

# THE CONCEPTION OF CONTEMPORARY HYPERCIVILIZATION: J. BAUDRILLARD

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The article deals with the conception of hypercivilization that was developed by contemporary French media philosopher Jean Baudrillard and discusses its originality, innovation and philosophical-sociological validity. It is compared with the classical conception of Western civilization, highlighting their basic similarities and differences. The author investigates the relationships between classical Western civilization and traditional metaphysics and between contemporary hypercivilization and pataphysics.

The first section of the article is introduced to the meaning and problematization of the concept of civilization, analyzing the connections between the concepts of civilization and culture. The second section discusses traditional French concept of civilization. The third section analyzes and interprets the conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard. The last one from a critical thinking perspective discusses the philosophical-sociological validity of the conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard, seeking for possible parallels with the conception of classical Western civilization.

Keywords: capitalism, consumption, contemporary information and communication technologies (new media), hypercivilization, pataphysics.

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## Introduction

The emergence of contemporary information and communication technologies, usually identified as the new media, in the background of the late, i.e. post-industrial capitalism, requires re-considering the traditional conceptions both of culture and of civilization. This stage of capitalism hyperbolizes and re-intensifies the problematics of its earlier periods. Baudrillard interprets the civilizational aspect of the post-industrial socio-economic system of capitalism and the capitalist social order. He declares that contemporary hypercivilization<sup>1</sup> is fundamentally different from the classical Western civilization due to the spreading scale and character of the technological images in new media. The technological images, which he discusses, are contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most important aspects of contemporary hypercivilization in the thinking perspective of Jean Baudrillard is globality, which means the emergence of the worldwide civilization, homogenizing the differences of the separate civilizations and cultures. Nevertheless, this article deals with other aspects of hypercivilization – with the social and the technological ones.

simulacra (French *simulacres*), i.e. some sort of copies without their originals – much more mobile than the material objects and therefore easily re-signifying and re-commodifying. There can be traced the thread, linking classical Western civilization with traditional metaphysics in the texts of Baudrillard. He dissolves this thread, drawing another one between contemporary hypercivilization and pataphysics. Here we will try to answer three basic questions: What conception of hypercivilization suggests Baudrillard? What is the essence of hypercivilization that he penetrates? What is the relationship between classical Western civilization and contemporary hypercivilization?

### The meaning and problematicity of a concept of civilization

The concept of civilization is descended from the French *civilisation*, and its meaning is akin to the Latin adjective *civilis*, which in Lithuanian means *civil*. There are two most popular meanings of the concept of civilization: the first one implies a certain level of material culture of society, demonstrating how much people have mastered the forces of nature; the second one refers to the culture of progressive world countries (Kvietkauskas 1985: 92). However, this concept has many other meanings, from which as the most important can be distinguished even seven: firstly, it implies an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached; secondly, those people or nations that have reached such a state; thirdly, any type of culture, society, etc., of a specific place, time, or group (for example, Greek civilization); fourthly, the act or process of civilizing or being civilized; fifthly, cultural refinement, refinement of thought and cultural appreciation (for example, the wit); sixthly, cities or populated areas in general, as opposed to unpopulated or wilderness areas (for example, civilization *versus* the jungle); seventhly, modern comforts and conveniences, as made possible by science and technology (for example, television or running water) (Dictionary.com 2009)<sup>2</sup>.

It is worth noting that, according to Norbert Elias, the concept of civilization refers namely to the *Western* self-consciousness or national consciousness but not to any other one. This concept, as he claims, includes everything by what the Western society, from approximately the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, supposes has to be excelled the earlier or much more primitive societies. The Western society, Elias continues, requesting the concept of civilization, tries to characterize its *own* peculiarity and what it is proud of, i.e. its *own* level of technology, its *own* mode of behaviour, its *own* development of scientific knowledge, world outlook, etc. (Elias 2004: 1). This means that the concept of civilization, firstly, is requested to express a certain superiority of Western nations with respect to non-Western ones. In this way, the Western nations try to compete with non-Western ones and, most importantly, to outrival them. Secondly, this concept includes the material, i.e. the material based or external inventions and discoveries as well as spiritual that is without such a basis, internal achievements. Here arise the multiplicity and its following problematicity. Why?

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/civilization>.

Firstly, different Western nations attach different meanings to the multiple concept of civilization; secondly, even though it is rather often compared with the concept of culture, nevertheless, they are not always used as synonyms<sup>3</sup>. It is worthwhile to bear in mind that the usage of these concepts is largely dependent on a particular tradition, namely whether they are used as synonyms or concepts, having different meanings. For these reasons, different Western European nations both the concept of civilization and the concept of culture connote differently. That is why any nation puts into the concept of civilization that what is identified by another nation as the concept of culture, and what the latter one characterized as a civilization, the first of them could identify as culture. For these various Western European nations and their different usage of the concepts of civilization and culture in an academic discourse rather often arises a certain confusion of the meanings, assigned to them, while in the populist one usually is not made the separation between these two concepts and they are used as synonyms.

### The traditional French conception of civilization

In this article, which is devoted to the conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard, we will limit ourselves discussing the French concept of civilization, revealing the similarities and differences between it and the concept of culture. And the usages of these concepts, prevailing in other Western European nations, we will discuss in that case solely and from such a perspective, which can help us to understand better the French ones. As Elias notes, there is a huge difference between some French and English and different German usages of the concept of civilization. In the first case, as he says, this concept expresses the pride of the significance of their own nations in the progress in the West and in all human kind. And in the second case, according to Elias, the concept of civilization means what is really useful but, nevertheless, is a second-rated value, since it includes only the external human world, the surface of his existence (Elias 2004: 1). Consequently, the traditional French concept of civilization namely refers to external, i.e. both scientific discoveries and technological inventions and, as he writes, political, economic, religious, moral and social facts, relevant to some attitude and behaviour of the members of society (Elias 2004: 1). This means, that the traditional French concept of civilization refers to first-rated values and its usage emphasizes the opportunity to demonstrate the advantage of its own national consciousness in respect with both Western and non-Western nations. Meanwhile,

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<sup>3</sup> Leonidas Donskis, emphasizing the multiplicity of the concept of civilization and its dependency upon a certain tradition, suggests its six meanings. Civilization, according to him, is: firstly, civil society, or civil state of society, essentially different from its innate state; secondly, material cultural substrate, i.e. re-materialized objective culture and its material presence (Stasys Šalkauskis); thirdly, specific localized society and its mode of existence (Arnold Toynbee); fourthly, the end of the life cycle of culture, the crisis phase of cultural process, the lethal destructive culture (Oswald Spengler); fifthly, extreme objectification of culture, estrangement from the framework of life, alienation in respect with forms of life; sixthly, historical, i.e. rapidly changing, progressive, future-oriented culture, essentially different from the non-historical, or traditional and isolated culture, which is based on tradition and on orientation to the past (Donskis 1993: 27, 28).

everything what cannot be related to the advantage and competitiveness of the national consciousness, i.e. what cannot be related to external achievements but belongs to the inner human world, to the core of his existence, the French people identify, requesting the concept of culture.

However, such a separation between the concepts of civilization and culture in the French tradition is conditional, more precisely, this separation cannot be treated as universal, i.e. as adaptable to any use cases. Therefore, although the concepts of civilization and culture are not synonymous but jointly they cannot be opposed to each other. Usually civilization, as mentioned-above, is associated with certain scientific, technological, economic, political achievements and attainments, allowing one civilization to compete with other ones, while culture is much more associated with spiritual and creative activity, which does not have anything in common with competitiveness. Civilization and civilizational processes, taking place in a society in certain material or rationally explainable level, according to Ewert van der Zweerde, are objective (Zweerde 2009: 21), while culture and cultural processes, taking place in spiritual level, are subjective. So, civilization in some interpretations is seen as static, i.e. as stagnant, sluggish, dead derivative, while culture is treated as a dynamic, i.e. as constantly becoming, processual, developing, living organism. However, it is worth noting that, on the one hand, civilization and culture can (permanently) interact with each other. On the other hand, mobile, processual culture, which has reached a certain development point, can become stagnant and dead civilization (in this case, culture transforms into civilization; the establishment of civilization means the end or the depletion of culture). However, such a separation of civilization and culture is not completely accurate, since some authors treat civilization like culture – as occurring, evolving, growing, becoming ripe and mature, getting old, i.e. as living organism. It follows from this, that to distinguish between threshold civilization and culture is problematic in essence. Moreover, in the French tradition, according to Leonidas Donskis, their terms are tended to use synonymously (Donskis 1993: 27), so in some cases that separation completely disappears. Then the question arises, what factors has determined the basic peculiarities of the usage of the concepts of civilization and culture in the French tradition?

In order to answer this question, firstly it is worth noting, that these peculiarities are some historical and social factors, demanding to focus on the French order, which had been prevailing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There was the Renaissance period, when the feudal social system had collapsed and it gradually had been replaced with the bourgeois<sup>4</sup> (the capitalist) one, resulting in some social transformations of castes. The collapse of feudalism in France has mobilized different social classes, making the possibility to arise the inter-classic metabolism. This had meant, that different social castes, i.e. the higher aristocracy and the lower bourgeoisie classes have converged, due to favorable economic circumstances at that time the broad masses have moved toward narrow

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<sup>4</sup> Bourgeoisie (from French *bourgeoisie*) is the ruling class of the capitalist society, the owner of basic means of production, living by the exploitation of the employment labour (Kvietkauskas 1985: 79).

higher layers, by taking over their specific characteristics. Elias, reflecting this situation, writes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France when the middle class peaks were more increasingly joining the estate society and thus increasingly broadening it, the education and the behaviour between the higher bourgeoisie and the estate aristocracy has varied almost imperceptibly. The estate aristocracy and the estate bourgeoisie at that time already had been speaking the same language, had been reading the same books and had been following the same standards of conduct by a certain scale. According to Elias, when the bourgeoisie had become a nation, many things such as the style conventions, the forms of the social interactions, the modelling of affects, the estimation of politeness, the significance of good speaking and conversation, the articularity of the speech from the very outset being the distinctive feature of the social character of the estate aristocracy and later of the estate bourgeoisie classes, eventually had become the French national character (Elias 2004: 3–4). Such social classes assimilation means, that they have become mobile and inter-classic limits – more versatile and more difficult to define. This situation has determined an increasingly active role in politics of bourgeoisie, its integration into the ranks of aristocracy, which carried the functions of government of state. Baudrillard, reflecting the social order and society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France, as the most vivid features of that period, distinguishes the emergence of the new species of non-representative but simulative *signs*. These signs he opposes to those ones, which had carried out the representation function under conditions of the feudal system, i.e. to the “reliable signs” (French *signes sûrs*). So the questions are: What are those new, “non-reliable signs” in the thinking perspective of Baudrillard? What do they simulate? Moreover, why do these signs not represent but simulate?

Firstly, as Baudrillard writes in *Simulations* (1983) and in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993), the relationships of social classes have become increasingly dynamic, mobile and liberated from the rigid and clear hierarchical social structures in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as well as signs are increasingly emancipated from the previous obligation to represent, i.e. to indicate what is beyond them (Baudrillard 1983: 85; 1993: 51), for example, social hierarchies, established by religious or social authority. The signs have become “free to play” or, in other words, to simulate<sup>5</sup>, i.e. to copy or imitate external reality and to create its optical effects, belonging to the art technique of the *trompe-l'œil*<sup>6</sup>. Secondly, the progress of science and technology allows those signs to provide a certain material basis because, as the thinker notices, it is created such a flexible and easily moulding material as stucco (Baudrillard 1983: 83–92; 1993: 50–53) and mechanical figures of people and animals, performing the programmed

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<sup>5</sup> According to Baudrillard, the simulation is opposite to representation (Baudrillard 2002: 12).

<sup>6</sup> French *trompe-l'œil* – to trick the eye. The works of art, belonging to the technique of *trompe-l'œil*, create some optical effects, making the images of objects to appear as the real ones, i.e. such ones as it would be possible to locate their forms and bends. The images of objects, which are two-dimensional, using the technique of *trompe-l'œil*, the observer perceives in three dimensions.

movements<sup>7</sup> (Baudrillard 1983: 92–96; 1993: 53–54). These two types of “non-reliable signs” Baudrillard treats as counterfeits (French *contrefaçons*), which have become the predecessors of contemporary signs as simulacra, establishing the so-called “new system” of objects and, in their turn, determining contemporary situation of Western civilization. However, it is important to emphasize, that these “free to play” signs, which have emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which reflects the philosopher, in this case should be understood not only in concrete but also in much more abstract sense, i.e. in a sense of social emancipation, liberalization as well as in sense of social dissemblance.

If the “non-reliable signs”, i.e. simulating signs at that time, as philosopher writes in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard 2002), are “<...> naturalistic, based on the view, imitation and counterfeiting <...>” (Baudrillard 2002: 140), they establish some certain masks of stilycity, propriety, politeness, refinement, unimpeachable elegance, good taste, great erudition, proper education, high intelligence, which are characteristic of bourgeoisie, concealing the dissolute mode of life, immorality and failures. Namely these masks of bourgeoisie as the new nobility in the 18<sup>th</sup> century carry out the differentiating function between it and the lower social classes, demonstrating the then social differences. Such a situation is crucial for the French bourgeoisie self-consciousness at that time because, according to Elias, namely it has formed and consolidated the French conception of civilization, characterizing and emphasizing the specificity of this social class in respect with the lower and primitive ones (Elias 2004: 5). In this way the masks or, in other words, the images of bourgeoisie as the ruling class, persuasively making the possibility of semblance, have become the criterion of the French understood civilizability, which is the basis in the subsequent development of this social class.

It is worth noting, that both the traditional and contemporary, developed by Baudrillard, conceptions of civilization, namely grow up in the background of bourgeois, i.e. under conditions of capitalist mentality. This mentality has not occurred suddenly or casually when the feudal social system was replaced with the bourgeois one – it has been forming for a long time and its roots are much older than the 18<sup>th</sup> century, since there were needed some certain conditions. So, trying to divide the capitalist social order into the certain stages of development or, in other words, of growth, i.e. into the early (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century), the mature (19<sup>th</sup> century–the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), and the late (the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century–the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) periods of capitalism, it is to be said, that they are united by the same aspirational spirit of competitiveness, emancipation and superiority, displaying itself in the forms of social liberalization and the self-regulation. This spirit in the background of bourgeois civilization, according to Daniel Bell, combines these three

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<sup>7</sup> Such automata are especially popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most important are the *Digesting Duck*, created by Jacques de Vaucanson in 1739; the *Silver Swan*, the first time described in 1773, probably was created by John Joseph Merlin; the *Jaquet-Droz Automata* were designed by Pierre Jaquet-Droz between 1768–1774 and consisted of three figures – the musician, the drawer and the writer; the *Turk, or Automaton Chess Player* was constructed by Wolfgang von Kempelen in 1769.

elements: firstly, the rational socio-economic system of capitalism; secondly, the ideas of the emancipation and the self-creation of the individual, liberating him from traditional constraints and inherent bonds; thirdly, the structure of character, based on the self-controlling, retention and striving to reach a goal (Bell 2003: 13–14). These three elements, reflected by Bell, acquire some new ways and forms of expression in the different stages of capitalism. The old elements transform into the new ones and remain, not denying the capitalist socio-economic system, culture and civilization but, on the contrary, in a new way strengthening it. So, although the capitalist mentality faces some certain transformations, its essence remains the same, rapidly occurring the processes of political, social, cultural liberating, nowadays repudiating and thus acquiring some non-traditional contents and forms. Namely, these contents and forms make some suitable conditions to mould and emerge contemporary hypercivilization, perceived by Baudrillard. This hypercivilization is rapidly transforming the traditional view of social reality under conditions of the late capitalist culture and mentality.

### The conception of contemporary hypercivilization of Baudrillard

Traditional French conception of civilization, as we have seen, is associated with the aspiration of superiority of its own nation among the other Western and non-Western nations as well as with the possibility to be proud of their material and external attainments with respect to other nations. Baudrillard, developing his conception of hypercivilization, on the one hand, dissociates from the traditional conception of hypercivilization, on the other hand, he indirectly rests upon it. Besides, the philosopher, reflecting the periods of industrial and post-industrial capitalism, supplements that conception with some new and unexpected insights. His own conception of hypercivilization is developed in a wide context of contemporary information and communication technologies, i.e. new media, contemporary production technologies, simulacra and simulation, industrial and post-industrial capitalism, of problematics of contemporary consumption. It is important to bear in mind that, investigating the conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard, this concept is developed in the discourses of post-Marxistic, psychoanalytic, post-structural and phenomenological discourses, which are united by much broader postmodern discourse of simulation. Baudrillard, developing the conception of hypercivilization, not only criticizes the Marxistically interpreted capitalist civilization but also provides his own its interpretation. However, here it is worth noting, that the conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard, on the one hand, emerges as a result of reflection of the critics of Marxistically interpreted capitalist civilization of industrial period. On the other hand, this conception can be treated as a result of post-industrial period of capitalist civilization.

Let us start from the discussion about the concept of hypercivilization of Baudrillard. What does this concept mean in his philosophy? In the texts of Baudrillard, the concept of civilization is appended with a particle *hyper-*, which corrects the meaning of this concept in essence. A particle *hyper-* is descended from the Greek one *hyper-* and indicates the exceeding (Kvietkauskas 1985: 200). In this case, the concept of civilization, appended with a particle *hyper-*, means the *over-civilization*, *civilization-*

*more-than-civilization, too civilized civilization*, in this way overstepping the traditional understood meaning of civilization. So, hypercivilization emerges as the surplus, the excess, the redundancy of civilization, distorting the essence of the treating of traditional French civilization. But, equally important is, that the philosopher, suggesting the concept of hypercivilization, adapts it not so much in his contemporary Western civilization studies *per se*<sup>8</sup>, as in his contemporary Western culture interpretation. In the texts of Baudrillard, the concept of hypercivilization with some reservations could be replaced with the concept of hyperculture because, even if he is interested in material, public, external attainments of Western nations not with respect to competitiveness and superiority among non-Western ones, but with the interest to the technologically simulating, duplicating, visualizing social reality, its development and relationship between it and the social subject.

The concept of hypercivilization in the texts of Baudrillard is used only one time in one of his early works, published in 1968 (when the Student contra-Cultural Movement at that time had blown over in France) and titled as *The System of Objects* (2005a). However, this concept is used only in this work, as can be inferred, it is important for the thinker, like the many others with the appended particle *hyper-*. This particle in the dictionary, created by Baudrillard, has become a real cliché – it is important to him to emphasize and to reveal the character and uniqueness of the epoch of simulation with respect to the earlier ones. Even if he does not use the concept of hypercivilization in all another his books – neither in the mature, nor in the late ones – the meaning of this concept paradoxically is developed in his late writings but without using this concept.

The philosopher uses this conception among the other concepts, such as *the new environment, the new morality, the new humanism, the new social structures, the new technical structures, the new field of action, the new ethical system*, etc. (Baudrillard 2005a). These concepts, signifying the novelty, Baudrillard associates with the concept of hypercivilization, which can be treated as combining them. The question arises, what is relationship between the novelty and the exceeding of norm in the context of contemporary Western civilization?

To answer this question, it is appropriate to begin with the problem of hypercivilization, considering by Baudrillard in his *The System of Objects*, and then to proceed to the some others mature and late works, where he not only develops but also extends this interpretation. The thinker begins from the classification of certain four systems of objects; the emergence of them he sees still in the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to some social and technological innovations. In this book Baudrillard, beginning from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the objects divides into functional (daily consumer goods), non-functional (antiquities, collections), meta-functional and dysfunctional (gadgets and robots), making their socio-ideological system, which includes massively produced and purchasing-selling entity of commodities (Baudrillard 2005a). The classification

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<sup>8</sup> From Latin *per se* – *by itself*. From Latin *per* – *by, through* and from Latin *se* – *itself, himself, herself, themselves*.

of these four systems of objects in the interpretation of Baudrillard, is based both on technological and social mobility and flexibility. The objects, made of the new, easily moulding materials, correspond with the mobility and arbitrariness of social classes, becoming predominant from the failure of feudal society and the emergence of the bourgeois (Baudrillard 1993: 50–53). Thus in the texts of Baudrillard, the inventions of such materials as, for example, stucco, plaster, glass as well as the technologies of production, are closely related to the fact, that the essence of the objects, made of these materials constitute their power to simulate the social and natural reality; to reflect, to aesthetize, highlight artificially, to visualize, to create its illusions, to hyperbolize and to be able to manipulate with the consciousness of the subjects, admiring those illusions, i.e. to establish various aesthetic, social and even ideologic effects.

These objects are the commodities as signs<sup>9</sup>, fascinating the subjects and imperceptibly thrusting upon them the power to admire and to consume them in such a way, that the subjects would purchase the commodities not at utilitarian reasons but devoting themselves in ideologic and aesthetic meanings<sup>10</sup>. So, the 18<sup>th</sup> century, according to Baudrillard, can be treated as a period, when the rigid feudal social hierarchical structure pines away and becomes predominant the flexible bourgeois social systems<sup>11</sup>. These social actualities correspond with the beginning of massively painted portraits, produced mirrors, the stucco and plaster mouldings, the modern lighting systems (Baudrillard 2005a: 11–74), the moving mechanical figures of people (Baudrillard 1983: 92–96; 1993: 53–54) and animals, which function in a capitalist market. Meanwhile, the feudal social caste structure in the interpretation of the philosopher, corresponds with the crude and non-commodified natural non-flexible materials such as wood, which is characterized by a certain inner warmth, smell, age, the parasites, corroding it and referring to its existence (Baudrillard 2005a: 38).

Due to these social and technological transformations, which reflects Baudrillard, in his thinking perspective the 18<sup>th</sup> century emerges as the epoch of Renaissance, i.e. as the period, when traditional Western civilization is replacing with the capitalist hypercivilization. Baudrillard, suggesting the conception of hypercivilization, goes beyond the Marxistic and the Freudistic interpretations of the period of industrial

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<sup>9</sup> Here and below, using the concept of object, we will bear in mind re-commodified and re-signified object, i.e. the commodity as sign.

<sup>10</sup> This capitalist (bourgeois) system of objects of Baudrillard correlates with the classification of the human actions and practices of Michel Foucault in his work titled as *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (2002). According to Foucault, there is no any required orders of things. These orders are relative and/or plural, established by the own subject. So the capitalist orders of things do not exist objectively, to which the subject should adapt itself. The orders of things are possible only as some contingent construct, which are made by the author in his texts. This means that the orders of things exist only in the texts or in authors' minds but not beyond them. Moreover, any order can be easily replaced with another one as well as the subject, creating them. Consequently, as Foucault writes, already at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the man could be erased like a face, drawn in sand at the edge of the sea (Foucault 2002: 422).

<sup>11</sup> The concepts of structure and of system here are not used synonymously. The author of this article, in this case, basing on structuralism, is convinced of the opinion even the structure is necessarily inherent in a given system, it can be without a structure.

capitalism, following the basic conviction of classic Western civilization – the subject and the object dichotomy. It is based on the type of the hierarchical relationship between the subject and the object, when the subject is subordinated to the object. The subject governs the object, rationalizes it and thrusts upon it some power. Usually, in the various interpretations of classic Western civilization, this subject and object dichotomy reveals some certain forms of competitiveness, the maximization of utility and profit, the rationalization of needs and libidinal energy. In such cases, the civilization is treated as a result of the rational subject actions and based on rational binary logic. So, such a treating of Western civilization is based on rational way of thinking and activity of individuals. Baudrillard estimates Western civilization as essentially incompatible with the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> century realities of post-industrial capitalism.

At the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the event of contemporary information and communication and production technologies, the earlier rational subject, following the traditional rational binary logic, in the interpretation of Baudrillard is supplanted of a fundamentally different, i.e. hyperrationalized subject. The technological hyperrationality means the end of binary logic as well as of the traditional metaphysics, and an essential change of the relationship between the subject and the object. In his work *Pataphysics: Philosophy of the Gaseous State* (2005b) Baudrillard declares the emergence of contemporary “new metaphysics” or, in other words, post-metaphysics, i.e. pataphysics (French *pataphysique*)<sup>12</sup> (Baudrillard 2005b). The technological inventions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the interpretation of Baudrillard duplicate, aesthetize and stylize reality, re-objectify it, or according to Martin Heidegger, sets upon it in the presence of the subject, thus establishing the situation of *Ge-Stell* (German *das Ge-Stell*) (Heidegger 1992: 228–243). In later centuries, this aesthetized and stylized sphere of objects and objectivity is re-commodified, re-signified and, according to Vytautas Rubavičius, is increasingly expanding to the maximum. Thus, as he notices, after all the opposite sphere of the subjects and subjectivity absolutely vanishes (Rubavičius 2006: 155–156). But, it is worth noting, in thinking perspective of Baudrillard, the decay of this sphere should be understood not as the annihilation of the subjects but as the investment of the status to the objects as commodities, which mean the weakening of traditional metaphysics and the emergence of contemporary pataphysics. In this case, the end of traditional metaphysics coincides with the end of Western civilization. According to Wolfgang Schirmacher, this end is clearly visible in a “hybrid Western technology”, which ignores the finite nature of human beings. Here, in his opinion, the metaphysics standstills and the Western civilization destroys itself from within (Schirmacher 1984). The question arises, how in the interpretation of Baudrillard, the failure of traditional Western metaphysics is associated with the end of classic Western civilization?

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<sup>12</sup> The French compound predicate *pataphysique* can be deconstructed in three ways but then the meaning is changing. Firstly, the concept *pataphysique* can be deconstructed as *patte à physique*, which in English means the *leg of physics*; secondly, as a *patte à physique*, which means *not your physics*; thirdly, as *pâte à physique*, which means *physics-dough*. The authorship of this concept belongs not to Baudrillard but to French writer Alfred Jarry, who for the first time uses this concept in one of his plays, created in 1893 and develops in a book titled *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustrall, Pataphysician* (Jarry 2008).

This end in the texts of Baudrillard can be related to the collapse of the traditional “banal strategies” (French *les stratégies banales*), governing the pre-bourgeois systems of objects and to the emergence of the “fatal strategies” (French *les stratégies fatales*). These strategies in the interpretation of Baudrillard, govern the bourgeois and capitalist systems of objects. The relationship between the subjects and the objects in the background of traditional metaphysics, according to the philosopher, is governed by the “banal strategies”. In this case, the subjects govern the objects or, in other words, the subjects and the objects oppose to each others. Meanwhile, as he writes, under conditions of the “new metaphysics” or, in other words, post-metaphysics, the relationship between the subjects and the objects establishes the “fatal strategies”, which emerge after the failure of the “banal strategies” (Baudrillard 1990: 187). Then, as the philosopher continues, the objects begin dictating the rules of a game, incomprehensible to the subjects (Baudrillard 1990: 181). Such the subjects follow the so-called “rhizomic”<sup>13</sup> logic, i.e. the logic of “sign fetishism”, developed by Baudrillard in his work *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981), and devote to the objects – to the commodities as fetishes.

The objects, in this case, the commodities, according to Baudrillard, transform into the technological signs of reality, i.e. into contemporary simulacra and the reality effects, which are re-produced in the new media. They are much more flexible than the material based objects. In his works these signs of reality and reality effects in new media Baudrillard treats as the objects, which abundance drowns the subjectivity. However, this does not mean, that the objects, understood in this way, displace the subjects – such a conclusion would be an absurd in essence. Rather, the subjects under conditions of contemporary consumption lose their criticality and reflectivity to the objects, and thus become the *pseudo-objects* and the objects in their turn become the *pseudo-subjects*; between them penetrates the so called “symbolic exchange”<sup>14</sup> (Baudrillard 1993).

The paragraph in the *Fatal Strategies* (1990), titled as “The Object & Its Desire” Baudrillard begins from this thesis: “Only the subject desires; only the object seduces” (Baudrillard 1990: 111). What does it mean? Trying to clarify this thesis, we should request the separation between the seduction (French *le séduction*) and the desire (French *le désir*), which is found in Baudrillard’s *The Ecstasy of Communication* (Baudrillard 1988). The seduction plays with the desire, jeering at it and over-shadowing it; the seduction allows desire to appear and disappear again and again (Baudrillard 1988: 67). The duality of the desirable subject and the seductive object, he requests, discussing

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<sup>13</sup> Rhizome (Greek *rhizōma* – root, French *rhizome rhizome* – rootstalk) – rootstock, rootcrop. The structure of Western way of thinking is compared with the struck rooted tree, which is depicted by the conception of rhizome of Gilles Deleuze. Rhizome is the root network, in which its stem (sprout), i.e. the center can grow anywhere. In addition, in the system of the roots, its center(s) can be not only one but several or a dozen of them. The growing stem of rhizome is fed by the neighbouring roots. If the nutritious and food compositions are enough, the stem grows up but if not – it languishes. The system of rhizome does not have a structure and is anarchical so, its roots are bounded in any manner.

<sup>14</sup> “Symbolic exchange” (French *l’échange symbolique*) is the conception of Baudrillard, proposed to define the absence of traditionally understood dialectics and dialectic interactions in new media.

the change of the relationship between the subject and the object. The thinker begins from traditional Western metaphysics and finishes with contemporary pataphysics. If, under conditions of traditional Western metaphysics, as Baudrillard writes, the subject had been creating history and had been governing the world while the object was only a detour in the Royal road of subjectivity, and its only glory is to be entered into the Hegelian master-slave dialectic (Baudrillard 1990: 111). Meanwhile, in the case of pataphysics of Baudrillard, it is no longer the subject, which desires, it is the subject, which seduces. Everything comes from the subject and everything returns to it, just as everything started with seduction, not with desire, Baudrillard writes (Baudrillard 1990: 111). Here the thinker does not deny, if there is the object, which seduces, it must exist the subject who could be seduced. The position, which in this case declares Baudrillard, is that the subject appears only through the object as the technological sign of reality, i.e. as simulacrum or, in other words, the desirable subject emerges only through the seductive object of reality effect. Thus, according to Schirmacher, the technological images, establishing by the human beings, become the idols, requiring human victims (Schirmacher 1984). These idols emerge in the period of decadence of classic Western civilization and betoken the renaissance of contemporary hypercivilization. The question arises, what is relationship between pataphysics and hypercivilization?

Let us start from the observation, that the traditional, i.e. subjective metaphysics Baudrillard characterizes as follows: it wants a world of forms, distinct from their doubles, their shadows, their images (Baudrillard 1990: 184). Meanwhile, the new objective metaphysics, on the contrary, opens the latter ones. Moreover, if the possibility of reference is annihilated, under conditions of the “new metaphysics” are legitimated the doubles, shadows and images. They already are not only signs, signifying the referents beyond simulacra – they are the “real objects”. The object, according to Baudrillard, is always a fetish, the false, the factitious, the lure; it incarnates the abominable confusion of the thing with its magical and artificial double (Baudrillard 1990: 184). In *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and Its Destiny* (1999) such signs of reality and reality effects are defined by Baudrillard as the pure objects, pure events without the origins and the end, so as indifferent (Baudrillard 1999: 18). This means, that the real objects as technological simulacra, which in this case should be assigned not to reality but to hyperreality, do not cast a shadow.

Their “purity” determines the possibilities, offered by new media: the images of the objects have neither origins, nor the end because they are not traditionally understood as the images of reality, but as the visual products of technological operations; i.e. technological simulacra. So much the objects-signs are possible only as media products because, bearing in mind the reality of the things, there does not exist such things as the pure objects or pure events. They should pretend to the status of the Kantian noumena, which are beyond the perception and knowledge and belong to traditional metaphysics. Baudrillard, in other case, suggesting his conception of the pure objects and the pure events, does not eliminate them from the field of subject’s perception. The subject with respect to the object, even if it does not failure, but it

is not critical and reflective. And, when the philosopher emphasizes, that there is no longer the desirable subject but only the seductive object, which is at the center of the world (Baudrillard 1988: 80), this does not mean, that the subject is annihilated by the object. This means, on the one hand, that the identity of the subject is defined by the object, on the other hand, that the critical position and the reflectivity of the subject are eliminated by the seductive object. The subject with respect to the object is not autonomous – the subject is possible only due to its subordination to the object. More specifically, the identity of the subject is fitted with the consumed signs as the objects, the critical thinking is “cut off” by the maximum increase of desire. Thus, according to Rubavičius, the subject is fragmented under conditions of consumptional capitalism (Rubavičius 2004). That is why, such the fragmented subject at the level of consciousness is not annihilated but, as Baudrillard writes, moved away to the periphery of the world since it is not autonomous in respect with the objects. In other words, the consumption of the objects as signs has become the metaphysical principle, predetermining the identity of the subject. That is why, the object, according to Baudrillard, is extatic and can fascinate and seduce the subject: the pure object is sovereign since it violates the sovereignty of the subject, destroying it into an ambush. In this way, Baudrillard concludes, the subject disappears beyond the horizon of the object (Baudrillard 1990: 113–114).

This means, that under conditions of the “fatal strategies”, the solutions, values and principles of the subject are determined by seductive objects like some certain opiate. Such the subject is not critical and reflective so, his own solutions and choices already do not depend upon it. The subject, as Baudrillard says, has become much less rational than the object, governing the subject, i.e. the object organizes the environment of the subject and assumes its actions (Baudrillard 2005a: 53). Here we can specify, that the solutions and actions of the subject assume nothing, but the advertising media, stimulating the seduction. The advertising, as Baudrillard adds, assumes moral responsibility for society as a body, replacing puritanical morality with a hedonism, founded purely of satisfaction in the bosom of hypercivilization (Baudrillard 2005a: 202).

This hedonism and pure satisfaction, i.e. non-competitiveness, which has become predominant during the period of post-industrial capitalism, replaces the Marxistically interpreted competitiveness, the aspiration of maximization of utility and profit, specific to industrial capitalism. The specific non-competitiveness of contemporary hypercivilization Baudrillard illustrates, requesting the example of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York (Baudrillard 1983: 103; 1993: 69). The homogeneity of the Twin Towers here is understood as the expression of post-industrial capitalist socio-economic system and as the manifestation of hypercivilization. Unlike the rational architectural solutions of neighbouring buildings, demonstrating the essence of capitalist Western civilization – its competitiveness and the following of the utilitarian imperative, the hyperrationalized architecture of the Twin Towers in its turn expresses the pataphysical character of non-competitiveness.

The newly defined relationship between the subject and the object in the perspective of Baudrillard, establishes contemporary pataphysics, influenced on Alfred Jarry.

Pataphysics, as he writes, is the science of imaginary solutions (French *la pataphysique est la science des solutions imaginaires*), attributing symbolically to the framework of those properties of the objects, which are described, according to their virtuality (Jarry 2008). So, the place of pataphysics is beyond the metaphysics, which due to the efforts of critical thinking and reflections, establishes the rationality and universalities. Meanwhile, under conditions of pataphysics there are established the contingencies, more precisely, according to Jarry, the rules, governing the exceptions (Jarry 2008). So, pataphysics pretends not to non-rationality or irrationality but to another sort of rationality – post-rationality, i.e. hyperrationality. Even if, pataphysics extends beyond metaphysics, it is not opposed to the latter one: the opposition of metaphysics and physics. So, it is much more accurate to say, that pataphysics is the third type of science, existing in parallel with physics and metaphysics. Pataphysics, as the science of the rules governing the exceptions, is not denying but parodying the modern science, both its theory and methodology.

Baudrillard in his book *Pataphysics* quotes the insight of Jarry, that pataphysics is science (Baudrillard 2005b). Pataphysics is one of the type of sciences, making the parallel to physics and metaphysics but its uniqueness predetermines the celebration of ambiguity, inconsistency and absurdity. Nevertheless, pataphysics does not mean the denying of scientific argumentation. So, the argumentation of pataphysics as of the imaginary science, is based on different principles, which parody the modern science. Baudrillard writes, that pataphysics is not something serious but its travesty establishes its seriousness (Baudrillard 2005b: 10). That is why, pataphysics emerges not as the denial of metaphysics but as its parody, travesty or burlesque.

Here we have to return to the conception of the “fatal strategies” of Baudrillard and to relate it to the conception of pataphysics. If the subject under conditions of traditional metaphysics and of the “banal strategies” governs the object, so the subject constructs the view of the world, ruling the real objects and subordinating them to itself in the way, they for some moments satisfy the classic binary oppositions and rationality requirements. Meanwhile, under conditions of pataphysics of Baudrillard, we have to speak about the imagination. But equally important is the fact that, according to David Teh, imagination and fantasy do not distort science and rationality but the science perverts the imagination (Teh 2006). Such a perversion occurs, because the object under conditions of “fatal strategies” is liberated from the subject. More specifically, the object becomes indifferent to the subject. Here it is important to bear in mind, that the conceptions of the “fatal strategies” and of pataphysics are some parts of the philosophy of media, not of reality.

That is why, what traditional metaphysics attributes to the periphery, in the background of pataphysics it finds itself at the center; what is under conditions of classic Western civilization is treated as the periphery of civilization, i.e. as barbarism, in the case of hypercivilization is understood as the new forms of being civilized, parodying the old ones. In other words, what under conditions of classic Western civilization is treated as the necessary civilization requirements, in the background of hypercivilization becomes inadequate. So, the traditionally understood rationality

is transformed into the hyperrationality, the binary logic in its turn into the “rhizomic” one, the subject and object dichotomy – in the non-dialectic relationship between them. Such non-dialectical relationship between the subjects and the objects Baudrillard treats as obscenity (French *obscénité*). This transformation is realized by hyperraesthetizing and hyperstylizing the technological signs of reality. In this way classic Western civilization, based on traditional metaphysics of the subject, is transformed into hypercivilization, in its turn based on the pataphysics of the object.

### Civilization *versus* hypercivilization?

The hypercivilization of Baudrillard is a result of reflections of the social perversions and technological innovations under conditions of capitalist socio-ideological system from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century or, in Immanuel M. Wallerstein’s words, the result of the development of capitalism as “commodification of everything” (Wallerstein 1995: 11–44). The position of Baudrillard is truly radical and, in some cases, reductive. For example, analyzing and interpreting the texts of him, such declaration, that traditional Western metaphysics as well as classic Western civilization is finished, should be treated rather as metaphors but not as directly understood historical and social facts. Why?

The becoming of contemporary hypercivilization Baudrillard sees still in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, relating it to the failure of feudal social order and the establishment of the capitalist system. That mobile and arbitral combination of capitalist social order, the progress of technology and of technological innovations in his texts is interpreted from the cinematographic thinking perspective. Baudrillard declares the transformation of classic Western civilization into contemporary hypercivilization, emphasizing the huge role of visibility in capitalist societies. The becoming of hypercivilization in his interpretation is inseparable from counterfeits, illusions and with contemporary simulacra. These technological images and visions of reality can be treated as its simulation and the same time the overstepping of it, on the one hand, striving to reach the maximum of reality or even its redundancy, on the other hand, the tearing off it and the devotion to imagination, awakened by momental satisfaction of capitalist consumptional pleasures. Such a hypercivilization can be established by the object, acting in pataphysical way and by the subject who is not rational or irrational individual but is the hyperrational subject<sup>15</sup>, devoting to the seductive power of the commodities as signs, which function in the capitalist market. Such a subject is hyperrational, more specifically, the subject of hyperrationalized consciousness since its social needs, valuable orientations, moral convictions, existential imperatives, i.e. his solutions and choices are inseparable from the influence of the anonymous power structures. That is why the conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard we can treat as some certain capitalist “image industry”, which has established before the failure of feudal epoch

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<sup>15</sup> According to Immanuel M. Wallerstein, rationality and rationalization are two different things (Wallerstein 1995: 73–94).

and particularly has developed in contemporary post-industrial period both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The questions are: How original and innovatory is such the conception of hypercivilization? And, most importantly, what is its scientific validity? In one or in another way, for example, the old, i.e. the archaic civilizations simulate reality. Still the hunters and the planters in the Old Stone Age had been depicting their hunting animals, on the one hand, exciting the fear, on the other hand, becoming the sources of surviving under conditions of wintery climate. But Baudrillard, does not inquire into the heart of the archaic technologies of simulating reality. The practices of reality duplication he sees only from the beginning of Renaissance, when the rigid social feudal system was replaced with the bourgeois (capitalist) order. Baudrillard, the capitalist hypercivilization deriving from reality simulations, the practices of re-commodifying and re-signifying reality, does not notice very important fact, that simulating technologies has emerged in conjunction with a man. We can say, that any society, culture and civilization can be characterized by the “spectacle practices”<sup>16</sup>, opportuned “image industries”, the technologies simulating reality as well as any subject can be seduced by the object since metaphysics, according to Douglas Kellner, in the interpretation of Baudrillard become one of the forms of pataphysics (Kellner 1989: 180).

In all known historical times the subjects used to desire for the objects, being seduced by them and devoted to them. Still in the archaic societies there used to be the efficient various practices of simulating reality and making its images, allowing the subject to devote to the seducing object. In this case, it is worth noting, that the consciousness of the subject used to be expanded, allegedly dealing with the framework of human world. Likewise, in the archaic societies there was the efficiency of the re-commodified signs of reality, yielding a profit even to the representatives of parallel, the very geographical distant civilizations. These representatives at all the historical times used to desire for the hyperaesthetized and hyperstylized objects as signs. Therefore, beginning from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and finishing with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was a period of prosperity of capitalist, i.e. the period of re-commodified and re-signified signs of reality. Then classic Western civilization faces some quantitatively and qualitatively transformations, on the one hand, distinguishing it from its earlier stages and from non-Western civilizations. On the other hand, the hypercivilization of Baudrillard keeps some essential features of classic Western civilization. So, the sufficient argumentation of hypercivilization of Baudrillard, requires the much solid argumentations, allowing to distinguish it from classic Western civilization.

## Conclusions

The conception of hypercivilization of Baudrillard is inseparable from contemporary information and communication technologies as well as from contemporary production

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<sup>16</sup> There is an allusion to the work of Guy Debord titled as *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 2006), where the author considers the problematics of the images, existing under the conditions of postmodern “fragments of culture” and of anonymous power structures (Debord 2006).

technologies, from the interpretation of post-industrial capitalism and the problematics of consumption. Even if he develops his own media philosophy not in civilizational aspect but rather in cultural one, this aspect in thinking perspective of Baudrillard arises as one of the most important in the analytics of technological images. The conception of hypercivilization he clearly relates to the conception of the “new metaphysics”, i.e. of the pataphysics, parodying the rational subject, traditional binary logic and the modern Western science. Hypercivilizationality in the interpretation of Baudrillard is understood as the liberation of imagination, establishing the intra-contradictory, i.e. “rhizomic” logic. However, such insights of Baudrillard, even unquestionable originality and innovatory, it is worth noting, show their deficiency of argumentation. The criteria, chosen to define contemporary hypercivilization – the invasion of technological images, the prosperity of visual culture, the quantity and quality of this civilization derivative, etc. – in some specific forms are typical to the earlier stages of classic Western civilization and also to some non-Western civilizations.

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## ŠIUOLAIKINĖS HIPERCIVILIZACIJOS SAMPRATA: J. BAUDRILLARD'AS

Jovilė Barevičiūtė

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje tyrinėjama šiuolaikinio prancūzų medijų filosofo Jeano Baudrillard'o plėtojama hipercivilizacijos samprata, aptariamas jos originalumas, novatoriškumas ir filosofinis-sociologinis pagrindumas. Ji lyginama su klasikine Vakarų civilizacijos samprata, išryškinami jų pagrindiniai panašumai ir skirtumai. Tyrinėjami klasikinės Vakarų civilizacijos ir tradicinės metafizikos bei šiuolaikinės hipercivilizacijos ir patafizikos santykiai.

Pirmajame straipsnio skirsnyje pristatoma civilizacijos sąvokos reikšmė ir problemiškas, analizuojamos jos ir kultūros sąvokos sąsajos. Antrajame skirsnyje aptariama tradicinė prancūziškoji civilizacijos samprata. Trečiajame analizuojama ir interpretuojama Baudrillard'o pateikiama hipercivilizacijos samprata. Paskutiniame, ketvirtajame, skirsnyje iš kritinio mąstymo perspektyvos aptariamas Baudrillard'o plėtojamos hipercivilizacijos sampratos filosofinis-sociologinis pagrindumas, ieškoma galimų paralelių su klasikiniu Vakarų civilizacijos konceptu.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dabartinės informacijos ir komunikacijos technologijos (naujosios medijos), hipercivilizacija, kapitalizmas, patafizika, vartojimas.

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