

The Ambivalence of the Hyperreal

positive and negative visions of the hyperreal in the writings of
Baudrillard, Bradbury and Eco

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Abstract

At first glance, many works about the hyperreal seem to carry a positive or negative opinion of the concept of hyperreality. In some cases these opinions are stated outright, in others they are more subtle. Through the analysis of texts that have either a positive or negative general opinion of the hyperreal, it is possible to demonstrate that in many cases, the concept is much more ambivalent. The idea of hyperreality is built on binaries, on pairs of opposing concepts that each require the presence of the other as justification for its own existence, and thus the interpretation of hyperreality in any given situation must also be (at least partially) both positive and negative: as these are subjective concepts, it is possible to find or construct a point of view supporting either claim for any action or situation.

After a brief reiteration of the concept of the hyperreal, an in-depth analysis of three concrete examples, Ray Bradbury's "The Tonybee Connector" (generally positive opinion), Jean Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulations" and Umberto Eco's "Journeys Through the Hyperreal" (generally negative opinions) will be conducted. The analysis will be conducted by isolating narratives, to make sense of the positive or negative opinions. The aim is to (1) show in what way the general opinion of the work is positive or negative and how this manifests in the text, (2) identify the person or persons that share each text's general opinion and explain why they do so, and (3) identify the person or persons that hold the opposite opinion and explain why they do so. More specifically, if a text has a generally positive view of the hyperreal, then that view can be traced in the text and perhaps in the opinion of one or more persons that experience (or are in some other way confronted with) this hyperreality and in some way profit from it. Given the subjective nature of what is positive or negative, there will likely be people with a differ-

ing opinion, who suffer from the hyperreal. Since there is no absolute truth, either point of view remains valid, and there can be no universal evaluation of the hyperreal.

The findings show that the the hyperreal cannot be viewed as strictly positive or negative in any given situation. Instead, the question should rather be "how are the positive or negative opinions of hyperreality justified?", and perhaps "what characteristics vary between the people that hold one or the other opinion?".