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## Introduction

*There's one in a billionth chance that we are not living in a computer simulation right now. (Elon Musk, 2016).*

In an interview with Elon Musk in 2016, Musk the founder of Tesla, SpaceX and Mars One, answered a question of an audience member in regards to his strong belief in the hypothesis of human kind living in a computer simulated reality. Musk answered with the quote stated above, further explaining his theory by using the example of the vast growth of developing realistically looking video games. Referring to the minimalistic design of 'Pong' (two rectangles and a dot) which was only 40 years ago, to 2016 in which we have 3D simulations and the possibility of simultaneous gameplay. This rapid evolution in game evolution is a sign of human kind living in a computer simulated reality according to Musk. Arguing that if we continue evolving in this pace, reality as we know it (read: the NON-simulated reality) will be undistinguishable from the simulated reality. Since game technology will grow so much, it will be able to create photorealistic simulations.

This comment of Musk stimulated a research and an internal interest that led me to several philosophers and professors, all theorising on the possibility of a simulated existence. My interest slightly shifted, I was not so much concerned about whether we live in a computer simulated reality but more to what extent our reality can be perceived as 'real' in its current state. During my research on this topic I stumbled upon theorists that discuss the simulated reality claim similar to Musk above, but I also came across the French post-structuralist Jean Baudrillard. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* he theorises, amongst other topics, on media and advertising. By doing this he is criticising capitalism, politics and social structures. Perhaps comparable to Plato's cave-theory, Baudrillard says that Reality with a capital R is out of sight, in fact one is unable to find this reality. In contrary to Musk, Baudrillard's simulation claim has much more to do with social-political structures rather than an advanced computer based technology. The French post-structuralist is in the company of philosopher Jacques Derrida, both making use of deconstruction in their work.

Derrida defined deconstructionism with his famous quote: *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte* (there is nothing outside of text), stating that everything we see and experience is subjected to language. Entangled in a web, a text and its words only refer to each other or words associated/linked to it. Therefore a piece of text can deviate from its origin depending on the reader, time and place. I will be using the deconstruction theories of both Baudrillard and Derrida. In discussion is authenticity and authorship and how I believe the internet testifies to the loss/importance of it. I will be demonstrating both philosophers' ideas and how I believe it is relevant with examples of our current technological system. Both Derrida and Baudrillard shake the ground of our understanding of reality, things seem to be in a state of instability. I will refer to Hito Steyerl for theory on the role of the horizon in the creation of stability.

This Berlin based artist and professor of New Media Art at the Berlin university of Arts touches upon many interesting subjects such as an alternative reality, media, technology and its interference with humans. Apart from being found in her art practice, these topics also recur in her writings. With her essay bundle *The Wretched of the Screen* (inclusive of references to the contemporary media theorist Steven Shaviro and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze) the existence of the internet is questioned, museums are called factories and the ending of linear history is discussed. I found Steyerl's ideas on linear perspective

versus vertical perspective and media interesting and important for this thesis, in particular its resonance in our personal life. I will be using this to explain the span and functionality of the internet. Migrating from screen to screen and even penetrating our living world. It seems to exist without borders.

This 'expansion' of the internet will be looked at by a recent event in Turkey, where an alleged coup d'état was plotted. Through an analogy with torrents, I will explain how Turkey's current President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was advertising propaganda and activating an entire nation. Torrents are downloadable files, usually found on therefore specially designed websites that offer all kinds of digital media pre packed in a 'torrent'. When one downloads a torrent, with the appropriate software, it will be connected to other people to achieve a successful download and a full file. This is called a 'peer-to-peer' network, supporters and backers for when a download is processed. This means also uploading content to that network whenever a new download is handled.

In line of a peer-to-peer network, I wonder if we all are connected in some sort of way. Is my reality a malleable fact? Eight days before the deadline of this thesis, BBC UK released a documentary by English documentary film-maker Kevin Adam Curtis called *HyperNormalisation*. The groundwork for this thesis was already finished but since the documentary is dealing exactly with the same topics as found in this thesis, I felt I could not neglect it. Curtis presents an in depth chronological timeline of events that led to a fictional reality. The documentary helped me understand my own research better. In the last chapter of the thesis I will draw upon the documentary and refer back to previous chapters, in order to clarify anything that might be left uncertain.

## ***1. - Authenticity and authorship of the internet me(me)***

The 21st century has shown itself to be rather fast of nature, technology is booming. It's evident by only looking at the growth of mobile phones. The late 90's 'Blackberry', the first smartphone to have large commercial success, was a prelude to the large territory that it would claim. After Blackberry's introduction and continuing success into the 2000's, it seemed like every month or so a new feature was added to enhance the phone. Western society gradually developed into one that centres and reduces our communication to this mobile device. This communication is identified as sharing information between people and other devices. What does this mobility stress exactly and what is the nature of the shared information?

### **1. - Understanding stability**

Upon observing the practical procedures that come with the use of smartphones a few things stand out. Swipes from left to right, up, down and the lack of no fixed position to have it function. In the palm of the hand, held up in the air, the user can engage with the world around them. Stationary devices are deemed as unnecessary since lightweight laptops encompass the same hardware as desktop computers, together with tablets and smartphones they currently stand as the three dominant (mobile) devices that connect us to the net. All three of them share the fact that they are mobile, all three of them are used to access the net. The internet seems to have no fixed position and is therefore unstable so to speak. Anything and anyone can access it with the proper settings. This instability is considered in Steyerl's essay 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective', in which she explains a shift of perspective and stability through the growth of technology.

The horizon has been key in framing a user's position. By looking at the horizon, we are able to distinguish ourselves from our surroundings. In the early times it was used for (overseas) navigation and as a tool for measurements. The perspective it creates is one of a single view point. Steyerl recognises a shift by looking at art historical paintings, as they're reflective of the mindset and state of a specific period of time. According to her, artist J. M. W. Turner was questioning the supposition of stability with his painting *The Slave Ship (1840)* as he depicted the horizon as blurry and shaky. The viewer of the painting was to experience the overboard throwing and dying of the slaves. Simultaneously, the concepts of colonialism, full mastery and subject-hood were drowning with them. This has to be seen within the context of a linear perspective, linked to full control for which stability is needed.<sup>1</sup> Technological refinements through the centuries push this shift even further.

Correspondingly to the time of Turner's painting, cinema began to rise in the late 19th century and developed further into the 20th, putting emphasis on destabilisation. Cinematic techniques such as montage and varying camera techniques lend themselves to creating a distorted non linear timeline, in turn deflecting the idea of a linear perspective. Meanwhile the cubists' paintings of landscapes were showing complete abstraction. Besides cinema other fields of industry were flourishing too, of particular importance being the advancement of aviation. Aircrafts, helicopters and rockets prompted the enlargement of physical space into

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<sup>1</sup> Steyerl, Hito. "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective" *Journal #24*. E-flux, Apr. 2011. Web. 21 Oct. 2016.

verticality, consequently perspective obtained a complete different dimension.<sup>2</sup> Fast forward to our current time in which the human eye is externalised. We are able to view ourselves (rendered flat) through google maps, with use of GPS satellites. Just to point out how far we have come, our current rich multi-planar and distorted perspective stands to explain just how outdated the linear driven horizon has become. How exactly does this affect the internet user? On the internet we are reduced to a self that consists of words and images. To understand how words come in to play I would like to give a brief introduction of deconstructionism, in order to connect this back to the internet and understand how we, as users, are subjected to it.

## 1.2. - Short introduction to deconstructionism

In 1967 Derrida presents his theory and notion of Deconstruction with his book *La Voix et le Phénomène*, giving language an interesting dimension. An important aspect in his theory is the term 'différance' that he has used before in *Cogito et historic de la folie* from 1963. This is a term that basically covers his whole deconstruction theory. Based on Ferdinand Saussure's ideas of semiology (signifier/signified) which, so claims Saussure, is established in our language system, Derrida claims that language is a pitfall. It is problematic in itself, stating that everything is language and that there is nothing outside of this.<sup>3</sup> The lemma 'deconstruction' reads as follow:

*Deconstruction, as applied in the criticism of literature, designates a theory and practice of reading that questions and claims to "subvert" or "undermine" the assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meanings of a literary text. Typically, a deconstructive reading sets out to show that conflicting forces within the text itself serve to dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meanings into an indefinite array of incompatible and undecidable possibilities.*<sup>4</sup>

Language itself is undermined, therefore it doesn't provide any ground from which one can make any 'stable' assumptions. It is inadequate in forwarding a message. As stated earlier, written text is a problematic given. The cultural background of a reader and the changeability of the signifiers through time can start many discussions about its 'meaning'. Taking the many factors into account, an interpretation of a text is endless and indefinite. According to Derrida it is essential for a text to deviate from itself. For a pictograph or word it's important that there is no predetermined meaning present, in this way we can see them as signifiers. Through this, the meaning of the pictograph remains unfixed and is able to give a text endless interpretations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Steyerl, H. (2011)

<sup>3</sup> Veire, Frank Vande. "Deconstructie." *Als in Een Donkere Spiegel: De Kunst in De Moderne Filosofie*. Amsterdam: SUN, 2002. 304. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Abrams, Meyer H., and Geoffrey Galt. Harpham. "Deconstruction." *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston, Mass.: Thomson Wadsworth, 2012. 69. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Vande Veire, *Als in Een Donkere Spiegel*, 305.

Correspondingly to Saussure, Derrida also says that language is a construction of differences, signifiers themselves don't have any value or distinguishers, but they are determined or defined on the basis of differences with other signifiers or - difference of tone in verbal language. The same applies to experiences, they can never be experienced as new since they will always be postponed by and subjected to previous ones.<sup>6</sup> In the example of a written text, meaning can be interpreted by the effect that it gives when several signifiers are combined. Derrida calls this 'Différance'.<sup>7</sup> The internet, as seen on a screen, is text. Using the medium with a diminishment. With words and images one conveys a self-image to fill up the digital/bodily void. So far I've talked about instability in both the physical sense and in the realm of language. How do these two come together on the internet?

### 1.3. - I am me (me)

Steyerl's theory on stability, I believe, is in line with deconstructionism; linear vision creates linear implication. The effect of a text in the context of linear vision is a straight line delivering content from its stable and unchangeable context, but there in lies a problem. Stability has become an archaic concept. Embedded in the internet, deconstructionism and instability is evident. When thinking that the internet is an extended condition of ourselves, we become the medium since we're bound to what it offers, meaning that we are as unstable as the medium that is used. The world wide web thrives on sharing, it's at the core of its existence. Exactly this is also visible on the social platform Tumblr, a space where users are able to create and share posts with other users. But there's something strange taking place. In itself the internet could be viewed as rather dense yet simultaneously lightweight. One can sense a type freedom by accessing anything at will, but the cookies that track every website visit and "click", feed back to us similar interests and further potential clicks. Are we looping in our own 'reality'?<sup>8</sup>

On the net different stresses of time tend to collide. Reading a text, watching a video, chatting with another user, or even sensory experience by physical reactions to what ever is being perceived are all framed in one (virtual) space, conveying a distorted non-linear idea of time. I even find myself experiencing this as I write. My phone is at my side which I use for chatting or to access the dictionary application, while at the same time a dozen websites fill my web browser. One thing in particular strikes me as interesting, the heavily shared, scraped together shreds called 'Internet meme's'. Typically a meme consists of: 1. A text that implies something in the top part of the layout, the initiation; 2. An image in the middle part; where the implication is refuted or confirmed; 3. A third line of text on the bottom part, communicating with both the first and second part.<sup>9</sup> Internet meme's are known to appropriate stills or texts from popular culture, their success of becoming a meme shows the unimportance of authorship/authenticity and their active trait of looping.

At least two things are relevant when looking at a meme. First of all there is a separation from origin of the used image (or text), in the context of deconstructionism this indicates instability. As the used imagery

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<sup>6</sup> Vande Veire, *Als in Een Donkere Spiegel*, 307.

<sup>7</sup> Meyer Abrams and Galt, *A Glossary*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Steyerl, *Too Much World*.

<sup>9</sup> "Internet Meme." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 21 Oct. 2016

and/or text have been framed in another time, they have deviated from their 'origin' and are now successful in conveying something completely different. Secondly the effect is created through the use of image and language, meaning that the effect is solely accomplished when the signifiers are combined and dependant on one another. In the context of social media it seems to perhaps deal more with portraying and conveying an identity, particularly that of the person that is posting/sharing, liking and reblogging the meme. It isn't so much about the origin of the meme, but more about how it correlates with their identity. Phenomenologically they embody exactly what deconstructionism conveys. It basically loops right back to itself, referring to the medium it is embedded in, revealing how unstable it is. A meme is only able to accomplish its effect because the receiver knows the lie in it. The audience can separate reality from non-reality, facts from falsities in the blink of an eye, and understands that those words are carefully selected and juxtaposed onto that image. They understand that this meme, in the carving process, was made from loose matter gathered from a web of words and a web of images. Together they communicate the medium, the internet as a free market for a malleable reality, in which you take on any desired identity to portray yourself. Ever changing and shapeshifting, signs and signifiers accumulate to create an effect.

Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr all provide us the ability to track the source of a post, ironically so. On Tumblr blogposts always include a source which is found at the end of each post. A 'source-link' is a redirection to another blog (or internet page). But whose hand are we shaking? As cartoonist Peter Steiner illustrated with his work *On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog* (1993), that shows two dogs and a computer, in use by one of the animals. What the cartoon talks about is the internet as a place that is independent of gender, age or even 'species'.<sup>10</sup> I could be anything or anyone on the internet, I could even be a dog if I wanted to. Embedded in post-modernity, that is known for gathering and assembling fragments of different aesthetics, the internet identity seems to be characterised by similar traits. This identity creation is referred to as a prothesis by Shaviro, he states: "There is no pre-given, natural reference point, no first or final term. Everything is a hyperlink; everything is a reference to, or a prothesis for, something else. Images and narratives proliferate endlessly over the network, in a vain attempt to populate the void." (Shaviro 82)

Indeed everything is a hyperlink. We travel from flat surface to flat surface, with neither a beginning nor an end. If one 'reblogs' something, it originates a new source with the same content, but as ironic as the reblog-icon on Tumblr (two arrows, one ends where the other begins creating a loop), this new source offers no difference, content wise, from the source it has used to reblog the post. Even more so because the cookies that track your data, only show you equivalents of your interests and clicks. It offers an elongation of the hypothetical identity perhaps, but even that is as unstable as the medium itself. We are looping.

Using the internet comes with terms that a user is accepting from the moment we are engaging with it. Weightlessness and instability create a rather abstract notion of time. Floating in the obscure self referential world wide web, the identity is shattered and reassembled through text and images; the two components to which it is reduced. But according to Derrida, text too doesn't provide a solid ground for assumptions, it is inadequate. So where does this leave us? In the next chapter I would like to deconstruct reality a bit more by introducing Baudrillard. His ideas on reality deal with social political structures. Together with Derrida's deconstructionism of language I will explain how reality seems to be a construction grounded on instability, reshaping the construction whenever it is of interest.

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<sup>10</sup> "On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 21 Oct. 2016.



## 2. - God-is-real.org

Just as Derrida, post-structuralist Baudrillard uses deconstruction in regards to reality. In the bundle of essays called *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard attempts to undermine reality. He presents case-studies on political events and/or theories on media and advertising. In typical post modernistic fashion Baudrillard is deconstructing reality and its means through the use of signs and signifiers. The book begins by setting a foundation for the following essays, by detailing characteristics of simulacra and simulation.

### 2.1. - Precession of simulacra

Two key points in Baudrillard's theory are to *simulate* and to *dissimulate*. In short he states: 'To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence.'<sup>11</sup> In other words dissimulating is masking whereas simulating is to represent by a false appearance. To demonstrate this the reader is given the example of an 'illness'. An ill person that fakes a sickness makes his bystanders believe he is ill just by staying in bed, the person that simulates an illness can actually profile the illness by producing the ascribed symptoms.

According to Baudrillard we're in a place that is far from reality, a place lost in the ruins of its own reflection. To understand what reality is we have to understand what reality is not. Baudrillard draws on the fable *On Exactitude in Science* (1946) by Jorge Luis Borges in which 'the cartographers of the Empire draw a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory'.<sup>12</sup> With the decline of the territory there's simultaneous decline of the map. The shreds of territory and map merge into one, resulting in a questionable reality. Baudrillard points out an important change in history: 'The transition from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing marks a decisive turning point.'<sup>13</sup>

In four stages throughout history a world full of 'copies' took over to such an extent, that within this even newer signs found existence that are deflections of reality. With the ongoing event of replicating replica's we allowed for so called 'copies without an original' to claim territory. Simulation is the process of simulating a reality, simulacrum is the image constructed through simulation. In this reality signs and signifiers have become incompatible partners, they wouldn't recognise one another as eligible to begin with.

The four stages as told by Baudrillard:

1. *it is the reflection of a profound reality;*
2. *it masks and denatures a profound reality;*
3. *it masks the absence of a profound reality;*
4. *it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum*<sup>14</sup>

In example:

1. it is the reflection of a profound reality; - A portrait

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<sup>11</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "Precession of Simulacra." Trans. Glaser Faria Sheila. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1994. 3. Print.

<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2-6.

<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

2. it masks and denatures a profound reality; - An icon
3. it masks the absence of a profound reality; - Disneyland
4. it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum - Hyperreality, or everything

The fourth stage 4 (hyperreality) is a completely fabricated reality that is not in correspondence with the 'real'. Hyperreality arises when reality is fuelled with simulacra. Signs that represent no 'profound reality' that have no origin confiscate reality in order to represent a falsity, a gleaming reality without an origin. This gleaming reality makes profound reality vanish under a thick slab of everything that is a better version of it. These improvements of reality sham the underlying and create a picture perfect distortion. To explain how this works he refers to the falsity of theme parks, Disneyland in particular, and how they actually function as a deterrence mechanism.

Visitors of Disneyland are aware of where they are going, the type of fantasy that will be realised momentarily and the type of fantasy left at the gate upon leaving. Here 'dreams come true' as written on the Disney world gate in Florida USA, and dreams belong to the world of fantasy. Baudrillard points out that there's an illusion at play. Since Disneyland frames fantasies and all that is imaginary, the area external to this frame is made to believe as the place where the actual reality takes place. It serves as an institutionalisation of fantasy in order to keep hyperreality intact.<sup>15</sup> This is part of the third order, masking the absence of a reality. Shaviro has an interesting remark concerning the appearance of Disney's California Adventure and the validity of the appearance of the real world outside of the gates. He notes that the park is a simulation of the State of California, which in turn is a simulation of the American Dream, and the latter being a simulation itself.<sup>16</sup>

Given the clear borders of Disneyland, the reality outside its fence should be considered authentic. But according to Baudrillard our imagination isn't able to make the distinction between true and false to begin with, since the world is suffused with signs that do not refer to a reality whatsoever. Instead imagination is treated as a waste product he says, and in western culture waste is recycled. The promise for realisation of fantasies in Disneyland contrasts with the 'real life' world where dreams (seen as phantasm) are no longer glorified. Dreams are negligible unless cleverly used as instruments of deterrence so as to keep the appearance of reality intact. Exploiting, utilising even selling them. Contemporary waste-treatment plants manifest themselves in many shapes and forms.<sup>17</sup> Baudrillard says: 'People no longer look at each other, but there are institutes for that. They no longer touch each other, but there is contactotherapy.'<sup>18</sup>

But there's more: they no longer connect with each other, but there is Facebook where they agree on disowning thoughts and feelings; they no longer look at each other, but there is gaze via Instagram where the gleaming reality is propagated, there is gaze via snapchat glasses and Google-maps; they no longer create,

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<sup>15</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 12-14.

<sup>16</sup> Shaviro, Steven. "What Is Matter? Never Mind." *Connected, Or, What It Means to Live in the Network Society*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2003. 88. Print.

<sup>17</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 12-14.

<sup>18</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 13.

but reproduce endless and endless pages of Tumblr, where emulation is exhausted and art history ended; they no longer know, but there is Google; they no longer feel, but there is porn and cinema.<sup>19</sup>

Utilisation of dreams is happening all around us, on each corner and street end, at stops of public transport, on the highway, airports and airplanes. While the identity is crippling and showing itself scattered on the world wide web, mass surveillance by big companies such as Facebook and Google keep track of and manage every click. Completely monopolised and serving to your needs, the net shows a custom made version that is fitting to your reality. Its promising start, as a space that is free 'for the mind' and free from governed control, failed.<sup>20</sup> As you're surfing from website to website, the screen you're looking at is looking right back at you. But according to Baudrillard the tangible real world is fabricated and by the internet reflecting and giving back to you this falsity it just creates another loop. Since the input is fake, the feedback is fake. In the next paragraph I will explain this further by describing a recent political event in Turkey that demonstrates the faded line between reality and fiction but also the role of the internet in this. When the country's president marketed and sold a fake reality.

## 2.2. - I pray to you our mother God, which art everywhere

On July 15th 2016, a military group of about 30 people allegedly plotted a coup d'état in Turkey. Attempting to throw down the regime of president Erdogan. The coup saw massive failure. After flying military planes over Ankara and having tanks parade and block streets, the president that wasn't captured (showcasing the unorganised planning, taking the president into hostage is one of the first interventions in undertaking a coup) gave out an order to his nation to fight against the traitors. In an iconic moment in TV history the news anchor on CNN Turkey holds up a phone, the Turkish nation saw their president on FaceTime urging them to get out on the streets and protest against the coup plotters. Propagating that he's still president and commander in chief, that the coup plotters are just a minority in the military and that they will fail cause no force can stand the power of the people.<sup>21</sup> Millions of them watching the president, facing him eye to eye, making it seem that he was calling each of them individually. Every Erdogan devotee from all over the world could tune in and would be connected to a face-time video call with their hero. It was of unimportance whether they would act straight away as urged, but more about spreading a sentiment. To fathom this event I would like to draw a parallel between the Turkish president giving out orders through a face-time video call and the downloading of Torrents, that in terms of spreading a message show similarities.

One of the most popular torrent search engines is without a doubt 'The Pirate Bay', if anything because of its notorious resonance in the media. In 2014 the website was shut down after the police seized several servers on which the torrent-network was operating, forcing it to go offline.<sup>22</sup> But the police weren't able to seize or better said block the millions of particles that make up the torrent. A single website doesn't make a torrent, it's the shareholders that do. When a torrent is downloaded, information isn't downloaded directly through the server of the website. Rather a connection is made to a peer-to-peer network consisting

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<sup>19</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> Shavero, *Connected*, 87-88.

<sup>21</sup> Rahim, Nakam. "Erdogan Facetime" Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 15 Jul 2016. Web. 23 Oct. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> "The Pirate Bay". *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 21 Oct. 2016.

of people who each own a bit of the torrent. The downloader is receiving all the parts from the network and unites it with the software client that's facilitating the download. The result is a fully complete torrent. In other words: the 'geist' of the torrent lives through several people and doesn't belong solely to one entity. It is the bond of shareholders that together create a unity. And this is what was at stake in Turkey.

When president Erdogan showed his face digitally through the use of FaceTime, he expanded his message by breaking it up in a cluster of particles, similar to a torrent. The millions of people watching this became instant shareholders of the message. It was him prompting action, deliberately not carrying out the action himself, it was a remarkable piece of propaganda. He could have easily chosen to make his military act against the traitors, since he said they were just a minority, but he specifically chose to rely on the nation to act instead. The downloaders of the software, for all one knows, were not even consciously aware of it. By indoctrinating and making them owners of his propaganda they create the unity. That in this case is the strong bond of the nation: the nation that was to be saved, fighting the traitors, supporting the president and fighting against the downfall of a country. Not only did they react right away, the 'geist' of his message will live on even after the uproar has calmed, even after it has been shut down and gone offline. The power of the net was already noticeable during the Arab spring in 2011, when social media was used to gather people to the Tahir square in Egypt. A chain reaction that led to a revolution in that country. With Erdogan renouncing full authority, the nation now carries part of the weight of itself. Each individual owning a bit, and indeed as he said the power of the people is a force to be reckoned with. Once a shareholder always a shareholder, uploading information when needed and supporting a network of peers. There are a few very interesting cases of reality bending at play here. In the next paragraph I will explain this through the powerful role of advertising, that is utilised to 'surveil' and gain control.

### 2.3. - He had me at Hello

Popularity of advertisements based on our 'self-image' has increased in recent years. If we take for example food-culture and self image there's a noticeable emphasis on advertisements about a healthy lifestyle. What is sold to you is the dream of being healthy. Trying to delude you into buying that one detox tea that will make you slim and fit (promoted through an Instagram picture posted by Kim Kardashian), a book about a work-out method that 'really' works bannered on your Facebook timeline, or deluding you into buying items with a green tag in the supermarket. Slowly browsing the aisles, an abundance of abstract ecological and organic icons can be found, confronting the consumer with the type of person they are, better yet the type of person they want to be.<sup>23</sup> These items figurate one to five stars, equating how organic the product is. Thus prompting a self questioning of the consumer: How organic, or actually how 'good' do I want to be? Do I identify myself with 1 or 5 stars? Your self-worth is determined with an X amount of stars.

It is the fourth stage of simulation, signs that refer to no profound reality whatsoever, but are a pure simulacrum of themselves. Everything is already laid out and just waiting for confirmation and reassurance of its existence when being purchased. Baudrillard refers to it as verification of the code. According to him the major billboards lining the streets are actually looking at us, instead of the other way around. Following

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<sup>23</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 75.

and foreboding. He talks about surveillance cameras as props in the decor of *Simulacra*.<sup>24</sup> Didn't Erdogan create a similar effect? The question he really asked was: to what extent do you want to be part of the prosperous, free from evil and 'stable' Turkey. As a live banner, now able to communicate to the viewer directly, he was mirroring their identity. As he was selling integration in the soon to be pure Turkish system, he in return was receiving control. It was a misleading advert, what you actually purchased was self-surveillance. He laid out the rules for proper behaviour, which were anything but sharing and acting on the same ideology of the traitors. The self-surveilled consumer will act accordingly and will even police its fellows if needed. Commerce is characterised by conducting and controlling. In the section *Indeadted*, Shaviro discusses how purchasing-power has become a model for control, "consumers 'reveal' their 'preferences' in the marketplace. He quotes the French post-modernistic philosopher Deleuze: 'Marketing is now the instrument of social control (. . .) A man is no longer confined but a man in debt.'"<sup>25</sup>

The beginning of this quote 'marketing is now the instrument of control' refers to the power of corporations that regulate the ways we spend. These companies with a 'corrupted soul' as Deleuze describes, do this by 'taking control rather by establishing a discipline, by fixing rates rather than by reducing costs, by transforming products rather than by specialising production'.<sup>26</sup> This is clearly evident in the case of company Apple Inc, that yearly brings out new designs of their trademark macbook. The release of the 2016 macbook (with only a few minor design changes) had only one USB-C charging/expansion port, a rather controversial and drastic change. Few to almost no other company creates supplies for their product that are compatible with this type of USB port. This meant that the buyer of this laptop also had to invest in an adapter for inter-connectivity with other devices. Furthermore the laptop only had one extension port, so yet another adapter needed to be purchased for establishing connections with more than only one other device. This I believe is what is meant by 'transforming instead rather than specialising'. To end, the quote 'A man is no longer confined but a man in debt' is also applied to the 'social good' the Turkish nation purchased during the coup.

Information is power, collecting enough data allows for the predicting of behaviour. But it goes further than that. Spending money is to banks what meteorological instruments are to weather-forecasts. In *HyperNormalisation* Curtis explains how a virtual network created by banks for trafficking financial transactions, would change the 'value' of money. This virtual network would determine forthcomings. A personal account with a bank gives the corporation insight into your spendings, now patterns can be found, generating a blue print to which your future would be equated.<sup>27</sup> In our world of commerce one is constantly confronted with buying, this goes hand in hand with creating debt. Be it Credit card, mortgage or bank debt, they are all types that are paid back financially. But there is also social debt. Shaviro draws upon the novel *Everyone in Silico* of author Jim Munroe, in which Munroe suggests that if your debt is purchased by for example Sony Holdings Ltd you can forcibly be relocated to work in a factory of their choosing.<sup>28</sup> Debt in this case is controlling your life. In the context of a country like Turkey, one that is grounded on a heavy base

<sup>24</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 75-78.

<sup>25</sup> Shaviro, *Connected*, 159.

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (1992): 6. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Oct. 2016.

<sup>27</sup> *HyperNormalisation*. Dir. Adam Curtis. *Adam Curtis*. BBC, 16 Oct. 2016. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Shaviro, *Connected*, 159-190.

of trust (honour killing still present in their culture), purchasing self-surveillance simultaneously meant being confronted with debt. You owed it to the nation, your peers and president to act or police when necessary. The strength and trust of the nation was evidently big. Right after the failed coup. Turkish and non Turkish critics and/or traitors, in and outside of the country were arrested, jailed and sued and not to mention the pressure of the death penalty that was about to be reinstated.<sup>29</sup> When Erdogan was doing his performance on CNN Turkey, a state owned news outlet, the people watching it followed his orders. Shortly after the failed coup, allegations were made by western countries, claiming the event was a staged act of Erdogan himself. These allegations probably only benefited the situation. In the final paragraph of this thesis, I'll explain how this works by examining the previously mentioned documentary *HyperNormalisation*, giving an accurate representation of reality and showing the importance of instability in western reality.

#### 2.4. - But is it really true?

In the documentary *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis sets out a timeline that starts in 1975 New York City, USA at a time of financial crisis. Already having borrowed money from the banks, the city was facing a problem as the middle class was moving away, and with them their taxes. Seeking more help of the banks that refused to borrow any more money, the city was about to drown in debt. A new comity was created to save the city and bring order to the chaos. Of the 9 people, that were assigned for this position, 8 were bankers. It was the start of a bank-run society, their opponents being politicians. This shift in power marked a significant change, from a world run on politics to a world run on a stable (money) system, gradually blurring reality. Curtis calls this the post-political world, in which the aim was that of management and prediction. The documentary starts with a conflict between the USA and Syria. The middle-east needed stability according to president of Syria Hafez al-Assad, and help of USA was asked to help obtain this. But instead providing assistance, they stirred the pot by making false promises to Assad. The conflict reached a point where Syrian ordered suicide bombers attacked and killed many American militants that had invaded Beirut. America had to withdraw as it was becoming too dangerous. This event, together with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, was an initiation of a constructed reality.

During the 1980's in America, the then president Ronald Reagan described the country as one with good moral that would act against evil. As more Syrian bombings were taking place, the American nation insisted on following his words and retaliated against this Middle Eastern country's growing evilness. But they needed a new villain now that it was too risky to enter the Middle East, so they chose the ruler of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi. After a total of five Americans were killed during a bombing at both Rome and Vienna Airport, America identified Libya as the mind behind the terrorist attack, although all the evidence was targeting Syria as the perpetrator. To prove their verdict, American analysts were being pressured into making up a false story about Gaddafi, gathering earlier statements from him, taking bits and parts to construct a piece of text that would affirm his evilness. What was so remarkable about this case was that Gaddafi never denied these allegations. Facing racism during his training in the UK, he took this as a chance to fight against the west. It would fulfill his wish of becoming a global figure. Reality suddenly became a fictional play, all for the interest of power. Simultaneously the Soviet Union was falling apart, communism

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<sup>29</sup> Emanuella, Grinberg, and McKenzie Sheena. "Turkey's President Erdogan Won't Rule out Death Penalty." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 19 July 2016. Web. 23 Oct. 2016.

was failing. People were seemingly unhappy and confronted with their economy crashing, but since no-one had a solution, they played along with the charades of their leader. In the documentary this is referred to as 'Hypernormalisation': when you're so much a part of the system, you can't see beyond it. Curtis goes on to explain that as things got blotchy and complex in the world, there was a growing need for an 'alternative reality'. One that was free from any governing body.

It was the birth of cyberspace, a place where everyone was equal and no longer ruled by politics. But not long after the start of its search for answers in a cruel world, its potential and reputation began to fluctuate. The fast increasing popularity and use of the system was a design created by bankers, and in a post-political world, user-data was a goldmine. No politics meant no law, this in turn gave a free pass for corporations to regulate the cyber sphere collecting data spanning from webcam images to website visits and e-mail traffic. Algorithms grew in intelligence over time by finding patterns of behaviour, to help computers generate prophesies. Predicting your future by feeding back the reality you put into it, these algorithms were so advanced that they come to serve as a mirror. Curtis uses the example of the American presidential elections of 2016, during which critics of running mate Donald Trump would express themselves on the internet. He points out that they were probably unaware of the fact that were only speaking to themselves.<sup>30</sup>

The internet has become a tool for controlling behaviour and by doing this it prevents the facade of reality from cracking. Everyone is held in their lane. In the first chapter of this thesis I was explaining how this works on Tumblr, as seen by the 'looping' of content, new sources but same matter. Meme's on the other hand reflect content of the internet, referencing their medium of origin (controlling and predicting). Like a virus it spreads out on the net, liked and shared by people with similar interests. It's a collective that mirrors the user/poster, assembled through masses of data it foresees it's own popularity, it is as if it encompasses all the traits of its home-base. Now that the importance of the source has also become irrelevant, we can't tell if it's a dog, a bot (an automated computer program run on algorithms) or another person. But if it's another person, could that mean it is able to generate the same tricks algorithms do, and would that show how fictitious reality has become?<sup>31</sup> The fabricated reality needs instability in order to keep fiction stable, as shown by Curtis in the last part of the documentary.

People started noticing flaws in the system and began questioning the liability of their country, but this would only benefit politics. When it becomes uncertain what is real and not it's easier to pull a trick, bending reality to the interest of the country. Gaddafi would soon be given another role, from villain to Democratic Hero, just to reprise the role of villain again later. By this time UFO's (unidentified flying objects), that actually were technologically advanced military planes, were spotted across different places in the USA. Documents later revealed that a few people were assigned to give testimonials of their encounter with UFO's or Aliens. These revelations showed state controlled acts of merging reality and fiction. Meanwhile in Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Putin (current President) was branded as the new top leader with alliances of his party who would support all kinds of projects, left and right winged, pro/against Putin. Leaving the civilians in a state of uncertainty, as it was not sure whether Putin is standing left, middle or right. Therefore uncertain about what to expect, there's neither rhyme nor reason to

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<sup>30</sup> Curtis, *HyperNormalisation*.

<sup>31</sup> Steyerl, *Too Much World*.

it. Another example of how keeping the society unstable creates stable politics.<sup>32</sup> Wasn't Erdogan plotting something similar in Turkey?

As told by Curtis the world has become one of managing and predicting in which instability seems to be a key factor. Although no one is certain about the validity of the Coup in Turkey. It wouldn't be a surprise if Erdogan himself organised political instability in order to establish stability. In the night of the 15th of July Turkey served as the backdrop for the theatrical effects pulled by the government. Jets were flying over cities, breaking the sound barrier and making it seem as if bombs were dropped. This created a general feeling of fear and of danger but also of the possible collapse of the state. This fear that was seeded would allow for Erdogan to 'purify' the country by throwing out any (leftwing) ally and anyone that in one way or another could endanger his presidency and regime. From now on everything could be blamed on the coup and its plotters, critics and detractors. None of his actions would need any defence nor explanation. This was evident. Shortly after the coup, thousands of people from inclusive of journalists, military, judges, professors and civilians were arrested. Anyone that would criticise Erdogan's politics was seen as a sign of potential danger as it would possibly catalyse a coup and a collapse of a country, so to say. I believe this is currently at stake in Turkey. A stable position of a president on top, in self-organised chaos with people on the (unstable) ground being the designated 'puppets' in constant state of framing one another as either good (pro erdogan/turkey) or bad (traitor).

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<sup>32</sup> Curtis, *HyperNormalisation*.



## **Conclusion**

In the introduction to this thesis I was questioning to what extent our life is malleable. According to the writers that I've chosen to quote on this subject, our life to a large degree is indeed a fabrication. Now that the world has become one of prediction and management, surveillance has moved from cameras in the street into the realms of advertising and the internet. Within this malleability an individual doesn't sense similar freedom (of bending reality), it is confined to the control apparatuses in the hands of corporations and banks. Even though we 'create' our reality (in the sense that we feed it), our feedback becomes a fabrication because the information we input is a fabrication. We are looping in layers of fabrications. I believe it is important to be critical of our surrounding, never to take things as they are but always stay questioning. Awareness for the media we use to communicate shouldn't be left unsaid here. Social media showed new ways of communicating, it made it much more easy to stay in touch with people from all over the world. Its popularity shows its success, but the way reality is framed through the eyes of social media is very particular and shouldn't be taken on as a new norm. What is evident I believe is the way social media percolates 'the real world'.

Aside from the daunting fact that personal data is stored there's also the daunting fact that social media teaches a very specific way of looking at and framing of reality. It's easy to process events by examining their likability. Whatever it is that's conveyed, can easily be seen in terms of liking/disliking. Starting with the way they are conveyed in the first place. I talked about institutionalisation of reality in the second chapter of the thesis. Baudrillard's ideas on hyperreality, ones that I share, tell us that signs are detached from their origin and refer to hyperreality only and nothing else. Taking this into account and looking at for example Instagram I wonder what is actually propagated. The medium thrives on likes, gleaming beauty and aesthetics. On top of the layers of fabrication, it is fabrication itself which is re-presented as reality. It's a continuous cycle in which layers of pretence are added to hyperreality and Instagram is merely one of the many mediums that catalyses this. Is reality only 'real' when it is captured, recorded and presented?

A constant stream of data is continuously around us in the hyper linked world. This only creates a greater gap, more than it actually benefits you in being connected with the real world. The amount of information one is subjected to on a daily basis reduces 'intensity' I believe. Information is processed but not digested. It's important to be conscious of this and to understand that mass media sensationalises information. It peaks too fast before it can actually really impact one without being 'just' information. This process renders it as zero, as null or purely an artefact. Taking part in this is instability. In the last chapter of this thesis I talked about how blurriness is part of western society. Now that governments 'bend reality' with wily manoeuvres out of self-interest, a general feeling of uncertainty is spread. One can argue that this is subjective. But what has to be understood is that living in this world, even though it might not be one's individual reality, comes with the existence of unstable conditions. In which the leader of your nation might appear on national news and demand for your participation in a plot he wrote himself. And since your entire neighbourhood responds to the demand you're likely to follow the mass. Perhaps feeling suspicious but since everyone around you is doing it, you act the same. Something that the leader in dispute has premeditated.

In the control society, as Curtis puts it, individuals are information. Based on heavily use of the internet, the outcome of future plots can be predicted. At the same time the reality that is presented to one on the internet is predetermined by its own input. We've become data and our recordings all together make us mass data. I find it hard to conclude with a possible 'solution', as it is too difficult and too complex for there to be one that easy. I mentioned earlier that awareness and a critical mind is needed. As a person in this control society one should have more understanding about the media it uses and the politics that are played. But since everything around has been simplified to such extent life has become 'easy', purely seen in terms of living (in the western-society) when following the popular stream so to say. It's this idea of being so much part of the system that one cannot see beyond it. It would be interesting to do more research on the phenomena such as GIF and Emoji culture that challenge language as a communication method. This simplification of life is visible all around us. The western society, with hyperreal simulacra, isn't so much about 'struggle'. It seems to be playing on your unstable identity. Constantly making you aware of who you are, questioning who you want to be or what you want to become. In my own work as an artist these questions are very relevant, as I examine life subjected to issues as such.

It was a great time to grow up as a technology fanatic. The internet boomed in my early teens, thus internet became part of my life, my language and being. Being continuously connected became something I internalised already early on, as my days would go by going to school coming home and using MSN-messenger. This increased as I grew older with the possibilities of being connected on and to the net grew simultaneously. My art practice is heavily influenced by this, it always questions my relation as a human-being to technology and the way it is embedded in my life and/or vice versa. I see my work as an ongoing investigation of reality as seen in these terms. Therefore writing this thesis helped me understand my practice to great capacity and offered me an enriched lens. It was very interesting to dig deeper into the subjects that are fascinating me. Reading *Simulacra and Simulation* of Baudrillard and this in relation to Steyerl was interesting. It gave me insight into how as an artist she draws upon theories of life suffused with mass media and surveillance. If anything I feel inspired and uplifted to have been doing this research. It stimulated more questioning and motivation for me to keep my eyes open, to investigate and understand my own reality.

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