FOR JEAN BAUDRILLARD, a French sociologist and philosopher, the postmodern condition is “the age of simulation,” or, as he terms it, the “third order of simulation.” The notion of simulation is intricately linked in his argument to the historical understanding of the idea of representation. Thus, to comprehend Baudrillard’s perception of postmodernity, which he postulates in *Simulations*, one should first grapple with his concept of “three orders of signification”: signs—reality (signs reflect reality); signs—signs—reality (signs refer to signs, which reflect reality); and signs—signs (signs refer only to themselves).

The first order of signification is the traditional belief that signs exchange for meaning. In other words, in this order there is, supposedly, a direct, linear relationship between the signifier and the signified (sign—reality). This relationship of exchange rests upon the assumption that something, for example, a belief in God, can function as a guarantor of this exchange. Such a perception of signification presupposes the conviction that signs, understood as fixed and unmovable entities, exist in a stable hierarchy. Hence, in this model, meaning itself is positioned as static and fixed. Thus, the first order of signification posits the notion of “reality” as constructed through the workings of representation in which signs simply directly reflect reality through imitation.

The second order of signification might be best understood through Walter Benjamin’s reflections on the contemporary status of the work of art and his notion of “the age of mechanical reproduction.” In Benjamin’s argument, signification is a direct result of the process of reproduction of the “original” and this process cuts the work of art off from its “origin” (we might think, for example, of Andy Warhol’s famous rendition of Marilyn Monroe). Thus, the “reproduced” work of art disrupts the traditional concept of how we might think of aesthetics, and it undermines such notions as singularity, originality, and uniqueness.

It is the third order of signification, however, that is crucial for Baudrillard’s discussion of postmodernism. If the first two orders claim to assert
a connection between representation and reality, in the third order such a
connection does not exist, or is no longer valid. In contemporary societies, as
he claims, the boundaries of “reality” have been exploded and expanded in
such a way that signs no longer refer to anything else but themselves. In
other words, signifiers no longer reference signifieds, but become self-refer-
tential, creating, in turn, a world of “hyperreality.” Thus, what has tradition-
ally been conceived of as reality is now only a series of simulations.

One of Baudrillard’s well-known analyses is his critical look at Disney-
land, which is, as he writes, “a perfect model of all the entangled orders of
simulation,” and a site that reveals “the morphology of individuals and the
crowd” when it comes to analyzing contemporary American sociocultural
dynamic: “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe
that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America sur-
rounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simu-
lation.” Disneyland is, thus, the emblem of American imaginary, “panegyric
to American values,” a paragon of contemporary social microcosm. Simulta-
neously, Disneyland purports the idea that the world “outside” its walls is the
real “reality,” the space of adults and seriousness. Such a staging, such an
“ideological blanket,” as he calls it, “serves to cover over a third-order simu-
lation: Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is ‘real’ country.”

As you read this selection, consider these three questions: How might
you explicate Baudrillard’s claim that we live in the world of “hyperreality”? Think of examples (taken from contemporary culture) that could effectively illustrate the notion of the hyperreal. Explore Baudrillard’s notion that Dis-
neyland is the “real” America. Examine Baudrillard’s statement that post-
modernity is “the age of simulation.”

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth
which conceals that there is none.
The simulacrum is true.
Ecclesiastes

If we were able to take as the finest allegory of simulation the Borges tale
where the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it
ends up exactly covering the territory (but where the decline of the Empire

sees this map become frayed and finally ruined, a few shreds still discernible in the deserts—the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction, bearing witness to an Imperial pride and rotting like a carcass, returning to the substance of the soil, rather as an aging double ends up being confused with the real thing)—then this fable has come full circle for us, and now has nothing but the discrete charm of second-order simulacra.

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—**PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA**—it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.

In fact, even inverted, the fable is useless. Perhaps only the allegory of the Empire remains. For it is with the same Imperialism that present-day simulators try to make the real, all the real, coincide with their simulation models. But it is no longer a question of either maps or territory. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference between them that was the abstraction’s charm. For it is the difference which forms the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real. This representational imaginary, which both culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographer’s mad project of an ideal coextensivity between the map and the territory, disappears with simulation—whose operation is nuclear and genetic, and no longer specular and discursive. With it goes all of metaphysics. No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: rather, genetic miniaturisation is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all. It is a hyperreal, the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere.

In this passage to a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor of truth, the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referen-
tials—worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs, a more ductile material than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalence, all binary oppositions and all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced—this is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection which no longer leaves any chance even in the event of death. A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference.

HYPERREAL AND IMAGINARY

Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation. To begin with it is a play of illusions and phantasms: Pirates, the Frontier, Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to be what makes the operation successful. But what draws the crowds is undoubtedly much more the social microcosm, the miniaturised and religious revelling in real America, in its delights and drawbacks. You park outside, queue up inside, and are totally abandoned at the exit. In this imaginary world the only phantasmagoria is in the inherent warmth and affection of the crowd, and in that sufficiently excessive number of gadgets used there to specifically maintain the multitudinous affect. The contrast with the absolute solitude of the parking lot—a veritable concentration camp—is total. Or rather: inside, a whole range of gadgets magnetise the crowd into direct flows—outside, solitude is directed onto a single gadget: the automobile. By an extraordinary coincidence (one that undoubtedly belongs to the peculiar enchantment of this universe), this deep-frozen infantile world happens to have been conceived and realised by a man who is himself now cryogenised: Walt Disney, who awaits his resurrection at minus 180 degrees centigrade.

The objective profile of America, then, may be traced throughout Disneyland, even down to the morphology of individuals and the crowd. All its values are exalted here, in miniature and comic strip form. Embalmed and pacified. Whence the possibility of an ideological analysis of Disneyland (L. Marin does it well in Utopies, jeux d’espaces): digest of the American way of life, panegyric to American values, idealised transposition of a contradic-
tory reality. To be sure. But this conceals something else, and that “ideological” blanket exactly serves to cover over a third-order simulation: Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.

The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real. Whence the debility, the infantile degeneration of this imaginary. It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the “real” world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly amongst those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness.

Moreover, Disneyland is not the only one. Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain, Marine World: Los Angeles is encircled by these “imaginary stations” which feed reality, reality-energy, to a town whose mystery is precisely that it is nothing more than a network of endless, unreal circulation—a town of fabulous proportions, but without space or dimensions. As much as electrical and nuclear power stations, as much as film studios, this town, which is nothing more than an immense script and a perpetual motion picture, needs this old imaginary made up of childhood signals and faked phantasms for its sympathetic nervous system.

**Strategy of the Real**

Of the same order as the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real, is the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible. It is the whole political problem of the parody, of hypersimulation or offensive simulation, which is posed here.

For example: it would be interesting to see whether the repressive apparatus would not react more violently to a simulated hold-up than to a real one? For the latter only upsets the order of things, the right of property, whereas the other interferes with the very principle of reality. Transgression
and violence are less serious, for they only contest the distribution of the real. Simulation is infinitely more dangerous, however, since it always suggests, over and above its object, that law and order themselves might really be nothing more than a simulation.

But the difficulty is in proportion to the peril. How to feign a violation and put it to the test? Go and simulate a theft in a large department store: how do you convince the security guards that it is a simulated theft? There is no “objective” difference: the same gestures and the same signs exist as for a real theft; in fact the signs incline neither to one side nor the other. As far as the established order is concerned, they are always of the order of the real.

Go and organise a fake hold-up. Be sure to check that your weapons are harmless, and take the most trustworthy hostage, so that no life is in danger (otherwise you risk committing an offence). Demand ransom, and arrange it so that the operation creates the greatest commotion possible—in brief, stay close to the “truth”, so as to test the reaction of the apparatus to a perfect simulation. But you won’t succeed: the web of artificial signs will be inextricably mixed up with real elements (a police officer will really shoot on sight; a bank customer will faint and die of a heart attack; they will really turn the phoney ransom over to you)—in brief, you will unwittingly find yourself immediately in the real, one of whose functions is precisely to devour every attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to some reality—that’s exactly how the established order is, well before institutions and justice come into play.

In this impossibility of isolating the process of simulation must be seen the whole thrust of an order that can only see and understand in terms of some reality, because it can function nowhere else. The simulation of an offence, if it is patent, will either be punished more lightly (because it has no “consequences”) or be punished as an offence to public office (for example, if one triggered off a police operation “for nothing”)—but never as simulation, since it is precisely as such that no equivalence with the real is possible, and hence no repression either. The challenge of simulation is irreceivable by power. How can you punish the simulation of virtue? Yet as such it is as serious as the simulation of crime. Parody makes obedience and transgression equivalent, and that is the most serious crime, since it cancels out the difference upon which the law is based. The established order can do nothing against it, for the law is a second-order simulacrum whereas simulation is third-order, beyond true and false, beyond equivalences, beyond the rational...
distinctions upon which function all power and the entire social. Hence, failing the real, it is here that we must aim at order.

This is why order always opts for the real. In a state of uncertainty, it always prefers this assumption (thus in the army they would rather take the simulator as a true madman). But this becomes more and more difficult, for it is practically impossible to isolate the process of simulation, through the force of inertia of the real which surrounds us, the inverse is also true (and this very reversibility forms part of the apparatus of simulation and of power’s impotency): namely, it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real.

Thus all hold-ups, hijacks and the like are now as it were simulation hold-ups, in the sense that they are inscribed in advance in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their mode of presentation and possible consequences. In brief, where they function as a set of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer to their “real” goal at all. But this does not make them inoffensive. On the contrary, it is as hyperreal events, no longer having any particular contents or aims, but indefinitely refracted by each other (for that matter like so-called historical events: strikes, demonstrations, crises, etc.), that they are precisely unverifiable by an order which can only exert itself on the real and the rational, on ends and means: a referential order which can only dominate referentials, a determinate power which can only dominate a determined world, but which can do nothing about that indefinite recurrence of simulation, about that weightless nebula no longer obeying the law of gravitation of the real—power itself eventually breaking apart in this space and becoming a simulation of power (disconnected from its aims and objectives, and dedicated to power effects and mass simulation).

The only weapon of power, its only strategy against this defection, is to reinject realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy and the finalities of production. For that purpose it prefers the discourse of crisis, but also—why not?—the discourse of desire. “Take your desires for reality!” can be understood as the ultimate slogan of power, for in a nonreferential world even the confusion of the reality principle with the desire principle is less dangerous than contagious hyperreality. One remains among principles, and there power is always right.

Hyperreality and simulation are deterrents of every principle and of every objective; they turn against power this deterrence which is so well
utilised for a long time itself. For, finally, it was capital which was the first to
feed throughout its history on the destruction of every referential, of every
human goal, which shattered every ideal distinction between true and false,
good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and
exchange, the iron law of its power. It was the first to practice deterrence,
abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialisation, etc.; and if it was capital
which fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it
in the extermination of every use value, of every real equivalence, of produc-
tion and wealth, in the very sensation we have of the unreality of the stakes
and the omnipotence of manipulation. Now, it is this very logic which is
today hardened even more against it. And when it wants to fight this cata-
strophic spiral by secreting one last glimmer of reality, on which to found one
last glimmer of power, it only multiplies the signs and accelerates the play of
simulation.

As long as it was historically threatened by the real, power risked deter-
rence and simulation, disintegrating every contradiction by means of the pro-
duction of equivalent signs. When it is threatened today by simulation (the
threat of vanishing in the play of signs), power risks the real, risks crisis, it
gambles on remanufacturing artificial, social, economic, political stakes.
This is a question of life or death for it. But it is too late.

Whence the characteristic hysteria of our time: the hysteria of produc-
tion and reproduction of the real. The other production, that of goods and
commodities, that of la belle époque of political economy, no longer makes
any sense of its own, and has not for some time. What society seeks through
production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes
it. That is why contemporary “material” production is itself hyperreal. It
retains all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is
nothing more than its scaled-down refraction (thus the hyperrealists fasten in
a striking resemblance a real from which has fled all meaning and charm, all
the profundity and energy of representation). Thus the hyperrealism of simu-
lation is expressed everywhere by the real’s striking resemblance to itself.

Power, too, for some time now produces nothing but signs of its resem-
bance. And at the same time, another figure of power comes into play: that
of a collective demand for signs of power—a holy union which forms
around the disappearance of power. Everybody belongs to it more or less in
fear of the collapse of the political. And in the end the game of power comes
down to nothing more than the critical obsession with power—an obsession
with its death, an obsession with its survival, the greater the more it disap-
pears. When it has totally disappeared, logically we will be under the total spell of power—a haunting memory already foreshadowed everywhere, manifesting at one and the same time the compulsion to get rid of it (nobody wants it any more, everybody unloads it on others) and the apprehensive pinning over its loss. Melancholy for societies without power: this has already given rise to facism, that overdose of a powerful referential in a society which cannot terminate its mourning.

But we are still in the same boat: none of our societies knows how to manage its mourning for the real, for power, for the social itself, which is implicated in this same breakdown. And it is by an artificial revitalisation of all this that we try to escape it. Undoubtedly this will even end up in socialism. By an unforeseen twist of events and an irony which no longer belongs to history, it is through the death of the social that socialism will emerge—as it is through the death of God that religions emerge. A twisted coming, a perverse event, an unintelligible reversion to the logic of reason. As is the fact that power is no longer present except to conceal that there is none. A simulation which can go on indefinitely, since—unlike “true” power which is, or was, a structure, a strategy, a relation of force, a stake—this is nothing but the object of a social demand, and hence subject to the law of supply and demand, rather than to violence and death. Completely expunged from the political dimension, it is dependent, like any other commodity, on production and mass consumption. Its spark has disappeared—only the fiction of a political universe is saved.

Likewise with work. The spark of production, the violence of its stake no longer exists. Everybody still produces, and more and more, but work has subtly become something else: a need (as Marx ideally envisaged it, but not at all in the same sense), the object of a social “demand,” like leisure, to which it is equivalent in the general run of life’s options. A demand exactly proportional to the loss of stake in the work process. The same change in fortune as for power: the scenario of work is there to conceal the fact that the work-real, the production-real, has disappeared. And for that matter so has the strike-real too, which is no longer a stoppage of work, but its alternative pole in the ritual scansion of the social calendar. It is as if everyone has “occupied” their work place or work post, after declaring the strike, and resumed production, as is the custom in a “self-managed” job, in exactly the same terms as before, by declaring themselves (and virtually being) in a state of permanent strike.
This isn’t a science-fiction dream: everywhere it is a question of a doubling of the work process. And of a double or locum for the strike process—strikes which are incorporated like obsolescence in objects, like crisis in production. Then there is no longer any strikes or work, but both simultaneously, that is to say something else entirely: a wizardry of work, a trompe l’oeil, a scenodrama (not to say melodrama) of production, collective dramaturgy upon the empty stage of the social.

It is no longer a question of the ideology of work—of the traditional ethic that obscures the “real” labour process and the “objective” process of exploitation—but of the scenario of work. Likewise, it is no longer a question of the ideology of power, but of the scenario of power. Ideology only corresponds to a betrayal of reality by signs; simulation corresponds to a short-circuit of reality and to its reduplication by 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 the simulacrum.

This is ultimately why power is so in accord with ideological discourses and discourses on ideology, for these are all discourses of truth—always good, even and especially if they are revolutionary, to counter the mortal blows of simulation.