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Pregledni rad

Back to *Sociological Impressionism*: Simmel, Baudrillard, and the Theoretical Path from the Blasé Attitude to Hyperreality[1]

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ABSTRACT This paper advances the reasons why it is necessary to reread Simmel's essay on the metropolis and the concept of *blasé attitude*, which has already been analysed and examined many times in the sociological production so far (especially in studies of urban sociology). Our first aim is to show that Simmel's theory itself, and especially the idea of the blasé attitude, is a prelude to what Jean Baudrillard would later describe in his theory as the mental and social condition of individuals living in a hyperreal world, in a world of simulations and simulacra. The connection between the two theorists has so far received relatively little attention in secondary analysis, which gives this research its originality. Among classical sociologists, Simmel has repeatedly been interpreted as one of the most important precursors of themes later associated with postmodern social theory, although this represents only one of several possible trajectories through which his work has been received. Also, bearing in mind the contemporary context marked by the existence of several major war zones shaking the world, we believe it is important to recall both Simmel and Baudrillard in order to sharpen as much as possible our sociological tools for understanding the way individuals perceive what is happening on their screens, and is coming from Ukraine or the Middle East. The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical analysis of the way in which Simmel's blasé attitude becomes an answer to Baudrillard's question of why the (Gulf) War did not take place.

Key words: Georg Simmel, Jean Baudrillard, blasé attitude, hyperreality, sociological theory.

[1] It is a term first used by David Frisby in his study of Georg Simmel. The term was first used in 1981 and has since been frequently used in the context of Simmel's theory (Frisby, 1992).

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1. Introduction

One of the most eminent representatives of the very demanding and difficult (sociological) subdiscipline, Methodology of the History of Ideas and Historical Sociology, Arthur Stinchcombe, reminds us of a very important reason why we should return to the foundations, and why we should not forget the *Founding Fathers and Mothers:* as Stinchcombe says, it is very important that, when researching contemporary phenomena (and theories), we do not *reinvent the wheel,* that is, that we do not think and claim that we have discovered and defined the concepts that have been in use for a hundred years (and more). In addition to the obvious didactic value that the classics possess, this element of curbing a certain kind of contemporary research arrogance should also be a very important, and often neglected, element of scholarly papers. Of course, it goes without saying that old concepts should not be overestimated, nor should meanings be read into them - those they do not possess, once torn from their context. However, if we abandon the classics to oblivion, as Stinchcombe warns may happen – we may begin to forget the continuities in the development of particular concepts and theories (Stinchcombe, 1982).

Bearing precisely this Stinchcombe's postulate in mind, I decided to reactualise one important Simmelian concept, which he defined as the *blasé attitude* of the metropolis (Simmel, 1950a: 414). This notion is highly significant in Sociology in general, and is especially important for Urban Sociology and the Sociology of Space. It is, of course, a concept that has already been analysed many times, so the question may be raised as to why are we writing about it again? It was first reaffirmed by Robert Park in 1915 in *The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment* (Park, 1915)[2], and was later examined in much greater detail by David Frisby (1986; 1992). Wolff (1950) and Coser (1977) also occupy an important place in the broader sociological reception of Simmel's work. In this paper, I set out two reasons that I believe make the reactualisation of Simmel's concept interesting. The first reason is theoretical, and the second is contextual in nature. The focus of this text is on the first reason, but at the end we shall also turn to the contextual motives.

In this paper, I will advance one *bold hypothesis* stating that Jean Baudrillard's position (especially its segment concerning the development of hyperreal reality and society) is a kind of a (postmodernist) continuation of Simmel's initial idea of progress of the blasé attitude in modern society. I am not claiming that Baudrillard is a direct and intentional successor of Simmel's thought, nor that he intentionally elaborated Simmel's concept; I merely want to point to the theoretical similarities in the *capturing* of a very

[2] Park's engagement with Simmel was also biographical and intellectual: during his studies in Berlin in 1899/1900, he attended Simmel's lectures on sociology. Simmel's influence would subsequently become important for Park's work and, through him, for the development of the Chicago School and American urban sociology (Müller, 2023).

similar mental state with enormous social consequences, which Simmel would define as the blasé attitude, and Baudrillard named it a fundamental failure to truly understand and experience events taking place in a multimedia, hyperreal world. Such a comparison should not, however, be understood as an exercise in what Merton termed *adumbrationism* – the retrospective search for anticipations of later concepts in classical theory (Merton 1968: 21–22). The argument advanced here concerns a theoretically productive continuity between two distinct conceptual frameworks, rather than a claim that Baudrillard's theory was already implicitly contained in Simmel's work. **What is at stake, therefore, is the tracing of a theoretically relevant continuity that has not been systematically addressed in the literature so far; the only notable study directly approaching this connection is Weinstein and Weinstein (1993)**.

The Simmelian individual who walked in a blasé attitude through the streets of Berlin at the beginning of the twentieth century has a rather similar psychological profile, emotional dullness, and essential social detachment from the world around him as does Baudrillard's viewer of news from the Middle East, who experiences real and physical war as a kind of a video game. Thus, in this paper I will shed light on that individual analysed by both one and the other classic (from this historical distance, Baudrillard too may be regarded as a classic), of course taking into account the differences that make up the broader theoretical framework of both authors. In other words, I will underline the still insufficiently accentuated hypothesis that Simmel's blasé attitude is quite a strong overture to postmodern theory (although, of course, the concept itself is directly tied to the context of modernity). As we shall see in the continuation of the paper, Simmel has indeed been regarded as one of the classics whose work came particularly close to themes later associated with postmodern theory (if we consider him in relation to the other founding fathers – Marx, Durkheim, and Weber), yet the interesting theoretical connection between Simmel and Baudrillard has been completely unjustly neglected in sociological production.

The second reason is, as I have said, contextual. At the time of the writing of this paper, in 2026, three major war zones are active – the war in Ukraine has already lasted four years, the suffering in Palestine has gone on for more than a year, and the bombing of Iran by the United States and Israel is also intensifying, all of which is gradually taking on the form of a broader conflict across the entire Middle East (bearing in mind the direct involvement of the surrounding monarchies). In the moments of very intense warfare in different parts of the world[3], sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and media theorists are *grappling* with the reception of these events by people who are not in the vicinity of direct war operations. How do these wars appear, and how are they experienced, when for us in the areas not currently affected by war they are only images on the screens of our televisions and smartphones? Various stud-

[3] At one point, Latin American countries were also affected by conflicts due to the American intervention in Venezuela.

ies on this are carried out actively[4], and this paper is one (small) contribution from the history of theories to all colleagues dealing with contemporary currents. Let us remind ourselves of the concepts and authors that in this context can be highly important and instructive for us, and that in the contemporary (hyperreal) accelerated world we certainly must not forget.

2. The Sociological Squirrel Explores Modern Cities

As is well known among sociologists, Simmel devoted considerable attention to changes in lifestyles in (German) cities affected by rapid industrialisation and modernisation. Unlike some other authors (Marx, Weber, or Durkheim, or Rickert and Dilthey – authors who are closer to Simmel in terms of the theoretical standpoint), Simmel showed a tendency to analyse different segments of modern social life, with a particular focus on the individual and their experience of the surrounding world. Lewis Coser described Simmel as a *Sociological Squirrel* (Coser, 1977), while David Frisby characterised his theory as *Sociological Impressionism* (Frisby, 1992), and both of these descriptions captured Simmel's sociology indeed plausibly. The analogy with a squirrel suggests that he moved from one topic to another (like a squirrel jumping from tree to tree, he selected a wide range of highly engaging themes), while Frisby's analogy goes a step further and reveals the very essence of his theoretical style, which is fragmented, colourful, layered, somewhat abstract, yet, when examined more closely, it offers a highly coherent picture of modern society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Just like impressionist paintings – they may seem confusing, but when you step back and look at them as a whole they become a perfect portrait of the world. As we shall see later, it is precisely this style of writing, for which Simmel is recognisable, as well as his focus on the subjective experience of the individual in a rapidly changing world (in contrast to authors concerned with systems, structures, and society as a whole), that constitutes one of the important arguments for placing him among the precursors of postmodern theory.

Two of his best-known works are certainly the essay *The Stranger* (Simmel, 1950b) and the study *The Philosophy of Money* (Simmel, 2004), but Simmel did not hesitate to write about fashion, gender regimes, secret societies, conflict, and many other topics. The essay on the metropolis belongs among his more prominent works, and in this paper I will be particularly interested in the phenomenon he calls the blasé attitude, which he identifies as one of the main characteristics of metropolitan inhabitants. Before turning to the phenomenon of the blasé attitude itself, it is important to briefly

[4] Various recent studies within media and communication research have addressed these questions, demonstrating how contemporary conflicts such as Ukraine and Gaza are not only represented but actively constructed and interpreted through digital platforms, shaping audience perception and engagement (Dumitrescu, 2024; Alsharairi, 2025; Mets et al., 2026).

consider the context in which the essay emerged, both theoretically and biographically.

The essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (Simmel, 1950a) was written at a time when it had already become clear that Simmel would not obtain a permanent position at the University, and when he was increasingly turning toward public lectures and essayistic production for a wider, non-academic audience. Before 1900, Simmel published around 50% of his work in academic journals and 50% in non-academic publications, while after 1900 a significant shift occurred – the share of strictly scientific work dropped to around 28%, and his style of writing became more relaxed even in strictly scientific works (Coser, 1958). The essay on the metropolis belongs precisely to this type of work (unlike, for example, *The Philosophy of Money* (Simmel, 2004), and although Simmel was already a highly influential thinker at that time, he clearly stood out from the academic community and *challenged* its standards and norms, which was one of the reasons (alongside, of course, open anti-Semitism) why he did not obtain a permanent position at the University (Coser, 1958; Wolf, 1950). However, this *Outsider* position also largely contributed to his particular charisma as a lecturer and public intellectual. Thus, the essay on the metropolis is coloured by the position of an Outsider who offers his impressions of social changes without the constraints of academic writing, impressions that would later leave a significant mark on Sociology, perhaps even greater than the more rigid analyses of his contemporaries who held academic positions. Nevertheless, regardless of these biographical circumstances, Simmel remains faithful to some of his key theoretical orientations, among which formalism, neo-Kantianism, and nominalism stand out in particular, with the latter two being especially important for the understanding of the essay on the metropolis (although they cannot be completely separated in analytical terms).

Simmel's nominalism is particularly evident in this essay, as the focus is placed on the individual rather than on society or the system. From his definition of society as a *network of interactions* (Simmel, 1910), it follows that the individual constitutes the basic unit of analysis, and it is precisely this individual, in the context of the development of the metropolis, who becomes – crucially for this paper – blasé. This nominalist approach is stripped of structural considerations – we are not concerned with class or other structural positions from which the individual originates, but rather with their inner experience and their perception of the architectural and social conditions that surround them (on Simmel's nominalism and the importance of the individual and individualism in the ambivalence of modernity, it is best to read Kurt Wolf's classic but still notable and very detailed study (Wolf, 1950).

Neo-Kantianism in this context (for a more detailed explanation, see: Podoksik, 2014; Wolf, 1950) refers particularly to the distinction between objective and subjective culture, which will be of key importance for the understanding of the phenomenon of the blasé attitude. Let us briefly recall – Simmel takes over Kant's question *How is*

nature possible? and transforms it into the question *How is society possible?* (Simmel, 1910). While Kant argues that the totality of experience cannot be grounded in itself but must be located in the consciousness of the subject, Simmel goes a step further and argues that complete knowledge cannot be achieved at the level of the individual, since the individual encounters an already constituted social reality. In other words, individuals are simultaneously subjects and objects of mutual perception, and it is only through this interaction that society emerges as a network of relations (Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2019a: 972). In the context of the metropolis, the city may be understood as an objective *nature*, while the individual's subjectivity defends itself through the adoption of the blasé attitude, which will later be of particular importance for our analysis. More will be said about this in the second part of the work.

The general formalist position (which is, of course, also a consequence of neo-Kantianism) is in the context of this essay reflected in the assumption that both the metropolis and the blasé attitude are forms that recur in different contexts (countries, cities…). It is perhaps unnecessary to reiterate how Simmel conceptualised formalism and how he separated recurring forms from unique content, as this belongs to the most basic premises of Sociological Theory and Sociology in general; however, it is important to emphasise once again that, in the analysis of cities as well as forms of human behaviour and states of consciousness, we are dealing with social forms. Just as Sociology is concerned with *The King* John rather than a particular king *John*, we do not ask whether our metropolis is Berlin or Paris; what matters is the form of the city and the form of the mental state adopted by its inhabitants (Coser, 1977; Wolf, 1950).

Let us now return to the essay that stands at the center of our analysis. David Frisby has on several occasions drawn a very compelling parallel between the spirit of the metropolis described by Simmel and the very text and style in which it is written: Frisby argues that, in a certain sense, Simmel's essay itself becomes a textual image of the city – it is concise, full of sharp strokes and stimulating observations, interwoven with fragments and rapid tonal shifts (Frisby 1986; 1992). I would extend this argument further and suggest that Simmel's actors are constructed in a similar way: they attempt to form a coherent image of the world in their mind at the very moment when the stimuli of the city are breaking that image into pieces. The blasé attitude is not a pure boredom; it is a defence strategy against an excessive quantity of information, sounds, images, and (short-term) interpersonal relations. The form of the blasé individual implies a particular psychological and sociological profile that does not necessarily define our entire day – we may be far less blasé when we return home and focus on private relationships – but within the vortex of demands that life in the metropolis entails (ranging from economic[5] to interpersonal), the only way to endure is to adopt a blasé

[5] Frisby insists that the essay on the metropolis must be read in the context of *The Philosophy of Money* (Simmel, 2004), particularly in relation to what he describes as the "mathematisation of the world" whereby quality (what something is) loses ground to quantity (how much something is worth). For a more detailed discussion see: Frisby, 1986.

attitude. In other words, the blasé attitude is not alienation, but a form of existential necessity. Simmel's blaséd individual may thus be interpreted as a tragic figure, situated within what Simmel conceptualises as the *Tragedy of Culture* (Simmel, 1968), a process that, as Frisby (Frisby, 1986) emphasises, lies at the very core of modern experience, in which intimate and meaningful relations are sacrificed in order to preserve fragments of individual freedom within the accelerated dynamics of metropolitan life.

In Simmel's words: "The same factors which have thus coalesced into the exactness and minute precision of the form of life have coalesced into a structure of the highest impersonality; on the other hand, they have promoted a highly personal subjectivity. There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which has been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blasé attitude. The blasé attitude results first from the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves. From this, the enhancement of metropolitan intellectuality, also, seems to stem originally. Therefore, stupid people who are not intellectually alive in the first place usually are not exactly blasé. A life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all. In the same way, through the rapidity and contradictoriness of their changes, more harmless impressions force such violent responses, tearing the nerves so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent; and if one remains in the same milieu they have no time to gather new strength. An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy. This constitutes that blasé attitude which, in fact, every metropolitan child shows when compared with children of quieter and less changeable milieus" (Simmel, 1950a: 413-414).

According to Lewis A. Coser and David Frisby, for Simmel the metropolis is not merely a geographical concept, but rather a *state of mind* (Coser, 1977; Frisby, 1986). The gap that Simmel identifies between objective and subjective culture becomes most clearly visible in the blasé attitude of individuals. "The most profound reason, however, why the metropolis conduces to the urge for the most individual personal existence – no matter whether justified and successful – appears to me to be the following: the development of modern culture is characterised by the preponderance of what one may call the 'objective spirit' over the 'subjective spirit'" (Simmel, 1950a: 421).

The distinction between objective and subjective culture is a recurring motif in Simmel's analyses – it is present in his discussion of male and female culture (Simmel, 1997a; for more, see Jarić and Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2020), as well as in his essay on religion (Simmel, 1997b; for more, see Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2019a). To recall: "Objective culture represents the final process of transposing a specific value system and different social elements into the final systemic emanations such as, for example, industry, science, art, commerce, religion, etc… Simmel strives to correct this injustice by introducing a new system – subjective culture – into the pantheon of previ-

ously created cultural systems (Jarić and Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2020: 19-20). Simmel argues that men are the creators and bearers of objective culture, while women are associated with subjective culture[6]; likewise, religion as a system represents an emanation of objective culture, whereas personal religiosity belongs to subjective culture. In the context of the increasingly developed urbanisation of Germany, this dichotomy implies that the individual must find a way to preserve their subjective culture in relation to the dominant objective (urban) culture, and this is achieved precisely through the adoption of the blasé attitude. The metropolis represents the physical and material embodiment of this objective culture, while blazéness is its necessary and logical by-product, given the individual's need to preserve their inner world and individual freedoms (i.e. subjective culture). In contrast to the calmer life in rural settings (and in earlier historical periods), the metropolitan individual is compelled to respond with the intellect rather than with emotion, confronting an intensified process of quantification that replaces what is authentic and expressive. As Simmel concludes, it is therefore hardly surprising that an extreme individualist such as Friedrich Nietzsche harboured such a strong aversion toward the metropolis – seeing it as a force contributing to the atrophy of individual culture in the modern world (Simmel, 1950a: 422).

At this point, it is important to emphasise that Simmel's analysis of the metropolis is not limited to a diagnosis of overstimulation and the emergence of the blasé attitude, but is also deeply connected to his broader understanding of modern individualism. For Simmel, modernity is characterised by a significant expansion of individual freedom, made possible through the multiplication of social circles and the loosening of traditional forms of belonging (Simmel, 2004). Unlike premodern individuals, who were embedded in a limited number of tightly structured communities, modern subjects are able to move between different social contexts, thereby widening their horizon of experience and choice. However, this expansion of freedom is accompanied by a parallel and deeply ambivalent process. The same conditions that enable individual autonomy – namely the growth of the money economy, the intensification of social interactions, and the development of metropolitan life – also contribute to the dominance of objective culture over the individual (Simmel, 2004; Frisby, 1986). As a result, the person finds him/herself increasingly unable to meaningfully engage with the very world that he/she has gained the freedom to navigate (Simmel, 1950a).

What emerges from Simmel's analysis of metropolitan life is not only a subtle diagnosis of modern subjectivity, but also a point of tension that has long been identified in sociological theory – namely, the tendency toward psychologism. By grounding large-scale social transformations in the sensory and cognitive reactions of individuals,

[6] It should only be noted, without going deeper into the topic, that Simmel advocated for the hypothesis that male and female cultures are different, but one (male) is by no means more important than the other (female) in the sense of its content. This hypothesis was challenged from a feminist position by Marianne Weber (Jarić and Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2020).

Simmel risks reducing structural dynamics to the level of individual experience, a critique that has been raised particularly within the Durkheimian tradition (for more see, Scaff, 1988). This tension between structural analysis and psychological interpretation remains one of the key unresolved aspects of Simmel's sociology. Nevertheless, it is precisely this sensitivity to the micro-dimensions of experience that renders his work remarkably notable. In contemporary digital environments, where individuals are exposed to an unprecedented intensity and speed of stimuli, Simmel's notion of the blasé attitude acquires renewed analytical relevance. The fragmentation of attention, the flattening of qualitative differences, and the dominance of quantification – today visible in the metrics such as likes, views, and algorithmic rankings – suggest that the *mathematisation of the world* has reached a new, technologically mediated stage. In this sense, rather than being dismissed as psychologistic, Simmel's insights can be productively reinterpreted as an early phenomenology of overstimulation, offering a conceptual bridge toward later theories of simulation and hyperreality, most notably in the work of Baudrillard.

3. From the Tragedy of Culture to the Perfect Crime: From Blasé Subjectivity to Hyperreality

In my view, two (main) lines of connection can be drawn from Simmel to Baudrillard. One relates to Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (Simmel, 2004) and Baudrillard's theory of consumption, while the other connects Simmel's explanation of the blasé attitude with the state of mind characteristic of a hyperreal world filled with simulations, the concepts introduced into sociological theory by Jean Baudrillard. It is clear that the focus of this paper is on the second aspect of linking these two authors, but it should be noted that it would also be interesting to explore the connection between Simmel's understanding of money as an absolute means that levels all qualitative differences, and Baudrillard's analysis of the code in consumer society. Namely, while Simmel sees money as the first phase of abstraction that strips objects of their essence, Baudrillard brings this process to its culmination in a world in which use-value is entirely absorbed by sign-value, transforming consumption itself into an act of stimulation (for more, see Baudrillard, 1993; 1996a; 1998). However, as already noted, the focus of this paper is on the blasé attitude as the connective tissue between the metropolitan subject and the state of consciousness of individuals sitting in front of screens upon which hyperreal images – such as those of war – unfold. Thus, as in the case of Simmel, in Baudrillard's case we are also primarily interested in his later phase of work, when he turns toward studies of culture and mass media (after 1980), although it should once again be emphasised that his earlier phase (the 1960s and 1970s) also deserves analysis in the context of linking Baudrillard's concepts of code, systems of exchange, and consumption with Simmel's theory of money.

When Simmel states that: "The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life" (Simmel, 1950a: 409-410), we are almost reading a prelude to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality (to immediately employ his neologism). Although in sociology this has almost become a commonplace, it is nevertheless worth briefly recalling that hyperreality denotes a condition in which we can no longer speak of imitation, duplication, or parody; rather, it is a moment in which hyperreality replaces reality itself, with which we no longer have any essential contact. Signs and status symbols replace the object itself, while television images and quasi-places become the lens through which we perceive and experience the world around us (for more, see Baudrillard, 1994).

Frisby was right to insist on the description of Simmel's *Tragedy of Culture* (as we have already noted, this is the process in which objective culture overwhelms subjective culture); however, Simmel (as we have seen) remains at the level of merely diagnosing this condition of modernity and does not proceed further in the direction of critique. He describes the given state of affairs, but does not introduce a certain dramatisation into his theoretical narrative. Baudrillard, of course, goes a step further (or even two), and in his hyperbolic and grand manner writes about the Perfect Crime (Baudrillard, 1996b), in which he argues that reality has effectively been killed and replaced by its perfect copy – hyperreality. The blasé attitude, in Baudrillard's theory, evolves into what he terms *Fatal Strategies* (Baudrillard, 1990), where, to put it in Simmelian terms, the individual no longer even attempts to understand the world, but simply surrenders to objective culture until he/she is completely *dissolved* within it. In other words, if Simmel's individual at the beginning of the twentieth century still offered at least a minimal resistance to the city (through the state of the blasé attitude, which functions as a kind of semi-permeable mental and social membrane – filtering out the "attacks" of metropolitan stimuli while allowing the individual to remain, at least to some extent, within their subjective world), Baudrillard's hyperreal consumer and spectator simply surrenders and lives comfortably within a world that, in fact, does not exist.

For Simmel, as we have already noted, the metropolis is a recurring sociological form and may correspond to any concrete city in the world[7], whereas for Baudrillard cities and states become very concrete agents in the execution of the *Perfect Crime* against human subjective culture. First and foremost, these are, of course, America and various American cities. One may go so far as to say that Baudrillard describes America as a realised utopia of the blasé attitude. Simmel's individual wandered through Berlin, whereas Baudrillard's subject is stationed within the largest hologram in the world – America. It is precisely at this point that one can observe an elegant transition from modernity to postmodernity: Simmel's individual defends him/herself against the assaults of the metropolis through the blasé attitude, whereas those living in America have embraced this external emptiness and take considerable pleasure in Disneyland, Las Vegas, endless highways, and various other *non-places* (to use the well-known concept of Marc Augé (Augé, 1995). The blasé attitude thus ceases to function as a defensive mechanism and evolves into a mode of driving through life, to recall the motif from the chapter *Astral America* from Baudrillard's book (Baudrillard, 1988: 27-75).

A further, although somewhat different, trajectory from Simmel's metropolitan subject can be recognised in Bauman's figure of the postmodern *tourist*. Bauman describes the tourist as a subject permanently in motion, searching for new experiences while avoiding lasting attachments to places and relationships; the tourist is present in the world but maintains a sufficient distance to leave, once an experience loses its attraction (Bauman, 1995: 95-100). In this respect, the tourist shares something of the emotional distance characteristic of Simmel's *blasé* individual, although the function of that distance has changed. Whereas Simmel's metropolitan subject withdraws as a defence against excessive stimulation, Bauman's tourist actively seeks new stimuli while resisting the commitments they might entail. The comparison thus suggests another possible transformation of Simmelian subjectivity in postmodern conditions, situated alongside, rather than replacing, the trajectory toward Baudrillard's hyperreal spectator.

Given that I have already stated at the beginning of this paper that one of its main impetuses is the ongoing and prolonged war crisis in several parts of the world, I will now focus on Baudrillard's well-known text *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Baudrillard, 1995), that is, the triptych of texts in which Simmel's blasé metropolitan individual – staring at a single point in an attempt to balance the intense stimuli surrounding them – becomes a spectator fixated on a screen, once again looking at a single point, but this time at something far more horrifying: the green images on night-vision screens that

[7] Simmel, therefore, consistently speaks in terms of forms that are universally applicable within sociology; however, it is very often clear which historical model served as the basis for the construction of a particular form. Just as it is a truism that Jews served as an inspiration for his formulation of strangeness and enmity, it is equally evident that, in the case of the metropolis, Simmel was primarily thinking of Berlin and other German metropolitan centres.

transform the war in Iraq into a video game rather than something that is actually taking place. Although he does not, of course, name this condition as the blasé attitude, Baudrillard's description of people who listen to news about the war while waiting in traffic on highways, without any emotional response, since that war is merely another fragment within the mosaic of general hyperreality, strongly resembles what Simmel described, but also anticipated as the future of the (post)modern individual. "Stuck in traffic one can always amuse oneself by listening to the Gulf radio reports: the time of information never stops, the slower things are on the roads the more things circulate on the wavelengths. Another distraction was that of the young couple who switched between watching the war on TV and their child to be filmed and recorded in the mother' s womb and made available on ultrasound cassette. When the war stops, they watch the child. At the level of images it is the same combat: war before it has broken out the child before it has been born Leisure in the virtual era" (Baudrillard, 1995: 78).

From the above, we can see that Baudrillard elevates Simmel's ideas to another level: even war becomes a spectacle rather than human suffering. As already noted, everything in Baudrillard becomes a spectacle – Disneyland and Las Vegas, as well as other forms of so-called entertainment such as pornography – but for our purposes, this dimension of complete blasé indifference toward the horrors of human suffering is particularly significant. People replace the image of their own unborn child with images from the battlefield in an instant, because such a state of mind has become normalised. Baudrillard equates the image of a baby and the image of human suffering not in order to deny the individual's capacity to distinguish between them, but because the hyperproduction of images is so overwhelming that it necessarily produces levelling, emotional distance, and ultimately a form of emotional numbness. To reiterate: Simmel's blasé attitude is no longer a defensive mechanism – it becomes a permanent state of consciousness, as Baudrillard suggests.

It should also not be overlooked that it is not only the spectator who is in blasé attitude. The pilot dropping a bomb represents a perfect example of the blasé subject, who does not perceive the target as a human being, but merely as a luminous point on a screen. The moment in which the pilot presses the button – an action that will result in an unknown number of casualties – represents the ultimate triumph of objective culture over subjective culture, if we are to speak in Simmelian terms. Or, in Baudrillard's words, this is precisely where the *Perfect Crime* is fully realised – the world is replaced by its copy, reality is killed, not through physical or political violence, but through its perfect (predominantly virtual) simulation (Baudrillard, 1996b).

For Baudrillard, even Saddam Hussein himself is not real; in terms of an actual historical figure, he is, as Baudrillard describes him, a leader who was primarily a *carpet seller*, who, as such, is embedded within his own context in both cultural and political

terms, and, of course, for Iraqis his figure carries a certain political weight. However, for the American viewer, he is merely a simulacrum of the enemy, one that is necessary in order to justify the power of hyperreal military technology. No one even attempts to engage with the context or to understand it. The war is not waged against Saddam[8]; the war is waged for the triumph of the model of war itself as something that is essentially non-existent (Baudrillard, 1995). This is precisely the ultimate victory of objective culture over subjective culture, in the sense that Simmel anticipated would occur in the future.

The differences between the two authors are, of course, numerous and evident, beginning with their historical positioning and general theoretical orientation, since Baudrillard belongs to the corpus of postmodern theory[9], whereas Simmel, of course, does not. There is also a clear difference in the sociological sensibility with which they formulate their theories. While Simmel remains indifferent toward the emerging reality ("Since such forces of life have grown into the roots and into the crown of the whole of the historical life in which we, in our fleeting existence, as a cell, belong only as a part, it is not our task either to accuse or to pardon, but only to understand" (Simmel, 1950a: 423-424), Baudrillard is distinctly cynical, pessimistic, and critical. Simmel's discourse is imbued with an almost stoic acceptance of this inevitable tragedy of culture, whereas Baudrillard adopts a position of radical critique and theoretical intensity, suggesting that such indifference (or blasé attitude) itself becomes a form of complicity in the production of simulacra. It is precisely this difference that constitutes the strongest objection to linking these two authors; however, I argue that, despite their differences in ideological and theoretical positioning, there remains a sufficient analytical basis for developing an argument about the similarity in their explanations of the subject and its experience of the world (the city, or simulacra) that surrounds it. This connection, as previously noted, is also important in highlighting the idea that Simmel's theory of the metropolis may be understood as a kind of a precursor to a postmodern mode of thinking and functioning – one that is captured with particular precision in the work of Jean Baudrillard.

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[8] At this point, we may also emphasise a third line that can be drawn in analysing the connection between the German classic and the French postmodernist. The figure of Saddam Hussein may be analysed through the lens of Simmel's theory of the Stranger and the Enemy (Simmel, 1950b). Hussein is, quite literally, a perfect embodiment of what Simmel defines as the form of the Enemy. As I argued elsewhere (Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2019b), Simmel's concept of the enemy provides a useful analytical lens for understanding how figures such as Saddam Hussein are constructed as necessary antagonistic others within broader symbolic and political frameworks. For a broader discussion of Simmel's *Stranger* within the framework of his sociology of space, see Škorić, Kišjuhas and Škorić (2013).

[9] As is well known, Baudrillard himself rejected both the postmodernist and poststructuralist labels, arguing that his theory does not belong to either of these traditions. I will not engage here in the debate over whether his work should or should not be classified within these frameworks; rather, I will follow the conventional classification that places Baudrillard within this group of theories, as is most commonly done in textbooks. Baudrillard's analysis of media, consumption, and simulation has been widely interpreted as a key contribution to postmodern social theory (Kellner, 1989).

The claim that Simmel's theory is, among classical theories, the closest to a prelude to postmodern theory is not entirely original – other authors have also recognised the grounds for such an argument. However, it is nevertheless striking how only a few scholars have approached this question in a comprehensive manner. The most complete work is certainly *Postmodernized Simmel* (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993), in which the authors offer a detailed argument as to why Simmel's theory can be understood as an overture to postmodern theory; however, there are not many such studies (in fact, there is this monograph and only a few scattered fragments in individual texts). The strongest argument they advance is precisely the one highlighted in this paper: That postmodernism represents a natural continuation of Simmel's idea that objective culture increasingly overwhelms subjective culture (as first noted by David Frisby; see Frisby, 1986: 43). Furthermore, Weinstein and Weinstein assume that the very style that Frisby termed *Sociological Impressionism* bears a striking resemblance to the narrative style of postmodern theorists: it is fragmented, discontinuous, nonlinear, more evocative than reliant on heavy theoretical apparatus, and often resembles essayistic writing. This, of course, does not diminish the originality or depth of Simmel's insights; rather, it suggests that his authorial signature is, in many respects, an introduction to a postmodern mode of writing and reflecting on social reality. Weinstein and Weinstein acknowledge Bryan Turner, who first proposed that Simmel should be read through a postmodern lens, and whose text – serving as a basis for their book – was included in Turner's edited volume (Turner, 1990). However, it is somewhat surprising how little attention they devote to analysing the parallel with Baudrillard. Although they do mention him in several places, this is more often in the context of his significance for postmodern theory than as a direct point of comparison with Simmel. Their focus is primarily on Foucault and Derrida, whereas the argument advanced in this paper is that it is precisely in the theory of Jean Baudrillard that many of Simmel's ideas are rearticulated, endowed with a postmodern dimension, and further elaborated. While the parallels outlined here are analytically productive, it is important to note that Baudrillard's break with referentiality represents a radical departure from Simmel's framework rather than its simple continuation.

It is, of course, well known that not everyone agrees with the view that Baudrillard was so *accurate*. A well-known critique is that of Christopher Norris, who, in a rather sharp tone, asks how much an intellectual can be mistaken and still remain widely recognised and cited – referring, of course, to the claim that it is, at the very least, inappropriate to describe a war in which so much blood has been shed as one "that did not take place" (Norris, 1990; 1992). Equally well known is the position of Anthony Giddens, who argues that Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality represents a failure of the sociological imagination, since the world has not become less real, but rather demands greater reflexivity and does not necessarily produce a blasé response in front of the screen (Giddens, 1990; 1991). However, for the purposes of this paper, these critiques are not of decisive importance, insofar as the aim has not been to reassess the

plausibility of Baudrillard's claims, but rather to underline the connection between Simmel's ideas and the theory of the well-known French postmodernist (if we still may refer to him as such). Moreover, although it is clear that Baudrillard constructed hyperbolic arguments and, in many respects, exaggerated, the nucleus of his ideas still appears highly insightful and, above all, accurate in the context of analysing the contemporary individual's relationship to the processes unfolding on screens. In other words, Baudrillard's claims should therefore be read less as empirical descriptions and more as theoretical exaggerations that reveal structural tendencies. In order to clarify both the analytical continuity proposed in this paper and the theoretical boundaries of this comparison, the key similarities and differences between Simmel's *blasé attitude* and Baudrillard's hyperreality may be summarised as follows.

Table 1.
Key Similarities and Differences between Simmel's Blasé Attitude and Baudrillard's Hyperreality

Dimension	**Simmel – *Blasé Attitude***	**Baudrillard – *Hyperreality***
Social context	Modern metropolis	Postmodern, media-saturated society
Source of overstimulation	Intensification and rapid succession of urban stimuli	Hyperproduction and continuous circulation of images, signs, and representations
Position of the subject	Overstimulated metropolitan individual	Hyperreal consumer and spectator
Response to overstimulation	*Blasé attitude* as a defensive mechanism	Increasing immersion in and acceptance of simulation
Relation to reality	Distance from the surrounding social world, while reality remains accessible	Reality is increasingly displaced by signs, images, and simulations
Theoretical outcome	Tension between subjective and objective culture; the subject retains a degree of resistance	Radicalisation of this tension: mediation increasingly structures the subject's experience of reality

Source: Author.

In the context of technological development, particularly the rise of social media – which we carry with us everywhere on our phones and engage with at work, in shops, in the gym, on public transport – it seems that wars in Ukraine or the Middle East have increasingly become just another sequence of moving images, especially in contrast to a time when there was typically only a single television set in the household. This, of course, does not mean that many people around the world are unaware of human suffering in other parts of the planet, nor that numerous individuals and movements are not actively engaged in various forms of anti-war activism – such efforts would not exist if everyone were entirely blasé in front of their screens. However, it

is equally clear that a significant portion of the global population can, without difficulty, be situated within Baudrillard's model. In other words, in the context of this technological revolution, Baudrillard should not be dismissed too easily (even though his work must, of course, be approached with critical caution).

This condition acquires an additional layer of complexity in the context of contemporary digital media environments. The proliferation of smartphones and social media platforms has intensified the circulation and accessibility of images to an unprecedented degree, embedding individuals in a continuous stream of visual stimuli. In such a setting, the experience of war is no longer limited to scheduled news broadcasts but becomes part of an ongoing, fragmented, and personalised flow of content. This transformation can be understood as an extension of the processes already identified by Simmel, but also as a key dimension of what later theorists describe as regimes of continuous attention and technologically mediated perception (Crary, 2013; Virilio, 1989).

Taken together, these developments suggest a further theoretical implication of the Simmel–Baudrillard connection. In Simmel's metropolis, the individual is confronted with an excess of stimuli within physical urban space, and responds by developing the blasé attitude as a form of psychological protection. In Baudrillard's hyperreal world, the problem shifts from the abundance of stimuli to the abundance of representations, through which the subject increasingly experiences events indirectly, as images and signs. Contemporary digital environments bring these two processes together: the individual is simultaneously exposed to a continuous and accelerated flow of stimuli, and increasingly dependent on technologically mediated representations of reality. The digital subject may therefore be understood as occupying the theoretical space between Simmel's metropolitan individual and Baudrillard's hyperreal spectator – overstimulated in the Simmelian sense, yet increasingly detached from the immediacy of events in the Baudrillardian one.

4. Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate that Georg Simmel's analysis of the metropolis and the blasé attitude can be read not only as a diagnosis of modern urban life, but also as a theoretical prelude to key dimensions of Jean Baudrillard's account of hyperreality. While Simmel limits himself to analysing the growing tension between objective and subjective culture, Baudrillard radicalises this trajectory by arguing that this imbalance culminates in the disappearance of reality itself, replaced by systems of signs, simulations, and mediated representations. In that sense, what appears in Simmel as a defensive mechanism of the subject, becomes, in Baudrillard, a permanent state of consciousness.

The contemporary relevance of this theoretical connection becomes particularly visible in the global context of 2026, marked by ongoing wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and the escalating conflict involving Iran. These conflicts are not experienced directly by the vast majority of global audiences, but rather through an unprecedented volume of mediated images circulating across digital platforms. Research increasingly shows that war today unfolds simultaneously as military and informational conflict, shaped by social media narratives, visual framing, and algorithmic amplification. At the same time, constant exposure to images of violence contributes to processes of desensitisation and emotional distancing, as war becomes part of the everyday flow of digital content.

In such a context, Simmel's concept of the blasé attitude acquires renewed analytical force. The contemporary subject, much like the metropolitan individual, is confronted with an overwhelming multiplicity of stimuli; however, unlike Simmel's subject – who still maintains a minimal defensive distance – today's viewer is fully immersed in a hyperreal environment in which the distinction between reality and representation becomes increasingly blurred. War is no longer only something that happens; it is something that is watched, scrolled through, shared, and consumed. The proliferation of digital images, including AI-generated content and disinformation, further destabilises the relationship between event and representation, transforming conflict into a field of competing simulations rather than a singular, graspable reality.

This is precisely the point at which Baudrillard's notion of the *Perfect Crime* becomes analytically productive: reality is not denied, but displaced. The suffering of others does not disappear; rather, it becomes embedded within a continuous stream of images that neutralise its immediacy and moral urgency. In this sense, the blasé attitude is no longer merely a strategy of self-preservation – it becomes a structural condition of perception in the digital age.

However, as indicated in the discussion, this does not imply total indifference or the absence of ethical response. Contemporary digital environments simultaneously enable awareness, mobilisation, and critique, even as they produce fatigue and distance. The persistence of anti-war movements, activist networks, and critical media practices demonstrates that the relationship between mediation and subjectivity remains open and contested.

Ultimately, the connection established in this paper suggests that Simmel's theory of the metropolis should be understood not only as a foundational text of modern sociology, but also as an anticipatory framework for analysing the conditions of contemporary digital life. Read in this way, Simmel emerges not as a distant classical author, but as a thinker whose insights remain deeply relevant for the understanding of the mediated experience of war, reality, and subjectivity in the early twenty-first century.

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Pregledni rad

Povratak sociološkom impresionizmu: Simmel, Baudrillard i teorijski put od blaziranog stava do hiperrealnosti

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Sažetak

U ovom radu argumentovani su razlozi za to zašto je potrebno da ponovo čitamo Simmelov esej o metropolisu i da koristimo koncept *blaziranosti*, koji je u dosadašnjoj sociološkoj produkciji više puta analiziran i proučavan (naročito u studijama urbane sociologije). Prvi cilj nam je da pokažemo da je upravo Simmelova teorija, a posebno ideja blaziranosti, preludijum za ono što će Jean Baudrillard u svojoj teoriji opisati kao mentalno i društveno stanje pojedinaca koji žive u hiperrealnom svetu, u svetu simulacija i simulakruma. Veza između dvaju teoretičara je do sada relativno malo bila u fokusu sekundarne analize, što daje originalnost ovom istraživanju. Među klasičnim sociolozima, Simmel je više puta tumačen kao jedan od najznačajnijih preteča tema koje će kasnije biti povezane s postmodernom društvenom teorijom, iako je to samo jedna od nekoliko mogućih trajektorija recepcije njegovog dela. Također, imajući u vidu savremeni kontekst, koji je obeležen postojanjem nekoliko velikih ratnih žarišta koja potresaju svet, smatramo da je važno podsetiti se i Simmela i Baudrillarda kako bismo što više izoštrili naša sociološka oruđa za razumevanje načina na koji pojedinci sagledavaju ono što se dešava na njihovim ekranima, a dolazi iz pravca Ukrajine ili Bliskog istoka. Cilj ovog rada je da se teorijski analizira način na koji Simmelova blaziranost postaje odgovor na Baudrillardovo pitanje o tome zašto se (Zalivski) rat nije dogodio.

Ključne riječi: Georg Simmel, Jean Baudrillard, blasé attitude, hiperrealnost, sociološka teorija.