
Your Own Personal Matrix: Generationally Mediated Realities and Digital Cultures of Choice

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The 1999 film may have been prophetic. The Matrix has us. But our children may have the Matrix. . .under their control. And it can be personalized.

This project, now at its seed level, merges performance studies, critical media studies and a reading of Jean Baudrillard's idea of simulations and simulacrum to examine the dramatization of our social reality as it occurs through each evolution of broadcast media in the twentieth century. Since the emergence of broadcast radio, each American generation has interpreted and aesthetically crafted a consensus reality that, with the onset of cable TV and the internet, has become somewhat of a simulation. This project claims that Generation Z (born after 2001) will inherit a social reality that is so highly filtered and aesthetically shaped as to be more of an abstraction of objective truth than narrative drama or even video games. Furthermore, the additional mediation of algorithms designed initially for marketing purposes will provide for Generation Z "realities of choice."

This investigation began as I observed my young daughter asserting her perceived right to choose her digitally delivered entertainment from a seemingly endless menu. The Gen Xers (my generation) are in charge of producing these entertainments, while Millennials form the bulk of the writers. This is strange alchemy, as Gen X produces both documentary and narrative drama that critiques the mythical post-war reality created by Baby Boomers, Millennials internalize and interpret that critique, producing infinite variations on themes by virtue of the sheer number of digital outlets and accessible, user friendly storytelling tools. The conceptual model of generational mediation to be presented, shows the gradual movement away from a relatively objective (or let us say homogenized consensus) social reality to and a multi-cyber-verse of highly mediated realities.

The irony is that, while the beauty of this techno-narrative state allows an exponentially diversifying population space and accessibility for disseminating their narrative and to communicate their cultural reality; the option to personalize our input, in tandem with our twenty-first century culture of convenience, means that we may never see and experience nor empathize with the lives of "Others."

This work marks a continuation of a dissertation on performing myth in virtual realities and the foundational level of a "Generational Reality Theory," an examination of meaning making, knowledge acquisition and generational ways of being as codified cultural expressions. In other words, because of our emerging ability to perform ourselves and shape our perception of reality wholesale via media spaces, and the likely development of digital (and other virtual) platforms beyond our current imagination, each subsequent generation is living, quite literally, in a different reality to the extent that cross-generational communication – and for professors, andragogy – is equivalent to cross-cultural communication.

Bibliography

Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. 14th ed. Trans. Glaser, S. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.