interesting. The mind of a human is malleable to an incredible degree and it can be structured in any way imaginable, but it seems that the structure of hyperreality has the stronghold and thus, the shape of reality has warped dramatically in the last generation or two. This is the new order.

"When we are born, we are not born into reality, we are born into all the social acts that make up 'reality'. In order to act with normal people and just *be,* we need to be properly installed with a symbolic order. But when this symbolic order is disturbed, our reality disintegrates" [82]

Disturbances are few and far between but there are ripples every now and then. 'Black Mirror' [83] was a series of three one-hour short films aired in Britain in 2011 and addressed issues relating to the neo-structures of reality that exist on television, and how they permeate the world outside of the screen, the *black mirror.* "If technology is a drug – and it does feel like a drug – then what, precisely, are the side-effects? This area – between delight and discomfort – is where *Black Mirror* is set." [84]

One such episode called '15 Million Merits' saw a dystopian (yet possible) world where people live surrounded by televisions, the outside world doesn't exist and they

all must ride exercise bikes to power the televisions. The only hope and aspirations these people are provided with is to go on a talent show to showcase their singing and dancing skills if they ride the bike hard enough to gain 15 million merits for a ticket to the auditions. After events in which the protagonist's (Bing) only companion wins the talent show but is lost to compliance and becomes just another product, he decides to subvert the regime. Bing enters the talent show only to hold himself hostage with a chard of glass pressed against his throat, exclaiming he will kill himself if the judges and audience do not listen to him, he goes on to say "..we lah dee dah, and sing and dance, and tumble around and all you see up here is not people.. it's all fodder and the faker the fodder is, the more you love it because fake is the only thing that works anymore... You break us, we're too numb for it, our minds will choke, there's only so much wonder we can bear. That's why when you find any wonder whatsoever, you dole it out in meagre portions and only then 'til it's augmented and packaged and pumped through ten thousand pre-assigned filters 'til it's nothing more than a meaningless series of lights, while we writhe day in, day out, going where?!" Bing then goes on to scream "Fuck you!" to the judges in a number of different ways, completing the silenced speech of a numb nation that cannot even comprehend it because they are products of their environment, unaware that anything is even wrong with their world. When he finishes, the judges simply praise his speech in the same way they would praise any singing or dancing act they see on the stage in front of them. Bing then gets his own TV show where he spews more speeches with the gimmicky chard of glass against his throat, becoming just another product in a systemic structure with no escape. As allegorical as '15 Million Merits' may be, the actual audience watching the episode who saw their hyperreal structure laid bare and may have acquiesced to notion of how unbelievable their culture had become were bypassed by one element – they were learning a lesson about how bad television was, on a television. The show parodied itself as the real audience watched the show, agreed with it and then turned the channel proving one thing – the hyperreal structure that nurtures society, is very much here to stay.

"The shock of recognition! In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer continued ≠ ignored. Too many people know too much about each

other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for each other."
"There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening" [85]

McLuhan (above) is certainly right that our environment compels commitment and participation because we have become so involved with each other that it's hard to ignore. The news is forever expanding, from hourly updates on the radio to 24 hour news channels, but there is one thing that makes it absolutely impossible to avoid and impossible not to involve ourselves with others - fear. The news is a prime example; it's a hyper-edited, real-time thriller of a chaotic and perilous world, like an escalating film depicting fresh horror upon fresh horror, not time for reflection, just pictures. Humans are biologically programmed to pay attention to such depictions of terror because they need to take account of anything that may pose a threat, meaning that the news is totally unavoidable, it pushes our subconscious buttons and we respond in numerous subconscious ways. The amygdala is the primitive reactionary part of the brain that deals with fear. It protects you, it responds when there are loud noises or fast movements just in case (in an earlier stage of evolution) a lion could attack. This is why it seems almost impossible to ignore something that behaves like a threat, whether it is a lion, or a scary news bulletin claiming the world is in disrepair.
The amygdala is also closely related to memory so if you have a traumatic experience in the past, it means that you're less likely to repeat that action. This works very well for public safety information which are shown to children at a very early age, it moulds their brains and can also lead to irrationalities of fear such as clowns, spiders and (if we're to listen to public safety information films) walking near a canal etc. A theory was developed called 'Cultivation Theory' [86], which examined the long-term effects of television on people of all ages in America. It found that over time, watching television alters a viewer's perception of reality and their view of the real world starts to march in step with that of the televised one. The more frequently an image or event is depicted on screen, the greater the significance the cultivated viewer starts to attach to it and apply it to the real world. Due to so much of television consisting of alarming news coverage and violent action, the more the viewer watches, the more passive, nervous and frightened they become. They start to believe
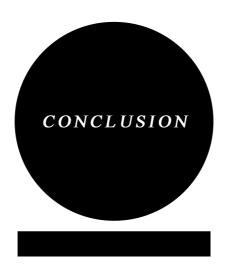
that the real world has become a mean and frightening place in what Gerbner called 'Mean World Syndrome'. The research showed that heavy duty viewers expected and anticipated more risk in everyday life; they were more likely to believe that crime rates were rising despite the fact that they were falling and they thought that they were more likely to becomes victims of crime themselves. Shows like 'Airline Crashes' and '999' ostensibly exist to teach you 'what if', but really they exist to incite fear and they know it, and so does the audience. 'Airline Crashes' [87] for example shows little information about how to keep yourself safe in the result of an emergency, but rather it shows more of a pornographic view of the terror in the eyes of the crew and passengers. This kind of television tickles the fear senses and deals with things that *do* go wrong in everyday life, but if that wasn't scary enough, there are also programs that look into what *could* go wrong in everyday life. In such programs, simulations are made to faux-re-enact the sun blowing up, or the Hydron Collider blowing up or something blowing up, but all of which actually numb the viewer by rendering real calamity into Hollywood drama thereby making it less real.

An extreme circumstance of debilitating fear is a condition called 'Cortard's Syndrome' named after Jules Cotard (*1840–1889*), it's a condition where all emotional responses to all stimuli are cut and you believe that you're dead. This links into derealisation and depersonalisation where the whole world seems unreal or like a dream, which is commonly seen in dissociative states such as anxiety and depression. This is when you feel you're not real or like a zombie but it is an adaptive mechanism. You shut off all emotion in order not to be hurt or damaged (like a soldier after a battle in Ari Folman's '*Waltz With Bashir*' [88] in which an Israeli soldier tries to piece together his memory of the 1982 attack in Beirut by using animation). The anterior singular (part of the frontal lobe) becomes extremely active which inhibits or temporarily shuts down your amygdala and other limbic emotional centres. This suppresses the disabling emotions like anxiety and fear whilst also making you alert and ready for action which serves instinctual survival purposes. But if the same system is activated by chemical imbalance or television then you experience derealisation where the whole world becomes completely devoid of emotional meaning so to make head or tail of this experience, you'll either tell yourself that either the world isn't real (derealisation), or I am not real (depersonalisation).

The hyperreal pervades every minute portion of our lives and is spurred on by powerful reactionary emotions such as fear. It may seem bizarrely logical to distance oneself from disaster because of Hollywood-esque drama no matter how fake it may seem but what if real fear of such a fake postulation could drive societies ever closer to a reality of disaster? This is the paradox of fear producing the very war it feared in the first place. 'The Power of Nightmares - The Rise of the Politics of Fear' [89] was a series of documentaries that explored the relations between the Neo-Conservatives of the USA and the Radical Islamists of the Middle East and how they degraded into fear and greed driven agendas that counteracted the reality of the situation, resulting in hatred, miscommunication/interpretation and ultimately war. "In the past, politicians had promised to create a better world, their power and authority came from the optimistic visions they offered their people. Today, they have a new role that restores their power and authority and instead of delivering, politicians now promise to protect us from nightmares. They say they'll rescue us from the terrible dangers we cannot see and do not understand from a powerful and sinister network with sleeper cells in countries across the world." [90]

Curtis theorises that much of this threat has been distorted by politicians, a dark illusion that has spread unnoticed around the governments of the world and the international media, and that those with the darkest fears became the most powerful. The Radical Islamists believed that Americans thought they were free but in reality, they were trapped by their own selfish and greedy desires. They thought American society was going backwards, not forwards and that they were isolated beings driven by primitive animal forces and that such people could corrode the bonds that held society together. The Neo-Conservative politicians however, inserted powerful and inspiring myths that everyone could believe in as necessary delusions: One of these was religion and another is the myth of the nation, that America had a unique destiny to battle the forces of evil throughout the world. The Neo Conservatives and radical Islamists were both born out of the failure of the (hyperreal) liberal dream to try and build a better world, both with a similar explanation of what caused that failure. The fact is that these same delusions still continue today; the same twisted stories shaping and simultaneously warping reality with fear as the main driving component of

change. This is the world we live in, the pervasive web of hyperreality subverts the course of humanity both externally in the visual world of culture and internally in the fear driven narratives of civilisation. This is reality.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of varying manifestations of hyperreality and vessels that perpetuate it, there is a bone of contention over whether or not there is a definitive reality in hyperreality. Each concept relies on the other; hyperreality needs reality to prove its presence and vice versa, but the line between them is so fine that definite truths are fragmented and unclear, there is no distinction between when one becomes the other.

The conclusion is twofold: Either everything is real (and nothing is hyperreal) or Nothing is real (and everything is hyperreal). There is no distinction between the two classifications because one incontrovertibly embodies the other.

A clear division between real and hyperreal could be surmised if it worked like an on/off switch where the off represented 'real' and the on represented 'hyperreal'. The linear timeline between when that switch was on could be charted to when it was turned off giving the operator knowledge of which world they exist in, pure unrefined knowledge. Unfortunately, there is no such switch, and the operator has no way to distinguish which world they inhabit at any given time. This is due to one of the recurring themes throughout these dissections of hyperreal culture, it's the feedback loop, a staple that has proliferated the thriving hyper.
This feedback loops exists in cinema, television, pornography, fakery etc, which result respectively in Hollywood, Reality TV, Hentai, CGI. The real no longer exists

without this loop because the loop feeds it, the public are fed a better version of the thing they had previously, and when it gets boring or moves onto the next generation, they create a reconstituted, hyper version that temporarily satisfies demand. There seems to be no end to this loop as it becomes harder and harder to look backwards and remember that real, true thing that inspired the manglement of the now - but to some extent, it doesn't matter because what is present and zeitgeist, is real. Children born into such a loop cannot look back, the strawberry candy they eat has no connection to strawberries and it doesn't even matter if it did, the candy is what is important now, that is the fact of the matter.
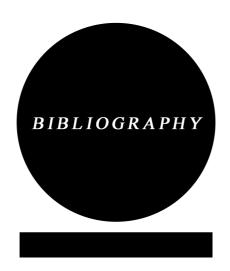
So if this is the case, then looking back as far as possible into the lineage of existence should surely find a time when everything obeyed the switch. The brain, the cause of all perceptions and conceptions seems like a safe bet to supply some definites but under neurological deconstruction it just provides more questions than answers. When biological elements enter into the equation, it seems to add more abstracts to an already unconceivable map of the self. This however causes even more problems when searching for the absolute, the concept of a singular and unified 'you' which would prove a solid grounding in the real falls apart under minimal scrutiny. It seems that long before hyperculture, the mind already partook in its own virtual environment and the introduction of computer-aided worlds was a facilitation of a pre-existing need.

It just so happened that the neurology of the mind's complex system branched out and manifested itself as *real virtuality*, a system based on the production and consumption of signs where reality itself is captured, and appearances are not mediated by the screen in our experience but *become* that experience.

Aside from the self, there's the evolutionary perspective to why this occurred which gives some indications of how elements of hyperreal culture began, such as fame and pornography. This could well be the crux of the real but there's seemingly no escape to go back to the primal (real) because once the mind has evolved and been moulded, there's no going back and ignorance can no longer be bliss. For someone to live in nature, using only natural substances would still be unable to escape the hyperreal because their knowledge remains. The knowledge that even physically, to build a

house from wood is taking a natural substance and using it for something unnatural (exaption) defies the notion of 'real'. Houses are made from nature, televisions are made from nature, the internet is made from nature, supposed 'natural' food made in factories are made from nature (as are the factories themselves). There is no escape. This global harmony has never occurred in human history but people will imagine it did in the past and this is what we all need to get back to. When has any race in the whole spectrum of human existence ever been content with their lot and not looked back to better days?

Unfortunately it's all a huge mess and there's no hope for answers and striving for them is just like searching for your feet in quicksand, you'll just get deeper and deeper until you're totally consumed. To search for the sublime of the real however may be fruitless but it's not without use. The unanswerable question is where the truth lies; searching for your feet in the quicksand is part of the answer itself. The perpetuation of hyperreality and therefore reality itself is imbued in the act of being submerged in that quicksand. The quicksand is our world and if we found our feet and managed to clamber out there would be no more reality. To clamber out of the quicksand would be to clamber out of existence, the mere quixotic search for an escape or answer is part of the answer itself, everything and nothing is real, this is the equilibrium.

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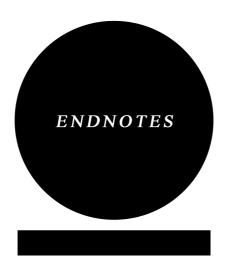HBO, "Boardwalk Empire", (2010)
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Graduation Thesis
Gerrit Rietveld Academie,
Amsterdam - 2012