JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S HYPERREAL: ANALYSIS OF THEME IN YOASOBI'S SONG "IDOL"

Konsep *Hyperreal* Jean Baudrillard: Analisis Tema dalam Lagu Idol oleh Yoasobi

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Abstract: *Jean Baudrillard is one among many prominent thinkers of postmodernism. One among many his notable idea is the Hyperreal In his book Simulacra and Simulation, Baudrillard's proposes the idea of something that transcend beyond the state of fake and reality, the Hyperreal. This concept can be found as a theme in lyrics of a song titled Idol by Yoasobi. This paper try to dissect the lyrics and finding the implication of Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreal within the implicit and explicit meanings of the lyrics. Idol is a certain profession that has gain significant rise in the 21th century. The common perception is that they are selling 'fake identities' to their audience. Nevertheless, the truth is more complicated than it is as with using Baudrillard's theoretical framework of the Hyperreal, idol has cross the boundary between falsehood and authenticity and become 'real' in their own sense.*

Keywords: *Baudrillard, Hyperreal, Simulation, Idol, Yoasobi*

Abstrak: *Jean Baudrillard adalah salah satu dari banyak pemikir terkemuka di bidang pascamodernisme. Salah satu gagasan terkenalnya adalah Hyperreal. Dalam bukunya yang berjudul Simulacra and Simulation, Baudrillard mengusulkan konsep akan sesuatu yang melampaui keadaan palsu dan kenyataan, yaitu Hyperreal. Konsep ini dapat ditemukan sebagai tema dalam lirik lagu berjudul Idol oleh Yoasobi. Artikel penelitian ini mencoba menguraikan lirik lagu tersebut dan menemukan implikasi konsep Hyperreal dari Baudrillard dalam makna tersirat dan tersurat dari lirik. Idol adalah profesi tertentu yang mengalami peningkatan signifikan pada abad ke-21. Persepsi umum tentang idol adalah bahwa mereka menjual 'identitas palsu' kepada audiens. Namun, kenyataannya lebih rumit daripada itu, dengan menggunakan kerangka teoritis Hyperreal dari Baudrillard, profesi Idol telah melampaui batasan antara kepalsuan dan keaslian sehingga menjadi 'nyata' dalam arti mereka sendiri.*

Kata kunci: Baudrillard, Hyperreal, Simulasi, Idol, Yoasobi

INTRODUCTION

Jean Baudrillard is one of the most prominent thinkers of the 21th century. His ideas renounced him as one of many influential figures of Postmodernism (Elva & Tang, 2021). His perspectives give new insights on how to view the relation of people and the world and his notions, up to this day, are still referenced (Wikandaru, 2018). One among many of his notable works is the *Simulacra and Simulation*. The book consists of Baudrillard's critiques of some concepts he theorized that exists in the postmodern era. It gave birth to a very amusing theory which probes the concept of reality and fabrication, which he named Hyperreal.

Baudrillard states in Simulacra and Simulation: "(*it is*) *the generation by models of a real without origins or reality: the Hyperreal*" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 1). It is a perfect concept to define what we refer to as "fake realities". Antony (Antony & Tramboo, 2020) simply explained this concept as something that allow the mingling of physical and virtual reality. The hyperreal is a product of 'simulating' a certain (first) reality through 'masking' the truth of another (second) reality which resulted in the third reality which Baudrillard called a Simulacrum -which bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. The concept can be identified with ease in today's society of technological convinience and especially consumerism specifically in the entertainment industry. This concept can be found in the 2023 global phenomenon of Idol which can be identified as a theme in the song Idol by Yoasobi.

Idol is a song by a Japanese duo Yoasobi which was released on April 12th 2023. The original song which is in Japanese has dominated the music charts as it listed as number 1 on the Billboard Japan Hot 100 for 8 straight weeks (Billboard Japan, 2023). The official English version was then released a few weeks later and it has reached number 9 on the Billboard Global 200 Music Chart (Gostick, 2023). The impact resulted from being an opening song for an animated series titled *Oshi no Ko* and its parallel to a principal element which emphasize the series, which is a story surrounding the entertainment industry and specifically a profession which is often referred to within it, an Idol.

Japan is one of many countries that thrive from the entertainment industries both locally and globally. One of their selling point of their entertainment is their culturally-rich music and performance. They are known to produce a successful profession called Idol. Patrick W. Galbraith wrote and edited a book with abundant information on the topic, titled Idol and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture, which he published in 2012. In order to understand the parallel of Baudrillard's concept of Hyperreal and Idol in the context of entertainment industry, this paper will reference some of the ideas from Galbraith's book as he has offered one of the best academic source to comprehend the term.

Galbraith defined the word Idols (plural of Idol) literally as: "*highly produced and promoted singers, models, and media personalities.*" (Galbraith, 2012, p. 2). In simple terms, idols are people who engage in the act of giving an entertainment, mostly in form of music performances. However, there is a deeper meaning to the term which holds a significant cultural and social context. They have become such figures whom their audiences look up to as something to be emotionally attached to -becoming the literal definition of the name Idol, an object of worship. The key factor contributing to success of an idol is the 'imagery' it needs to maintain –which is somehow indefinite and constantly evolving overtime- in order to cater to their audience. Notices the words 'produced' (in Galbraith's definition), 'imagery' and 'maintained' are some of the key words that can be drawn into a parallel of Baudrillard's Hyperreal.

Baudrillard explains in his book how something is processed into a Simulacrum -a simulation of reality. There are 4 stages which is transformative as Baudrillard explains in his book. The 4 stages of the simulation are:

(1) Reflection; of a certain 'reality' (a)

(2) Masking & perversion/alteration; of a 'reality' (b)

(3) Masking the absence; of a reality (a)

(4) Pure Simulacrum; bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. A new reality (c) (Baudrillard, 1981)

Baudrillard then gives an example of Disneyland being a simulacrum which is a perfect representation of a Hyperreal. Disneyland is a simulacrum, something

that has gone through the stages of simulation as it is a 'copy' of civilization. The park modelled after what exist in the real world which then they 'altered' by adding something new to it -a fantasy element- making it into a new reality. The illusion makes people believe that Disneyland is real in and of itself while it actually crosses the boundary of fakeness and reality. Hence, the hyperreal.

The concept of Baudrillard's hyperreal as a theme exists in many kind of forms. One among them is through proses which a song possesses in their lyrics. Hence, this paper will discern the theme of Baudrillard's hyperreal in Yoasobi's song, Idol by dissecting its lyrics. The idea of fake identity as a form of entertainment has been increasingly relevant in the 21th century. People consume such kind of entertainment without profound understanding of what they actually are. This lack of awareness can cause many negative effects, one being 'harmful' fanaticism (Pan, 2022). Therefore, this paper emphasize education by showing the concept of Hyperreal which in simple term general public will call it false realities through the object the analysis in this paper.

There has not been any previous academic studes on the song Idol by Yoasobi since it is relatively new. However there are many studies on the topic of Baudrillard's Hyperreal in the field of literature. Dalimu (2020) studied the concept of Hyperreal in a film in her study "*The Portrayal and the Effects of Hyperreality in Ready Player One Movie by Steven Spielberg (The Application of Jean Baudrillard's Theory)*". Dalimu discussed the concept of hyperreal and its relation to technology as in the film, there is a virtual world which serves as another reality which is created by technology. There was a study done by Sulaiman (2020) which researched the underlying impacts of Baudrillard's Hyperreal to an individual on a psychological and personal level. In his study "*Simulacra and Hyperreality in Novel Aku Lupa Bahwa Aku Perempuan by Ihsan Abdul Qudus: Perspective Jean Baudrillard*". Sulaiman highlights that hypereality causes a consumeristic behaviour of life in an individual on a personal level which ultimately change the collective society as a whole through that characterization. Although not exactly in the field of Literature, there is one other previous study that might holds significant relevance to this paper. Christianti (2021) in her study of social science titled "*'Instagramable': Simulation, Simulacra and*

Hyperreality on Instagram Post" discussed about how the 'instagramable' phenomena is an example of hypereallity within social context. She concludes that the pictures that people post on their instragam have gone through the stages of simulation, makes it a simulacrum, in which it is a hyperreal or 'false reality' as a result of creation.

Theme in a song are one of many important intrinsic factors that are being studied in Literature. The lyrics on Idol by Yoasobi give almost a literal and figurative explanation of Baudrillard's hyperreal as its narrative theme. The proses on the lyrics encapsulate the messages it tries to convey. It entails a philosophical meaning to the profession of Idol. There has not been a study which dives into that specific, hence this research is conducted to explain more about the major theme the song has within the explicit and implicit meanings within the lyrics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze and give an answer to the formulation of the problem. The paper will focus on the lyrics (proses) of the song Idol by Yoasobi as the datas for the analysis. Using the text from the lyrics, a study of its theme will be conducted through segementation of sub-topic on the subject, which is Baudrillard's hyperreal.

The primary source, the text of the lyrics of the song, will be attained through online findings. Later, it will be presented in lines which holds the significance to the subjects. The theory on the subject Hyperreal, is taken from Baudrillard's book Simulacra and Simulation. Some other sources to support the subject theory are also being referenced, such from Galbraith and other related sources. In the end, the conclusion will be drawn through thorough analysis of the datas.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

'Ideal' Image of an Idol Depicted in the Lyrics of Yoasobi's Idol

One thing to note when speaking about the profession of an Idol is their image. Galbraith states that the image of an idol "*gathers and focuses desires, and become a commodity in and of itself*" (Galbraith, 2012, p. 185). While obviously Idols sell what they are associated to (music, dance performance, photographs, etc), their

main selling point is their own image which makes it so important. Therefore, an 'ideal' image of an idol exists in the entertainment industry. This image and its qualities are depicted in the lyrics of Idol by Yoasobi.

> "***Complete*** *and **perfect***
> *All you say is a bunch of lies*
> *Dear miss **genius idol**, unmatched*
> (*You're my **savior**, you're my **saving grace***)"

-half of the Interlude of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The interlude provides 3 lines which depicted the 'ideal' image of an Idol. The line '***complete and perfect***' refers to the ability that an idol should posseses in which if someone does, they will be considered a '***genius idol***' as it stated in the third line above. Idol is a profession in the entertainment industry, specifically music. They often possess the ability to sing, perform dancing and some even do acting in television or other visual medias. As subjective as it the word is, a 'perfect' idol is considered to be multitalented in those area of expertises. One thing to note is that this image is generated from their audience, fans as the lyric on fourth line "***You're my saviour, you're my saving grace***" comes from the perspective of the fans in the form of a backing vocal (not sung by the singer).

> "*So unconcerned, although you **brigthly glow***"

-First line of Verse 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

A single line on the verse 2 of the song depicted another quality that exists in an image of an idol, "...***brightly glow***". This refers to the invisible charm an idol has which is perceived by fans.

> "*That emotion melts all hearts, all eyes on you*
> *Cause you are **perfect, the most ultimate idol***
> ***Unrivalled**, will not appear again*
> *It's **the brightest star** reborn, yes, indeed*"

-First half of Chorus 1 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The first half of the first Chorus depicts more of an Idol's image. The second line repeats what has been said in the interlude about Idol being something of a "*perfect*" before then states it as "*most ultimate...*", denoting again an ideal image

of an idol. The line that consist "*the brightest star*" again supports earlier line in the 2nd verse about depiction of an Idol as something that 'brightly glow'.

> "*That emotion seized all hearts worshipping you*
> *Yes, indeed*
> *So **strong**, it's you, **unrivalled** idol*
> *There cannot be weaknesses to find*
> *The **brightest star** is residing in you*"

-First half of Chorus 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

Chorus 2 adds new image of an ideal idol with the word "*strong...*", reffering to the charisma an idol posseses which making them to be able to "*...seized all hearts...*" and makes them 'worship' the idol. Lastly, the words '*unrivalled*' and '*brightest star*' are once again repeated for emphasizing.

Galbraith points out the importance of image for an idol to the fans as something that help them understand the idol and get the sense of intimacy from them (Galbraith, 2012). As explained before, images are an idol's main commodity or a selling point. Some are taking this subject and approaching it through the context of capitalism and specifically consumerism. As an example, Lvyin Zhuang discussed the phenomenon of "the idol effect" in economy as Zhuang states that Idols attract public's attention through their positives attributes that represent both internal and external images which stimulate fans to shows consumerist behaviours by purchasing any products which their idols love (Zhuang, 2019). Disregarding its purposes, it is worth nothing that the image of idol are subjectively real and can not be denied.

The datas shown above have can certainly be indentified as 2, not consecutively, certain stages of simulation of Baudrillard's concept. Those 2 are simultanueslty the 1st and the 4th stages of simuation; both a reflection and a simulacrum. Images of idols being associated with all the positiveness (*complete, perfect, bright, genius*) are a reflection of a reality which is the 'ideal' idol.

1st Stage of Simulation: Reflection of an 'Ideal Idol'

(Reality a = Positive attributes, images of an 'Ideal idol'.)

At the same time, those positive attributes (on the datas) are also somewhat a blueprint to end-goal it trying to achieve. Meaning that an idol should posses all

of that attributes and 'simulate' the reflection (of Reality a) and once they do, they will ultimately became it -The Ideal Idol-.

> 4th Stage of Simulation: Pure Simulacrum - 'The Ideal Idol'
>
> (Reality c = A newly-created, 'Ideal Idol' which originally based on Reality a)

In Baudrillard's concept of Hypereal, Reality a and Reality c are essentially two different things. One might simply say that Reality c is a 'fake' copy of Reality a, while somehow it holds a certain degree of truthness in it, it is sligthly more complicated than that. Baudrillard's theory allows us to consider Reality c as something real by itself does not have any relation whatsoever to Reality a. It transcends beyond the boundary of real and fake which makes it a 'Hyperreal'. In order to understand the differences, obviously there 2 other stages of the simulation which happens in between the stage 1 and stage 4 of that need to be explored. They are the alteration process (stage 2) and the masking of absence (stage 3).

An Idol is 'Produced' and 'Maintained'

It is not a secret that Idols are in a way 'created' as most often they belong to a company of an entertainment industry. Producers play a lot in the 'creation' of idols as they and the management directly responsible for their success. Marx worte about Aoyagi Hiroshi, a professor of Kokushikan University in Tokyo, who believes the managament of a company to have full control of all aspects that attributes to their idols' wheter creatively and comercially, as even he believes they (the company) 'shape' the idols' even down to the personalities (Galbraith, 2012).

Youjeong Oh of Texas University wrote a book Pop City which is about Korean popular culture in general and specifically discusses about Korean idols in the second part of the book. One takeaway from a specific chapter (of that 2nd part) is how Oh mentions how idols' image are 'crafted' to be unique and marketable (Oh, 2018). Oh then goes on to elaborate how is it done with certain rules the company have for their idols which Oh refers to as human capital.

Hiroshi and Oh both highlighted the main point of Images of an Idol. It is something that are not naturally born but rather 'produced' out of something. The song Idol by Yoasobi also gives information on this matter.

> "***Secret side****, I wanna know it, **so mysterious***
> *Even that **elusive side**, **part of her controlled area**"*

-Lines from the Interlude of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The first line depicted one aspect that an idol has which is somehow '*mysterious*' and having '*secret side'.* The two refers to the anything that is associated on personal level to something that being the 'idol' itself, and of course in this case a person. Idols have an image of being a 'perfect' being and in order to maintain that some parts that are not aligned with that image are being kept a secret. This fact makes an idol '*elusive'* in from the fans perspective which also something that the idols '*control*' to maintain the image and at the same time charmful.

> "'*What did you eat today?*
> *What book do you love?*
> *Whenever you go out for fun, tell me, where do you go?'*
> ***Haven't eaten anything***
> ***It's a secret, unknown***
> ***Any questions you're facing, always acting so vaguely***"

-Verse 1 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

Verse 1 offers information which are more practical. The last three lines are the answers commonly given by an idol when they are given personal questions either by the audience or the media. The lines '*haven't eaten anything*' is one perfect response of '*vagueness*' in which one of a quality of an Idol. Once again, having a secret and '*unknown*' are common traits of the profession.

> "*So unconcerned, although you brightly glow*
> *Any **seemingly unveiled secrets** are as **sweet as honey***
> *Confusing, why, why, why?*
> ***Essential lie****, lie, lie*"

-Line from Verse 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

Verse 2 give more emphasize on the idols secret being as something very valuable for the fans with the line '*...sweet as honey'* and to produce such

valuables idols are commonly known to tell lie which are '*essential*' for their image.

> "'***I don't have any idea how I could love anyone***'
> '***I don't seem to know what it signifies***'
> ***Cannot find out if it's true or it's a lie***"

-Line from Pre-Chorus 1 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The first 3 lines from Pre-chorus part gives an example to common response given by idols when they are asked about their romantic subject. In order to maintain a degree of intimacy with their fans idols are supposed to have an image of 'purity' and the facade of somehow 'attainable' to their fans (Galbraith, 2012; Valge & Hinsberg, 2019). The first and second lines are generic response of the idols everytime they are asked about the subject of love while the the third line is how the effect it has on fans which left them with the feeling of uncertainty, once again denoting the fact of idols being secretive.

> "***There cannot be weaknesses to find***
> *The brightest star is residing in you*
> ***The gaps and shortcomings, don't show 'em***
> *Dammit, dammit*
> ***Parts nobody wants to know should remain hidden***"

-Lines from Chorus 2 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The lines from chorus 2 gives more explanation which is more literal regarding the truths of idols. Humans are never perfect in any way and arguably have flaws. The simple rule of nature applies to everyone, even to idols who are basically just a normal human being. In the industry, its common for such '*weakness*', '*gaps*' or '*shortcomings*' of an idol to be hidden as it is something that '*nobody wants to know*'.

> "*How can we not feel **jealous while being around***
> *It's not a joke, you know, right?*
> *So, **I cannot forgive you** for that*
> ***Completely deny***
> ***Imperfect you that I sight***"

-Lines from Verse 3 of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)-

The truth of Idols actually having weakness can be seen from some lines fo Verse 3. The third verse interestingly gives perspective from people '*around*' the '*perfect idol*'. Idols usually come in group and among the members it's always the case only 1 stands up. This 1, most of the case, is the one being dubbed as the 'perfect idol' while the others are 'sides' that supports the main one. Verse 3 tells the perspective of those 'sides' being '*jealous*' of the 'perfect idol'. Being in the same space as the one, the 'sides' actually know and even '*see*' the '*imperfect*' sight of the supposedly 'perfect idol'. They 'cannot forgive' the fact that those '*imperfection*' are being denied.

> "***Keeping everything about my secret deep inside***
> ***'Im in love with you' my career is built on such a lie***"

-Lines from Bridge of Idol by Yoasobi (2023)

The bridge gives an ultimate take of idol profession being a career that '...*is built on such a lie*'. All lines from the bridge are told from the perspective of the person who is being the 'perfect idol' themselves. Most of the lines are self-awareness shown by the person on what they do which is fabricating a reality. Idols are often saying 'I love you' to the fans on many but most of the times out of courtesy. Those 'lies' the idol perform or uttered are parts of the of an idols image.

The datas given from the lyrics shown proof idols being something purposely 'created' into a reality it wish to aim. It is reality a -the reflection of a 'perfect idol, which has been discussed on the previous section. Hence, it can be easily infered that the 'production' of idols are the processes of stages 2 and 3 in Baudrillard's simulation concept.

> 2nd Stage of Simulation: Masking & Perversion/Alteration of Normal Person
>
> (Reality b = Idol is a normal human being)

> 3rd Stage of Simulation: Masking the absences of 'The Perfect Idol'
> (Reality a) in a normal Person
> (Reality b is in absent of traits of Reality a, hence the masking)

In the sense of idol production, Stage 2 can be easily identified from its early stage. Idols are basically a person -normal human being who perform in the

entertainment industry. Producer need to find 'someone' for them to 'produce' into idols. This 'someone' is a reality (reality b) which then will be undergoing 'alteration' in order to match what is reflected in the stage 1 of simulation (reality a). A pre-idol person are trained and 'crafted' (quoting Aoyagi) since they are decided that they are going to be idols. The 'alteration' of that person can sometimes be literal as idols' physical and visual appearances are controlled by the company. For example, some idols company in Japan prohibited idols to have hair color other than black. In Korea, some idols go through to some extent of having plastic surgery to make them more visually attractive. Stage 3 of the simulation happens subsequently since all the 'alteration' that are being done to the idols mask the absences which exist in reality b- a normal person. In their initial state, the normal person are in an abscences of the quality and traits of 'The Perfect Idol'.

Stage 1
- Reflection of a Reality
  - Images of an 'Ideal Idol' - Reality A

Stage 2
- Masking & Perversion/Alteration of a Reality
  - Normal Person - Reality B

Stage 3
- Masking of abscence of a Reality
  - Normal person (Reality B) are 'produced' to mask the absence of images of an 'ideal idol' (Reality A)

Stage 4
- Pure Simulacrum: New Reality without any relation to others - Reality C
  - Newly created Idol (Reality C) which is 'created' from the production of a normal person (Reality B) based on the reflection of images of an 'Ideal idol' (Reality A)
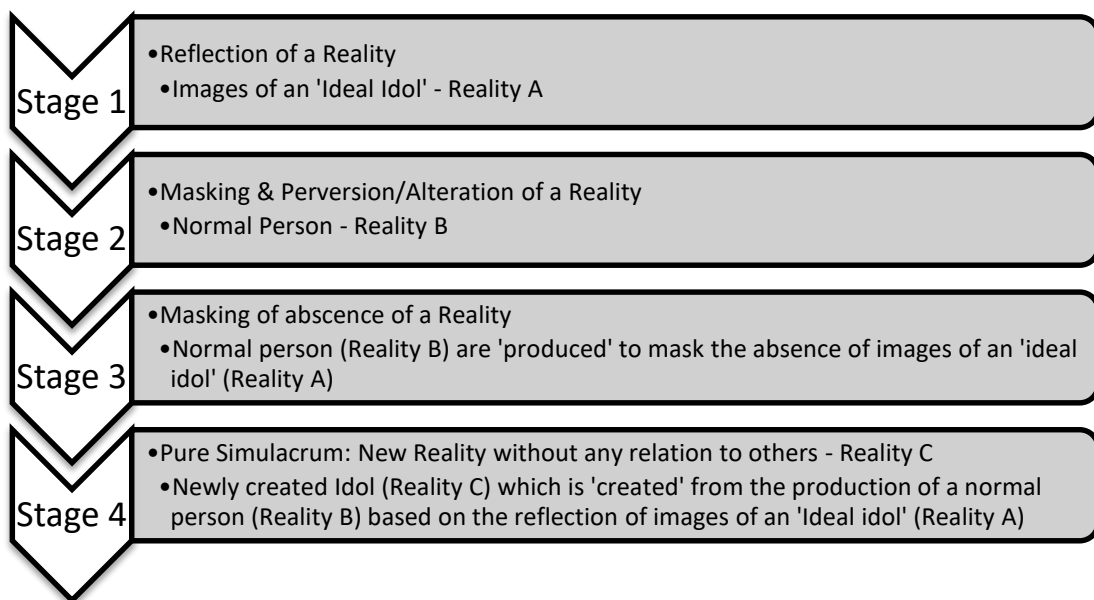
Chart 1.1 Complete Stages of Simulation of Idol

The process of 'producing' an idol ultimately end with stage 4, the simulacrum (reality c). It is the idols which are 'completely' produced which are based on reality a in stage 1 after masking and 'altering' reality b. Here lies the final problems. Some people argues that the completed idol (reality c) are fakes as they are altered copy, that is based on reality a (images of 'The perfect idol') of reality b which is a normal person. Baudrillard would disagree with the notion

since he states that the simulacrum bears no relation to any reality whatsoever. It has became something that transcends any reality and be one of itself. The state of Hyperreality.

CONCLUSION

The advent of globalization has improved the civilization in many senes. The entertainment industry only have limited numbers of idol that can be recognized in their early emergences. Now there are more than can be counted, as many companies trying to emulate the success of the previous ones. Hence this idol production are become more and more extensive to the extent mass-produced idol has became a normalcy. Baudrillar's concept of simulation certainly put the phenomenon of idols into postmodernist condition in which the values of it can be understood through a deconstruction.

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