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Digital Virulence and Post-Truth in Light of Baudrillard's Science-Fiction Theory of Pataphysics

<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/10/07/digital-virulence-and-post-truth-in-light-of-baudrillards-science-fiction-theory-of-pataphysics/>

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Jean Baudrillard's contribution to the discussion about the content and meaning of the postmodern condition remains important (Best and Kellner 1991, 111–145). His reflexive insights on the economic, ideological, cultural and technological phenomenon of neo-capitalism and so-called globalisation (Ritzer 2007), or whatever now is classified under the label of platform capitalism (Srnicsek 2017), must be regarded as an integral component of a broader philosophical and theoretical discourse on the specific form and operation of post-war capitalism on a global scale (Ritzer 1997, 76–118). Specifically, from the 1970s onwards, more and more, a bunch of new and dynamic disciplines, approaches and methodologies, to name amongst others poststructuralism, postmodern theory, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, cyborg feminism and ecology, have raised the question of the catalytic role of technology in contemporary Western societies, drawing our attention to the advent of a posthuman condition (Best and Kellner 2001).

In an innovative way, Baudrillard placed capitalist technology within the frame of digital virulence. Digitality is perceived as the 'turbine' of late capitalism, especially when it comes to the fields of information technology (IT), communication, mass media and social networks (Baudrillard 2012). It is not by chance that he speaks about a 'turbo-capitalism' (Makris 2018). The proliferation of digital technology has totally changed the epistemological, axiological, ideological, political and cultural characteristics of humanity. As in the similar cases of Haraway's cyborg feminism (Haraway 2004) and Braidotti's approach about a posthuman era (2013), Baudrillard brings to light the critical relation between man and machine or human and inhuman, stressing the process towards an anthropological shift in contemporary social ontology and phenomenology (Baudrillard 2000, 3–30).

IT, genetic cloning and Artificial Intelligence (AI) compose a basic analytical pillar in Baudrillard's social and political theory about late capitalism (Baudrillard 2008). If, as Haraway claims, the contemporary human being has been transformed into a cybernetic organism; or a hybrid of machine and organism; or a science-fiction creature (Haraway 2004, 7) – then, cybernetics, digital screens and genetic engineering play a crucial part in the transition of modern humanity to a posthuman age. By the same token, Braidotti asserts that this development in late modernity does not concern a post-naturalistic assumption of the modern world. Instead, it modifies the whole relationship between Nature and culture and chiefly the way that humanity places itself within a new existential condition (Braidotti 2013, 1–12). In all these pioneering approaches, information, communication and genetics affect largely the epistemological structure of social and political life in late capitalism, especially how we perceive the axiological and ethical justification of truth (Audi 2011). It is now clear that digital technology alters rapidly the epistemological limits of modern axiology and truth, bringing to focus the burning question of post-truth (Stenmark et al. 2018). The proliferation of information and communication via global media, platforms and networks undermine the cohesive view of modernity, revealing the multiple regimes of truth in a postmodern world that reign in relativism and post-truth. Through digital pluralism 'the real' is turned into a chaotic and liquid spectrality (Bauman 2000).

Digital technology and post-truth are critically connected to both the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change. On the

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one hand, we are witnesses to the ongoing process of a deconstruction of the human cell via genetics, medicine and technology, as happens with the vaccination engineering (Rezaei 2021). Technology creates a posthuman being, introducing at the same time world into so-called post-truth age: everything has been surrendered to the virulence of untrust, conspiracy theory and populism (Axford 2021). The rhetoric of Covid-19 has toxically merged with post-truth hate speech coming through the digital networks of platform capitalism (Lilleker et al. 2021). On the other hand, Covid-19 pushes humanity deeper in the bubble of digitisation. Despite the fact that the new approaches connect Covid-19 with the phenomena of the Anthropocene, climate change and a political theology of catastrophe (Delanty 2021) – social distancing as well as the digital tones of post-truth led late modernity to a situation of an onto-theological saturation. It is like, as Baudrillard claims, we have now exhausted all our potentialities. The global system has been entrapped into a condition of inertia, although everything seems to travel around the globe in record time.

Doubtless, Baudrillard has built the science-fiction theory of pataphysics as a holistic approach to the relations between technology, capitalism and globalisation, by paying attention to the extreme phenomena of simulation, simulacra and digitality. Postmodern condition pushes the human body, truth and nature to their limits (Baudrillard 1983). Given that, the chapter consists of five sections. The first section explores how postmodern axiological crisis tends to be turned into a digital and ecological dystopia. The second section analyses the relationship between mass media, masses and global politics. The third section examines Baudrillard's principle of reversibility with regard to reality and news. In the fourth section, cloning, AI and Baudrillard's concept of the 'Hell of the Same' are put within the problématique of true and false. The fifth and final section displays the provocative simulacrum of a zombie digital world.

From modern certainties to a post-truth digital and ecological dystopia?

Baudrillard connects the orders of simulacra and industrial technology with the questions of representation, appearance and counterfeit. In that respect, it could be claimed that simulation concerns a whole economic, political, ideological and cultural process in contemporary capitalist societies that turns false and fake into a new kind of reality, more real than the real: the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1983). So, knowledge, truth and artificiality are interconnected within the excessive technological reproducibility of capitalism (Benjamin 2008, 19–55). From this point of view, both simulacra and simulation can be seen as the critical steps towards a theory of post-truth – where reality collapses under the explosion of information, communication and news. Post-truth arises as social entropy in the age of digital technology, globalisation and populism (Nicholls 2016; Overell, Nicholls, 2020). Digital technology and political discourse prevail in the social ontology of post-truth in late modernity (Block 2019, 1). In most of cases, the relevant discussion is unfolding as a reflexive interrogation about disinformation, fake news and lying in politics (Dalkir and Katz 2020). Actually, this is not a new theoretical trend. In the 1970s, Hannah Arendt (1972, 1–47) drew our attention to the relationship between lies, truth and power. However, this remains a mainstream approach, so to speak. This chapter delivers a radical philosophical and theoretical perspective on the phenomenon of post-truth that is articulated with postmodern scepticism (Sim 2019) and Baudrillard's theory about simulacra and simulation (Kalpokas 2019, 103–104).

If we live in a postmodern condition, stigmatised by a new version of capitalism, i.e. 'platform', 'turbo' or 'tele-capitalism', Baudrillard (2011) builds a novel conceptual edifice that helps us to see things from a different point of view, revealing the catalytic role of IT, AI, genetics, mass media and digitality in contemporary social and political life (Baudrillard 1983). In fact, he has built a provocative science-fiction theory in which true and false are no longer considered as two separated situations, like good and evil in the conventional sense, but as the two faces of a new radical metaphysics: i.e. pataphysics (Baudrillard 1994, 1–9). In this new brave digital-driven postmodern and posthuman world, true and false are exchangeable either within a Manichean or a Nietzschean frame – where the reversibility principle and the pataphysical science-fiction theory of imaginary solutions dominate. Poetically speaking, he designates this onto-theological and anthropological metamorphosis of humanity in late capitalism as 'telemorphosis', pointing out that 'television has shown itself to be the strongest power within the science of imaginary solutions' (Baudrillard 2011, 29). Nothing anymore must be taken for granted. Everything attains its shape and meaning within a global network of digital circuits that has the pataphysical stamina to create entities without real referents. Living in a hyperreal world, in an ecstasy of communication (Baudrillard 2012, 19–30), or in a constant delirium of speed, as Paul Virilio (2006) claims from a similar viewpoint, in fact, we are travelling as object- signs

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through global digital platforms, desperately seeking for an Archimedean point. But, it is in vain.

For Baudrillard, since the 1980s, the postmodern world has entered into a dizzying orbital flight without a destination. Onto-theologically speaking, we live now in a condition emptied from meaning and reference. In Lefort's lexicon (1988, 19), everything is governed by the cataclysmic 'dissolution of the makers of certainty'. As information flows across the globe, through TV and digital screens, via demonic images (Baudrillard 2017, 13–31), true and false have become the blinking shades of a posthuman world that has been entirely sunk into the digital archipelago of indifference, contingency, obscenity and promiscuity. According to Baudrillard, this is not about good or bad. It is not a matter of ethics. Following in Nietzsche footsteps, he refers to an anthropological turn beyond good and evil, where the modern certainties no longer have any meaning or significance. In that respect, his analysis concerns a fatal condition that is dominated by extreme phenomena (Baudrillard 1993). Adopting Canetti's position about a deadly leap of modern humanity beyond reality and history, he claims that we are travelling in a void without even noticing it (Baudrillard 1990, 14).

Instead of a simple science-fiction theory of pataphysics, his systematic approach could be seen as an innovative New Critical Theory focusing on the crucial economic, technological, social, political, ideological and cultural changes that are taking place in late modernity (Makris, 2021). In order to constructively and imaginatively read these extreme changes of Western neo- capitalism on a global scale, we need a new and radical conceptual armoury. In a nutshell, we need a radical thought (Baudrillard 2008, 95–106). For him, the postmodern world, flooded by simulacra, screens, virtual realities, clones, information platforms and ecstatic communication, is a pornographic and virulent universe, in which the spectres of true and false are reversible (Baudrillard 2003, 25–30). It is interesting how, in the posthuman age of simulation and digitality, Paul Preciado (2019) applies Baudrillard's concepts of pornography and simulacra to human body, by placing artificial and modelled sexuality before anatomic reality itself.

Projecting our hyperreal existence through screens, circuits, platforms and networks, in fact, we occupy the perverse fortitude to make true and false according to the obscene needs of the moment. Baudrillard claims that the Cartesian ego lives now as a quasi-rational human being, lost in a chaotic and abyssal virtual space that he himself has diabolically overproduced. Putting an end to the modern binary realities of real and virtual, good and evil, true and false, etc., IT, AI, mass media, communication and simulation reinvent reality as a gigantic digital simulacrum amongst other extreme eventualities (Baudrillard 2006, 92–93). By doing so, post-humanity has almost been exhausted by her technological perversion. She looks like a contemporary Prometheus who has been transformed into a postmodern Frankenstein. The orgy of Western modernity has led the world into an artificial end of history (Baudrillard 1993, 3–13). The whole process seems like a vicious circle. To put it another way, it looks like a fatal strategy that brings to the fore a cool and ironic revenge coming from the side of the neglected objects themselves (Baudrillard 1990).

The excess of information and communication has turned into a condition of inertia – a bizarre immobility that appears like a frozen world. The posthuman world has already started the endless trek into the digital space of virtual redoubling, genetic cloning and AI (Baudrillard 2011a, 145–158). If we already live in a science-fiction future, without past and present, beyond reality and history, having exhausted all our human potentialities, then, it could be said that Baudrillard may reveal here the advent of a digital, as well as an ecological, dystopia. This is a critical situation we have to deal with, especially in light of new phenomena, such as Covid-19 and climate change, that exacerbate postmodern virulence.

Mass media, masses and the stupidity of politics in the age of globalisation

Trumpism, as an extreme transpolitical phenomenon, gives us the opportunity to move one step beyond the conventional wisdom of an allegedly moral and immoral power. For Baudrillard, this is pointless. Contemporary politics is not about honest politicians that speak the truth and vicious politicians that deceive the innocent people. This is a naïve approach that sees politics either as a romantic experience or as a way to manipulate crowds (Prado 2018). For him, global politics is nothing but a fatal strategy of a self-catastrophic stupidity. Contrary to mainstream Marxism and its alienation theory, Baudrillard (2007, 29–67) claims that in the age of globalisation the masses are accomplices to the perfect crime of politics. However, that is half the story. Actually, he claims that in late capitalism

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silent masses block hegemonic politics, through a process of involution that replaces the traditional problématique of revolution. Eventually, he comes to the conclusion that the masses have been nearly entrapped into the chaotic circuits of mass media and digital screens, leading the global system to ruins. This paradoxical and ironic situation, that saturating of the global system of power, destroys everything without an active rebellion, i.e. involution. For Baudrillard, in a postmodern world, we see the unfolding of two crucial procedures. First, politics and power are obsolete. In this vein, hegemon and masses are exchangeable simulacra via a fatal strategy of stupidity and involution. Second, hyperreality is rooted in global digital networks (Baudrillard 2007a).

Mass media constitutes the neuronal centre of hyperreality. As in Samuel Beckett's theatrical absurdism, we dwell in a brain that has been trapped in its simulacrum. Transcendence of God has been replaced by the immanence of genetic and digital codes (Baudrillard 1983, 109). We are imprisoned into the Platonic cave. Covid-19 could be regarded as another episode to this long industrial process of mediatisation and digitisation of human life (Delanty 2021, 107–121). Having lost every feeling of exteriority and otherness (Makris 2017; Makris 2021a), we cannot only find a way to make true and false or axiological judgments, but, in fact, we have lost every sense of reality and reference. Mass media, masses and digitality compose the dystopian scenery of global autism. Nevertheless, when Baudrillard talks about the demon of digital images, he does not mean a kind of a misfortune that reigns upon the world. On the contrary, he tries to reveal the Manichaeian structure of postmodern condition. At the end of the day, so-called 'empire of good' is proven to be evil itself (Baudrillard 2010 and 2010a). The global system of power gives birth to international terrorism (Baudrillard 2012a). Who is good and who is bad? What is true and what is false? No longer is possible for us to distinguish moral from immoral. This is a transparent, superficial and flat world. Behind digital screens haunts an onto-theological void (Makris 2020).

Hyperreal relativism leads to an axiological crisis (Stenmark et al. 2018, 141– 198). In the global age of transpolitics, transsexuality and transaesthetics, it is beyond our powers to judge good and bad, true and false or beautiful and ugly (Baudrillard 1993, 14–35). To the extent that postmodern world is flat, without transcendental depth – like a digital screen, packed with simulacra – this means that radical otherness has been eliminated in the fatal game of virtual copies. Ironically, the orgiastic passion for identity politics led to the tragic end of singularity. We dwell in a virtual void that seems like a huge digital pulp. Everything is distorted by the spectrality of digitality. As a huge black hole, simulacra absorb reality. The digital Minotaur devours humanity sending back a broadcasting version of hyperreality: i.e. artificial truths and lies of so-called 'real time'. Our daily lives are running out at the 8pm news. This is not merely about post-truth and the like; this is about digitality, hyperreality, posthuman condition and pataphysics (Baudrillard 1994, 2–9).

Baudrillard reads the extreme phenomena of simulacra in late modernity drawing his inspiration from Marshall McLuhan's axiom that medium dominates over the message (Baudrillard, 1996, 52). Message no longer expresses social ontology. Message is the medium itself (Baudrillard, 2019, 171–195). 'From medium to medium', he writes,

the real is volatilized; it becomes an allegory of death, but it is reinforced by its very destruction; it becomes the real for the real, fetish of the lost object – no longer object of representation, but ecstasy of denegation and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1983, 141–142).

Undoubtedly, this is a turning point in his analysis to the extent that although the ideological usage of digitality varies, bringing to light a heterogeneous multitude of individual and collective attitudes and behaviours, many of them are absolutely violent and racist. For example: online vitriol, lack of civility in the cybersphere, and anti-feminist rhetoric in social media (Jane 2014; Cole 2015). For Baudrillard, medium has the pervasive force to homogenise everything. In fact, digital simulacrum transforms messages into pure operations, without any real connection (Baudrillard 1983, 100). By digitising social, political and cultural activity, IT, AI, mass media, screens and communication networks evacuate human life from content. Digital instantaneity, i.e. 'real time', decodes and denervates any referent. Digitality distorts and controls meaning (Baudrillard 1983, 115–123).

Masses are absorbed into a hermetically closed global virtual circuit that reproduces them as a silent object sign. But, as mentioned above, this is half the story. While mass media inactivates masses – at the same time, the masses block mass media and global politics. It is worth pointing out here that the mediatised hyperreal world, composed of

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digital screens and simulacra, does not function as a mirror of truth and lies, but as a transparent and depthless void that devours every negativity and singularity (Baudrillard 1993, 111–174). Mass media is not a rational mechanism of verification and falsification. Instead, it works as an operational system that overproduces digital virulence in 'real time'. Having transformed masses into an enormous brain, without body and blood, mass media circulates in it the virtual viruses of pure simulacra on a 24/7 basis (Baudrillard 2000).

Despite the fact that Covid-19 brought to the fore the medical aspect of viruses, for Baudrillard, digital virulence stands in the very heart of late capitalism. It is no coincidence that he likens the ecstasy of communication to the situation of a cancerous metastasis. The excess of information destroys every possibility of meaning. The obscenity and promiscuity of mass media and digital screens nullifies every possibility to distinguish truth from falsehood. 'The contradictory process of true and false', he writes, 'of real and the imaginary, is abolished in this hyperreal logic' of mass media montage (Baudrillard 1983, 122). The exhaustion of reality murders the Real via the fatal strategy of perfect crime (Baudrillard 2008, 18). Nonetheless, it is important to remember that digitality means complicity. The masses participate in a post-orgy condition in which lies, fake news and trolling are not but the obese expression of a pornographic world (Happer et al. 2019). Digitality turns capitalism into a gigantic stage, where humanity exists performing in 'real time'. As in a reality show, masses can only live through screen and simulacra. However, this is in vain. Digital hyperreality evacuates any message, distorts truth and false and corrupts axiological judgment. Only mass media, networks and platforms can deliver the pretext of objectivity.

In the postmodern and posthuman world, true and false are empty signifiers that are floating in the depthless space of global digitality. As pixels, they unstoppably change in a dizzying void full of bizarre simulacra. Paraphrasing Heraclitus, it could be said that everything is given birth through a digital war (Merrin 2019). Following in Baudrillard's footsteps, Merrin (2005) asserts that the digital screen 'is killing the art of symbolic exchange'. In other words, the electronic demon of simulacra turns human life into a delirious spectacle of non-events.

Reversibility principle, reality, and the political economy of TV fantasies

Globalisation, where a political economy of virtual news reigns, could be seen as a Manichaeian digital war of principles. This is a key aspect in Baudrillard's pataphysics that brings to the fore the principle of reversibility. The postmodern world is not a monistic universe. Instead, it looks like a pendulum that swings unstoppably between reversible positions. So, acceleration is turned into inertia. Good is turned into evil. Truth and falsehood are interchanging situations. Reversibility is the metonymy of excess. Henceforth, we dwell in a world that works in a state of existential and phenomenological exaggeration. It is an obscene world full of extreme phenomena (Baudrillard

1990, 25–70). The delirium of mass media digitality takes the form of an immanent deification in the fascinating and seductive ritual of evening news: i.e. TV fantasies (Baudrillard 2002, 186–190). However, it is not simply about virtuality. Digitality, as an accelerated spectrum of media news as a whole, operates into the void. TV, video, screens, multimedia, the internet, platforms and networks have cancelled any possibility of moral judgment (Baudrillard 2002, 176). Even the global system cannot control the exponential proliferation of information. Social media pushes it to its onto-theological limits: i.e. the agony of power (Baudrillard 2010a). True and false are being merged into a semantic confusion. Who has the fortitude to verify the validity of news, while they are running across the globe, through endless circuits, building an enormous pile of digital rubbish? Albert Camus says that humanity must pay the heavy price of her metaphysical rebellion (Camus 2000, 29). Modern Prometheus has been enslaved to the demonic space of virtual images and digital news. Reality has been replaced by the hyperrealism of simulation and simulacra. The hyperreal, Baudrillard asserts, means that the 'contradiction between the real and the imaginary is effaced. The unreal is no longer that of dream or of fantasy, of a beyond or a within, it is that of a hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself' (Baudrillard 1983, 142).

As we have seen, Baudrillard (1990, 111–179) rejects the Marxist theory of alienation. In this brave new mediatised world, simulacra, TV fantasies and digitality compose a pataphysical order of objectivity. He repeatedly refers to a kind of objective irony that leads humanity to a situation of cool revenge. Object-signs reign upon human subjects. In that sense, the reversibility principle and turbo-capitalism reveal a postmodern Apocalypse. His provocative science-

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fiction theory may shed light on a digital dystopia that more and more turns into an ecological dystopia. As pointed out earlier, both Covid-19 and climate change could be regarded as new episodes towards this risky process of global virulence. On his paradoxical account, salvation is translated into a kind of self-catastrophe. It looks like an ancient Greek drama. Hubris via nemesis leads to catharsis. He places this chain of events on the basis of a radical onto-theological destiny. As a contemporary Luther, he approaches redemption of world through its ruin. Following Walter Benjamin's messianic political theology, he crafts a postmodern *Angelus Novus* that leads humanity to heaven through hell. Provocatively speaking, he terms this pataphysical process the intelligence of evil (Baudrillard, 2005).

Baudrillard builds a theory of simulacra in which the object-sign of mass media news prevails. Since the 1960s he has drawn our attention to the catalytic role of information, communication and images in late capitalism. He places technological developments, and especially digitality, at the epicentre of postmodernity. Neo-capitalist reality brings to the fore hyperreality. By doing so, he displays the end of metaphysics and the advent of pataphysics.

Sometimes, he speaks as a postmodern physicist. In fact, through physics, he transforms metaphysics into a science-fiction theory. To put it another way, he uses physics and developments in IT, AI, communication and genetics in order to unveil the onto-theological limits of posthuman condition (Baudrillard 2000, 1–30). Hyperreality concerns the replacement of real life from 'real time', through a political economy of viral news and images. More specifically, digital technology transforms late capitalism into a laboratory of global simulacra. At the end of the day, the dizzying, speedy and chaotic character of digital technology leads to a new cosmogenesis. Having absorbed by the abyssal TV fantasies, mass media and digital screens, humanity loses not only her tangible body, but her brain, that is to say her rationalistic capability to translate social ontology and phenomenology into a stable, sensible and comprehensive axiological system of true and false connotations (Baudrillard 2008, 21–25).

From this perspective, the political economy of simulacra and simulation puts the postmodern world in peril. The lack of transcendental depth, even the depth of the human mind itself, leaves humanity without a steady system of cognitive and ethical reckoning. The new measure of things is a digital image that travels across the globe via screens, circuits, platforms and networks. Nihilism is no longer about a dead God or the so-called end of history. Posthuman nihilism concerns the implosion of meaning in the mass media; the implosion of the social in the silent masses; the parodic, ironic and fatal strategy of a more and more accelerated inertia (Baudrillard 1994a, 161). In Heideggerian terms, it seems like *Dasein* has dived into onto-theological oblivion. Trapped and lost in the Khôra of a digital coma, the world travels without moral guidance, meaning and essence. Being flat, meaningless and chaotic, postmodern humanity has been subjugated to the pataphysical destiny of an objective and cool irony. Poetically speaking, it could be claimed that a grotesque laughter is raised now above world, distorting every trace of human physicality. In Marx's parlance, it could be said that a spectre haunts world: the spectre of digitality.

Cloning, AI and the apotheosis of the 'Hell of the Same'

In a postmodern world that seems like an enormous media laboratory, Baudrillard (2000, 3–30) shifts his analysis to cloning in the sense of a generic category of phenomena, not only genetic but chiefly digital. For some social scientists, we have already entered into the global age of digital cloning, flooded by tones of human digital thought clones (Truby and Brown, 2021). For some other social analysts, this is the age of digital immortality and virtual humanity (Savin-Baden and Burden, 2019). In that respect, AI could be perceived as a gigantic digital brain that pointlessly stores every aspect of posthuman life (Baudrillard 2011a, 158).

Cloning and AI compose the essential processes of digitality in late capitalism. Both demonstrate the apotheosis of sameness, so to speak. In fact, the homogenisation of negativity and singularity via simulation and simulacra, with the exponential proliferation of social media communication, TV fantasies and IT, leads postmodern world to the 'Hell of the Same' (Baudrillard 1993, 113–123). Using so-called smart electronic devices all around the clock, we have been transformed into homogenised clones and replicas of virtual simulacra. In onto-theological terms, it is like we have achieved the Promethean feat to recreate cybernetic, cyborg and posthuman ourselves as an omnipresent and omnipotent digital god (Harari 2017). Digital cloning brings to the fore the axiological and ethical anxieties of social cloning, cloning cultures and socio-cultural sameness (Essed and Goldberg 2002). Cloning and AI pave the way for a homogenized world mindset. Everybody is technologically and virulently pushed to think and express themselves the

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same way, using the same digital software. Baudrillard speaks about a global 'massage' of human thinking, acting and judging (Baudrillard 1983, 124).

It is no longer about true and false, good and bad or beautiful and ugly. Modern cognitive, ethical and aesthetical pluralism is obsolete. Who cares about true and false when everyone immerses themselves into the digital habitat of sameness? Every single moment of the day, we offer ourselves as prey to this postmodern Minotaur: i.e. digital homogenisation. No more faces, only digital simulacra. No more events, only digital news. No more rationality, only AI. No more singularity, only the dread of sameness. Entering the age of digital posthumanity, flooded by electronic devices and virtual images, in fact, we have been entrapped into a digital enchantment, leaving behind every trace of human frail and reality (Bishop 2011, 349). Henceforth, human physicality seems like an abnormal exemption. The dominant trend is to live like a digital replica and think like a digital clone. This is the hyperreality of posthumanity. Transhumanists herald the advent of a digital religion. Digital sameness preaches a digital wellbeing, where every virtual human tends to look the same, behave the same and features the same digital operationalities. It is no coincidence that more and more the idea of a post-truth age is intertwined with mass media, IT, AI, cloning and digitality (Gibaroğlu 2019; Lacković 2020).

If in the final analysis the digital era is realised as a post-truth age – some invoke a sort of media literacy to distinguish truth from lies, to deconstruct information and communication disorder, and to achieve an axiological and ethical accuracy (Friesem 2019). In this vein, a post-truth condition in the digital era could be considered as an onto-theological and an epistemological crisis (Angermuller 2018). As posthumanity proceeds towards a new, radical and extreme technological context, i.e. the digital order of simulacra, it is difficult to keep her conventional metaphysical status. If we have passed the critical point of human horizon, as Canetti claims, travelling beyond historical time, we need a new metaphysical guidance. Given that, it can be claimed that Baudrillard builds the imaginative toolkit of pataphysics to help us cope with the postmodern complexities of hyperreality (Baudrillard 2003).

Living as virtual zombies in a screen universe? A provocative prognosis

In Nietzschean terms, it is no longer about good and evil. In posthuman era, everything is about sameness and complicity. Virtual masses fervently take part in a fatal game of homogenisation. The global system of mass media and social networks – that is to say either 'platform' or 'turbo' or 'tele-capitalism' – does not concern the situation of servitude, but the condition of complicity. Contrary to the Marxist narrative of alienation, post-humanity is accomplice to the digitisation of everything. Everybody wants to play this fascinating game of digital cloning and virtual human. Talking about a perfect crime, Baudrillard (2008) means a bizarre condition, in which there is no crime, predators, victims and motivations. If the digital world is a neutral world, then no human singularity exists. Medically speaking, we are approaching the condition of a hyperreal media-driven death. Posthuman cardiogram seems like a straight line, but, in a paradoxical and ironic sense, we continue to live like zombies do. Don DeLillo and Neil Postman's media dystopias are now fully alive (DeLillo 1999; Postman 2006).

Is this science-fiction prognosis of a digital-led human destiny true or false? Could it be the actual question of the so-called post-truth age? Is it feasible for contemporary humanity to cross over the historical horizon, by transforming herself into a postmodern digital replica? Is digitality, as Baudrillard constantly says (1996, 66), our new normality? Telling personal stories, or providing resistance against racism and sexism (Barlow and Awan 2016) in a dynamic virtual context, is regarded as a positive aspect of this massive digitality that overflows capitalism in the age of globalisation, post-truth, viruses and climate change (Dayter and Mühleisen 2016). On the other hand, there is an analytical tendency that sees the apocalyptic advent of a digital zombie world in these extreme technological and cultural developments. The provocative discourse about zombie media and 'digital dead' occupies a foundational position within the current debate about digitality, hyperreality and post-humanity (Schott 2010; Cameron 2012; Olofsson 2013; Iannella 2017).

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