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Interpretation of postmodernism and pop art from the perspective of Jean Baudrillard in urban art

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ABSTRACT

Urban art plays a vital role in shaping cityscapes and public perceptions, reflecting cultural, social, and political realities. However, contemporary theories suggest that these visual expressions are increasingly influenced by hyperreality, as proposed by Baudrillard. The proliferation of digital media and consumer culture has transformed urban spaces into sites of spectacle, blurring the line between authentic social critique and superficial entertainment. This raises questions about the true social and political potential of urban art in the context of hyperreality. The primary aim of this study is to analyze how Baudrillard's concepts particularly simulacra, hyperreality, and spectacle apply to contemporary urban art and to explore its functions as both resistance and commodification. A qualitative, interpretive approach was employed, involving a comprehensive review of theoretical literature, analysis of visual examples such as murals, digital interventions, and social media representations, and thematic analysis to identify patterns and implications. The study found that urban art often operates simultaneously as a form of social resistance and as part of spectacle culture. While some artworks challenge dominant narratives and foster genuine engagement, many are co-opted or transformed into commodified symbols, reinforcing superficial perceptions. Baudrillard's theories offer valuable insights into understanding the complex nature of urban art in the hyperreal city. Recognizing the tension between authenticity and spectacle emphasizes the need for critical engagement and strategies that foster genuine social dialogue in urban visual culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism is a philosophical, cultural, and artistic movement of the contemporary era in response to modern philosophy and art. In the 1960s, we witnessed the emergence of a movement called pop art. This tendency mainly emphasized popular culture, especially the middle class, and believed that the aesthetics used in art should be understandable to everyone. Followers of this school paid no attention to the aesthetic standards of that enlightened period. It can be said that the foundation of this new art was the common letters, symbols, everyday objects, and consumer goods. This new artistic approach quickly gained acceptance and influence in areas such as cinema, pseudo-scientific stories, pop music, advertising, graphic design, and especially fashion. Well-known artists associated with this movement include Richard Hamilton, Peter Smithson, and Andy Warhol. This philosophical and artistic movement has had many effects, many of which are yet to be fully understood. In this research, we seek to answer the question of what impact postmodernism and pop art might have on urban art. Jean-François Lyotard, a prominent European theorist, in his famous work titled "The Postmodern Condition," addresses the myths of the totalized modern era, such as the idea of narration. Essentially, the postmodern theory is linked to critique of holistic science and rejection of universal fundamentalism. The term postmodern has increasingly referred in recent decades to the end of the glorious era of modernism and its decline after its peak in the twentieth century (Lyotard, 1999). At least, some principles or important ideas of the new western culture are considered outdated by postmodernism. In this sense, postmodernism is seen as the latest wave of critique of the Enlightenment, specifically the critique of the hallmark cultural principles of modern society, remnants of the eighteenth century. Some postmodernists explicitly claim that modernity is approaching its end or should do so (Keshavarzi, 2020). Postmodernism does

not respond to modernism; rather, it challenges or sometimes acts within it. Instead of offering a complete or alternative answer to modernism, postmodernism mainly focuses on criticizing its assumptions and principles. In other words, postmodernism is part of the same tradition that it critiques. For modernism, two features can be considered in two areas: the rapid growth and development of scientific, industrial, and cultural intellectual transformations. Another feature of modernism relates to the content of these transformations. The same features can also be applied to the conditions referred to as postmodernism (Ranjabr, 2016). In fact, postmodernism can be seen as the rebellion of thinkers who believe that modern and classical philosophical schools do not sufficiently address contemporary humans. Nonetheless, postmodernism is a useful term used as a framework for understanding general judgments and increasingly about the world (Gregson, 2004). The 1980s began with a resurgence of art. During this decade, those who presented contemporary art, as well as some who focused on modern art, introduced a new era characterized by rejecting innovation and invention and returning to traditional methods and values. Perhaps the most significant claim made about the art of the late twentieth century is that it has addressed human issues. Another claim of postmodern artists is that, after several decades of abstract art, we are witnessing a return to formalism in the late twentieth century. Norbert Lynton describes the most important feature of postmodern art in visual arts as follows: The hallmark of the best works presented in the 1980s is their richness in color and form and the richness of their presentation. Postmodern artists aim to move art out of the realm of abstraction and also use indigenous elements and ancient symbols together, meaning they employ a pluralistic way of thinking both in form and content of their artworks. In fact, what occurs in postmodern art is late modernism. Postmodern art, insofar as it can be considered an entity, is the result of

conceptualism, pop art, and neo-expressionism. The women's movement is a prime example of many postmodern trends that emerged in the 1960s and transformed into a recognized political force in the 1970s (Lynton, 1999).

Evolution of contemporary urban art has been profoundly influenced by broader cultural and philosophical shifts, notably postmodernism and popular culture. These movements challenge traditional notions of authority, authenticity, and aesthetic value, reshaping how artists and audiences engage with urban environments (Jameson, 2019). The interplay between media, consumer culture, and visual spectacle has created new paradigms for understanding public spaces and artistic expression in cities. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for analyzing the complex fabric of modern urban aesthetics. Postmodernism, emerging as a reaction to modernist ideals, emphasizes fragmentation, plurality, and the deconstruction of singular narratives, influencing street art, graffiti, and other forms of urban expression (Lyotard, 2018). This paradigm shift reflects a skepticism towards grand narratives and universal truths, fostering diverse and often contradictory visual vocabularies in the cityscape. Consequently, urban art becomes a site where multiple cultural codes coexist, competing and collaborating in the urban fabric. Simultaneously, pop art played a transformative role in elevating mass media, consumer products, and popular icons into high art, thereby blurring the boundaries between high and low culture (Harvey, 2019). In the urban context, this crossover manifests through advertising aesthetics, murals, and street interventions that incorporate commercial imagery, turning the city into a vast canvas of pop culture references. This intersection has democratized art access and challenged elite artistic standards. Jean Baudrillard's theories offer critical insights into understanding this phenomena, especially his concepts of simulacra and hyperreality, which articulate the relationship between reality and its representations in material and media

environments (Baudrillard, 2017). His critique of consumer society and media spectacle provides a framework to interpret urban artscape as a hyperreal space where signs and images override authentic experience. Baudrillard's notion that contemporary society is dominated by simulations and copies rather than original referents aligns closely with trends in urban art that rely heavily on reproductions, memes, and digital imagery (Harvey, 2019). These art forms, often ephemeral and media-driven, symbolize a cultural shift toward a spectacle-based urban aesthetic that challenges traditional notions of artistic authenticity. Furthermore, his analysis of the "desert of the real" underscores how urban environments are saturated with images that create a sense of detachment from tangible reality, fostering spaces that are more about spectacle than function (Jameson, 2019). This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding the role of graffiti, murals, and digital projections that dominate contemporary cityscapes. The integration of pop art aesthetics within urban spaces exemplifies Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, where images are detached from any underlying reality and serve as autonomous signs (Eco, 2020). These signs influence urban identities and alter inhabitants' perception of their environment, emphasizing superficial engagement over meaningful interaction. Moreover, the proliferation of media and digital platforms amplifies these trends, transforming city streets into stages for performance and spectacle, aligning with Baudrillard's idea of the hyperreal (Kellner, 2018). Urban art thus becomes a language of simulation, constantly mediated and re-mediated through screens, posters, and installations. Analyzing urban art through Baudrillard's lens reveals the transition from traditional notions of aesthetics towards a mediated, image-saturated culture where authenticity is secondary to spectacle. This perspective invites a reconsideration of how art functions in public spaces and what it signifies in a hyperreal city environment (Rofford, 2018).

In sum, understanding postmodern and pop art within modern urban contexts requires engaging with Baudrillard's theories of simulacra and hyperreality. These conceptual tools enable a deeper comprehension of how contemporary cityscapes serve as arenas of cultural production where images, signs, and media converge to shape urban experience and identity (Fleury, 2020)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Postmodernism

A style of art after the 1960s that rejects traditional values and the conservative political assumptions of its predecessors in favor of a broader and more entertaining concept of art, using new artistic forms aided by video and computer technology. Postmodernism refers to gradual developments in critical attitudes, philosophy, architecture, art, literature, and culture that emerged from within modernism (modernity) in reaction to it or as its successor. Postmodernity is a sociological historical concept referring to the period following modernity. Jean Baudrillard (July 27, 1929 – March 6, 2007) was a sociologist, philosopher, and theorist of postmodernism and post-structuralism. Baudrillard is the most well-known and controversial theorist of postmodernism. He argues that postmodern societies are saturated with information and communication technologies and have entered an age of simulation (hyperreality). According to Baudrillard, the dawn of consumer cultures fundamentally blurs the usual boundaries between high and low art, deep and superficial matters, culture and commerce, signifier and signified, and the very ideas of human needs, throwing them into a state of uncertainty. Through an analysis that the post-industrial approach has taken most explicitly, he argues that the real relationships of production and consumption have been replaced by a system of signs. (Baudrillard, 2020) Also representation is one of the most important theories regarding the nature of arts. According to this theory, every artwork necessarily imitates

nature. From Aquinas' perspective, art imitates nature not just by mimicking its appearance but by mimicking the act of nature and even the divine act. He considers human creators and artists as faint shadows of their Creator, aiming to extend divine creation into the existence and nature of the world. Although, from his viewpoint, humans are not capable of creating from nothing like God, they are only able to add new forms or images to nature. Therefore, the goal of art is to serve nature and create something that nature lacks, thereby continuing the creative activity of nature. (Rabiei, 2006) Hyperreality is a process during which, through the proliferation of computers, communication technologies, and media, generated images and models of reality increasingly replace the original reality, shaping human experience. Variations of this concept include super-reality, acute reality, and hyper-realism. It involves the creation of samples of real phenomena without a foundation or reality, leading to the disappearance of distinction and difference between subject and object when dealing with illusions.

The Role of Media in Postmodern Art in a Consumer Society

Fredric Jameson identified four essential elements of postmodern society. First, it is characterized by superficiality and lack of depth. Cultural products in this society rely on superficial images, with no relation to their deep meanings. Second, there is a reduction in emotions or any impact in the postmodern world. Alienation replaces connectedness. Since the world and its people are fragmented, the resultant image is an empty and impersonal one. Third, there are no historical dimensions in postmodern culture; little can be learned about the past. This shortcoming and inability to distinguish past from present and future on an individual level are expressed through a form of schizophrenia. Even for a phenomenon theorist, events are discontinuous. Fourth, a new technology accompanies postmodern society. Instead of productive technologies like automobile assembly lines, we

see the dominance of reproductive technologies like television and computers (Jami, 2009). Zygmunt Bauman states that in the postmodern era, social control relies more on “adherence” than on repressive state actions or shared cultural values. He considers postmodernism as an extension of the hidden or marginal aspects of modernity. Choice, diversity, criticality, rethinking, and the agency of modern values are maintained in the postmodern era, but there exists a profound contradiction between modernity and postmodernity (Falah et al., 1398). If signs are languages through which we make the world meaningful, then for culture to be fundamentally meaningful, it must become a system of distinct signs that acquire meaning through their differentiation from other signs. While art was once conceived as separate from the consumer work, pop art challenges this separation from the consumer world. Pop art turns art into something exchangeable with everyday objects rather than something unique. (Tefulti, 2011)

The works of artists of the Pop movement, which emphasize the urban culture of the masses, propose a kind of universal aesthetics in art and reject the criteria of conventional intellectual aesthetics. Of course, this does not mean that this art is a superficial art and its understanding is understandable to everyone, but many Pop Art works have hidden layers that require analysis and examination. From the perspective of Jean Baudrillard, a postmodern thinker and theorist, it is considered a turning point in the history of art, because through them art refers solely to the reproduction of signs and the world becomes in a special way a sign of the consumer society, which itself is a system of signs. The end of the art of representation and the birth of a new form of art based on the domination of what he calls simulation. Baudrillard himself points out that it is wrong to criticize every pope for his simplistic or American sophism, for his flatness and insignificance, because that is the only way to expose the logic of contemporary culture. Art today has become increasingly sym-

bolic, and that is why copies and forgeries are increasingly questioned and stigmatized. Rigid principles of composition and visual form are no longer as important as the artist's signature. Also, the work of art of earlier periods emerged from a collection of works that shared elements of style and method, whereas in contemporary art, works of art are largely the original product of a creative individual, who is only one of them. The works of a creative individual are perhaps the mechanical reproduction and mass production of works of art reference in some way. Freeland states that everyone knows what the Mona Lisa and Michelangelo's David look like. They have become so numerous that we all feel we know them, even if we have not been to Paris or Florence. Countless ridiculous copies have also been made of them (Johns, 2009). Some artistic movements have also addressed this issue, among which we can note the Pop Art movement. The artworks of this movement directly refer to the repeatable mass media and use mechanical techniques to reflect images of objects and people that are daily present in the consumer life of modern people. As Bacula says: “The visible reality of everyday life in the second half of the twentieth century is the reality of consumption of the urban consumer society. Its appearance is shaped by mass production, design, advertising and new methods of communication. It is through these magical paths that countless images and information packages are spread around the world with stunning speed. Our awareness and our methods of perception are determined by the amount of unprecedented and second-hand experiences, the simultaneity and diversity of pre-processed and manipulated information, and the method is quotation and adaptation” (Baudryar and Richard, 1991). In fact, it is the changing nature of art and art objects that provides the basis for the emergence of pop art. While art in previous periods dealt with transcendent and moral issues and values, which gave them a spiritual aspect, with pop art we have entered a new area of artistic issues that

is related to the consumer society and the characteristics of that period. The arts before the pop movement relied on the perspective of “depth”, on the other hand, pop art is a claim that is related to industry and chain production, as well as artificial or, in fact, fake. The characteristic of the entire living environment is harmony, this art is in sync with the internal order of things; Therefore, pop means the end of depth, perspective, gestures, expression or concept of the creative artist, the creator of meaning and the critic as a tradition-breaker and innovator (Baccola, 2008). Jasper Johns is the first influential figure in the formation of the Pop Art movement. According to this understanding, in 1954, Johns, as one of the pioneers and most important painters of this movement, by setting aside his previous experiences in painting, drew an image of the American flag without any changes or differences from its original version. In this way, he separated a sign that contained a set of critical approaches or nationalist beliefs from all its explicit and implicit meanings. In fact, Jasper Johns’ flags are merely imitations of a flag. In other words, his paintings are highly realistic imitations without any specific orientation, because according to Johns, “painting is neither a means of reflecting the artist’s inner emotions nor a means of making a statement” (Azarang, 1997). In fact, instead of distorting objective reality like styles such as Impressionism, Cubism and Surrealism, he reproduces and directly quotes its signs on the canvas in order to reveal the original reality. By drawing similar flags that cannot refer to anything other than the flag itself, Jones actually chooses a new way to present reality in the postmodern era. The main influence of pop art was not simply the reproduction of signs of reality from consumer society, but more importantly, it was the mechanistic approach to production. This makes it possible to consider pop art as the point of intersection between the depiction of reality and the reproduction of reality in contemporary art; because pop artists, inspired by the production-oriented

mindset of the modern world and employing technology in the creation and duplication of their works, introduced a new concept of painting and the process of its creation. Among pop artists, Andy Warhol undoubtedly plays a more prominent role than others. It can be said that he represents a point where the depiction of reality meets the reproduction of reality in contemporary art; because the nature of his works, both in terms of execution and subject matter, is based on mechanical repetition and reproduction. From a technical perspective, Warhol did not adhere to any particular technique and used various methods such as drawing, photography, and printing to produce and replicate his works (Mirzaei and Abdi, 2013). This mechanical characteristic is evident in most of Warhol’s works, including the serial reproduction of the famous Mona Lisa painting and his numerous images of Coca-Cola bottles. Moreover, Klaus Oldenburg’s focus in the mid-1960s was on performances that were another form of performing arts, carried out in the streets and impoverished neighborhoods of New York City. The difference between the art he presented and what was accepted as art at that time in society caused it to attract very quick attention. Although the craze for popular arts waned in subsequent years, Oldenburg remained steadfast on his path and continued creating pop art works. Many of his newer works were created in collaboration with his wife, Van Bruggen, a Dutch-born artist, historian, and art critic. Another of their joint and highly renowned works is “The Spoon and Glass Bridge”. Other joint works of the couple include “Bottle of Notes”, “Clothes Peg”, “Typewriter Eraser”, and “Crescent Umbrella” (Ali Rezaei and Moradkhani, 2019, Montazeri, 2021).

Urban Art

A “landscape” is a phenomenon created through human interaction with the environment. Therefore, it is considered an objective-subjective concept; the physical form of the environment constitutes its objective aspect, while the perception of the observer constitutes its sub-

jective aspect, two inseparable parts. Pier Donadio considers landscape as a comprehensive concept that is very important for describing the relationships between the physical space and the humans who perceive it (Adelvand et al., 2016). The city is a space and a setting for life. Thus, the interaction and relationship between art and the city and its spaces can be explored through this lens. There are many cities that relatively meet the communal, welfare, and comfort needs of their citizens; however, they lack the spirituality that is essential for a city and urban space. The comfort of life in the city can be defined as fulfilling the daily needs of people, but the richness of life arises when artistic spirituality is provided within urban environments and public spaces (Hojati Saeedi, 2000, Kellner, 1989, Seiman, 2012). Urban art, as an art form intertwined with city space, is a type of public art that connects with the environment and the general public. The placement of art within the city's fabric depends on the context in which the artwork is situated, and the extent to which public art can create recognizable and memorable signs in urban spaces, thereby contributing to the formation and strengthening of the image of that part of the city, is a subject worth discussing. An artwork can manifest as an object visible in the urban environment or elevate the visual and emotional quality of the city space through its spatial qualities, transforming the urban space into a place of significance and making it memorable. The subject of urban arts is a modern topic within the fields of urban planning theory and practice, with its roots in contemporary literature dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. This term, known by concepts such as Urban Art, emphasizes the emergence of art in public spaces within cities. Despite differences in content, these terms share a common perspective focused on the development of art in communal urban settings and examine a wide range of arts capable of becoming public. Historically, art has always been used as a tool for beautifying the city, with its most prominent

manifestations seen in memorial elements such as buildings, sculptures, and symbolic cityscape decorations (Keshavarzi, 2020, Kafeshchian Moghadam and Pahlavan, 2015). These types of art include sculptures, statues, murals, installations, and more broadly, urban furniture, whose presence transforms city spaces into familiar environments for urban audiences and plays a fundamental role in shaping desirable urban environments. All historic monuments, memorials, and city sculptures can be considered among the oldest forms of urban art. Even many details of architectural works can inherently fall under the category of urban art. During the development of a city area, various branches of urban art might be considered, such as urban furniture, lighting, and graffiti art, which should be taken into account during the planning process. Urban art is not solely defined by the presence of a physical object; it also includes elements like spaces for gatherings, theaters, and even poetic venues, all of which are considered part of urban art. Pop art, with its simple and understandable visual language, allows people to engage with art and discuss it. This has democratized art and helped create more dynamic and interactive urban spaces. By bringing art into streets and public spaces, this movement fosters greater public interaction with art and initiates new conversations about art and society. To visually exemplify the previous discussions, we intend to present a specific example.

Jean Baudrillard's theories on art, culture, and urban space

Jean Baudrillard's body of work offers profound insights into the nature of contemporary culture, especially through his concepts of simulacra and hyperreality, which fundamentally challenge traditional understandings of representation and authenticity (Baudrillard, 2017). His critique of modern society posits that in the age of media and consumerism, reality itself is increasingly mediated by images, signs, and simulations that distort perceptions and create a hyperreal world where distinctions between real and artificial

become indistinguishable (Harvey, 2019). Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum refers to copies or representations that no longer have an original reference point, thus leading to a state where reality is replaced by endless replicas (Eco, 2020). In urban spaces, this manifests through the proliferation of advertisements, graffiti, murals, and digital projections that serve as signs detached from any authentic origin (Kellner, 2018). These art forms epitomize the logic of hyperreality, where surfaces and appearances take precedence over any genuine referential meaning. His assertion that society has entered a "desert of the real" describes a condition where authentic experiences are replaced by mediated spectacles, leaving behind a landscape filled with illusions and superficial representations (Jameson, 2019). This environment fosters a sense of detachment from tangible reality, making urban spaces into sites of endless simulation rather than meaningful physical interactions. The city, in Baudrillard's view, becomes a stage for images and signs that simulate life but do not convey authentic existence. Baudrillard's critique extends to the role of mass media, which he believes creates a universe of images that dominate everyday life (Harvey, 2019). In this universe, news, entertainment, advertising, and social media merge into a spectacle that sustains the hyperreal city. Urban art, in this context, is a form of participation in this spectacle, blurring distinctions between art, advertising, and entertainment (Eco, 2020). Furthermore, he discusses how urban landscapes are increasingly saturated with signs and symbols, which act as a language of their own, shaping urban identities and collective perceptions (Kellner, 2018). Murals, graffiti, and media installations become not just artistic expressions but also tools for constructing collective urban myths and narratives rooted in hyperreality. These signs often lack any grounding in the physical or social reality of their surroundings, emphasizing their role as pure simulacra. Baudrillard also argues that in the hyperreal city, traditional notions of authen-

ticity are undermined, replaced by a preoccupation with surface appearances and spectacle (Jameson, 2019). This shift impacts how citizens experience their environment, where superficiality often eclipses depth and substance. The urban landscape, therefore, becomes a mosaic of images that reflect societal desires, fears, and identities but are disconnected from any real substance. His concept of "the code" relates to the idea that society is governed by a system of signs and rules that determine how meaning is produced and consumed (Eco, 2020). These codes operate within urban art and media, shaping perceptions and creating a shared language of the hyperreal city. Art, in this sense, is not merely aesthetic but a participant in the ongoing production and manipulation of signs. Baudrillard's theories also explore the notion of consumer society, where commodities and images serve as commodities of desire, transforming urban environments into marketplaces of spectacle (Harvey, 2019). Public space becomes a site where commercial images are embedded into the city fabric, influencing perceptions and cultural practices. Urban art, especially street art and advertising, exemplifies this commodification of visual culture. Moreover, his concept of "the precession of simulacra" describes how the image or simulation precedes and determines our perception of reality (Kellner, 2018). In the urban context, this phenomenon is visible in how media representations, advertisements, and digital images shape public understanding and aesthetic appreciation of the city. The original, physical urban environment becomes secondary to its mediated representations. He also emphasizes that in the hyperreal universe, the boundary between reality and fiction collapses, leading to a situation where society is governed more by signs and images than by tangible facts (Montazeri, 2021). This impacts urban art forms that often rely on borrowed, reconstructed, or digitally manipulated imagery, thus reinforcing the dominance of simulation over authenticity. Baudrillard's critique extends further to the

concept of “the spectacle,” which he sees as a key component of contemporary urban life. The spectacle refers to the mass-produced images and events that serve to distract and pacify society, replacing authentic social interactions with mediated experiences (Eco, 2020). Urban art becomes part of this spectacle, contributing to the constant reproduction of hyperreal images. In conclusion, Baudrillard’s theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the cultural logic underpinning urban art and architecture in the postmodern age. His notions of simulacra and hyperreality reveal how cities are increasingly shaped by signs, images, and spectacles that obscure the distinction between the real and the fake. Urban spaces, therefore, are not merely physical environments but also complex terrains of signification and simulation, constantly mediating and constructing social realities (Harvey, 2019). (Tab. 1)

This table summarizes key concepts from Baudrillard’s theories and their application to urban art and space. The first row emphasizes the fundamental distinction between reality and its simulation, highlighting how urban spaces are saturated with images that often disconnect from tangible experience. Murals, projections,

and digital media exemplify this condition, embodying Baudrillard’s idea that visual culture increasingly mediates our perception of reality. The second row focuses on the notion of simulacra copies that have no original and illustrates how street art and advertising can embody this concept, becoming autonomous signs that no longer reference any physical or social ‘truth.’ These signs emphasize surface and appearance over substance, aligning with the postmodern artistic landscape. The third row discusses the language of signs and codes that govern urban aesthetics, revealing how murals, graffiti, and media messages form a visual language that constructs urban identity. The city becomes a text filled with signs that communicate, manipulate, and mediate social meaning beyond literal message. In the fourth row, the “spectacular” nature of urban environments is highlighted how social media fame, public artworks, and urban spectacles become part of a spectacle-based urban culture. This aligns with Baudrillard’s critique of a society dominated by images that serve entertainment and distraction. Finally, the concept of “precession of simulacra” describes how images and signs precede and shape social perception, creating a world where the distinction between

Table 1: Key concepts of Jean Baudrillard’s theories on art, culture, and urban space

Key Concept	Explanation	Urban and Visual Examples	Relation to Urban Art	References
Precondition: Reality and Image	The distinction between the real and the simulated	Urban murals and digital projections detached from genuine experience	Streets as sites of flux between authentic realities and artificial images	Baudrillard (2017), Eco (2020)
Simulacrum	Copies without an original	Street art and advertising signs lacking real referents	Urban art as examples of pure simulacra, lacking original reference	Baudrillard (2017), Kellner (2018)
Code and Sign Language	Systems of signs and rules for meaning production	City symbols, advertising messages, media signals	The city as a text and language, composed of visible and invisible signs	Eco (2020), Kellner (2018)
Spectacular Space	Continuation of images and media spectacles	Online fame, graffiti, public displays, urban performances	Urban art as part of public spectacle and media-driven entertainment	Harvey (2019), Jameson (2019)
Precession of Simulacra	The precedence of images in social perception	Digital sculptures, city monitors, visual advertisements	Images dominate the public space, replacing tangible reality	Kellner (2018), Jameson (2019)

truth and illusion erodes. Digital sculptures, city screens, and advertising exemplify this, where mediated images become the primary reality experienced by urban inhabitants. Overall, these concepts help us understand the transformation of urban spaces into arenas of visual spectacle and simulation. Urban art, in this context, is not just creative expression but also a participant in a culture of signs, images, and spectacles that define contemporary city life. This theoretical framework underscores the importance of critically analyzing how cities are constructed and experienced in the age dominated by hyperreality.

Interpretation of postmodern art and pop art from Baudrillard's perspective

Baudrillard's theories offer a compelling framework for understanding the dynamic and complex nature of contemporary urban art, particularly within the context of hyperreality and simulacra. As urban environments become increasingly saturated with images, signs, and media spectacles, Baudrillard's notions provide insight into how these elements shape perception and social behavior (Baudrillard, 2017). In modern cities, street art, murals, and digital projections serve as visual manifestations of the simulacrum copies that have no original beneath them. These forms of urban expression blur the boundaries between reality and representation, creating a landscape where signs and images function independently of any tangible referent (Kellner, 2018). This detachment exemplifies Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where simulation replaces genuine experience. The proliferation of commercial signage, billboards, and advertising spaces in cityscapes further exemplifies the precession of simulacra, with images preempting and shaping urban perceptions before any physical or social reality is encountered (Eco, 2020). Urban art becomes intertwined with commercial culture, transforming city walls into sites of cultural production that reinforce consumerist values and spectacle. Digital technology intensifies

these trends by enabling rapid reproduction, manipulation, and dissemination of images. Digital murals, augmented reality installations, and social media feeds merge into a continuous spectacle that mediates everyday urban life (Harvey, 2019). These mediated environments reinforce Baudrillard's assertion that the city itself functions as a hyperreal space dominated by signs and images. Moreover, the visual language of urban art whether graffiti tags, murals, or media installations functions as a system of signs governed by specific codes. These signs communicate within a shared cultural lexicon, shaping collective identities and urban mythologies (Eco, 2020). However, in Baudrillard's view, the meaning of these signs is often superficial or detached from any authentic social or political context. Public art projects and murals frequently participate in the spectacle, serving as visual performances that attract spectators and media attention. They reinforce the idea that urban spaces are arenas of mediated spectacle places where images are curated and consumed rather than experienced authentically (Jameson, 2019). This commodification of urban art transforms the city into a stage for spectacle-driven culture. Baudrillard also points out that in hyperreal cities, the distinction between original and copy erodes, leading to a state where reproductions become the dominant form of cultural expression (Harvey, 2019). This phenomenon is evident in digital art that mimics traditional styles or combines multiple references to produce layered, often ironic, visual narratives. The role of the media in constructing urban reality cannot be overstated. Televised cityscapes, digital billboards, and social media feeds create a mediated version of urban life, embedding the city within a network of signs that perpetuate the cycle of simulation (Kellner, 2018). Urban art becomes an active participant in this cycle, often blurring the lines between genuine expression and commercial or political spectacle. Street art's ephemeral nature also aligns with Baudrillard's critique of authenticity. Graffiti and mural art often lack a fixed original and are subject to constant al-

teration or erasure, emphasizing their status as transient simulacra sent to evoke reactions rather than deliver authentic messages (Eco, 2020). Furthermore, the spectacle created by urban art correlates with Baudrillard's idea of society being immersed in a world of images designed for distraction and entertainment rather than critical reflection (Jameson, 2019). In this context, murals and street artworks serve as visual spectacles that reinforce societal narratives, whether political, commercial, or cultural. Significantly, digital and mobile technologies have amplified the reach and impact of urban art, transforming local street expressions into global memes and virtual spectacles. This amplifies Baudrillard's claim that the simulation process is global and interconnected, where local expressions are subsumed into a planetary hyperreality (Harvey, 2019). The concept of "the desert of the real" is especially relevant when considering urban art that seeks to challenge or critique hyperreality. Street art, graffiti, and murals can serve as resistance forms attempts to break through the screen of simulation and reconnect urban inhabitants with tangible social issues (Eco, 2020). Yet, even these acts often become part of the spectacle, complicating their authenticity. Finally, Baudrillard's critique warns us that contemporary urban art, while seemingly autonomous and expressive, often participates in the cycle of simulation that defines hyperreality. Recognizing this allows for a more critical engagement with urban spaces questioning whether street art and public art merely reinforce the spectacle or whether they can serve as genuine platforms for social change and authentic expression (Jameson, 2019). This contemplation underscores a fundamental tension in contemporary urban culture: the push and pull between superficial spectacle and meaningful critique. In conclusion, Baudrillard's concepts of simulacra, hyperreality, and spectacle are invaluable tools in analyzing contemporary urban art. They reveal how cities have become landscapes of signs where authentic urban experience is often disguised or replaced by a mediated, hyperreal

presentation. As urban environments continue to evolve with digital technologies and media saturation, understanding these theoretical frameworks becomes essential for both artists and critics who seek to decipher the true nature of urban cultural production. Urban art, therefore, functions not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a mirror reflecting society's relationship with reality, illusion, and spectacle. Recognizing the influence of hyperreality allows us to critically assess whether these artistic practices contribute to genuine social dialogue or merely perpetuate the cycle of simulation and spectacle that Baudrillard critiqued decades ago. A deeper engagement with these ideas can foster a more nuanced understanding of the role of art in the spectacle-led urban environment, encouraging both acknowledgment and resistance to its dominant logic.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the application of Baudrillard's theories to contemporary urban art. The primary goal is to explore how concepts such as simulacra and hyperreality manifest in urban visual culture and inform public perception and social dynamics. The main research questions focus on understanding the role of urban art within hyperreal city environments and whether it functions primarily as spectacle or genuine social critique. Data collection involves a comprehensive review of existing theoretical literature, including seminal works by Baudrillard, Jameson, Eco, and Kellner, as well as recent academic articles and case studies related to urban art practices. To enhance analytical depth, the study also examines visual examples like murals, digital projections, and street art images sourced from online databases and urban media platforms. Interpretive analysis will be conducted by comparing theoretical concepts with real-world urban artworks to identify evidence of simulacra, spectacle, and resistance. In this process, selected urban artworks will be analyzed to discern how they reinforce or challenge the hyperreal cityscape. The research-

er will adopt an inductive approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the visual and textual data. Critical thinking will be applied to assess the extent to which urban art reflects Baudrillard's notions of simulation and spectacle, and how these concepts influence urban social and cultural perceptions. Methodologically, the research emphasizes descriptive interpretation rather than quantification, aiming to provide nuanced insights into complex visual phenomena. The study also uses a comparative analysis between classical and contemporary urban artworks to highlight developments over time. Ethical considerations focus on respectful representation of visual sources and proper citation of all referenced materials. Overall, the research process combines theoretical review, visual analysis, and interpretive insights to offer a comprehensive understanding of Baudrillard's relevance to urban art studies. This approach ultimately aims to contribute to academic discussions regarding the cultural significance of urban visual culture in the digital age.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Examples of emergence of pop art from Baudrillard's perspective

Digital Murals and Augmented Reality Installations

These artworks extend traditional street art into the digital realm, often incorporating augmented reality (AR) that viewers can experience via smartphones. According to Baudrillard's concept

of hyperreality, these digital layers create a world where the distinction between real and simulated blurs. For instance, a mural might be overlaid with digital animations that only exist in virtual space, making the art not just a physical object but part of an ongoing spectacle that mediates perception. This exemplifies how urban art now exists in a hyperreal space, where images and virtual layers override tangible reality. (Fig. 1)

Viral Street Art and Memes

Street art that becomes viral through social media platforms often loses its original socio-political intent, turning into a shared image or meme. Baudrillard's idea of simulacra suggests that these images exist independently from any original message or context they are copies without an original. For example, a politically charged mural may be reposted countless times, altered, and transformed into a symbol of broader cultural currents, detached from its initial context and serving more as an image for consumption than a site of resistance.

Commercialized Murals and Branding

Many urban murals and street art projects are now sponsored or co-opted by brands, transforming what could be politically or socially critical art into commercial spectacle. This aligns with Baudrillard's notion that art and signs are increasingly embedded in a system of commodification, where their primary function becomes aesthetic or promotional rather than critical.



Figure 1: Left picture: “Etnias” mural entitled “Todos Somos Um” (We Are All One) made in Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Summer Olympics by Eduardo Kobra – a perfect example of how street art is now encouraged instead of disapproved. At the time, this piece broke the record for the biggest graffiti mural on the planet. Source: Free Walkers Tours. Right picture: A crowd gathers before the dedication of “Dreams, Diaspora, and Destiny” (Photo by Gavin O’Reilly ’20).

For example, a mural featuring a social message might be sponsored by a corporation, turning it into an aesthetic object that reinforces brand presence while diluting its original critique.

Transient, Ephemeral Graffiti as Resistance

Graffiti, especially illegal street tagging, exemplifies Baudrillard's ideas about the transient nature of simulacra. These works often last only a short period before being removed, emphasizing their superficial and temporary existence. They serve as a form of resistance because their ephemeral nature prevents their commodification and long-term spectacle, making them a

fleeting challenge to the hyperreal environment of urban spectacle cities. (Fig. 2)

Cityscape as a Spectacle of Signs and Symbols

Urban enviro that create a cityscape resembling a giant tableau of signs, as Baudrillard describes. For example, digital billboards displaying changing advertisements or neon signs create a visual environment that prioritizes spectacle over authenticity. These signs contribute to a city that is increasingly disconnected from "real" social interactions, embodying Baudrillard's concept of the city as a hyperreal space dominated by signs and images. (Fig. 3)



Figure 2: From brick to Blu, The first mural in July 2008, Source: Roehensee/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain



Figure 3: Cityscape and signs in streets, Hong kong

Critical Reflections on Urban Art and Baudrillard's Theories

Baudrillard's theories serve as essential tools for critically reflecting on the nature of urban art in contemporary society. They challenge viewers and critics to question whether urban art functions as a genuine form of cultural expression or simply as a component of the hyperreal spectacle. The distinction between authentic social critique and superficial spectacle is central to understanding the role of street art, murals, and digital interventions in city spaces. In modern urban environments, street art often appears to act as a voice for marginalized communities, resisting dominant narratives and providing space for social commentary. However, Baudrillard's notion of simulation suggests that even these acts of resistance are susceptible to co-optation and commodification, transforming potentially subversive art into part of the spectacle. As artworks circulate on social media, they sometimes lose their political or social potency, becoming packaged symbols consumed by the masses. The paradox of urban art as both a tool for resistance and a product of spectacle raises important questions about authenticity and agency. While mural art and graffiti can embody authentic social critique, they often become commodified objects within a marketplace of visual culture, subjected to commercial interests and aesthetic trends. This commodification further complicates the role of urban art in fostering genuine social change, as it risks being subsumed into the cycle of hyperreality. Another critical aspect involves the digital transformation of urban art, where viral images, online campaigns, and augmented reality installations extend the reach of street art but also dilute its physical, tangible qualities. In this digital realm, images lose their materiality and become part of an endless cycle of reproduction, reinforcing Baudrillard's idea that simulation replaces the real. Digital urban art often privileges spectacle over deep political or cultural messages. Moreover, urban art's ephemerality plays a significant

role in its critique of hyperreality. Graffiti and murals are often temporary, removed or painted over, which highlights their transient, simulacrum-like nature. Their temporary existence underscores Baudrillard's warning about the superficiality of simulated culture what remains is often only the image of resistance rather than the resistance itself. This transient nature calls into question the permanence or durability of authentic social commentary in the urban landscape. The spectacle of urban art also influences urban residents' perception of public space, transforming streets into stages for curated images and performative identities. Social media amplifies this transformation, creating a global stage where local artworks become part of a larger spectacle. These mediated images often prioritize visual appeal or viral potential over critical content, thus aligning with Baudrillard's critique of the society of spectacle. Baudrillard's concept of the "precession of simulacra" becomes especially relevant when analyzing how urban art is consumed today. Images evolve into autonomous signs that precede and shape social perceptions, creating a landscape dominated by simulation. Grassroots murals, digital projections, and meme culture exemplify this process, often blending authenticity and superficiality into layered visual narratives. The role of urban art in fostering social dialogue remains complex and multifaceted. While some artworks clearly challenge dominant power structures, others are deeply embedded in commercial or entertainment interests. The tension between these modalities determines whether urban art acts as a genuine vehicle for social resistance or merely as part of the hyperreality cycle. Critical engagement must, therefore, contextualize each work's intent and impact.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The aestheticization of urban art contributes to its spectacle-like quality. Artists increasingly adopt visual styles that appeal to mass audiences, transforming politically charged murals into

aesthetically pleasing but superficial displays. This aestheticization risks diluting the critical potential of urban art by transforming it into mere decoration or branding. Despite these challenges, some urban artists intentionally employ hyperreal techniques, such as digital manipulations, to subvert expectations or critique the spectacle itself. These art practices deliberately highlight their simulacra nature, prompting viewers to question perceptions of authenticity. Such strategies demonstrate a conscious awareness of Baudrillard's critiques and serve as a form of resistance within the hyperreal landscape. Finally, critical reflection on urban art through Baudrillard's lens encourages a nuanced understanding of how city spaces are conditioned by media and signs. It also invites a reconsideration of the potential for urban art to serve as an authentic voice, capable of disrupting the cycle of spectacle and simulation. Recognizing the risks and possibilities inherent in contemporary urban art fosters a more informed and critical engagement with urban culture and its role in shaping social and political realities. While some urban artworks do challenge dominant narratives and foster social critique, many are absorbed into the spectacle, reinforcing surface-level perceptions rather than genuine

change. This paradox underlines the importance of critically analyzing the context and reception of urban art, assessing whether it perpetuates hyperreality or serves as a catalyst for authentic social dialogue. Baudrillard's critique ultimately urges viewers and critics to move beyond surface appearances and question the deeper significance of urban artworks within the hyperreal cityscape. It encourages embracing a reflective attitude that recognizes both the potential and limitations of urban art as a tool for resistance or expression. Understanding this dialectic is essential for fostering more meaningful engagement with urban cultural practices, challenging the dominance of spectacle, and cultivating spaces for genuine social critique in the modern city. In conclusion, the application of Baudrillard's theories to urban art reveals a complex landscape where visual culture simultaneously constructs and deconstructs social realities. The tension between authenticity and superficiality, resistance and commodification, spectacle and critique, is central to understanding the role of urban art today. Critical awareness of these dynamics can inspire more conscious practices and deeper appreciation of the cultural significance embedded within city spaces. (Tab. 2-4)

Table 2: Concepts of hyperreality & spectacle in urban art

Concept	Explanation	Urban Examples	Significance	References
Hyperreality & Spectacle	Dominance of mediated images and curated appearances in cities	Digital murals, augmented reality art, viral street art	Shapes perception and experience of urban space	Baudrillard (2017), Jameson (2019)
Simulation & Reproduction	The cycle of copying and reproducing images, losing original authenticity	Meme culture, digital reproductions, stylized murals	Reinforces superficiality over authenticity	Kellner (2018), Eco (2020)
Urban Aesthetics & Commercialization	Aestheticization and commodification of street art	Politically charged murals turned into branding, art for sale	Dilutes critical messages, turns art into spectacle	Kellner (2018), Eco (2020)

Table 3: Resistance & commercialization of urban art

Theme	Explanation	Urban Examples	Social Implication	References
Resistance & Social Critique	Urban art challenging dominant power structures	Protest murals, activist street art	Potential for social change, but often co-opted into spectacle	Eco (2020), Jameson (2019)
Commercial Co-optation	When urban art is appropriated for profit or branding	Branded murals, commercial street art	Limits original voice, turns critique into commodity	Kellner (2018), Harvey (2019)
Ephemerality & Resistance	Transient nature of graffiti and murals as a form of resistance	Painted-over murals, temporary installations	Emphasizes superficiality and fleeting protest	Eco (2020)

Table 4: Critical engagement & future perspectives

Aspect	Description	Urban Application	Challenges	References
Critical Reflection	Analyzing the depth and authenticity of urban art	Evaluating whether artworks challenge or reinforce spectacle	Distinguishing genuine critique from superficial spectacle	Eco (2020), Jameson (2019)
Digital & Media Influence	The role of digital media in extending or diluting urban art	AR installations, social media campaigns	Balancing spectacle and critique in digital spaces	Kellner (2018)
Cultivating Authenticity	Encouraging art forms that resist hyperreality, fostering genuine dialogue	Community-led murals, participatory art projects	Overcoming market pressures and aesthetic trends	Harvey (2019), Eco (2020)

This comprehensive table encapsulates the core ideas for synthesizing Baudrillard’s theories within the realm of urban art. It highlights how cities are saturated with signs and images that increasingly replace tangible reality (hyperreality), with urban art acting both as spectacle and potential resistance. The relation to media and technology underscores their role in ampli-

fying or complicating these phenomena, while critical perspectives remind us of the risks of surface-level art disconnected from social critique. The future challenges point toward ways of sustaining authentic, socially meaningful urban artistic practices amidst pervasive spectacle culture.

Table 4: Comprehensive key concept interpretation

Key Concept	Explanation	Urban Examples	Relation to Hyperreality & Simulation	Role of Media & Digital Technologies	Critical Perspective	Future Challenges
Hyperreality & Spectacle	Cities dominated by images, signs, and mediated perception	Digital murals, city screens	Signs and images replace reality	Digital media amplify spectacle, blurring real and virtual	Art becomes spectacle; danger of losing social critique	Balancing spectacle with authentic community engagement
Simulacra & Copies	The prevalence of copies without original reference	Viral memes, stylized graffiti	Copies detached from original meaning	Reproduction in digital spaces creates endless simulations	Authenticity diminishes; art as a surface phenomenon	Reclaiming genuine social and political messages

Key Concept	Explanation	Urban Examples	Relation to Hyperreality & Simulation	Role of Media & Digital Technologies	Critical Perspective	Future Challenges
Co-optation & Commodification	When urban art is absorbed into commercial and branding interests	Sponsored murals, branded street art	Art as commodity rather than resistance	Branding turns urban art into marketing tools	Threat to artistic independence and social critique	Protecting artists' autonomy and integrity
Ephemerality & Transience	Temporary nature of street art as a form of resistance	Graffiti removal, temporary installations	Transience emphasizes surface over permanence	Ephemeral art challenges commodified culture	Resistance that remains fleeting and fragile	Creating lasting impact within transient art forms
Signs & Symbols in Urban Space	Urban environments as a complex language of signs and meanings	Murals with symbolic images, advertisements	Signs shape urban perception; often superficial	Signs often mask deeper social realities	Surface appearances can obscure true social conditions	Deeper interpretive work to uncover layered meanings
Digital & Visual Culture	Impact of digital reproduction, social media, and augmented reality on urban art	AR murals, viral videos of street art	Digital media extend spectacle; reinforce simulation	Technology intensifies hyperreality and spectacle culture	Need for critical digital literacy and media awareness	Developing strategies for authentic digital engagement
Resistance & Genuine Expression	Potential of urban art to challenge hyperreality and foster genuine dialogue	Protest murals, community-led projects	Art as act of resistance against spectacle	Community participation as act of social agency	Importance of fostering authentic voices in urban spaces	Balancing commercial interests with grassroots activism

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