Post Queerness: Hyperreal Gender and the End of the Quest for Origins

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Introduction

The contemporary United States is awash in media images working in concert to create and sustain a static, heteronormative view of the dyadic structure of gender in which only masculine and feminine identities achieve mainstream acknowledgement and, thus, intelligibility. In order to dismantle this rather limited model of the gendered body, theorists such as Judith Butler have endeavored to reconsider the gender binary by examining the ways in which the gendered body has been and is currently manufactured by our mediated culture. While in the process of critiquing the socially constructed concept of gender, Butler often becomes mired in debates on the implication of reality within those social constructions as well as the source of “originality” as an idea. By straining for a point of origin, however, the infinite number of examples of individual expressions of highly personalized identities are eventually realigned upon a spectrum, with masculine on one end and feminine on the other, with minor variations still owing allegiance to the primary categories. The sexed nature of a body, the biological/corporeal component of the gender equation, has become interwoven with the search for the authentic examples of gender thereby allowing (or even encouraging) a continual realignment with the gender binary. As such, that Butler’s work seeks to locate “the mechanism whereby sex is transformed into gender is meant to establish not only the constructedness of gender, its unnatural and nonnecessary status, but the cultural universality of oppression in nonbiologicist terms.” In the quest to assay the sex/gender binary, Butler circles around semantic discussions of the constitution of reality. By allowing the question of reality to direct the debate, however, Butler ultimately misses an opportunity to free the contemporary notion of gender from its tethers to the social convention of triginality in a hierarchal structure of value. Conceiving of gender within a hyper-real framework is of particular importance to the field of communications and media studies due to not only the increasing visibility of non “traditional” performances of gender in conventional electronic media outlets like television and film, but as well as, and more importantly, the continually multiplying opportunities for personal expression and ideology construction in online, virtual realities.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce Judith Butler’s construction of gender to the theoretical model known as hyperreality as conceived by theorist Jean Baudrillard. By reading Butler’s schema regarding gender with the theory of hyperreality, the question of originality becomes moot. Thus, rather than struggling under the unnecessary yoke of “correctness,” the notion of reality is completely removed from the currently existing gender labels that are applied to individuals. Such a conflation of theoretical
constructs reconfigures the hierarchal, value-laden conception of the oppositional and restrictive forces known as masculine and feminine. Instead of a hierarchal order of gender based on preconceived heteronormative notions of gender, each gender “copy” as enacted by a body in a place in time will in itself be primary, thereby owing no allegiance to earlier, heretofore considered primary, incarnations of gendered activity.

In order to achieve this conflation of theoretical models, I will first introduce the theory of hyperreality as it has been developed in the works of Jean Baudrillard. Next, I will trace the trajectory upon which gender has traveled in works of Judith Butler including Gender Trouble: Feminisms and the Subversion of Identity, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex, and Undoing Gender. Taking into consideration these two theoretical models, I will then offer a reading that interjects Butler's construction of gender into a hyperreal frame.

The Orders of Hyperreality

Within Baudrillard’s schema of hyperreality there exists four orders of understanding: counterfeit, production, simulation, and virtual. Since the dawn of the Italian Renaissance, humanity has been slowly and steadily working its way through the levels of simulacra. As technologies have both evolved and progressed, thereby making us ever more independent from the “natural” world, society’s movement through the various orders of reality has been accelerated resulting in an ever shorter grace period between the orders. Through these four stages, an understanding of the importance of humanity’s growing interconnectedness with not only the mechanization of life but also its growing dependence on our “mediated” lives can be appreciated.

FIRST ORDER: Counterfeit

Beginning with the Italian Renaissance and continuing through to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the counterfeit order as conceived by Baudrillard was the grounding force in societal constructions of reality.² The simulacra produced in “[t]he first-order simulacrum never abolished difference. It supposes an always detectable alteration between semblance and reality.”³ Additionally, the first order corresponded to the “natural, naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit, that are harmonious, optimistic, and that aim for the restitution or the ideal institution of nature made in God’s image.”⁴ Baudrillard highlights the deference exhibited by human beings in this period towards the ultimate creator (i.e. God) thereby providing definite boundaries for the counterfeit simulacra.

Inherent in the first order, therefore, is a reverence for God and his creation(s). The referent upon which the simulacra is based exists within the traditional, modern considerations of reality, as the simulacra is a “reflection of a profound reality.”⁵ Instead, humanity and their inanimate creations exist in harmony with a world beneficently bequeathed to them by a benevolent entity. Rather than working against or attempting to exceed the natural world around them, individuals in this period of perception create with respect in mind for the natural world around them.

Before the supplanting of the benevolent God by the deity of production born of the Industrial Revolution, understanding, knowledge and perception were quite different. Knowledge was based on faith, not empirical evidence that became the standard in the nineteenth century.⁶ According to Baudrillard:

Before [the Industrial Era] nothing was produced, strictly speaking: everything was deduced, from the grace (of God), or beneficence (of nature) of an agency that offered or refused its wealth. Value emanated from the reign of divine or natural qualities (for us in retrospect these converge).⁷

Reality, and the simulacra emanating from it, possessed inherent meaning thereby insuring inherent value. No exchange for sign or symbol was necessary; meaning was a gift endowed by the creator upon his creation(s) and flowed through the “creations’ creations.”

SECOND ORDER: Production

By the beginning of the Industrial Era, however, a shift or “revolution”⁸ occurred in the
era that precipitated the instillation of the second order of simulacra known as production. The era of production realized the creation of “simulacra that are productive, productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by the machine and in the whole system of production—a Promethean aim of a continuous globalization and expansion, of an indefinite liberation of energy.” Individuals living in the Industrial Era attempted to re-make the work, or at least re-trace the steps, of God and improve upon the natural, observable world around them. Advancement and “modernity” were the order of the day, thereby instilling the desire in individuals to attempt to move beyond the perceived limitations of humanity. One need only take into consideration the importance of monument building, such as the Crystal Place in the United Kingdom and the Eiffel Tower in France, which spotlighted both the wealth and growing technological prowess of the United States and Europe and realized the need to exceed what had once been considered impossible.

Even with the ever-exploding boundaries of technology in the Industrial Era, individuals still continued to reproduce, not simulate, objects and events. Replication was the order of the day, as for, according to Baudrillard:

The second-order simulacra simplifies the problem [of reality] by the absorption of appearances, or by the liquidations of the real, whichever. It establishes in any case a reality, image, echo, appearance; such is certainly work, the machine, the system of industrial production in its entirety, in that it is radically opposed to the principle of theatrical illusion. No more resemblance or lack of resemblance of God, or human being, but an imminent logic of the operational principle.

With the rise of the machine and production, the simple crudity of man-made simulacra quickly slipped away. While an original referent in reality was still essential to the productions of simulacra in the second order, the simulacra moved ever closer to perfectly representing “the real” as well as creating simulacra en masse.

While connections still existed to the referent, the earth-bound referent did not ultimately define the relations between the simulacra and its real-world correspondent. In the world governed by the law of production “there is the very possibility of two or of n identical objects. The relations between them is not that of the original to its counterfeit, or its analogue, or its reflection; it is a relationship of equivalence, of indifference.” With its exact replicant existing side by side, the simulacra (the reflection of reality) loses meaning. Instead of a miraculous gift from God, a copy is a disposable thing. The individual simulacra are easily re-creatable and, thus, no different from the last, or the next, incarnation. Unlike the first order, inherent meaning does not reside within the simulacra or its referent.

THIRD ORDER: Simulation

The third level, simulation, corresponds to the means of perception known as hyperreality which reconfigures the post-modern condition and consciousness by removing the need for a referent or an original to exist prior to its copy in the corporeal world. Simulation began at the end of the Industrial Era and reigned perceptions of reality until the very recent arrival of the virtual.

Even without a definitive beginning and end point in place, one can still discuss the postmodern condition of hyperreality. While theorists from Walter Benjamin forward have discussed the loss that occurs when a “real object” is reproduced, hyperreality reconfigures the notion of loss so it becomes the loss of conventionally-held notions of reality. In Symbolic Exchange and Death, Baudrillard writes “[t]he modern sign dreams of the sign anterior to it and fervently desires, in its reference to the real, to rediscover some binding obligation. But it finds only a reason: a referential reason, the real - the ‘natural’ on which it will feed.” The loss is not only felt by the viewer/receiver of the sign but the sign/simulacra itself. Without a support structure, the copy may easily fall into a void of meaninglessness as an actual object on this metaphysical plane is no longer necessary.

In one of the more tangible critiques of Baudrillard, Richard Lane defined this “simulacra of simulations” as producing “a reality of its own, without being based upon any particular bit of the
real world.” What this means is that an object or an event can exist prior to having a corresponding referent in the physical world. As conceived by Baudrillard,

Here we are in the third-order simulacra; no longer that of the counterfeit of an original as in the first-order, nor that of the pure series in the second. Here are the models from which proceed all forms according to the modulation of their differences. [...] We are in simulation in the modern sense of the word, of which industrialization is but the final manifestation. Finally, it is not serial reproducibility which is fundamental, but the modulation. Not quantitative equivalences but distinctive oppositions.

We are no longer exchanging the real for a reproduction, but creating a real, a “reproduction,” a simulacra all by ourselves with no help from mommy, daddy, or (ultimately) God.

Baudrillard, in one of the more grounded sections of Simulations and Simulacra, has an essay entitled “The China Syndrome.” The piece describes the events that took place on the screen in 1979, in the film The China Syndrome, and in “real-life” news reports that followed the almost incident that took place at Pennsylvania’s nuclear energy plant known as Three Mile Island. To Baudrillard, “the real corresponded point by point to the simulacrum, including the suspended, incomplete character of the catastrophe, which is essential from the point of view of deterrence: the real arranged itself, in the image of the film, to produce a simulacrum of catastrophe.”

Taking into consideration the practical concerns of filmmaking including writing the screenplay, casting the parts and designing the set, it is obvious that the “reality” of Three Mile Island was imagined by the creators of The China Syndrome well before the “real” event occurred.

To fully understand the theory of hyperreality, one must consider it in terms of the United States of America. Unlike the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, the United States of America is its own creation. America is a new, shiny land that:

Ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth. Having known no primitive accumulation of time, it lives in a perpetual present. Having seen no slow, centuries-long accumulation of a principle of truth, it lives in perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs.

Without the weight of historical tradition or “founding truths” as is present for older, more established nations, America and its citizens (Baudrillard’s masses) simulate an existence that lacks an historical precedent. As America “ducks” the issue of origins, it re-confirms its status as a nation living in a hyperreal state, for the “nothing” gave birth to it nor is it a copy of anything else that existed previously. It was conceived in the minds of men; the purest form of hyperreality.

To that end, America is the land of hyperreality and Disneyland. Disneyland: a world produced out of the insubstantial matter of dreams, wishes and fairy tales and now driven and buoyed up by the need to need, the desire to desire. In his book Simulations, Baudrillard explains the appeal of Disneyland and how it correlates to the post-modern American existence. Thus:

But what draws the crowds is undoubtedly much more the social microcosm, the miniaturized and religious reveling in real America, in its delights and drawbacks. You park outside, queue up inside, and are totally abandoned at the exit. In this imaginary world the only phantasmagoria is in the inherent warmth and affection of the crowd, and in that sufficiently excessive number of gadgets used there to specifically maintain the multitudinous affect. The contrast with the absolute solitude of the parking lot—a veritable concentration camp—is total. Or rather: inside, a whole range of gadgets magnetize the crowd into direct flows—outside, solitude is directed onto a single gadget: the automobile.
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To Baudrillard, Disneyland represents what the hyperreal American is; a nation defined by excess and the contradictory feelings of extreme familiarity and togetherness coupled with the ultimate solitude in a little metal box. It is the world of Disneyland, however, that most fully exemplifies the third order of simulacra in Baudrillard’s conception of hyperreality, for it is a world, a thing, a reality that came into being on our plane of existence with no physically incarnated antecedents.

FOURTH ORDER: Virtual

America, Disneyland and all of its inhabitants are now moving away from the third order of simulacra and are now entering a new world: the virtual. Instead of the paradigm of human existence put forth by William Shakespeare several centuries ago that equated man to actors on a stage, “we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks.” The flesh and bone and blood so central to our personal understanding of reality has been replaced by USB cords, Ethernet cords and satellite television that keeps us connected to the ultimate of conclusion of the trajectory of the hyperreal condition: the virtual. Instead of inhabiting the role of creator, individuals are now receptacles for the simulacra that constitute reality.

Baudrillard has not yet definitively declared the historical event that marks the end of the simulation and begins the virtual. For simulacra in the virtual stage of existence, however, “there is no longer any equivalence natural or general. Also, there is not any law of value as such, dialectical or structural. There remains only a sort of epidemic of value, a general metastasis of value; a sort of proliferation and problematic dispersal.” With the removal of the need for a referent, the simulacra produced under the fourth order lack any intrinsic value or inherent meaning. The sheer number of simulacra broadcasts and ultimately erodes all self-contained, inherent meaning.

Yet, the third order of reality has not yet completely let go of its hold on contemporary society. In his piece entitled “Bathos of Technology and Politics in Fourth Order Simulacra,” Mike Gane attempts to make sense of the nature of the virtual in relation to the hyperreal. Gane alludes to the inherent tension when he writes:

The problem is that for the reader of the thesis of the fourth order is, as a conception and definition, still in statu nascendi. Just as Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality (and the end of the social) took over a decade to be seen as having caught the shift that has occurred in our societies, something of the same disbelief hangs over this thesis.

Thus, to fully critique the essence and extent of the virtual is quite difficult, for discussions on the third order of simulation are difficult enough to comprehend. When considering a concept like reality that, on the one hand seems so tangible, yet defies easy definitions, debate on the nature of reality can ultimately be unsatisfying.

The importance of the concept for contemporary society, however, recommends the virtual for at least a consideration as the fourth order of reality. According to Baudrillard, “the image can no longer imagine the real, because it is the real. It can no longer dream it, since it is its virtual reality. It is as though things had swallowed their own mirrors and have become transparent to themselves, entirely present to themselves in a ruthless transcription.” While this definition reads very similarly to that of hyperreality, the difference between the two orders comes about not in the genesis of the image but what happens after the image is created. In hyperreality, the image/simulacra is born without referent in the real world, yet the simulacra produced from the hyperreal moment give birth to the referent in the “real” or “unmediated” world.

The virtual conception of reality, however, has no need and in fact demands a lack of a corresponding referent in reality either before or after its realization. With the growing power of the virtual, the traditional sense of reality loses power and meaning. In Impossible Exchange, Baudrillard writes:

When the world, or reality, finds its artificial equivalent in the virtual, it becomes useless. When the only thing needed to reproduce the species is cloning, sex becomes a useless function....
When artificial memories reign supreme, our organic memories become superfluous (they are, in fact, gradually disappearing). When everything takes place between interactive terminals on the communication screen, the Other has becomes a useless function.²⁴

One need only consider the Internet and the nature of online and offline senses of reality and existence to see how the virtual enters our lives. The lines between mediated and corporeal experiences become blurred. According to Sherry Turkle, “[a]s human beings become increasingly intertwined with the technology and with each other via technology, old distinctions between what is specifically human and specifically technological becomes more complex.”²⁵ Defining identity in the virtual age, therefore, has evolved into both a more nuanced and fractured process with the conflation of technology and self in one body.

**Contemporary Gendering**

In her groundbreaking treatise on gender, Judith Butler embarked upon a course, which set out to trouble tightly held beliefs regarding the state and “nature” of gender. According to Butler, *Gender Trouble* was written:

> To show that the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a preemptive and violent circumscription of reality. To the extent the gender norms (ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complimentarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity, many of which are underwritten by racial codes of purity and taboos against miscegenation) establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be ‘real,’ they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression.²⁶

With the burden of such value-laden convictions weighing upon gender, it appears that any attempts problematize commonly held views of gender would be views as either radical, implausible or both. By both naming and questioning the foundational beliefs associated with gender, Butler questioned the nature of being and reality in the contemporary context.

While a tangible definition of gender remains elusive in *Gender Trouble*, Butler imparts to the reader ideas as to the multiple possibilities of what gender *may* be and become. Inexorably intertwined with Butler’s conception of gender is the trope of performativity. Not to be confused with the singular or isolated notion of a “performance,” performativity suggests a seemingly unceasing action in which a body enacts gender on multiple levels of consciousness. When attempting to provide an understanding of gender, Butler writes:

> Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence…gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.²⁷
Neither discernable as a list of adjectives nor a concrete entity existing on our corporeal plane, rather, gender has become a verb, a state of being one inhabits. Butler’s aforementioned definition refuses to provide a tangible point of departure as gender, as conceived by Butler, itself lacks any concrete attachments or well-defined boundaries.

The concept of free-flowing construction of gender is reiterated throughout _Gender Trouble_. Butler engages this active, ethereal view of gender when writing:

> Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the *illusion* of an abiding gendered self.

As the construction of gender only fleetingly exists in a particular time and place, defining gendered behavior becomes the domain of culture: an equally ambiguous term. Gender, while informing and affecting identity, becomes an action of the self but not born of the “real” self. As an action, gender becomes disengaged with the belief that gender is an essential or that there exists a true nature of a gendered being.

In _Gender Trouble_, gender never becomes incorporated into the physical body. Gender, instead, resides

on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

Only through communicating with society does a body become a “gendered” entity. Through the course of _Gender Trouble_ the body remains elusive. Gender either resides outside or on the body or as an act experienced by the “Other,” but it never intersects with the sexed form the body inhabits. Divorced from this mortal coil, gender exists only in our perception of the performative act as evidenced in others.

Butler reconfigured the discussion of gender to include the physical body in _Bodies that Matter_ by troubling the notion of the impenetrable biologically sexed body. While the sex of an individual appears to be unquestionable, Butler relocates the construction of sex to the domain of the social. In the introduction to _Bodies that Matter_, Butler defines

> A regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time... “Sex” is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the “one” becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility.

What we conceive of as male and female, thus, has come into being through the “will” of socializing forces. Butler uses the Lacanian notion of “law” and the Foucauldian conception of power to explain how said social forces work.

Since sex, now a social norm, lacks a material presence, the discussion concerning the body has become centered *about* the body. For Butler, the human physical terrain is problematic for

To invoke matter is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures which should surely be an object of feminist inquiry, but which would be quite problematic as a ground of feminist theory. To return to matter requires that we return to matter as a sign which in its redoublings and contradictions enacts an inchoate drama of sexual difference.
Sex as a sign reconfigures sex as without either intrinsic value or meaning. Although such a reading may be troubling, Butler’s inquiry into the “nature” of the gendered body relies heavily upon the ways in which the male and female physical incarnations are read.

Gendered space is divided into masculine and feminine performative activity in which the male gendered body rides atop the hierarchal power structure. The feminine is marked with “privation and castration… the very figuration of that threat [castration] and, hence, is produced as a lack only in relation to the masculine subject.” The masculine, however, is the gender of abundance. Instead of a subject position, “[t]he symbolic position that marks a sex as masculine is said to ‘have’ the phallus; it is one that compels through the threat of punishment, that is, the threat of feminization, an imaginary and, hence, inadequate identification.”

By having the phallus, the masculine exercises social power. While the trope of the phallus is troubled by the tendency to conflate it with the biological penis, thereby creating a scenario in which biology appears to be the genesis of the seat of power, the phallus, like all elements in the construction of gender, is born of social identity. As such, the binary remains “grounded” in the realm of a constructed norm.

In *Undoing Gender*, the dialogue no longer concerns providing evidence for the assertion that either gender or sex is a norm. Butler, in a radical departure from her previous works, elucidates the ways in which the aforementioned norms are and can be “undone.” Butler provides a definition for the meaning of gender as a norm when she writes:

Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine takes place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes… Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized.

Instead of a fixation on the ways in which the gender binary plays out in masculine or feminine actions, Butler once again reconfigures the discussion. Gender becomes a process disengaged from the value-ridden forms it may take. While this argument may appear less aggressive or too similar to the views put forward in her previous works, this “mechanized” view of genders moves beyond gender as it was conceived in either *Gender Trouble* or *Bodies that Matter*. By presenting gender as a “apparatus,” minute meaningless distinctions are done away with in favor of a free-floating abstract notion, thereby allowing gender to be “unmade.”

Butler illustrates several ways in which gender can be said to be unmade or undone. Whether an individual is labeled as a transsexual, transgendered, intersexed or in any other way “queer,” a form of gendered activity is enacted. Although Butler does admit that by enacting these alternative/non normative genders as body may be named “unreal,” it is via the citational performative that such genders gain social currency. Butler writes:

One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly
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deterritorialized through citation. They can also be exposed as non-natural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defines normative expectation.\textsuperscript{35}

Although Butler provides a prospect for change in this refigured performativity, such activity often comes at a personal price in terms of cultural intelligibility.

Hyperreal Gender

One of the main issues confronting queerly gendered bodies/individuals concerns the lack of admission to cultural intelligibility by the heteronormative mindset dominating mainstream culture, resulting in social invisibility or a lack of acknowledgement. Queer bodies hover outside the power structure of society due to their perceived lack of “realness” or “originality” within the heteronormative social structure. By maintaining a biblically-inspired emphasis on the reproductive aspect of sexuality and the corresponding gendered performances, queer bodies are not permitted to communicate or engage with the current normative standards as created, established and maintained by the dyadic, mainstream gender structure.

By relying on a social structure that emphasizes the true or original in assessing worth, bodies/individuals exhibiting/performing a queer or non-normative gender cannot communicate within the same heteronormative arena due to a lack of common ground. In Butler’s estimation:

Gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{36}

Categories like butch and femme were not copies of a more original heterosexuality, but they showed how the so-called originals, men and women within the heterosexual frame, are similarly constructed, performatively established. So the ostensible copy is not explained through reference to the origin, but the origin is understood to be as performative as the copy.\textsuperscript{37}

While assigning value to queer bodies, Butler’s paradigm still requires the signifier to be intelligible. Under the rubric of either simulation or virtual reality, the signified takes precedence as the signifier either appears after the copy is realized (in the third order) or never materializes at all (in the fourth order).

By resignifying the understanding of copy, therefore, an empowered view of gender can be achieved. Butler admits in her essay “Imitation and gender insubordination,” that “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself.”\textsuperscript{38} Thus, placing it in the interstitial space between the third/simulation and fourth/virtual orders of reality becomes a natural extension of Butler’s view of gender. As an “original” form does not exist for gender, the multiple copies, which are promulgated by the individual bodies, are, in fact, primary expressions of gender.

When one returns to the performative or active element of gender, another hyperreal aspect comes to forefront. Due to the constant
reconstruction or resignification in every act of gender, each movement, look or moment creates a new, minutely different creation. Butler, in “Variations on sex and gender,” also emphasizes the mobile appearance of gender when she writes:

Gender is not traceable to a definable origin because it itself is an originating activity incessantly taking place. No longer understood as a product of cultural and psychic relations long past, gender is a contemporary way of organizing past and future cultural norms, a way of situating oneself in and through those norms, an active style of living of one’s body in the world.  

By ensconcing the temporal condition of gender in either the present or future, gender can dislodge itself from the historical sediment that burdens it.

Conclusion

Any attacks on gender, regardless of the structure of reality one employs, occupy a difficult position in society. According to Butler:

The structuring reality of sexual difference is not one that one can wish away or argue against, or even make claims about in any reasonable way. It is more like a necessary background to the possibility of thinking, of language, of being a body in the world. And those who seek to take issue with it are arguing with the structure that makes their argument possibility.

By taking up the argument with our seemingly impenetrable corporeal selves, critics like Judith Butler cause us to call into question the ways in which our bodies exist in the world.

The construct of hyperreal gender can be applied to multiple avenues of critical inquiry. With the continuing importance of cyber theory both by itself and in tandem with queer theory, hyperreal gender can be used to describe how bodies are gendered in the non-territorial plane of existence. Instead of viewing the cyber realm as the region of pure fantasy, hyperreal gender can buoy up the concept of multiple regions of “real” identity. Additionally, construing the multitude of queer (femme/butch, intersexed, transgendered, transsexual and all of the points in-between) genders as hyperreal genders confers agency and an immediate sense of “reality” upon those individuals, without having to maneuver through the heteronormative structure by the dismantling of said hierarchical structure.

While the idea of hyperreal gender may be considered as problematic, or possibly more so, than the two ideas separately, such a model has the ability to not only trouble but give a sense of cultural intelligibility to bodies once denied such a voice. In removing the limiting boundaries of conventionally conceived reality, gendered bodies can be understood on their own terms without the weight of a non-existent original hanging over them.

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End Notes

2 Jean Baudrillard, Simulations, translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (n.p.: Semiotext [e], 1983), 83.
3 Baudrillard, Simulations, 94-95.
5 Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations, 6.
6 In his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn elaborates this idea of the power of paradigm shifts when he writes "paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently. In so far as their only recourse to that world is through what they see and do, we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world (111)." Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).


8 In “Symbolic Exchange and Death,” Jean Baudrillard writes “A revolution separates each order from the next one: these are the true revolutions” (124).

9 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 83.

10 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 121.

11 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 95.


13 Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 83.

14 Baudrillard, “Symbolic Exchange and Death,” 139. (emphasis in original)


17 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 54. (emphasis added)


27 Ibid., 33.

28 Ibid., 179. (emphasis in original)

29 Ibid., 173. (emphasis in original)


31 Ibid., 49. (emphasis in original)

32 Ibid., 102.

33 Ibid., 101.


35 Ibid., 218.


40 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 176.