The Simulation of Modern Conflicts: Disentangling Hyperreality and "Fake News" in the Ukrainian and Palestinian Contexts

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Abstract

Like the Persian Gulf War before it, the Russia-Ukraine war is happening in real-time on the ground, but also on social media. The reality seems undeniable. And yet, concerning Baudrillard's definitions of simulacra and simulation, we have never been further from the reality of war. This is evident via echoing accusations of propaganda and media bias, which indicate the slippage of a normative reality. The debates and hysteria surrounding disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and the like have abounded since the beginning of the conflict in early 2022. This has only escalated after the onset of the Israeli-Palestinian war in October 2023. Informed by Baudrillard's theory and a grounded theory methodology, this paper investigates how scholars have recently deployed Baudrillard's theories as relates to two specific contexts, the asymmetrical conflicts in Ukraine and Israel-Palestine. If Baudrillard proclaimed the Gulf War did not take place, then how does his analysis of embedded reporting connect with these two contemporary wars? It is increasingly urgent to understand how representations of conflict impact our collective sense of reality.

Introduction

The following study explores mediated representations of war from the perspective of Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation (1994). In the early 1990s, Baudrillard proclaimed the first Persian Gulf War did not happen (1995). This controversial claim emphasized that mass media had irrevocably blurred the lines between coverage of the war and the war itself. The implications of Baudrillard's concept reverberate within contemporary conflicts. For example, when Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022 it was described by some media pundits as the first "social media war" (Suciu 2022), or the "first TikTok war" (Chayka 2022). Meanwhile, either side has arguably exploited digital media to spread propaganda (Cadier et al. 2022). Concomitantly, the Israeli-Palestinian war exploded along the Gaza border in October 2023, which was precipitated by a surprise attack by Hamas on Israel that has become hypermediated via social media. This deeply divisive

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war has further fractured public opinion, as well as faith in news reporting, particularly online, as, indeed, misinformation has shaped public opinion on social media (Briceno and Swann 2024).

As such, this paper examines the term *hyperreal* in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 and the Israeli-Palestinian war of 2023. The goal of this study is to establish novel preliminary categories for the application of hyperreality to contemporary asymmetrical conflicts. Asymmetric conflict is a form of warfare in which opposing forces have significantly unequal military capabilities, leading the weaker party to adopt unconventional strategies such as guerrilla tactics, cyber warfare, or terrorism to counter the superior force (Berglund and Souleimanov 2020; Mello 2015; Olivetta 2008). While doing so, the research revisits key terminology first described in Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), like hyperreality, simulacra, simulation, the precession of simulacra, orders of simulacra, and the phases of simulation. Baudrillard also elaborated on the four orders of simulacra in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, first published in 1976, and seduction in his book of the same title, *Seduction* (1990), first published in French in 1979. This terminology is then utilized to recontextualize modern asymmetrical conflicts in terms of their hyperreal media effects, primarily with an emphasis on social media effects. The present research also relies on qualitative methods, which include grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), and case study (Creswell and Poth 2024). Initially, the research suggests the necessary task of disentangling terms that are often applied to social media: disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and propaganda. Thoroughly defining these terms is important to ascertain exactly how they compare with the concept of hyperreality. Building upon the distinction between hyperreal and the terms above, this paper argues that discussions related to hyperreality, particularly in the context of war in Ukraine and Palestine, are central because they evoke metaphysics, ontology, and discourses surrounding space. More specifically, understanding our current state of media hyperreality is important to our experiences of everyday life, as well as our sense of security in a global society, because our sense of well-being is intimately linked with being able to discern falsehoods from truth.

Further, the hyperreality of modern warfare gives rise to an experience of high strangeness that can be likened to surrealism. If the hyperreal is just another means of describing fake news or disinformation, then the everyday exposure to it leads to an experience that is not just hyperreal, but increasingly surreal. This line of inquiry leads to a particularly bleak focus, for example, when examining efforts to commemorate the history of the Holocaust and the experience of survivors. As the news of modern warfare increasingly incorporates footage from social media an experience of surrealism emerges. This reflects how social media coverage is increasingly a fourth-order simulacrum in Baudrillard's terms, that is, it no longer has any relationship to an original reality.

Literature Review

Baudrillard's Hyperreality and Simulation Theory

Baudrillard defined hyperreality in *Simulacra and Simulation* and his earlier work *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. In this section, I will define key terms associated with Baudrillard's theory, specifically hyperreality, simulation, and the orders of simulacra. Hyperreal and hyperreality were not only used as keywords for the searches that provided the data for this study, but Baudrillard's theory also provides a framework to shape the functional theory of hyperreality of asymmetrical conflict in the age of TikTok.

Baudrillard completed his doctoral thesis, *Le Système des Objets* (*The System of Objects*), in 1968 under the supervision of Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes, and Pierre Bourdieu (Baudrillard 2013, 1, 2). That same year he began teaching at a university just outside of Paris, which was the same year student protests erupted across the nation. The demonstrations escalated into clashes with authorities throughout France and eventually involved 10 million workers throughout the country, which subsequently instigated the collapse of Prime Minister Charles de Gaulle's government (Horrocks and Jevtic 2012, 20-26). However, the protests were quickly dispersed. Meanwhile, de Gaulle's government returned stronger than it had been before the protests. Horrocks and Zoran note that Baudrillard remained completely uninvolved throughout these events. However, while he may have remained on the sidelines, the protests did impact his thinking. By some accounts, he was disillusioned by the uprising and the failure to use media to support the students' cause; the protests just became a spectacle.

In *The System of Objects* (2020), Baudrillard investigated commodity capitalism. He argued that consumption had replaced production as the basis of the social order in the 20th century. His influences included semiotics, Marxism, and media philosopher Marshall McLuhan. Thus, in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard defined simulation as the postmodern state where signifiers are divorced from the signified. In other words, the signifiers freely float without referencing what was signified (16). Using an analogy built upon the use and exchange value in Marxist terminology, the sign value of objects surpassed their reality, and thus, we consume pure signs. Therefore, hyperreality is our interactions with fake simulations of reality in a consumer society (Ibid., 1, 2), whereas a simulacrum is defined as a copy without an original (Ibid., 66-70).

On the first page of *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard famously referenced Jorge Luis Borges' fable of the empire whose cartographers create a map so detailed it covers the territory. As the map decays, so, too, does the empire, and Baudrillard clarifies that,

> *Today abstraction…is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive*

> *it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must turn to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map* (Ibid., 1)

Baudrillard elaborates throughout his seminal work the various examples of how daily interactions with fake simulations in a consumer society reinforce this hyperreality. For example, the medium of advertising pervades all media and human interactions (Ibid., 87). Disneyland, as a microcosm of American culture, really epitomizes the American culture and values, "a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra" (Ibid., 12). Indeed, Baudrillard organized the four orders of simulacra (Ibid., 6), which directly correspond to historical eras. He elaborated this framework in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. The fourth order describes a copy that no longer has any relationship to its original referent. Thus, it is a pure simulacrum.[1]

Koch and Elmore (2005) discussed Baudrillard's orders of simulacra, emphasizing how simulation functions as a system of control. Even in his early works, Baudrillard argued that simulation aims to create a perfectly docile society by organizing signs in a way that makes its dominance unassailable (560). A key mechanism in this system is the consumption of symbolic goods, which serves to absorb excess production and keep individuals tied to the machinery of capitalism. Advertising plays a central role in reinforcing this cycle by making participation in consumer culture seem necessary. Moreover, resistance to this simulated reality is difficult. The self-referential nature of signs—where meaning exists only within the system—prevents alternative discourses from emerging (Ibid., 572). This order is also seductive, as it offers comforts that people may not be willing to abandon, even if it means maintaining a repressive political or social structure. This aligns with Baudrillard's idea that seduction replaces power, making control more appealing than coercive (Baudrillard 1990).[2]

To sum up, this study relies upon elements of Baudrillard's framework, particularly the terms hyperreal and hyperreality, as well as his concepts of simulacra and simulation and his framework for the orders of simulacra. The goal of the research is to understand how these concepts have been applied in the academic literature, specifically with reference to Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As such, the analysis relies on Baudrillard's theory to make use of a grounded theory and case study where data is analyzed for relevance to hyperreality. For this research, the data

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1 Like Jameson (1991), Baudrillard preferred a pessimistic, top-down view of postmodernism. For example, in his 1999 book *The Perfect Crime*, Baudrillard gives the example of the 1980s movie *Chinatown*, which is more technically perfect than any film noir movie of the 1950s era that it seeks to emulate.

2 A detailed analysis of how Zelensky's use of social media gives him a strategic advantage in 21st century wars, along the lines of Singer and Brooking's *Like War* (2018), and how this aligns with Baudrillard's concept of seduction (1990) deserves its own study.

takes the form of journal articles. These articles were cross-referenced with keywords—Ukraine, Gaza, and Palestine—to present new categories of research; thus, the methodology is an interpretive grounded theory (Creswell and Poth 2024, 99) due to the study's reliance on data collection involving an archival search of academic documents via ProQuest. It also has elements of a case study, since the case descriptions of wars in Ukraine and Palestine aid in developing case themes (Ibid., 114-116). In sum, the research aims to develop applications of Baudrillard's original theories within new contexts, as the new categories of research are taken to be equivalent to the categories of grounded theory, or case themes as mentioned above.

Methods

This research seeks to uncover how Baudrillard's framework for hyperreality and simulation has been applied to contemporary asymmetrical conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine; it does this by employing elements of grounded theory and case study, as well as Baudrillard's key concepts. First, we define the relevance of grounded theory and its procedure, as well as the methodology of case study. Then, the next section discusses how key terms in Baudrillard's framework for hyperreality and simulation were applied to a keyword search using ProQuest to gather articles for the construction of grounded theory.

Grounded Theory and Case Study

Many scholars have defined grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss; Charmaz 2014; Corbin and Strauss 2015), which emphasizes generating theory from the ground up. Glaser and Strauss originally defined grounded theory as a methodology where the researcher remains close to data to build *functional theory* up from *substantive theory* (79). This analysis relies on many kinds of data, quantitative or qualitative, e.g., archival research, survey data, or interviews, to envision "categories" and "properties" of the thing under study that will form "the core of the emerging theory" (Ibid., 40). This could include, for instance, entering a library section with an open mind to write a new sociological study. Glaser and Strauss emphasize new data sources for sociology, both field data and documentary data (Ibid., 161). In their original definition, the spirit of grounded theory is the "generation" of new theories to enliven sociological inquiry.

Creswell and Poth (2024) further clarify the meaning of categories and properties in data analysis and development of a grounded theory (101-103). Categories are conceptual labels assigned to patterns or themes that emerge from the data. They help organize information by grouping similar incidents, concepts, or behaviors. These categories serve as the building blocks of the emerging theory. In grounded theory, categories are not predefined but emerge inductively from the data. Properties, then, are

specific characteristics or attributes that define a category. Properties describe the dimensions of a category, showing variations within it.[3] Through constant comparison, researchers refine categories and their properties, shaping the final theoretical framework. Categories and properties are the building blocks of substantive theory. When substantive theory is generalized to different cases it establishes functional theory. For the purposes of the present study, the keyword searches resulted in categories of research that established substantive theory of hyperreality of asymmetrical conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine; only after substantive theory is established would it be possible to advance the grounded theory as a more generalizable functional theory.

Creswell and Poth also defined a case study as research involving the study of a case within a real-life contemporary context or setting (Ibid., 114-116). This is contained within a bounded system, which is bounded by time and place, with interrelated parts that form the whole. In a case study, the case is the unit of analysis, and it involves the study of a specific case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting. The case might be an event, a process, a program, or several people. The case could be the focus of attention (intrinsic case study), or the issue and the case used to illustrate the case. The present study then employs elements of comparative case study because it compares the widespread coverage of the war on social media in both the Ukrainian and Palestinian contexts to discern the relevance of Baudrillard's hyperreality.

The study utilized two ProQuest searches. The first was "Ukraine and Hyperreal*" with Boolean logic (fulltext(Ukraine) AND fulltext(Hyperreal*)) AND PEER (yes) over the past thirty years of Coronavirus Research Database, Ebook Central and ProQuest Central. This search was created on September 22, 2023, and this yielded 74 articles. Of these, only five were deemed relevant after further analysis, and just one was published before 2021. A second search labeled "Palestine and Hyperreal" with Boolean search logic hyperreal* AND Palestine* AND Israel AND PEER(yes) over the past thirty years of Coronavirus Research Database, Ebook Central and ProQuest Central created on October 20, 2023 yielded 170 articles, but this was later modified to cover only the past ten years to narrow the search to 34 articles; of these seven were selected. An eighth article from 1997 was also discovered serendipitously in the process of adjusting the search parameters, and it was included in the final set as it was relevant from a historical standpoint, as we will see. The source type for these searches was peer-reviewed, scholarly journals. The document type was "any." The language was English.

[3] For example, if "resistance" is a category in a study of social movements, its properties might include "intensity," "duration," and "scope."

Articles were selected through the constant comparative method: I scanned the 108 articles for relevance, paying particular attention to the placement of important key terms in the title, abstract, and keywords (e.g., hyperreality, Baudrillard, Palestine, Gaza, Israel, Russia, and Ukraine.). This required me to scan through a total of 108 articles. Those articles that were selected for further analysis needed to reference hyperreality and/or Baudrillard, Ukraine and Russia, or Israel and Palestine in the article title, abstract or keywords. This was done by considering first the title and abstract and then looking more closely at the article based on the find function in a document search. Essentially, the articles had to make some salient reference to Baudrillard's hyperreality theory in the context of Ukraine and Russia or Israeli and Gaza (and preferably the wars that emerged in 2022-2023). References to Baudrillard and hyperreality were generally not the central point of the articles, though references to his theories often constituted important supporting arguments. Because the recent wars are new, not much peer-reviewed research was published about them related to Baudrillard's theory. Thus, the themes that emerged from the final selection of 13 articles (12% of the overall search results) for a closer reading became *categories* of substantive theory to help the research pinpoint the hyperreality of asymmetrical conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

Results

In the spirit of critical and qualitative research traditions and grounded theory this study suggests new categories for a substantive theory. In this section, I group some of the preliminary findings and present them as results followed by discussion. This is the generative aspect of the grounded theory. ProQuest searches were conducted and cross-referenced using the keywords combinations of hyperreal and Ukraine, as well as hyperreal and Palestine. This search of the ProQuest database was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles over the past thirty years for the search containing Ukraine, and the past ten years for the search containing Palestine. The former produced only five relevant articles, while the latter produced eight. This number of results was fruitful when considering the keyword searches were narrowly tailored, though again, the topics of the articles were not necessarily directly related to recent wars. This makes sense since both conflicts are ongoing. An articulation of the central research question for this study would be:

RQ: How has Baudrillard's framework for hyperreality and simulation been applied to the contexts of Ukraine and Palestine in recent academic literature, in particular contemporary asymmetrical conflicts?

a. How does this aid in distinguishing hyperreality from "post-truth" in these contexts?
b. How does this aid in distinguishing hyperreality from related

concepts, including disinformation, misinformation, "fake news," propaganda, etc., in these contexts?

c. How do the distinctions drawn between hyperreality, "post-truth," and related concepts impact public trust in news reporting across media, such as social media platforms or traditional broadcast media?

Recall Glaser and Strauss (101) define the *constant comparative method* in grounded theory as a systematic approach "of joint coding and analysis" (Ibid., 102), that involves continuously comparing emerging data to refine concepts and develop theoretical categories, "an inductive method of theory development" (Ibid., 114); this also means that research questions can change as the researcher remains close to the data and constantly adjusts the categories of research (Ibid., 46, 47). This was indeed the case, as revisiting the data led to further refinements to the specific wording of the original research question, and the addition of sub-questions a. and b. above, while initial editorial feedback suggested sub-question c.

What follows is an attempt to disentangle the concept of hyperreality from terms like post-truth, disinformation, fake news, propaganda, etc., first using Ukraine as the backdrop, which involves reflecting on the role of metaphysics in distinguishing hyperreality from these other seemingly similar concepts. This is done with the urgent need to delimit a stable ground for reality and truth within the media ecosystem. Second, regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in addition to attempting to clarify terms, the study will also focus on a discussion of how space itself may be colonized by hyperreality, and the lived experience of surrealism as a byproduct of this state of hyperreality. Table 1 below provides a quick breakdown of five key terms.

Table 1: Definitions of key terms[4]

Hyperreality	Baudrillard (1994)	Human interactions with fake simulations of reality in a consumer society.
Post-truth	Yanchenko (2022)	"[T]he absence of the very conditions in the public sphere for citizens to concur on objectives and processual norms to determine the truth as verifiable statements about reality" (quoted from Waisbord, 2018)
Mis-information	Wardle and Derakhshan(2017)	False information that is shared, but **without the intention** to cause harm.
Dis-information	Wardle and Derakhshan(2017)	False information that is **knowingly shared with the intent to cause harm**.
Mal-information	Wardle and Derakhshan(2017)	Genuine (truthful) information that is **shared to cause harm**, often by taking private information and making it public.

"What are we…to do now?": Hyperreality, "Post-Truth" and Trust on Social Media

[4] Of note, Wardle and Derakhshan's definitions are based on the dimensions of falseness and intent to harm.

In this section, the Russia-Ukraine War of 2022 and its recent political context provide a case study to disambiguate Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality from more recent definitions of "post-truth" and related terminology, such as "fake news," disinformation, and propaganda. In the process of doing this, we examine the level of public trust in war coverage on social media. This includes an examination of President Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency (Yanchenko 2022), Donald Trump's presidency (Morris 2021), collective guilt regarding war atrocities (Khan 2022), and the folding of metaphysics into cognitive processes of media formation (Chornomordenko and Rubanets 2023). This research aims to bolster this underdeveloped area of academic research on hyperreality of social media in the context of asymmetrical conflicts.

First, a discussion of hyperreality in the context of Ukraine must address the presidency of Zelensky. Yanchenko (2022) conducted in-depth interviews with voters regarding Zelensky's presidential campaign in 2019. It was found that his candidacy was buoyed by Zelensky's popular portrayal of the fictitious Ukrainian president on the television show, *Servant of the People* (Kvartal 95 Studio 2015-2019) More specifically, the show follows a high school history teacher whose rant about the government goes viral on YouTube, resulting in him being elected president. Yanchenko refers to Baudrillard's hyperreality as an "intertwining of actual and 'media events'" (3), which involves media narratives influencing real political events. Yanchenko relates his concept of political hyperreality to the emerging body of work on post-truth. He distinguishes between tools of information war, like fake news, disinformation, and propaganda, which rely on a hard and fast notion of truth, and post-truth which is more akin to Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. In his analysis, the boundary line has been impossibly blurred between hyperreal and post-truth politics. Conversely, Morris (2021) points out that fake news is frequently associated with Donald Trump's presidency and is often viewed as a novel extension of the digital media landscape; this was prefigured by Baudrillard, the "prophet of fake news" (1). Morris re-contextualizes fake news and post-truth within a more recent continuum of 20th-century media forms as part of the simulation of mass media that preceded the rise of social media. Morris questions if there is an antidote to the political havoc caused by the phenomenon of fake news, and if there is even a possibility of truth when mainstream media produced fake news is countered with sketchy memes.

On the other hand, Chornomordenko and Rubanets (2023) fold metaphysics into cognitive processes of media reality formation, where metaphysics is essentially ontology, or the branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of reality and being. The authors consider the metaphysics of *being and nothing* in their exploration of *media reality*. They claim that "verbal processes" shape "media reality as cognitive processes," which suggests that

understanding these processes relates to their influence on democratic society (51). Moreover, they distinguish media reality from hyperreality and virtual reality.

Chornomordenko and Rubanets also note that "mass media is considered a construction of reality, through the function of mass media and publicity" (Ibid., 51). Many researchers in the interpretive vein of communication scholarship elaborate upon this point, which includes Berger and Luckmann (1967), Adoni and Mane (1984) as well as Krippendorff (2005). Chornomordenko and Rubanets distinguish a media reality that produces real objects from hyperreality. Thus, they point out that mass media is a reality construction and allude to the role of cognitive processes, as well as social representation, to establish "mental reality" (Ibid., 53). The authors spend some time defining a metaphysics of cognitive processes and refer to Rorty (1979) to acknowledge how verbal processes are social practices. Indeed, Chornomordenko and Rubanets claim—since the late 1980s—science has a reduced presence in the minds of society. Instead, there is a proliferation of cognitive processes in virtual reality and hypertext. In today's context, the image of reality is formed by the media, virtual networks, and communications. Media reality is becoming an integral structure that is shaped by verbal processes. In social networks, verbal processes reveal the influence of the personal thought within an average person. It can be constructed, imagined, and rigged. Chornomordenko and Rubanets link media reality to being and nothingness in the sense of Sartre (1956), for example, in the very important work of authenticating sources.

Khan (2022) invokes a humanistic element while discussing the relationship between collective guilt, personal responsibility, and connections between political thinking and political action in the context of Ukraine. She notes how concepts of media war and simulacra have relevance, as well as the relationship of these contexts to conflict in Yemen. Khan says that as of February 24, 2022, we have crossed a Rubicon in history. More specifically, "there's no way back" from a "human catastrophe" (Ibid., 558). When the dust of history has settled, the author notes that questions of accountability will be settled and evokes Baudrillard's thought regarding his concept of the precession of simulacra in relation to the Borges fable of the map. This leads her to inquire:

> "What are we, common people, representatives of the civil societies wherever we belong, supposed to do now? What should we stand for and whom can we trust? Have we remembered anything from Baudrillard's lessons of not taking the hyperreality for real – we, those who want to care about real people's lives and do not want to be affected by panic or shock?" (Ibid., 558)

Khan referred to the media's presentation of political events as "a

symbolic form of 'Zombies/Victims-Blaming Apocalypse"' (Ibid., 559), which renders individuals distanced from the conflict unless they personally know someone in Ukraine.[5] People see news through the "ideological framework of media and rumors," and can otherwise choose between various forms of "shock content" experienced as hyperreal (Ibid., 559).

> "…the multiplied texts, photos, and videos only seem to refer to the events, they seem to represent to us "what is going on" in a form of a news report. Instead, they serve as the affective machines full of content, requiring immediate and mostly passive reactions (such as "continue watching" or "switch the TV channel", add "like", "dislike", or an emoji), as easily calculated opinions" (Ibid., 559).

Khan notes the relevance of Baudrillard's four phases of simulation outlined in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994).[6] She suggests the human experience of war on social media is a lowering of the content, as well as the hype—distractions, exhaustion, confusion, etc.—of constantly having to vie for the truth.

Table 2: Four Recent Applications of Baudrillard's Hyperreality to Post-Truth Contexts

Chornomordenko, I., and Rubanets, O. 2023. "**Metaphysics of Cognitive Processes in the Formation of Media Reality.**" *Filosofija, Sociologija* 34, no. 1: 50-57.
● The authors distinguish **media reality** from **hyperreality** and **virtual reality**. ● "Unlike hyperreality, media reality, based on cognitive processes and discursive practices, leads to **real objects**" ● Mass media is a **reality/social construction**; the authors allude to the role of **cognitive processes** and social representation to establish **"mental reality"** ● **'**Being and nothing' in formation of 'media reality' is a **metaphysical threat**
Yanchenko, K. (2022). **Making sense of populist hyperreality in the post-truth age: Evidence from Volodymyr Zelensky's voters**. *Mass Communication and Society*, Article 15205436.2022.2105234.
● **Hyperreality** is the "intertwining of actual and 'media events"' (3) ● **Post-truth** is "the absence of [the very] conditions in the public sphere for citizens to concur on objectives and processual norms to determine the truth as verifiable statements about reality" (quoted from Waisbord 2018, 20) ● **Fake news**, **disinformation** and **propaganda** are *tools* that rely on a clear distinction between truth and what is not true, hence, not elements of "post-truth"

[5] This calls to mind, perhaps, Bauman's recollection of an interview given by Ulrich Beck in 1999, who referred to "'zombie categories' and 'zombie institutions' which are 'dead and still alive"' at the millennium, e.g., family, class, neighborhood, etc. (Bauman, 2000, 6). Khan would appear to be extending Beck's notion to encompass media events, and perhaps the idea that we as global citizens have an ethical mandate to consume news. Is this a mediatized manifestation of "compassion fatigue," that is, "the experience of any empathetic individual who is acutely conscious of societal needs but feels helpless to solve them" (Psychology Today, n.d.)?

[6] She specifically references the fourth phase (or stage) of simulation, that is "4) pure simulacrum with no connection to any reality" (Khan, 559, quoted from Baudrillard 1994, 6).

Khan, K.I. 2022. "**What Is to Be Done? In the Age of Ignorance**." *Studies in European Thought* 74, no. 4 (2022): 557-564.
• **Media war**, **simulacrum**, and four phases of simulation are pertinent concepts • Rubicon passed in Feb. 2022; no way back from "human catastrophe" (558) • Evokes Baudrillard's metaphor of the map and the territory • Digital and social media are just "affective machines of content" (559) • Consumption of distant images only **simulates** affect and emotional responses
Morris, J. 2021. "**Simulacra in the Age of Social Media: Baudrillard as the Prophet of Fake News.**" *The Journal of Comm. Inquiry* 45, no. 4: 319-336.
• **Fake news** and **post-truth** are novel extensions of the digital media landscape, associated with Trump, and an extension of **simulation** associated with Baudrillard and his analysis of 20th century mass media.

In sum, based on a deeper reading of these four recent articles, there is not a concise, agreed upon distinction between hyperreality and post-truth. Chornomordenko and Rubanets distinguished media reality from hyperreality, arguing that cognitive processes shape media as a social construct. Yanchenko emphasized that fake news and propaganda contrast with post-truth's lack of shared truth conditions; for Yanchenko, hyperreality and post-truth are similar concepts. Meanwhile, Khan links media war and simulacra, highlighting the irreversibility of digital media's emotional simulations, and Morris frames fake news as an evolution of Baudrillard's media simulations, particularly in the Trump era.

Indeed, Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality also contrasts with the typology for information disorder described by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) that distinguishes between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation to guide research and policy-making. While their typology is consistent with Yanchenko's claim that fake news, disinformation and propaganda are tools that rely on a clear distinction between what is true and what is false, it does not address Yanchenko's suggestion that reality has lost ontological weight under conditions of post-truth that are more akin to hyperreality. Benkler (2018) described a framework of networked manipulation that systematically exploits media ecosystems to shape public perception and influence political outcomes, but again, unlike hyperreality, fake news and propaganda rely on deliberate distortions of reality to achieve strategic objectives. Thus, Khan, and to a lesser extent Yanchenko, adopt a stance where hyperreality and post-truth are highly similar, while the other frameworks mentioned above still cling to the notion that 'reality' can be clearly delineated from what is 'fake' through mainstream and social media. Finally, note that Chrornomorenko and Rubanets, too, are keen to hold on to hard and fast notions of reality in their insistence that "media reality" produces "real objects" (ostensibly, broadcasts and content), but that the danger posed by losing a distinction between the real and hyperreality is an existential threat (Ibid. 54). Yet they distinguish a media reality that produces real objects from hyperreality; although the authors do not make this

connection, it sounds like "media reality" is a simulacrum, since it emerges from the hyperreal.

Israeli-Palestinian War and Hyperreality: Hyperreality, Space, and Surrealism

Hamas militants invaded Southern Israel on October 7, 2023, resulting in 1,200 dead Israeli civilians and the taking of 240 hostages (Frayer 2023). In turn, there has been an ongoing and overwhelming military escalation by Israel in Gaza. By March 2025, after a year and half of war, the conflict had spiraled into a global humanitarian crisis with an estimated 50,000 Palestinians killed, a third of which were minors (Reuters 2025). After a two month ceasefire and relative period of calm, Israel resumed all-out war against Hamas on March 18, 2025, killing 700 more people in the following week; by May 2025 Israel had announced plans to seize all of Gaza (AP News 2025). Yet after October 7, the stakes for a "like war" (Singer and Brooking 2018) on social media where battles are fought through viral content, attention, and narrative dominance across digital platforms also escalated overnight. This section explores scholarly applications of hyperreality in the context of Israel and Palestine, though only one of the studies directly engages with the topic of war. Significant themes to emerge include connections between hyperreality and the production of space, but also with an experience of surrealism.

Hyperreality, Space and 'Jerusalem AR Voids'

Cristiano and Distretti (2017) explored the application of AR in Jerusalem. Specifically, they analyzed user experiences with PokémonGo, which is a mobile AR game that is played on smartphones. More specifically, users search for and capture animated monsters, then engage in battle with them. The game uses GPS to place the monsters in a virtual background that is overlaid across the real world (again, similar to the Borges fable). Regarding Lefebvre (1991), the authors describe that all space is political and open to interpretation. They noted how gaming with PokémonGo reinforces the grid lines of Jerusalem's organization, "part of a hyperreal version," that serves "the theatricality of the Zionist vision over the city. Despite division, Jerusalem must remain unified and indivisible while East Jerusalem's landmarks of Israeli occupation stay invisible within Jerusalem AR voids" (Ibid., 137).

The hyperreality of the gaming app reinforces the reality of Israeli spatial politics. Again, as with Zelensky's rise from sitcom star to president, a playful hyperreality alludes to the weaponization of social media and its seductive power of reversibility (Baudrillard 1990, 47). Interestingly, Cristiano and Distretti note how voids are represented in the augmented reality map of PokémonGo in East Jerusalem. Similarly, Rosenberg Weinreb (2018) described how Israel has historically reappropriated desert spaces to mobilize the project of state building, which pose the Negev desert and

other sites as settlement projects for Zionist pioneers and capitalism. Thus, there is a theme regarding how empty spaces and voids can be utilized to reinforce political interpretations of space, with reference to hyperreality. The widely popular and often used photo filters on Instagram provides another example of hyperreality in the Israeli-Palestinian context, which normalize political reality in their own way. Al-Rawi, Al-Musalli and Fakida (2021) used a mixed methods approach of content analysis and topic modeling to compare news content on Instagram that was liked by users with topics reported by global news organizations such as CNN, al Jazeera, France 24, etc. The authors referred to citizen journalists using photo filters on Instagram as "hyperreality, affecting the practice of modern journalism," and that the use of visual effects pointed to "a new model that is different from standard realism and traditional photojournalism" (Ibid., 307).

Hyperreality and 'Creeping surrealism'

But the encroachment on space is not the only theme to emerge from the data. Cassif (2015) built on Baudrillard's idea that the Gulf War did not take place. In his book of the same title, Baudrillard (1995) argued that images of war that preceded the conflict had supplanted the real casualties in the bombardment and high death count of Iraqi civilians. Thus, the real carnage of war was excised from the media war of smart bombs with precisely targeted vantage points. Cassif noted the legacy of war crimes and atrocities on the part of Israel in Gaza, particularly violent deportation, discrimination, and marginalization. But, according to Cassif, what distinguished the repeated assaults on Gaza from September 2005 through 2014 was the manner the public experienced them through the media as a simulacrum of war.

Cassif referred to Virilio's concept of "pure war" (2008), or the endless preparation for war where simulations of battles transition continuously into the real thing. Virilionoted the mediated experience of the Gulf War was not confined to audiences at home, but extended to the generals, pilots, and controllers who executed it, rendering the battles continuous extensions of a simulation. Cassif chronicled how in the intervening years between 2002 and 2014, the public debate in Israel was overwhelmed by the precession of simulacra, with Israeli Defense Force (IDF) generals and specialists who reiterated Netanyahu's talking points via the mass media. Meanwhile, images of the war in Gaza were sanitized, while visual depictions of missile strikes in Israel graphically displayed blood, destruction, and the horror of the victims. The author quotes *The Guardian* to reveal that spectators in Southern Israel observed the 2014 war as a show:

> "The most blatant, not to say surreal, example of the precession of simulacra was the absurd theater in the southern town of Sderot and nearby locations in Israel: As the sun

> begins to sink over the Mediterranean, groups of Israelis gather each evening on hilltops close to the Gaza border to cheer, whoop and whistle as bombs rain down on people in a hellish warzone a few miles away. Old sofas, garden chairs, battered car seats and upturned crates provide seating for the spectators." (Ibid., 11)

With regard to entertainment media, Peleg and Kaplan (2021) argue that Israeli media and film are obsessed with reality, though this does not necessarily translate into more realistic fare. In particular, they focus on television as harsh political realities in the Middle East are depicted in the television series *Fauda*, which lose their political significance and relevance to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Contestants on the show do not fight based on national identity, but rather "what amounts to a globalized corporate tech race powered by the neoliberal world order" (2).

There is also an air of "creeping surrealism" associated with hyperreality in the history of holocaust commemoration. Bartov (1997, 66) critiqued the Holocaust remembrance exhibit of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. The exhibit opened in 1993. He claimed it produced an "emotions factory." Without directly referencing his work, Bartov reiterated Baudrillard's idea that any attempt to make the Holocaust a mediated spectacle supplants the real event.[7] As such, it becomes hyperreal. The event becomes a commoditized image that can be discarded at will and denies the event's context in history (9). Thus, through hyper-mediation, the holocaust museum undercuts its purpose because it extends the bureaucratic means by which the Holocaust was perpetuated. It also involves the role of propaganda, a strategy that is advanced by the reiteration of images the Nazis used to justify and promote the Holocaust; Finally, Bartov argues that the use of technology in the exhibit, which was the basis for Auschwitz, is also self-defeating.

Thus, Bartov also elaborates the role of hyperreality in attempting to represent the history of the Holocaust, and it, too, produces an experience of high strangeness or an "emotions factory" (Ibid., 10) It is arguably surreal, like "the absurd theater in the southern town of Sderot and nearby locations in Israel" observed by the *Guardian* in 2014.[8]

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[7] Of the 1978 NBC miniseries Holocaust, Baudrillard writes, "What no one wants to understand is that Holocaust is primarily (and exclusively) an event, or, rather, a televised object (fundamental rule of McLuhan's, which must not be forgotten), that is to say, that one attempts to rekindle a cold historical event, tragic but cold, the first major event of cold systems, of cooling systems, of systems of deterrence and extermination that will then be deployed in other forms (including the cold war, etc.)…" (Baudrillard 1994, 34).

[8] Surrealism, or "the principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or incongruous imagery or effects in art, literature, film, or theater by means of unnatural or irrational juxtapositions and combinations" (Merriam-Webster, 2025).

Hyperreality also arguably operates at the level of diplomacy; a different kind of theater. Kolesnyk and Holtseva (2022) focus on speech acts in the United Nations (UN) and in diplomatic discourse, noting the relationship between hyperreality, lies, and propaganda. They point out that lies and deception work in conjunction to "create simulacra shaping a 'hyperreality that is perpendicular to the world we truly live in"' (Ibid., 159). Kolesnyk and Holtseva utilize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example of the creation of simulacra in diplomatic discourse, which they label as a "synecdoche case" (Ibid., 163). More specifically, Israeli people are collectively characterized as victims and targets, while Palestinians unequivocally described as aggressors. This type of statement includes aspects of declaration, representing a mild deception to shift blame for a terrorist attack from Israelis to Palestinians, which furthers a myth based on the image of harm to the Jewish nation by Palestinian aggressors. As such, Israelis can only be conceived as victims (Ibid., 166). The net result is to portray Palestinians not just as a terrorist threat for Israelis, but as "dangerous people for everyone because you never know what is in their mind (fanatic Palestinians)" (Ibid., 167).

In sum, in Kolesnyk's and Holtseva's analysis of diplomatic discourse models, lies create or generate alternative variants of reality, and fake realities are created in political discourses (Ibid., 171). Further study of such processes in diplomatic and political rhetoric could combine speech acts with Baudrillard's framework. The study also points out just how deeply hyperreality is embedded in our contemporary reality, not just in the mediated and social media images coming through a smartphone or a TV screen, but in the very diplomatic rhetoric of our leaders.

This section explored how hyperreality shapes perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through digital media, augmented reality, and diplomatic discourse. Research on AR in Jerusalem, particularly in PokémonGo, shows how the technology reinforces Israeli spatial politics by erasing Palestinian landmarks and creating "Jerusalem AR voids." Similarly, Israeli media, such as the television series *Fauda* and Instagram photo filters, contribute to a hyperreal narrative that distorts political realities. The study also analyzes how Israel's 2014 offensive in Gaza was framed as a simulacrum, minimizing Palestinian suffering while sensationalizing Israeli casualties. Additionally, a 1990s critique examined the hyperreal representation of the Holocaust in museums, particularly the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which commodifies history into an emotional spectacle. Finally, the section examined diplomatic discourse at the United Nations, where political myths reinforce global narratives that portray Israelis as perpetual victims and Palestinians as aggressors. All of the above form the backdrop for the current war.

Discussion

The purpose of the above study was to investigate the relationship between Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality to the contemporary contexts for the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War and the 2023 Israel-Palestine War, which could provide insight into how hyperreality impacts modern asymmetrical conflicts and warfare. Returning to the research question, we see that the results suggest how hyperreality can be used to understand the use of social media in these regions in asymmetrical conflicts. This happens in four ways, corresponding to four categories of a substantive theory built up from the data of the constant comparative analysis.

Truth v. Post-Truth

A number of the studies grapple with the problem of whether or not we live in a post-truth society, and what that implies for democratic participation. For example, in the case of Ukrainian politics, Zelensky's presidency is arguably a case of political hyperreality according to Yanchenko, who drew a connection between what he refers to as political hyperreality, post-truth news, and politics. Of note, he distinguished these concepts from disinformation, fake news, and propaganda. On the other hand, Chornomordenko and Rubanets distinguish hyperreality from media reality (and virtual reality), while warning the latter is increasingly occupying cognitive space in the minds of individual media consumers. Chornomordenko and Rubanets incorporate metaphysics into their analysis by interpreting fake news as a kind of existential threat to the personal security of global citizens and a sense of well-being. We have also seen how hyperreality can be deployed as a kind of weapon, in the element of playful weaponized social media (Singer and Brooking).Meanwhile, Kolesnyk and Holtseva examined how hyperreality influences not only media routines, but also diplomatic processes. The proof is offered in the form of the dislodged realities of diplomatic rhetoric, where the authors specifically use Israel and Palestine as an example of how diplomatic discourse can shape a "hyperreality that is perpendicular to the world we truly live in" (Ibid., 159). Thus, there is a schism in this research over whether there is even any utility in attempting to clearly demarcate truth, and allusions to the metaphysical peril that results.

Damaged Trust in Social Media

Social media and hyperreality in Ukraine and Palestine contribute to the erosion of public trust by distorting reality through manipulated narratives, digital simulacra, and diplomatic rhetoric disconnected from tangible events. Yanchenko's analysis of Zelensky's presidency as political hyperreality highlights how post-truth news differs from propaganda, yet remains entangled with it, blurring distinctions between reality and simulation. Chornomordenko and Rubanets further argue that hyperreality

differs from media and virtual reality, warning that it increasingly occupies cognitive space, shaping public perceptions in ways that obscure truth. Kolesnyk and Holtseva illustrate how diplomatic discourse in Israel-Palestine constructs a hyperreality that is "perpendicular to the world we truly live in" (159). reinforcing media-manufactured realities. Awad and Bleibleh (2023) identify the "Disneyfication of space" in Palestine, reflecting neoliberal aesthetics rather than lived experiences. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how hyperreality fosters existential uncertainty, weakening public trust in both social and broadcast media. Recall Khan's evocation of Baudrillard and Borges' fable: "What are we, common people, representatives of the civil societies wherever we belong, supposed to do now? What should we stand for and whom can we trust?" (558).

Indeed, if hyperreality is defined as our interactions with fake simulations of reality in a consumer society, post-truth is, according to Yanchenko, "the absence of the very conditions in the public sphere for citizens to concur on objectives and processual norms to determine the truth as verifiable statements about reality" (Waisbord 2018, 20). Those two things sound quite different, however, part of this theme of damaged trust in social media uncovered here is that news packages conflict and violence for consumption as a media product, undercutting its meaning (much as Baudrillard argued it did during the 1968 Paris student uprisings). So although "post-truth" perhaps has a slightly different connotation than hyperreality if we rely on Yanchenko's definition, "post-truth" underscores the *fragmentation* of audiences that results from commoditizing news on social media, resulting in a state of hyperreality; that outcome might be expected, and thus these terms also relate to *convergence* (Jenkins 2006). Recall, too, that Chrornomorenko and Rubanets paint "media reality" as a kind of *simulacrum*.

Hyperreality of Space

This goes not just for physical space, but cognitive spaces and media spaces. Regarding physical space and its virtual representations, the creation of an unreality—Israel as represented on Israeli TV or PokémonGo in Jerusalem, even political reality as represented by diplomatic discourse or cognition as represented by media—are arguably examples of fourth-order simulacra, i.e., mediated images having little or nothing to do with reality. Rather, they have more to do with a neoliberal world system. For example, Awad and Bleibleh examine the evolution of the real estate market in Palestine over the past thirty years, particularly in the planned community of Rawabi City. They demonstrate how it reflects more the political order of neoliberalism than the lived experiences of residents in occupied Palestine in a "disneyfication of space" (Ibid., 5).[9] Chornomordenko and Rubanets

[9] Such a discussion could be elaborated nicely with Baudrillard's original interpretation of Disneyland (1995, 9).

elaborated on how truth in cognitive processes shapes education, journalism, and democracy, while warning that media reality has increasingly occupied cognitive space to the detriment of science in recent years (Ibid., 52). Thus, rather than just understanding associations of hyperreality with post-truth, or disentangling it from terms like disinformation, fake news and propaganda, or distinguishing it from media reality, there is also an urgent need to question if hyperreality leads to a daily experience that is divorced from reality as it encroaches on space in various senses, a discussion that could incorporate Lefebvre's critique of the capitalist production of space (1991). But physical and metaphorical mental and media spaces being colonized by hyperreality and "post-truth" constructs reality more and more as if it were a fourth-order simulacrum, what I refer to as surrealism.

Surrealism

As Chornomordenko and Rubanets warned, the assault on "media reality" and "mental reality" by hyperreality is a threat on a metaphysical level of understanding and engaging in news, politics and society (Ibid. 53). The surreal experience of daily life as being akin to the lived experience of a fourth-order simulacrum is introduced, emphasizing how hyperreality can lead to a daily experience that is disconnected from reality. This is different from distinguishing hyperreality from post-truth, because this category focuses on the effect of sustained exposure to simulated images and narratives that detach people from their real-world experiences, leading to a kind of surrealism where individuals no longer recognize what is real. This is evinced by tactics of social media warfare like a former TV star becoming president and using social media platforms to great advantage to make emotional appeals, and strategic framing to sustain supporters. It can take the form of a "creeping surrealism" of a museum exhibit, a "pure war," or an "absurd theater" of war in Southern Israel where spectators regularly relax by watching real bombardment of Palestinians as entertainment. Naturally, such surrealism would also erode public trust in truth on social media platforms and traditional media. In fact, in *Fatal Strategies* (2008, originally published 1983) Baudrillard aligned his writing with the absurdist philosophy of Alfred Jarry, called pataphysics, or, "the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments" (quoted in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005, section 3, paragraph 8). By proclaiming that the object predominated over the subject (for example, the predominance of sign value over exchange value, or that the TV had become the center of the home), Baudrillard evoked not so much surrealism, but Jarry's *pataphysics*, a proposed field of scientific inquiry that transcended metaphysics in the form of absurd conjectures. Thus, after *Fatal Strategies*, "[l]ike Jarry's pataphysics, Baudrillard's universe is ruled by surprise, reversal, hallucination, blasphemy, obscenity, and a desire to shock and outrage" (Ibid. section 3, paragraph 10).

In the sense that it exemplifies Baudrillard's polemic, the hyperreality of asymmetrical conflicts as depicted through social media evokes a comparison with the fantastic or incongruous imagery of surrealist art.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide multiple frameworks for applying Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality to post-truth terminology and contexts, but there is no general consensus as to how to apply it and the very definitions of related terms often vary. The conclusions are thus multifaceted and complex. The grounded theory analysis of thirteen journal articles led to four categories of how Baudrillard's hyperreality has been applied in recent research to asymmetrical conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine. These included: 1. the debate surrounding whether or not we live in a post-truth condition equivalent to hyperreality (with dangerous metaphysical implications), 2. damaged trust in media to faithfully represent reality, *in particular* social media 3. the colonization of space (both physical and mental/mediated) by hyperreality, and 4. the surreal experience of daily life as a result of continuous exposure to hyperreality through media.

Limitations: The Role of Traditional Media, Social Media, Convergence and Hybridity

One key limitation of the present study is a lack of differentiation of the levels of media under discussion: Are we talking about hyperreality in the context of social media, or traditional broadcast media (e.g., news media), or both (convergence, hybridity)? For example, Chornomordenko and Rubanets appear to intertwine the traditional mass media and news media with social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram in their description of "media reality"; they do not specifically address one or the other. On the other hand, Khan calls out social media platforms as "affective machines full of content," though her analysis evoking a sense of metaphysical dread would appear to apply to media generally. Notably, Hartwell (2015) looked at post-Soviet economies such as Ukraine as examples of fourth order simulacra.

Other studies focus more directly on hyperreality in social media, such as Yanchenko who focused on Zelensky's social media use as a case study and specifically addressed the equivalence of hyperreality and post-truth on social media. Morris explored Baudrillard's relevance to "fake news" on social media. Cristiano and Distretti examined PokemonGo, and Al-Rawi, Al-Musalli, and Fakida examined filters on Instragram. On the other hand, writing just prior to the explosion of social media into every aspect of social and political life (and years before the debut of TikTok), Cassiff looked at Israel's military operations in Gaza between 2002 and 2014, mainly focusing on traditional mass media and newspapers, while Bartov looked at a museum exhibit and film representations of the Holocaust as a kind of simulation. Kolesnyk and Holtseva analyzed speech

acts at the U.N.; Awad and Bleibleh studied real estate in Rawabi city; Peleg and Kaplan examined reality TV; and Rosenberg Weinreb looked at depictions of desert spaces in mid-20th century campaigns to encourage Zionist settlement.

The variation in media types that are the subject of these studies is intriguing. It illustrates the broad influence of Baudrillard's ideas on many aspects of communication and media studies, and it also demonstrates that people are taking his concept of hyperreality seriously across a spectrum of subfields in the past decade. However, note that three of the five studies on Ukraine directly address social media's relationship to hyperreality, while only two of the eight studies selected did so for Palestine. Future research should move beyond general discussions of hyperreality's impact on media in asymmetrical conflicts like Ukraine and Palestine. Instead, it should examine the interplay between hyperreality, mass media, and the convergence of social and traditional media. In particular, the effects of hyperreality on both social media and mass media audiences during the 2023 Israel-Palestine war remain an understudied area.

Future Research

Since conducting the initial exploratory study in late 2023, new research on hyperreality, "fake news," and "post-truth" has emerged in 2024 and 2025. A recent search for related key terms revealed an uptick in scholarly discussions of hyperreality and the situationist concept of "spectacle" (Debord 1967). For example, some recent studies, such as those of Moser (2024) and Tovërlani and Muhaxheri (2024) warn of the proliferation of disinformation that threatens to subsume (or, as Tovërlani and Muhaxheri put it, "flip," 60) reality into hyperreality. Moser offered countermeasures such as "inoculative prebunking" (42), citing the BBC's dark web broadcast against "the nefarious impact of dezinformatsiya" (Ibid., 160). Additionally, he addresses the broader "infodemic that pervades all facets of contemporary life" (Ibid., 85) and the "pseudoscientific content flooding social networks" (Ibid., 77), including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X. Tovërlani and Muhaxheri explore how youth in Kosovo increasingly rely on new media for communication while facing issues of privacy violations and misinformation. They advocate for media education and examine the mental health effects of digital media. Tomassi, Falegmani, and Romano (2024) evoke Wardle and Derakhshan to offer concrete definitions to battle fake news, Trumpism, and deep fakes. These studies have concrete recommendations which would be worthwhile to explore in future research, such as "inoculative prebunking" and media education, and such studies should pay attention to the categories developed in a substantive theory here. For example, consider the first category: the tension between truth and post-truth. Offering recommendations or solutions in the form of clear definitions or distinctions between the real and the fake on

social media (e.g., prebunking, the information disorder typology) ignores the central dilemma that we have already somehow lost the boundary between reality and hyperreality. Speaking from the perspective of public health, Ayres and Taylor (2025) argue that addiction itself has become "a hyperreality," driven by media representations, acknowledging that, "most of us are addicted to something, whether that be sugar, caffeine, shopping or exercise" (84). We might add media to that list.

In conclusion, one of the principles of hyperreality is that it obliterates the notion of any underlying truth, with the preponderance of fake images and the precession of simulacra. While it is a possibility that in the 21st century the boundary line between reality and hyperreality is utterly lost, it is reasonable to acknowledge that there are practical dangers in being bombarded on a daily basis with forms of disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation (to reference Wardle and Derakhsahn's typology again), because these things degrade civil society. Certainly, this was Donald Trump's strategy for handling the press during his first presidency, and there is even a name for it: the "Trump effect" (e.g., Warren-Gordon and Rhineberger 2021; Canales Lizaola and Lizarraga Salas 2019; Brady, Kelly and Stein 2017). Indeed, it continues to be his political strategy to create "false equivalencies, or 'both-sides-ism'" (Foreman et al. 2022, 78), analogous to the supposed 'controversy' over whether humans impact climate change, which is not a debate, it is established science (Cornwall, 2019). Similarly, it continues to be Trump's strategy to weaponize public institutions within a democratic society (e.g., legal system, police, elections, etc.), and that has a lowering effect on their efficacy for citizens. By lowering, I mean the paralyzing effect that results; or, in the sense of the Frankfurt school, Trump's platform is simply "noise" (Illing 2019).

Therefore, the function of propaganda is at least clear: not just to mislead with lies or half-truths, but to create an utter sensorium of falsities. This toxic media ecology eventually overwhelms the individual to the extent that cognitive processes cease, and he or she simply stops trying to find the truth. It is this danger that hyperreality logically leads to a global society of eternally warring propaganda that we must take seriously and critically engage by examining and untangling the difference between hyperreality and propaganda itself.[10] If we do not, then as Bartov noted, that "past will have become by then everyone's foreign country" (11) and we will be relegated to a state of perpetual hyperreality. Khan's claim that the manifold multimedia representations of war "serve as the affective machines full of content" (559)—with their emotional appeals requiring immediate response—

[10] Krippendorff (2004) provides a useful starting point with his content analysis, for example, mentioning specific categories of propaganda like "name-calling," "glittering generalities, "bandwagon devices," etc., and noting that these could be "identified easily in many religious and political speeches, even in academic lectures" (9).

resonates with this idea of lowering, as well as social media rendering its own kind of "emotions factory," in Bartov's terms.

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