Reflective Conversations: Baudrillard's orders of the simulacrum

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The French poststructuralist Baudrillard's (1981; 1983; 1976 and 1994) conceptualisation of the simulacrum entails the philosophical-theoretical exploration of the deconstruction and simultaneous realisation of the real. The gradual loss and ultimate realisation of the actual real is systematically arranged by Baudrillard's three orders of the simulacrum. These orders are historically framed by specific epochs and concurrently represent different phases of the image. This article investigates Baudrillard's orders of the simulacrum as a possible methodological approach for interpreting contemporary South African art. More specifically, this article focuses on selected art works from the group exhibition *Reflective Conversations: Typography, topography, typology* (2013). The methodology of this study consists of a theoretical understanding of Baudrillard's discussion of the simulacrum and the orders thereof. The selected art works are interpretively used as contemporary examples in order to enlighten Baudrillard's three orders. The value of this research lies in a contemporary reflection of Baudrillard's three orders of the simulacrum.
Key words: Baudrillard, orders of the simulacrum, *Reflective Conversations: Typography, topography, typology* (2013)

Weerspieëlingsgesprekke: Baudrillard se ordes van die simulacrum
Die Franse poststrukturalis Baudrillard (1981; 1983; 1976 en 1994) se konseptualisering van die simulacrum behels die filosofies-teoretiese ondersoek na die dekonstruksie van realiteit, en terselfdertyd ook die bewuswording daarvan. Die stelselmatige verlies en uiteindelike bewuswording van die werklike realiteit word deur Baudrillard gerangskik volgens drie ordes van die simulacrum. Hierdie ordes is histories gekontekstualiseer volgens spesifieke epogge en verteenwoordig gevolglik verskillende fases van die beeld. Die artikel ondersoek Baudrillard se ordes van die simulacrum as moontlike metodologiese benadering vir kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse kuns. Meer spesifiek fokus hierdie artikel op gekose kunswerke van die groepsuitstalling *Weerspieëlings en Weerklank: Tipografie, topologie en tipologie* (2013). Die metodologiese benadering van hierdie studie behels 'n teoretiese verkenning van Baudrillard se bespreking van die simulacrum en opeenvolgende ordes. Die gekose kunswerke word voorts beskoulik gebruik as kontemporêre voorbeelde om Baudrillard se drie ordes te verhelder. Die waarde van hierdie navorsing lê in die kontemporêre weerspieëling van Baudrillard se drie ordes van die simulacrum.
Sleutelwoorde: Baudrillard, ordes van die simulacrum, *Reflective Conversations: Typography, topography, typology* (2013)

According to the poststructuralist Baudrillard (1929-2007) "the simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none." (1994: 1). The term simulacrum is predominantly associated with the Latin verbs *simulare, simulo* or *simulavi* meaning to counterfeit, to copy or to pretend (cf. Oxford dictionary of word origins, 2010). Baudrillard's (1994) conceptualisation however, as inspired by a poststructuralist semiotic approach, deconstructs this definition by declaring that within a postmodern consumer society the line between a so called original and copy ceases to exist. Hence the Platonic dualistic binary between the real, original and counterfeit or copy collapses. Instead what Baudrillard (1994: 23) calls the hyperreal dominates: "Thus everywhere the hyperrealism of simulation is translated by the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself". In the simulacrum the hyperreal, in accordance with Derrida (1981: 192-193), becomes more real than the real itself, inherently deconstructing the meaning of the "real" completely. The real becomes a representational allegory of itself.

Baudrillard's conceptualisation of the construct *simulacrum* is known for its contradictive nature (cf. Butler, 1999: 14). This contradiction entails, in response and reaction to Plato's *mimesis* (cf. *De Republica in* Wartenberg 2002: 2-13), that although the copy represents the original, it isn't a counterfeit any longer but rather a new original. Suggesting that the copy only resembles the original in their difference – consequently the twofold between copy and original disappears and all that remains is the simulacrum. Baudrillard (1994: 3) proposes that the simulacrum presents itself as the reality, but essentially has no correlation with the actual reality, therefore threatening "the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary". Baudrillard (1994: 5) proposes, in contrast to Plato's (cf. *De Republica in* Wartenberg 2002: 2-13) complete, original *idea* reality that within the simulacrum only a dissimulation is present. Dissimulation refers to a so called masquerade of the real, which refers to an original or prototype of the *visual* reality, but only exists in its difference from the real. Baudrillard (1994: 5) uses this construct to argue that Plato's concept of a true original can only be realised by the projection or dissimulation of images. In other words the *idea* only becomes real as dissimulations of our thoughts as a *mimesis,* which is only possible in the reflection of another *mimeses*- the simulacrum:

> 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. But it is more complicated than that because simulation is not pretending: "Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littré). Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear; it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary" (Baudrillard, 1994: 3).

The *idea* of the simulacrum does not only eliminate reality or the real, but also the possibility of a reality (Baudrillard, 1993: 184). The main purpose of the simulacrum, according to Baudrillard (1993: 184), is not to eradicate the presented "reality", but rather to realise the actual reality. Ironically, the simulacrum then unmasks the illusion of the real through another illusion. The borders between the illusion or representation of reality and reality itself then disappear completely. Only models of the real remain where all other forms of reality flow according to regulated differences. The only 'experience' of the so called original reality is therefore based on associations with pre-textual models or other references to reality.

Baudrillard (1981) ironically arranged the diminution of the real by conceptualising a "historical framework" for the simulacrum, as an intertextual reference and critique towards the poststructuralist Foucault's epistemological approach in *The order of things* (1977). Baudrillard's so called history of the simulacrum is divided according to three orders (as Foucault's episteme of representation), each representing a historical epoch: the order of the counterfeit or imitation (the first) during the Renaissance and Baroque, the order of production (the second) which is characterised by the Industrial Revolution of the 1800's and lastly the order of simulation (the third) as represented by a post Second World War society. During the order of simulation, as a symptom of a "mega" consumer society, the difference between the original and the copy dissolve completely, becoming mere parodies of the real as a simulacrum. Within these historical orders Baudrillard (1994) uses different "phases" of the image to illustrate the gradual loss of the real. Art for Baudrillard (1981: 107, 110), as any commodity, merely becomes a set of signs reflecting the society it is made in.

Although Baudrillard (1981, 1983, 1976 and 1994) conceptualised these orders, and concurrently the phases of the image, according to specific historical epochs this article suggests that each order does not have to be bound to its particular timeframe. These orders can alternatively be used as a visual methodology as a way to reflect on, interpret and analyse contemporary art.

In this article Baudrillard's orders of simulacrum is discussed by referring to selected art works from the exhibition *Reflective Conversations: Typography, topography, typology* (2013). This is a collaborative exhibition that was organised by the North-West University's research niche for visual arts: *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research.*

Baudrillard's orders of simulacra

The order of the counterfeit or imitation

The order of the counterfeit (imitation), characterised by the Renaissance and Baroque periods, is based on what Baudrillard (1983: 84) calls the "natural law of value". The sign starts to break away from compulsory limits (as set by the feudal age) and refers to an external reality (Baudrillard 1983: 84). Signs in the order of imitation become real by means of a medium. Concurrently two signs can be compared with one another on the bases that both refer to the same external reality as an imitation (Baudrillard 1983: 85). Signs in the order of imitation do not attempt to become real but rather emphasise the imitation of the reality. Therefore they are celebrated not for being real but for imitating the real so well.

To illustrate the order of imitation within its historical timeframe, Baudrillard (1983: 88) refers as examples to stucco and the automaton which are both generally associated with the Italian Baroque. Stucco is known for its illusionistic qualities by convincing the viewer of a portrayed real. Simultaneously this aesthetic effect is only successful on the foundation that it is an illusion. In other words the viewer is in awe, not because the difference between the real and the portrayed is blurred, but because stucco imitates the real so well. Consequently stucco, such as the art technique *trompe l'oeil*, is dependent on an optic illusion (cf. Kleiner 2013: 595). The slightest difference from the real makes it more real (cf. Baudrillard 1983: 88). The same goes for the automaton, which leaves the viewer astonished. Not because it looks like a real person or animal, but because it is secretly different. It is celebrated as a parody or even a metaphor of the real, not as an equivalent of the real:

> The automaton has no other destiny than to be ceaselessly compared to a living man...A perfect double for him, right up to the suppleness of his movements, the functioning of his organs and intelligence – right up to touching upon the anguish there would be in becoming aware that there is no difference, that the soul is over with and now it is an ideally naturalized body which absorbs its energy. The difference is then always maintained, as in the case of that perfect automaton that the impersonator's jerky movements on stage imitate; so that at least, even if the roles were reversed, no confusion would be possible (Baudrillard 1983: 93-94).

Therefore, objects in the order of imitation "know" where the boundaries of the real lie, as they only cease to exist in their difference from the real - as imitations. Art made during the order of the counterfeit is no different. Art as a communication medium of a pre-defined power structure such as religion (specifically the Roman Catholic Church in Italy as a typical symptom of the feudal) refers to a fixed basic reality that isn't challenged. This starts changing with what Baudrillard (1983: 82) calls "the destructuring of the feudal order by the bourgeois" during the Renaissance, when open competition between signs occur in an attempt to democratise the sign. The sign therefore still refers to a basic reality as an imitation, but differs in individuality from other imitations. Generally speaking depictions during this epoch, in accordance with the revival of classical humanism, were also excessively focused on restoring the so called ideal beauty that was lost during the anonymous Middle-Ages (cf. Marien & Fleming 2005:

294-296). Concurrently representations of both immortal and mortal were depicted as overly beautiful, perfect and blissful.

Figure 1
Cashandra Willemse, *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child*, 2013 (photo courtesy of the NWU's research niche: *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research*).

Cashandra Willemse's (b. 1970) *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* (2013, figure 1) for example depends on such a recognition of imitation. Although her Mary and Child counterfeit becomes a metaphor for her own relationship with her daughter, the representation of the Madonna or Virgin and Child is an iconographical representation. Granting the depiction of Madonna or Virgin and Child is known throughout the Middle Ages, it is archetypally associated with the high-Renaissance. Willemse's reinterpretation of the theme imitates a basic reality - that of a mother and child - in order to convey a narrative that is immediately recognised by a pre-conditioned audience as determined by Baudrillard's (1983: 84) natural law of value of the sign. In other words, the educated viewer immediately recognises and accordingly contextualises Willemse's re-presentation in its similarity with the flawless beautiful depictions of Mary and Child during for example, the Renaissance. The basic (original) reality of Mary and Child, as well as her subjective interpretation of her own relationship with her daughter, is therefore masked by the perfect decadence of recognisable Renaissance portraits or altarpieces.

Figure 2
Andries Bezuidenhout's, *Sunbeams* (left), 2013; *Nieu Bethesda Tennis Club Hall*, 2013 (right) (photo: courtesy of the NWU's *research niche Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research*).

In accordance, art that uses painting as medium in the style of realism or naturalism such as Andries Bezuidenhout's (b. 1969) *Nieu Bethesda Tennis Club Hall* (2013, figure 2) and *Sunbeams* (2013, figure 2), is governed by optic illusions and techniques of imitation in order to portray recognisable imagery. Bezuidenhout's portrayal of the Nieu Bethesda Tennis Club represents a basic reality that becomes more real by imitating the real so well (cf. Baudrillard, 1983: 88). Bezuidenhout (2013) does this by focusing the theme of these artworks on "the topography of a landscape and specifically how light enters a landscape". As a result, Bezuidenhout's emphasis on the beauty of sunlight reflecting through windows, - together with his technical precision - creates a romanticised, nostalgic atmosphere as superimposed counterfeit of the real. Similarly, film as medium, becomes more desirable than the real itself. Steven Bosch's (b. 1978) video piece *Talking Head* (2012, figure 3), which forms part of the production *Dismotief* (2012)[1], depicts a portrait frame of himself hanging upside down. Bosch's video imitation of defaming portraiture, or *pittura infamente,* is identified in accordance with ancient Roman law with jurisdictive practices during the Italian Renaissance (cf. Bosch 2013). Upside-down portraits were commissioned by Italian governments and displayed publically as "municipal justice" in order to denounce conspirators, criminals or the general fraudulent (cf. Bosch 2013). Bosch, like Willemse's *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child*, refers to a pre-textual context, which an educated audience recognises as a basic symbolic reality which was only made real by portraiture in the first place. The concept of *pittura infamente* therefore becomes explicitly real by reproducing the counterfeit (Italian portraiture) by means of another counterfeit: a video.

Figure 3
Steven Bosch, *Talking Head* (video still), 2012 (photo: courtesy of the artist).

The order of production

The second order in Baurdrillard's (cf. 1983: 83) "history" of the simulacrum is the order of production. Production is concomitant with the rise of the Industrial Revolution of the 1800's and the commercial law of value. For Baudrillard (1983: 97, 98,100; 1976: 425) the importance of this order lies in the liberation of signs as a marginal period between the first order and the third order (simulation). The liberation of the sign is noticeable by the existing distinction between a so called original and a copy; however the difference between the two starts becoming unclear. The sign therefore, in contrast to the sign in the order of imitation, comes to be an equal of the real by pursuing to become the real.

This process paves the way to the complete loss of the original during the third and final phase of the simulacrum: the order of simulation. This outlook is accentuated by the Neo-Marxist Benjamin's *Work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (1935). Benjamin (1935: 12) argues that objects' so called *auras* are lost when they are constantly reproduced during mass production. Baudrillard, although from a semiotic approach, would later counter Benjamin's (1935) argument by postulating that an object, comprising of a system of signs, has no "aura" to lose for it no longer represents the original. Baudrillard (1983) frames this outlook by referring to the industrial conveyer belt that marks the beginning of commercial reproduction. During the reproduction process the difference between the original product or the prototype and the copy that is enforced by the conveyer belt is renounced. As the production process progresses, the difference between the original prototype and the copy later become completely undistinguishable as the quality of production is enforced (cf. Baudrillard 1983:

97). Consequently all copies of the prototype in the production line are equally original and unoriginal. In the order of production, signs are no longer imitations of the real (such as signs of the order of imitation) for there is no real or original to which they can be compared. Another example Baudrillard (1983: 94-95) uses to enlighten his argument is the production efficiency of the robot, as developed at the onset of the Industrial Revolution. In contrast to its precursor, the automaton, the industrial robot deconstructs any relationship it had with humans. The robot, unlike the automaton, is in no competition with the real, because it is more efficient in functionality than the real (cf. Baudrillard 1983: 94-95).

Art, as read and interpreted by Baudrillard's (1983) order of production, façades the absence of a basic reality by the liberation of the sign. The liberation of the sign denies imitation and rather pursues the real by the systematic deconstruction of the difference between the original and the copy. Even though the difference between the prototype and the copy fades, there is still a difference in the dualistic separation of original prototype and a copy thereof. The mechanical reproduction of art such as photography or video installations, are concise examples of such framed reproductions. Technically, in accordance with photographic works on the exhibition *Reflective Conversations: Typography, topography, typology* such as Richardt Strydom's (b. 1971) *Robert #1 and #2* (2012) and *Minima Moralia* (2012), Strijdom van der Merwe's (b. 1961) *Drawing a line 1, 2 and 3* (2013) and Bosch's *Hoofstuk II* and *Hoofstuk III* (2012, translated *Chapter II* and *Chapter III*) or Colette Lotz's (b. 1971) triptych *Reminiscence I, II* and *III* (2013, figure 4) photographs represent a so called original moment in time.

Figure 4
Colette Lotz, Triptych *Reminiscence I, II, III*, 2013 (photo: courtesy of the NWU's research niche *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research*).

The photo, although manipulated like video, is a copy of a so called original or prototypical moment and can only be reproduced as endless copies by means of reproduction. The

reproduction (being the photo or video) references the real moment by becoming the moment itself. In accordance with Baudrillard's (1983: 97) description above, signs in the order of production such as photographs are no longer imitations of the real in contrast to the order of the counterfeit, for there is no real to which they can be associated with. In other words, these photographic moments that photographs or videos depict, can never occur in "real-time" again, but exist only as equally original and unoriginal reproductions of past moments[2].

During Baudrillard's (1983) order of production the sign starts a so called emancipation process (which is completed during the third order). Therefore the sign begins to lose contact with a so called original real. This can be illustrated once again by Willemse's *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child.* Willemse's work as interpreted by the order of production becomes a mechanical reproduction of the various iconographical paintings during the Renaissance (as mentioned during the first order). *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* is literally built out of digitally illustrated designed and cut layers (Willemse 2013). The digital illustrations become the prototype on which the actual mechanically reproduced layers – the copies – are based. Furthermore, the cloth used in the piece to dress the *Child,* originated from a frock Willemse bought in Singapore for her daughter when she was still a baby (Willemse 2013). Willemse dismantled the original Singaporean frock and re-used the pieces in *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* to produce a new original frock. Concurrently the difference or twofold between the copy and the original begins to disintegrate. Willemse's framed reproduction as read from the order of production, in contrast to a reading and interpretation according to the first order of simulacrum, masks the absence of a basic reality. This masking occurs directly in conjunction with the freeing of the sign: a glamorously framed digital reproduction made in 2013, intertextually referencing various recognisable Renaissance paintings that depict the theme of Mary and Child, with a personal twist.

In accordance Louisemarie Combrink's *Gogga maak vir baba bang: 'n gesprek met Magritte* (2013, figure 5) (translated *Bug frightens baby: a conversation with Magritte*) comprises of photographic reproductive layers of her son in a Spiderman dressing gown. The collage itself becomes a playful reinterpreted copy of the Belgian surrealist René Magritte's (1898-1967) painting *La reproduction interdite* (1937, *Not to be reproduced*), (cf. Combrink 2013). Magritte's version was made as a commission for English poet and supporter of the surrealist movement Edward James (1907-1984). Combrink uses the same visual composition as the original, but replaces Magritte's intertextual references with signs that are specifically meaningful to her. In the original *La reproduction interdite* Magritte depicts the French edition of American author and poet Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) only complete novel: *Les aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838, originally published as *The narrative of Arthur Gordon Pyn of Nantucket*) on the mirror's mantelpiece. Combrink, instead, uses an Afrikaans copy of the children's book *The Gruffalo* (1999, translated to Afrikaans as *Die Goorgomgaai)* by British author and poet Julia Donaldson (b. 1948), (cf. Combrink, 2013). As a result signs in *Gogga maak vir baba bang: a gesprek met Magritte*, in agreement with Baudrillard's (1983: 94-95) example of the mechanical robot, are no longer competing with an original (as with signs of the order of the counterfeit) but rather become equals of the original. In other words *Gogga maak vir baba bang: a gesprek met Magritte* is not competing as a counterfeit of the original *La reproduction interdite* but becomes a playful, postmodern reinterpretation: inherently completely deconstructing the constructs *original* and *copy*. This marks the final freeing of the sign during Baudrillard's (1994) conceptualisation of the third order of simulation.

Figure 5
Louisemarie Combrink, *Gogga maak vir baba bang: a gesprek met Magritte*, 2013 (photo: courtesy of the NWU's research niche *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research*).

The order of simulation

The third and final order in Baudrillard's historical progression of the simulacrum is the order of simulation which accompanies a post Second World War consumer society. During this order emphasis is placed on the structural law of value as symptomatic of a global, mega consumer society. According to Baurdrillard (1976: 426; 1983: 83; 1993: 56) imitation ceases to exist in the order of simulation (in contrast with the first order). Nor is there any reference to an original prototype or a copy as with the second order. Instead, the final order is characterised by mere "models" of the once real and can only be associated with *traces* of difference. These models only resemble themselves as belated experiences of a pre-real, as simulacra: "The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is already reproduced, the hyper-real" (Baudrillard 1983: 146).

Where the order of imitation and subsequent order of production is branded by the systematic emancipation of the sign by the gradual loss of an original reality, the order of simulation in contrast becomes a new reality. The *idea* of an original reality becomes irrelevant and is rather

replaced by a newfound awareness of the real. Baudrillard (1983: 101, 105) describes this as a process of recycling the reality. The simulacrum, as a product of a recycled real, artifices difference in order to keep the illusion of the real intact.

This way the simulacrum simultaneously defends originality by declaring unoriginality. In other words, the simulacrum as product of the order of simulation is only possible by referring to traces of the so called real reality. Inherently the so called real reality only exists as an extension of the simulacrum. Baudrillard (1983: 101, 105) claims, as I have mentioned earlier, that the simulacrum ought not to be associated with the elimination of the idea of reality, but rather characterised by its awareness or experience of the "reality". Kellner (2006: 14) compares this to a carnival of mirrors that reflects and projects from other mirrors and then projects onto screens to other mirrors. The "reality" as a system of models, defends its originality by what Baudrillard (1983: 117) calls "tactical hallucinations" within the illusion. By this he (1983: 117) means that there is no "reality" outside of the illusion, but rather an experience of a reality - defending the fact that there is no reality. Baudrillard (1983: 117) postulates that the illusion protects and constructs originality by depending on a pretext of another reality: a tactical hallucination. The hallucination (being a hallucination) then declares the death of representation. Consequently, the simulacrum can't represent anything outside the simulacrum except itself (Baudrillard, 1994: 1).

The so called *death of representation* flows forth from Baudrillard's (1976: 423; 1983: 194-196) earlier interest in classical Marxism and semiotics. Baudrillard (1976: 421) argues that commodities within a consumer society don't only have *use* and *exchange value*, as Marx's (cf. 1844) dialectic described it, but moreover a *symbolic exchange value* - Baudrillard's (1970: 20) main argument being that commodities are not isolated as specific products that emphasise function, but are rather part of a greater system of objects that fulfil more than just basic needs. Commodities therefore, become part of a greater meaning as a system of interrelated signs (Baudrillard 1970: 27). Cultural norms and conditioning constructs the *symbolic exchange value* of commodities by imbedding social conventions such as taste, style, identity, authenticity and status (cf. Baudrillard 1976: 423; 1983: 194-196). Concurrently, in an advanced consumer society, the functionality of products (or signs) are deconstructed completely and are rather organised according to a greater hierarchy of status symbols. The value of signs is therefore classified by a differentiated system of status and not by the utility of the product. According to Baudrillard (1976: 134, 1994: 3), in agreement with Derrida (1981: 195), signs in the age of consumerism declare the death of representation since they only represent themselves and reference no original meaning. The copy and the so called original lose contact with each other. Within the simulacrum a mere <u>experience</u> of a representational reality remains. This experience is based on the principle of difference between the so called real and the simulacrum. And so, ironically, the simulacrum exists through the simulacrum of the real. Baudrillard (1994: 13) describes this notion in his discussion of Disneyland and the simulacrum:

> The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp. Whence the debility of this imaginary, its infantile degeneration. This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere – that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness (Baudrillard 1994: 13).

Baudrillard (1994: 13) states, in accordance with the above mentioned quotation, that the real as simulacrum (especially the USA) is surrounded and kept in tack by fictionist images like Disneyland. Concurrently, in agreement with the semiotic approaches of Boorstin, Borgmann

and Eco, the real exists only in a hyperreality of simulations. The term hyperreality is generally associated from a critical theoretical framework with the subconscious incapacity to differentiate between the reality and a so called fantasy world. This is heightened by a technologically driven consumer culture as currently experienced by, for example, social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter (cf. Hegarty 2004: 204). The hyperreal becomes continuously more real than the real itself by reflecting copies without originals. The hyperreal for Baudrillard, as suggested earlier, are only the recycling of signs and images that do not represent a so called reality other than themselves. Concurrently, in accordance with the poststructuralist Derrida (1981: 192-193), the construct *reality* is completely lost. All that remains is an allegory of death, brought forth by the self-destruction of signs (Baudrillard 1993: 72): "Thus everywhere the hyperrealism of simulation is translated by the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself" (Baudrillard 1994: 23).

For Baudrillard (1970: 33) art and imagery as a reflection of the hyper-real and inherently the third order of simulacrum, reaches this critical turning point with the rise of the British and mainly American Pop Art movements during the 1950's (cf. Arnason 2004: 478-504). Pop art's commercial success, banality, tactlessness and flatness became a mere reproduction of the consumer society from which it came - the final successful deliverance of the sign from any system of reference. Baudrillard (1976: 100-110) from this point forward, declares the death of representational art. Accordingly contemporary art as any sign of the order of simulation can only represent itself and doesn't resemble or imitate (as with the first order of the counterfeit) any prototypical original (such as during the order of production), but becomes its own original.

Willemse's *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* as read from the order of simulation, in contrast to a reading and interpretation from the stance of the first and second order, comprises of digitally designed, layered, copied meanings and interpretations of other copied interpretations, all without origin. The depiction therefore becomes a digital copy of a copied art style of an archetypical copied narrative without a specific origin: a self-referenced new original. The two figures - as well as for example the halos above them or the golden inner frame in the portrait - are physically built up from illustrative, two-dimensional layers that were fundamentally produced by binary codes (cf. Willemse 2013). Furthermore, they are dressed in cloth from a frock which was bought by Willemse in Singapore, but commercially reproduced in China as seen on the label which is on the child's dress (cf. figure 1). Thus the deconstruction of the pre-original, which in turn never referenced an original, and the re-assembling of these parts into a new original that references only itself: a subjective narrative of a mother and child.

Other examples of art works that can possibly be interpreted as a self-referencing system of signs are both Deirdre Pretorius's (b.1971) *Potchefstroom – legkaart van die verlede* (2013, translated *Potchefstroom – puzzle of the past*, figure 5) and van der Merwe's *Drawing a line 1, 2 and 3* (figure 6) that each conceptually and visually embrace maps. Both Pretorius and Van der Merwe engage with space and place in their distinctive art works as a typographical tool to unlock meaning. Pretorius uses a map of Potchefstroom as actual canvas to exhibit personal photographs and documents that she collected whilst growing up in Potchefstroom during 1977-1988 (Pretorius 2013). Van der Merwe, on the other hand, uses a site map at the bottom of each of the three *Drawing a line* (cf. figure 6) photographic works in order to document the site. From the perspective of the order of simulation, both art works use of the map visually and conceptually portray the hyper-real. In other words, a map is more real than the real itself, for it has no original moment or real to refer to. Baudrillard (1994: 1) uses an allegory of the Argentinian author Luis Borges's (1899-1986) short story *Del rigor en la ciencia* (1946, translated *On Exactitude in Science*) of an empyrean, territorial map to enlighten his explanation

of the simulacrum. In short: Borges's tale portrays an empire that constructed a map physically as large as the empire itself and when the empire is destroyed all that remained was the map. Baudrillard (1994: 1) proposes that this simulated map becomes the only real that we as mere reflections of a mega consumer society know and that we will forever be fixated with leaving our simulated mark on this simulated map, whilst the real that surrounds the map disintegrates completely[3].

Figure 5
Deirdre Pretorius, *Potchefstroom – legkaart van die verlede*, 2013 (photo: courtesy of the NWU's research niche *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research*).

Figure 6
Strijdom van der Merwe, *Drawing a line 1, 2 and 3,* 2013 (photo: courtesy of the NWU's research niche *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research*).

According to Baudrillard (cf. 1983: 101, 105; 1994: 117) signs in the order of simulation are only models - like the map -of the once real: the pre-real. The system of the simulacrum will continue to keep the difference between the two "reals" intact in order to keep the illusion of the real in place. Strydom's photographic portraits *Robert #1 and #2* (cf. figure 7)*, Minima Moralia* and the video piece *Oudisie* (2012, translated as *Audition*) as well as Bosch's *Hoofstuk II* and *Hoofstuk III* and the video *Talking Head* (all part of the production *Dismotief*)*,* comments on alternative positions of white masculinity. The collaborative exhibition *Dismotief* investigates, in accordance with the current discourse on whiteness in a democratic South Africa, the performance of white Afrikaner masculinity that is struggling to find a new voice and break away from the hegemonic, inherited stereotypes and constructions of the past. Conceptually one can argue, in accord with Baudrillard's (1994: 3) order of simulation, that these photographic works refer to a copy without an original in the sense that they comment and actively denounce past white, Afrikaner, masculine identities (cf. *Robert #1* and *#2; Minima Moralia; Hoofstuk II* and *III*). The Afrikaner heritage being one of an already hybridised copy of various other identity copies, the above mentioned images deconstructs the pre-real by conceptually investigating alternative expressions of white masculinity and conceptually presents identities that are new originals. Identity, as any other sign and simultaneously a commodity in the system of the simulacrum, is never fixed and always changeable: "the simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none." (Baudrillard 1994: 1).

Figure 7
Richardt Strydom, *Robert #1*, 2012 (photo: courtesy of Richardt Strydom).

Conclusion: Baudrillard' re-presentation of the simulacrum

This article investigated Baudrillard's (1981; 1983; 1976 and 1994) orders of simulacrum as a possible visual methodology to interpret selected contemporary South African artworks from the exhibition *Reflective Conversations: Typography, topography, typology* held in 2013 by the North-West University's research niche for visual arts *Visual narratives and creative outputs through interdisciplinary and practice led research.* Baudrillard (1981; 1983; 1976; and 1994) conceptualised the three orders of simulacrum to create a so called history for the gradual loss of the representational real: the simulacrum. In conclusion one can argue that Baudrillard's three orders, although initially framed according to a historical landscape, can be used as an interpretative, structuring tool in order to unlock different layers of meaning in contemporary art works.

The first order of the simulacrum namely the order of the counterfeit or imitation can be applied during a visual methodological approach as a starting point in a methodological approach. The application of Baudrillard's (1983: 84) first order entails identifying a basic reality that is framed by the natural law of the value of the sign. Concurrently, art can be interpreted as a masking of a basic reality by symbolically imitating the real, but being celebrated in its difference to the real. Willemse's *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* conceals a basic reality: a mother and child. Although the portrait was made in 2013 the knowledgeable viewer immediately associates the depiction with an iconographical Mary and Child from the Renaissance as determined by the pre-determined value of the sign. The value in using the order of imitation or the counterfeit as a first reflection on an art work, such as Willemse's, lies in the contextual introduction of the work which includes the underlying, intertextual systems of meaning.

The second order of the simulacrum namely the order of production emphasises the start of the liberation of the sign as product of the Industrial Revolution. The copy therefore starts to lose contact with the original as it becomes more and more similar to the prototype. According to Baudrillard (1983: 97-98; 100) endless copies by means of reproduction begin to become as original and unoriginal as their prototypes. Signs in the order of production such as photographs or video, in contrast to the order of the counterfeit, are no longer imitations of the real as there is no real to be compared with. Willemse's *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* as a digital and inherently mechanical reproduction of various iconographical paintings during the Renaissance, equally represents the prototype, the digital illustration and the copy, the actual work (cf. Willemse 2013).

The third and final order namely the order of simulation marks the total deliverance of the sign. The difference between the original and the copy cease to exist as there is no original to refer to. Instead, a new original is created by the system of the simulacrum in order to keep the illusion that there is in fact no real intact. This is based on what Baudrillard (cf. 1976: 423; 1983: 194-196) calls the symbolic exchange value. Signs as part of the system of objects as commodities are constructed according to embedded social conventions which ads status to the sign's value. The fixation with status as value becomes, like Borges's map, removed from the so called true meaning and declares the death of representation. Willemse's *A Topographical analysis of Mary and Child* as read from the order of simulation depicts a copy of a copy of a copy that only references itself as a new copied original. The deconstruction of the pre-real, which in turn never existed, and the construction of a new original becomes an ironic interplay of signs. The simulacrum therefore creates its own other: the hyper-real, in order to become more real than the real itself. It is this paradox that makes the third order of simulacrum never-

ending, circular and simultaneously immeasurable. For once the simulacrum is exposed there isn't a simulacrum any longer. For as we all know from the Wachowski's film *The Matrix* (1999) that was philosophically based on Baudrillard's theories of simulacra:

> 'This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill - the story ends; you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill – you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes' (Morpheus, *The Matrix*, 1999).

Notes

i *Dismotief* (translated as dis-motif) is an interdisciplinary production that was held in the Potchefstroom City Hall during the 2012 Aardklop National Arts Festival. It entailed a photographic and audio-visual exhibition, typographic representations of poems, sound recordings of musical compositions and a live music performance. The production investigated subjective perspectives of performing white identities and specifically the Afrikaans language and being an Afrikaner (cf. Strydom & Bosch, 2012).

ii Here I specifically refer to the photographic moment as a copy of a past moment and not to the technical manipulation of the image.

iii In my opinion Baudrillard's (1994: 1) account of Borges's tale can here be compared with the current social media culture.

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