Angelaki Theme Issue 34.1 (2029): Baudrillard Reconsidered

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Baudrillard Reconsidered

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Putting together an issue on Baudrillard in 2026 is no easy task: there is already an extensive body of secondary literature that seems to have covered every aspect (see, for example, Bishop, Baudrillard Now. Current Perspectives in Baudrillard Studies). Butler asked as early as 1999 (!): "There already exist a number of books on Baudrillard. The question must be asked: why another?" (Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real). The discontinuation of the International Journal of Baudrillard Studies in 2025 also appears to be a sign of Baudrillard's waning relevance. In contrast, it should be noted that, for example, in 2024, studies such as In the Delirium of Simulation: Baudrillard Revisited by Achim Szepanski were published, and it is frequently emphasized in more popular and feature-style articles that Baudrillard's theses on simulation and hyperreality do indeed provide a perfect description of our world, which is permeated by digital media and, more recently, so-called "artificial intelligence." "Furthermore, he [= Baudrillard] suggests that we have reached a point of symbolic overflow such that the truth status of images has become difficult to determine. Nothing could sound more appropriate in the world of deepfakes and fake news. Indeed, he can be considered a premature theorist of fake news." (Oraldi, "Baudrillard's Philosophy: Simulacra and Simulation in the 21st Century.").
But these all-too-obvious identifications of Baudrillard's concepts with the current situation are problematically simplistic. For instance, another author writes in an article on the relationship between generative AI and Baudrillard's theses: "A portrait created by Midjourney represents no one: it simulates the idea of a portrait." (Carré, "Augmented Hyperreality: When Artificial Intelligence Completes Baudrillard's Analysis.") This description overlooks, first, that AI-generated portraits can very well represent a specific person (e.g., Pope Francis in a Balenciaga jacket) and, second, that portraits representing no one naturally existed even before AI, e.g., in painting. Third, however, both of the cited positions reduce Baudrillard's concept of simulation to mere illusion and pretense, indeed, simply to lies and fakes. Yet hyperreal simulation is "more real than real" (Baudrillard, Fatal Strategies). "[P]resent-day simulators try to make the real, all the real, coincide with their simulation models." (Baudrillard, Simulations) Baudrillard speaks here of simulation models—this shows that a powerful technology looms in the background of his discourse: com-

puter simulation, which since 1945 has been the most important technology in the natural sciences, but al-so in the social and economic sciences (Varenne, From Models to Simulations).
The fact that Baudrillard placed the concept of “simulation” (and not, say, “text” like Derrida or “power” like Foucault) at the center shows that he understood that in the twentieth and twenty--first centuries, technologies—more precisely, media technologies—define what is “real.” And this by no means applies only to the mass media, which are constantly cited as an example (Merrin, Baudrillard and the Media). Baudrillard wrote: “The very definition of the real is that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction. It is a contemporary of science, which postulates that a process can be reproduced exactly within given conditions […]. At the end of this process of reproducibility, the real is not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: the hyperreal.” (Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange). This clearly addresses science and its use of advanced media technologies such as detectors, simulators, machine learning, etc., as the central instance of the “production of the real” (Baudrillard, Simulations). In discussions of Baudrillard’s work, these aspects—the role of simulation in science and how this affects the “real”—are underemphasized (one exception, which focuses on the Large Hadron Collider, is Salm, “Mediation, Simulation, and the Large Hadron Collider”). Yet advanced technoscience, along with its popular spin-offs—the technologies that shape our everyday lives—is the central instance that defines what is “real” and thus triggers ongoing discussions about what exactly “real” means.
This emphasis on a positive, productive conception of simulation—one concerned with the production of the real (rather than, as in a negative conception of simulation, merely with erasure, negation, and ideological obfuscation)—inevitably gives rise to two perspectives for the planned issue of Angelaki:

a. How can one analyze today’s technologies of the real both with and against Baudrillard? In addition to the aforementioned computer simulation (Varenne, From Models to Simulations), this includes artificial intelligence (Baudrillard, Transparency; Debrix, “AI’s Perfect Crime”). Simulation and artificial intelligence are currently also used together to produce the real—e.g., in particle physics, the reality of matter (Radovic et al., “Machine Learning at the Energy and Intensity Frontiers of Particle Physics.”); or in climate research, the reality of the climate (Van Katwyk et al., “Rewiring Climate Modeling with Machine Learning Emulators”), an issue that urgently concerns us all. But other technologies, such as holography (Baudrillard, Simulacra) or photography—which remains significant in its various forms—could also be explored.

b. How can Baudrillard’s analyses of the production of the real, reproduction, the hyperreal, and simulation be compared, contrasted, or brought into resonance with other important theories of the real? Numerous connections suggest themselves here, for example to “New Realism” or “object-oriented ontology” (King, “Object-Oriented Baudrillard? Withdrawal and Symbolic Exchange”), but also to thinkers of the real such as Agamben, Lacan (Grace, Baudrillard and Lacanian Psychoanalysis), Laruelle, or Rosset. Moreover, theories of the real from the natural sciences them-selves, such as quantum theory, could be re-read with and against Baudrillard (Bar-ad, Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning). This also addresses questions of the form of writing and theory as such (Kellner, “Theory Fictions. Baudrillard in the Contemporary Moment.”).

Possible contributions may address one of the following topics, but are not restricted to them.

1. Simulation as a Technoscientific Practice. Computer simulation has played a major role in the knowledge practices of natural, social, and economic sciences since 1945. Essay topics could explore the contrast between Baudrillard's concept of the “simulation model” and the actual practice and history of computer simulation in the sciences to consider advantages and disadvantages of Baudrillard's approach in light of real existing practices.

2. Generative AI and the Precession of the Model. Artificial intelligence systems are often said to be Baudrillardian, though this is seldom explored in depth. Possible topics for papers include training and testing of generative AI models using real-world data and other feedback loops, and analysis of whether and how concepts related to simulacra and the hyperreal can or cannot be applied to machine learning models.

3. Analyzing the Familiar Baudrillard. Baudrillard is widely cited by journal authors writing about deepfakes and fake news but less well known among scholars, as evidenced by the end of the International Journal of Baudrillard Studies. Possible paper topics include comparing Baudrillard's scholarly and journalistic influence and exploring ways to reinterpret the “more real than real” concept of simulation to counter misleading depictions of simulation as lying.

4. Reproduction, Measurement, and the Apparatus of the Real. Baudrillard defines the real as that which has an exact equivalent in reproduction. This line of inquiry might consider the everyday tangible apparatus (detectors, sensors, metrology, standards, laboratory procedures) involved in creating reproducible and hyperreal (or at least hyperrealistic) representations.

5. Images Without Originals? Photography, Holography, Digital Images, AI Images... Baudrillard's comments on and engagement with holography are largely unstudied. Potential paper topics include studies of Baudrillard's work on photography in rela-tion to other modern imaging technologies, including computational photography, 3D scanning, and volumetric and generative imaging, as well as debates about the nature of images with no originals.

6. Modeling the Planet: Climate, Ecology, and Reality. Climate models and newer machine-learning tools model the climate to make it a political and contested reality. Can Baudrillard help us understand modeling efforts to construct an ecological reality? Are material threats to our planet better understood outside the framework of hyperreality?

7. Baudrillard and Other Views on the Real. Speculative realists, object-oriented ontologists, and proponents of agential realism assert knowledge of a reality that Baudrillard is said to have made inaccessible. Other theorists, including Lacan, Laruelle, Rosset, and Agamben, also try to think the REAL. Comparisons with Baudrillard's views could clarify differences and similarities.

8. Theory-Fiction and the Mode of Theory. Baudrillard's style of writing, which can be described as fragmentary, excessive, and “fatal,” is closely linked to his theoretical ideas. Papers on this topic might explore the theory-fiction approach, its challenges, and possibilities for further development, including appropriate writing practices for describing a reality shaped by technology (e. g., science fiction, cyberpunk).

9. Baudrillard and Political Economy. As is well known, Baudrillard began with a Marxist perspective, which he abandoned. Given the current global climate and economic crises and renewed

interest in and debate about the end of work, as well as the importance of capitalist media and technology industries, the Marxist concerns about political economy are important today How can we rethink Baudrillard in this context?

Deadline for a proposal of max. 250 words and a short author's bio is 15 December 2026.

Essays will be expected to be between 5,000 and 8,000 words and first drafts will be due by the end of August 2027.

Please send your abstracts to
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Reference:
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