Simulacra, Simulation, and the Internationalization of Higher Education in Thailand

Matthew R. Ferguson *

Humanities and Language Division, Mahidol University International College, Thailand

Abstract

This paper offers a discourse analysis and critique of the processes of internationalizing education in the case of a university international college. The critique is rooted in Jean Baudrillard's work of simulation and simulacra. This paper offers a seminal audit of how simulation and simulacra has informed organizational theory literature, and how it may be applied for understanding the symbolic value of international colleges in Thailand, but more specifically in Bangkok. Through this review, the author works to make the claim that the case international college has become a symbol of elitism in its context, and it has ceased any connection to the humanistic and cosmopolitan values that an international education espouses in education literature. It is argued that the case international education has achieved full simulacra. This critique leads to a conceptual framework that may be put to use to inspire critical research about the symbolic value of international education in Thailand.

Keywords

* Corresponding author: matthew.fer@mahidol.ac.th

Introduction

Many schools and universities in Thailand have been going through a process of internationalization, both in their curricular programs as well as in their organizations since the late 1990s (Fry, 2002). There has been much debate about what internationalization means and what it looks like, but some symbolic features have become widely accepted, which include the use of English (Ferguson, 2015), the recruitment of foreign faculty and staff (Lavankura, 2013), and adopting standards of operation employed by so-called world-class institutions (Lao, 2015). International programs predominantly follow western approaches to curriculum and instruction. They also demand tremendous tuition fees, and they are populated mostly by the children of the wealthier Thai families (Fry & Bi, 2013). In the West, internationalization strategies are aimed at attracting international students in part for economic reasons (Knight, 2014); however, programs in Bangkok are aimed at attracting Thai students from middle and upper class families. And this is exclusively for competitive reasons, responding to a particular niche market demand (Lavankura, 2013): International Education (IE) programs "reflect the exclusive role of education in serving particular elites in the middle and upper classes" (p. 672).

For the purposes of this paper, my focus is on higher education, and even more pointedly, on the university where I work and teach, Mahidol University International College (MUIC). MUIC is the first public university international college of Thailand, founded in 1996. And until recently, it had espoused the values of a liberal arts education, which was the founding and progressive principle of the college. With the advent of greater competition in the international education market, and the waning exclusivity of MUIC as an international education provider in Bangkok, founding educational principles are being compromised for the more pressing needs for marketing and student recruitment. This has brought about significant distress to educators like myself. While MUIC is used as a case example for critique in this paper, it is not intended as a denigration. It is intended as a documentation of how market forces are co-opting the IE brand, and thereby transforming the organizational values and identity. A discourse analysis of images derived from promotional materials will show the changing currency of IE, from an education discourse to a symbolic one. It is argued that this shift is consistent with the critical theory of simulacra and simulation established by Jean Baudrillard, and that the case of MUIC falls in line with others described in organizational theory literature that draw on his seminal work. This paper is offered as a potential conceptual framework that may challenge other critical educators and researchers in international programs, particularly from the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, to find resonance in their own contexts.

Background

MUIC is an esteemed college and an exclusive center on the campus of Mahidol University proper, which is a highly reputed autonomous university in Thailand. The tuition rates are significantly higher at MUIC, and it draws on students of the wealthy and elite Bangkok families. Depending on the major, tuition fees range anywhere from 630,000 baht to 1,300,000 baht for a 4-year bachelor degree program. This is very high compared to the average cost of a typical Thai program at a public university that costs anywhere from 78,000 baht to 277,000 baht (International Comparative Higher Education and Finance Project, 2010). This disparity is important because Thailand is among the most unequal countries in the world, and has the greatest economic gap between rich and poor in Southeast Asia (Phongpaichit & Baker, 2016).

It could be argued that MUIC is symbolic of that inequality. It is considered an elite institution, and elitism is part of the organizational culture. Part of which contributes to its elite status is its international brand. Again, internationalization is a complex concept, but in the Thai context, it has meant westernization, which is imbued with the privilege of western knowledge, of whiteness, and of civilization (Winichakul, 2010). This is consistent with long-standing and prejudicial narratives dating back to nineteenth century Siam, when the aristocratic classes of the capital cultivated markers of Western civilization to aggrandize their own standing with Siamese society. Winichakul (2000) discusses in depth the Siamese notion of sivilai (civilized), which was attributed to western knowledge, customs, and behaviours. He says that "ideas on how to make Siam to be sivilai ranged from etiquette to material progress, including new roads, electricity, new bureaucracy, courts and judicial system, law codes, dress codes, and white teeth" (p. 529). In contemporary Thailand, Vorng (2011) observes that foreign and Western symbols continue to hold currency for Bangkokians as prestige markers He says that this is evidenced by colloquialism common to upper class Thai vernaculars such as to be hi-so (high society) or inter (international) (p. 687), reflective of the elite cultivation of western sivilai 150 years previous. The international brand of MUIC and institutions like it continue to serve as these markers of sivilai, which may carry greater currency than principles espoused in liberal arts education.

When I first moved to Thailand to teach in 2002, my recruitment was deliberately part of an internationalization strategy. And again, it is the argument of this paper is that this strategy is not about an equality project to develop the country. It is about meeting the demands of the elite and of a burgeoning middle class for an international education. While an international education is about preparing Thai students for the economic opportunities that globalization is bringing to Thailand, as well as instilling cosmopolitan values befitting global citizenship (Tran & Nguyen, 2015), it is actually and more importantly about something of more symbolic importance.

I posit that the processes of higher education do more to consolidate the oppressive hegemony of these symbols, and further uproot the optimistic, even if utopian aims of an international education from their foundations. It is a world that cultivates markers of civilization that are attributed to the West. It is also a highly nationalistic world that espouses the centrality of Thainess (Winichakul, 2010) in education. This includes the importance of hierarchy and order that sees the natural concentration of power at the literal center of the country, in Bangkok, and of the under-class at the margins, the rural regions. Somewhere in this world, I am an educator that espouses the emancipatory potential of education. However, I find myself inhabiting a paradoxical world dominated by symbols that have lost their truth in the service of self-interest and not of the common good. According to the formulations of Jean Baudrillard, IE has come to occupy a hyperreality where original meaning has imploded.

Simulacra and Simulation.

> Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principles of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. (Baudrillard, 1994, p.6).

French critical theorist Jean Baudrillard's seminal book entitled Simulacra and Simulation, first published in French in 1981 and later translated to the English version cited in this paper in 1994, will be the theoretical construct employed going forward. The premises set up in this introduction are intended to lead to a claim that the internationalization of education in Thai higher education, with MUIC as a case in point, has exacerbated inequality in education and even undermines the project of greater equality. In other words, the foundational underpinnings of internationalization have been co-opted and have lost their meaning, evidenced by its apparent disinterest to effect change for equality of opportunity. IE is an example of what Baudrillard calls a simulacrum, an image of truth for which the original meaning no longer exists.

Baudrillard is highly criticized for his esoteric writing and seemingly convoluted explication of his theory of simulation (Knights & Morgan, 1993). He is a self-described nihilist as he says the product of simulation is meaninglessness, again a point for which he is strongly criticized (Parker, 1995). However, I argue that there is utility in using his theoretical formulation for understanding processes such as the internationalization of education and the cultivation of power I described happening in Thailand. His work emerges out of a post-Marxist philosophical tradition associated with the Frankfurt school that reformulates the

relationship between value of production and consumption in oppressive capitalist systems. While Marxist critique focuses on the value ascribed to material and labour in relation to class (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013), postmodern theorists like Baudrillard critique the value ascribed to the commodity and consumer, and how the symbolic meaning attributed to the object is cultivated in the individual's sense of reality in an accelerated consumer society dominated by commerce and media (Knights & Morgan, 1993). In other words, the consumer is complicit in his or her own oppression, as subjects to the power of the sign. From this positioning, IE is a commodity to be consumed and cultivated for its symbolic currency, and not for any illusions of truth.

Baurdrillard outlines four phases by which a referent object undergoes a process of simulation and entry into the hyperreal. In phase one, the image of the object maintains an appearance of its origin. While the object has entered the culture industry, its identifying features remain intact. Phase two marks the masking of reality and the replacement of the object with representation (Grandy & Mills, 2004). This may be part of a replication. For example, the IE brand may be reproduced from an educational discourse and (re)presented in an economic discourse. It still appears as an educational symbol, but it is effectively now functioning as an economic one. In phase three, the mask of representation not only denies the origin, but also its absence. In this phase, the economic discourse in which IE now belongs does not recognize its origins. In phase four, the simulation is complete. The image bears no resemblance to reality. The original referent of the sign is disappeared. It has become full simulacrum and inhabits a hyperreality. It is in to this space that I argue MUIC and organizations like it are entering.

To illustrate, see an example of MUIC's promotional material taken from the 2013 prospectus (Figure 1). It depicts two Caucasian students in uniform. This is not simulation in the sense that Caucasian students are not a reality at MUIC. This would be the wrong reading. There are white students on campus. It is the symbolic currency of the image that is of note. Whiteness, popularly associated with western civilization, is the marketing tool. It is also part of the commodity of IE. Ideas like liberal arts education, humanism, or cosmopolitanism is not the driving force of the organization, or for that matter, the driving motivation for most consumers of IE. This is certainly not specific to MUIC as it is exceedingly prevalent to see promotional material throughout Bangkok depicting similar images of disproportionate whiteness and of western modernity to promote international programs.

Figure 1 Promotional image from the MUIC Prospectus, 2013.

Figure 2 is an image also take from the 2013 prospectus. In this publication, the marketing promotes "enhancing lives through a liberal arts education." Figure 3 is a more recent image taken from the 2016-2017 MUIC General Catalog. Here, there is a discursive shift from the mission to enhance lives, to "be recognized as a world-class liberal education institution." Some may see this as inconsequential semantics. However, if one is to take organizational identity without cynicism, one may critically observe the shift from an educational discourse to a more symbolic one (to be "world class"). There is also the conspicuous discursive decision to drop "arts" from the vision statement, to give a slightly more marketable "liberal education," which has the effect of diminishing general education in favour of greater specialization.
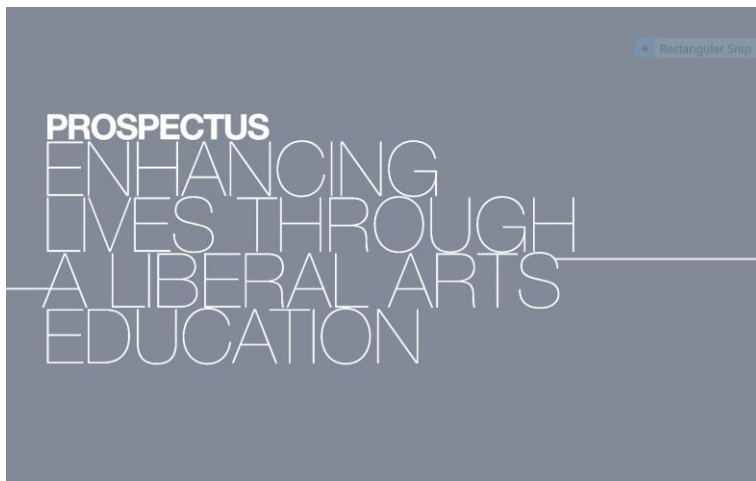

Figure 2 "Liberal Arts" education from the MUIC Prospectus, 2013.

Figure 3 "World-class Liberal Education" from MUIC General Catalog, 2016-17.

These types of ubiquitous imagery with respect to international whiteness, as well as the more nuanced discursive constructs of changing vision statements make up a contemporary world for what Baudrillard calls the "ambient consumer" (cited in Horrocks and Jevtic, 1999). It saturates and conditions a group of consumers to a simulated reality. And because an individual belongs to a group, the individual consumes such a product, generally without criticality.

In reference to Baudrillard's four phases of simulation, Hancock (1999) explains that the "sign value is said to represent the value ascribed to a commodity purely in terms of the prestige it endows upon its owner" (p. 166). This is precisely the value of MUIC's international education. It is a commodity of prestige and status, and not committed to its origins in education. Yet, Baudrillard would say that even this charge is futile, because in hypperreality, the origin has effectively disappeared. He calls this the implosion of meaning: "an absorption of the radiating mode of causality, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative charge — an implosion of meaning. That is where simulation begins" (p.31). It is argued here that the earlier described and paradoxical bifurcation of how IE manifests in the Thai context sets up the polar charges that necessarily force the implosion of meaning.

Locating Baudrillard in Organizational Theory Literature

"While Baudrillard's ideas might at first seem unrelated to organization theory," says Hatch and Cunliffe (2013), "you get a sense of hyperreality when you consider how images floating around us every day are produced by the organizations they serve" (p. 46). The frequent response to Baudrillard is that his conclusions lead us to despair if we accept that reality has indeed disappeared. However, his unique form of critique has been highly influential in organizational theory literature, to which this paper aims to contribute. In the appendix, a brief seminal audit is provided for the benefit of the reader to illustrate a history of

organizational critique informed by Simulacra and Simulation. It provides a historical context with respect to the widespread recognition that organizations indeed have been operating in worlds governed more by symbolism and fantasy (Dawson, 2015; Esposito, 2011; Ford & Harding, 2011; Gabriel, 1995; Montuori & Purser, 1996) than by reality or Enlightenment-era notions of truth. I believe MUIC represents a continuum in this tradition.

If it is accepted that we indeed inhabit a hyperreality and even embody simulacra, in a complete implosion of truth, where do we go intellectually from here? Drawing from the seminal audit detailed in the appendix, there seems to be three orders of response. The first order is we become willing participants in the simulacrum, which breeds apathy and denies agency (Alvesson, 1990; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Parker, 1995). The second is that we become nihilistic (Ford & Harding, 2011; Hancock, 1999; Rehn & O'Doherty, 2007), and in effect despairingly give up on truth. Or thirdly, we become highly reflexive about the processes of construction and destruction of reality that can be open to critique and challenge (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008; Dawson, 2015; Grandy & Mills, 2004; Zavattaro, 2012). The following sections of this synthesis will elucidate further on these three orders of response as deduced from the seminal audit. This will then be used to formulate a conceptual framework for approaching the unique processes of internationalizing higher education programs like that of MUIC.

Orders of Response.

Participation. Some studies place an emphasis of corporate identity and corporate culture (Alvesson, 1990; Dawson, 2015; Gabriel, 1995; Zavattaro, 2012;). In the paradigm of hyperreality, the ontology of participation is based on a premise that meaning is lost; therefore, meaning needs to be constructed in the image of another reference. As Baudrillard claims, "simulation is not pretending" (p. 3) because pretending assumes that reality is intact. Parker (1995) does not deny this contention, but he does not accept that it necessarily leads to apathy. He insists that while Baudrillard might be right about the dangers of assuming truth, he does not give him a "clear reason for *wanting* [my italics] to write at all" (p. 554), but he still wants to write. The constructed narratives by social forces like media and corporate culture are worth telling because they represent a reality, albeit a simulation, by which people live. Parker rejects the nihilism to which postmodernism frequently leads, and he argues against the deep irony used to describe those who seek meaning in an unreal world. He sees no other way than to participate, even if it is a conscious activity based in construction: "unless I act (and write) as if I were an individual capable of making choices then I do not understand how I can treat others with respect I accord to (my)self — however ontologically fictive that self might be" (p. 560).

On the other hand, Alvesson (1990) suggests that most individuals are not as motivated as Parker. He argues that the loss of meaning in contemporary life has spurred

organizational emphasis on motivation in lieu of meaning. In other words, there is a yearning for people, both producers and consumers, to connect and integrate their sense of self with the identity of the organization. He says that "a corporate image does not allow too much complexity. The objective of image management is to produce an appealing picture… and to position it in a beneficial way" (p. 378). Over recent decades, the seeming breakdown of social institutions, such as religion and family, has led to a crisis in motivation for which corporate culture has lent its image. This sounds paradoxical. In one sense participation connotes an activity. On the other hand, the activity here is the passive reception of meaning via corporate symbols.

At the organizational level, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) describe a type of participatory apathy with the more provocative term, functional stupidity:

Functional stupidity is organizationally-supported lack of reflexivity, substantive reasoning, and justification. It entails a refusal to use intellectual resources outside a narrow and "safe" terrain. (p. 1196)

While Parker (1995) says that even though hyperreality is fractured and unstable, there are clear patterns (p. 556) to observe and to learn. However, in Alvesson and Spicer's concept of functional stupidity, people are likely to get trapped into "problematic patterns of thinking" (p. 1196) and "bounded rationality" (p. 1198) that are a result of symbolic manipulation of the organization, "exercised often through stupidity management" (p. 1202). This entails the restriction and distortion of communication in the organization through the exercise of power (p. 1208). Organizational members are liable to invest so much of their identity in the image of the organization, so to deny the validity of the organization, its operations, and its systems, is to challenge parts of their sense of self. This is participatory apathy. "Organizational members become functionally stupid through a series of cultural and institutional beliefs" (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, p. 1214), which is the ontological framing of participation in the hyperreal. Next is nihilism.

Nihilism. "He who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 161). While Baudrillard's particularly nihilistic brand of postmodernism is charged with being dismissive of peoples' lived experiences of the world (Parker, 1995), his influence on mainstream cultural theory is hard to deny (Hancock, 1999). Baudrillard's construction of nihilism marks the death of the Age of Reason, the promise of observable and predictable truths. The epistemological implications of this is that understanding is ontologically only accessible through human interpretation, manipulation, and corruption. Therefore, if there are numerous positionalities and numerous truths, there is in fact no single and solitary truth to

behold, which is a direct rejection of the positivistic legacy of the Enlightenment. In fact, Hancock states that because of Baudrillard's work, "positivism is thus not only an untenable theory of knowledge, it is premised on an inaccurate ontological assumption" (p. 169). This is due, he says, to the rapidity of economic change, the fluctuations of market forces, and the accelerated development of technology that makes knowledge impossible to apprehend. The postmodern world of change is the "victory of the object… the implicit aim of corporate culturalism" (p. 169).

Despite the victory of the object, and the resignation to the fact that symbolism dominates society, there remains an innate yearning for authenticity. With respect to organizational theory literature, Ford and Harding (2011) discuss the increasing interest in authentic leadership (AL), which is premised on the idea that one remains true to one's self. Traits like integrity and genuineness are highly admired qualities. However, they say that striving to be authentic is itself a kind of play. The leadership of an organization often takes on the identity of the organization, to the extent that both become intertwined. Thus, "authenticity refers to the inability to distinguish between the self and the organization" (p. 468). In this sense, authenticity is construed as a fallacy. In the eyes of organizational members, the leader is "a fantasy of who they imagine that person should be. They may see a (fantasy) image but will not see the real person" (p. 472). Even with best intentions to transcend fakeness, the authentic is co-opted by the corporate symbolic machinery, and the "real" leader is disappeared.

For Rehn and O'Doherty (2007), they describe corporatism as the management and mismanagement of excess, which in other words is about the maximization and control of efficiency in organizational systems. They are channeling what Baudrillard (1994) calls the "ecstasy of excrescence" (p. 161) where the production of goods in a hyper consumer culture has surpassed any rational conception of supply and demand. The market excretes excessive desires that is perpetuated by a constant inertia and need for reification by consumer citizens. Thinking about financial markets, Rehn and O'Doherty (2007) discuss the contradictory excesses of the financial industry and the perceived excessive regulations of market economies. They ask: "In a hyperreality like that of modern finance, how could the regulatory frameworks become anything but excessive" (p. 111)? If the world is beyond conceptualization and is defined by shifting meanings, there is a "futility in trying to grasp excess" (p. 111). This describes an inevitability to the consequential happenings of world economies. "We are in the era of events without consequences (and of theories without consequences). There is no hope for meaning" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 164). The next order of response for this discussion is reflexivity.

Reflexivity. A more optimistic way to use Baudrillard's work is to help us identify procedures or strategies that serve only to further obscure best intentions. Practicing

reflexivitiy is the process of deconstructing accepted truths in order to rediscover ontological practices. In organizational research, reflexivity is integral to challenging the positionality of the researcher, and mitigating the interpretive liberty taken for producing and understanding the findings. According to Alvesson et al (2008), Baudrillard provides "theoretical resources for alternative constructions of social logics that influence accounts of positioning" (p. 492). Self-reflexive practice can be disarming and can compel the inquirer to be wary of truth claims. In a way, this again is paradoxical. While positionality is subversive of ontological truth, Baudrillard has helped put positionality at the center of qualitative methodology, precisely for the reason that it is so central to the production of a truth that is ultimately told. Reflexivity boosts the integrity of qualitative research, and positionality inevitably undermines totalizing claims.

Grandy and Mills (2004) say that "reflexivity problematizes that which constitutes 'social reality,' 'truth', and 'knowledge'" (p. 1159) in order to disrupt organizational strategy models developed, intentionally or not, to disguise reality. For example, they cite SWOT analysis as a type of simulation. It is reductionist of highly complex organizational systems. Equipped with Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation, and also with acute reflexivity, one can work to identify the shortcomings and obfuscations that SWOT analysis results provide. It may provide a neatly categorized foundation for strategy-making, but it ultimately is a simulacrum that produces generic solutions, which according to Grandy and Mills (2004), "will allow managers to control the destiny of their organizations" (p. 1162). Zavattaro (2012) also talks about strategies such a New Public Management (NPM) that is intended to address problems of ineffective government and over-bureaucratization. Zavattaro asks whether or not a simulacrum like NPM actually has the capacity to "loop back" (p. 97) and uncover the original. Again, Baudrillard highlights the reductionist impulse to over-simplify the complexity of a simulation, ultimately arguing for impossibility.

More recently, the advent of social media, and the intensity to which it has become part of contemporary society and culture has shifted the axis of organizational power. Dawson (2015) employs Social Identity Theory (SIT) to think about how "individuals base their self-concept on their various groups (organization) memberships" (p. 32). She goes on to say that "groups strive to attract more members, through the creation and dissemination of a particular image, in order to survive" (p. 32). In the world of social media, the creation and dissemination of an image is not particular. Identity is problematized to the point of meaninglessness. In the social media world, the carefully crafted corporate identity to which people attach themselves is not under the primary influence of the powerful. In social networks, Dawson says that the narrative identity of the organization becomes co-opted by the consumer (p. 58). In other words, the virtual machinery of reviews, ratings, and comments are acts of reflexivity, that in aggregate can contribute to a more user-driven

version of reality, which is not freeing of hyperreality, but it shifts the balance of power in meaning making from the producers to the consumers.

In this discussion, I have worked to categorize three orders of response to Baudrillard's theoretical construction. In the next section, I shall attempt to distill this review and synthesize it with my critique of internationalization in education at MUIC and organizations like it. The synthesis is intended to provide a conceptual framework rooted in simulacra and simulation.

Conceptual Framework

While a theoretical framework is a review of a theoretical paradigm that acts as a blueprint for the research approach and design (Grant & Osanloo, 2014), a conceptual framework includes the experience and positionality of the researcher in the project (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). For this reason, the framework that I am attempting to develop brings together discourses in international education, organizational theory, Thai Studies, as well as my personal narratives as a western educator in Thailand. This makes part of the reason for the deliberate personal voice of this paper, which is integral to my design and understanding of the research question, true to the critical/ideological paradigm (Ponterotto. 2005). The provided seminal audit in the appendix helps me to trace the influence of Baudrillard through organizational theory literature, and it will serve as the theoretical underpinning for my particular conceptualization of this problem of practice.

As described in the introduction, MUIC is a college populated by the children of the Bangkok middle class and elites. It is an international college that has until recently espoused the liberal arts values of cosmopolitanism and humanism that are integral to a democratic society in a globalized world, which is apparently in contrast to the economic and competitive machinations of Thailand's higher education industry. The process of internationalization that is argued in this critique is characterized by dominance and oppression in the service of reifying hierarchical culture, which is also in direct contrast to my personal egalitarian values that characterize my positionality as a scholar and a practitioner. What is described here is a competition of symbols that are simulacra to which no original truth can be apprehended. Claims of truth and reality are met with irony and cynicism, particularly in a hyperreal world dominated by social media and polarized politics. Full simulation is achieved.

However, this extrapolation of Baudrillard into the three orders of response named here as participation, nihilism, and reflexivity, intend to add additional layers of theoretical analysis to this critique. The main critique of Baudrillard is its necessary nihilistic end. While nihilism is transparency—as Baudrillard argues—his brand of transparency is one of implosion, where nothing ultimately matters, including violence and oppression. I agree with critics like Parker (1995) that this is a dangerous conclusion, albeit a valid one. Following Baudrillard can also lead to apathy, blindness, and despair. It can engender a form of

participatory apathy that comes with the wholehearted identification with corporate culture and identity, absolving the individual of the responsibility to cultivate his or her own sense of self and agency.

The more optimistic and utilitarian option discussed is reflexivity, which will be the means to resisting apathy and despair, with the aim of deconstructing the social and cultural oppressions embedded in Thai culture, society, and educational institutions such as MUIC. While postmodernists charge resistance as the "aestheticization of irony" (Parker, 1995, p. 558)—denying the simulation—it is the hope here that such a reflexive exercise shall serve to illuminate not as much the truth masked by simulation, but instead the processes that further obfuscate education reform efforts in order to take egalitarianism sincerely. And I believe that this is where curriculum and instruction come in. The classroom, in whatever form in takes between real and virtual, is a reflexive place. It can still be a subversive space where the hegemony of hierarchy can be undermined, and the emancipatory pedagogy of a liberal arts education can still happen. This is the crevice in which a critical educator can operate despite the organizational drift of the university into the economic sphere.

Conclusion

I have lived my entire adult life in Thailand, and all of my professional and practical knowledge is borne out of my experiences as a teacher in Thai culture. Intuitively, I have always been aware of the contradictions of MUIC, and I have complained about an emptiness as an educator of the elite. With or without me, my students will be successful people economically. Whether or not they will be ethical and righteous people is unclear. The founding values that MUIC espoused as an international liberal arts college were aligned with the cosmopolitan and humanistic aims of IE as understood in the education discourse. They were about fostering good global citizens, stewards of the earth, critical thinkers, and problem-solvers. Instead, the sign of internationalization is bombarded with new referent images of whiteness and privilege. The changing discourse marks the co-option of so-called western sivilai for the purposes of becoming recognized as world-class, and to supply symbols that garner greater social capital for the individual in the Thai context (Persons, 2016). If we follow Baudrillard's critique, the ambient consumer may not be aware of these two contrasting motivations for entering an international program as it is the purposefully constructed world in which we inhabit.

I am interested in the stories we tell about our experiences, from which we develop our understanding of the world and find agency. I have employed this strategy before to help reconcile my own sense of self in this confusing and contradictory world of international education in Thailand (Ferguson, 2011). Infused, with Baudrillard's theoretical construct and with self-conscious reflexivity, I believe that narrative research can expose the level of sophistication that goes in to the construction of stories of experience, and their potential to

both reveal and conceal truths. I asked the question earlier about what we can do with Baurdillard's conclusions. Where do we go in our intellectual development if we accept that we live in an unreal world? For Baudrillard's theoretical construct, narrative research may help to outline more clearly the contours between what I consider the three orders of response: participation, nihilism, and reflexivity. If reality is gone, only the stories of experience remain, and they matter more as they are all we have for making sense of our paradoxical experiences.

It can be an invigorating intellectual project to deconstruct the processes of internationalization through the prism of simulacra and simulation. As described above, I have at times felt an emptiness in my working with the upper classes, no matter how engaging some of my day-to-day experiences are. The process of doing this discourse analysis, synthesis, and conceptual framework has given me pause as it may explain from whence the emptiness comes. Maybe it is a form of nihilism that comes as a result of living in a simulation and embodying a simulacrum. "The dialectic stage, the critical stage is empty" Baudrillard (1994) says. "There is no more stage. There is no therapy of meaning or therapy through meaning: therapy itself is part of the generalized process of indifferentiation" (p. 161). So far, I am not indifferent. If not therapeutic, deconstructing the narrative meanings of my context is exciting, and I look forward to continuing my pursuit with the help of Baudrillard, and also in spite of him. I implore other critical educators to follow suit.

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Appendix

Seminal audit of literature from 1990-2015 drawing on Baudrillard.

	Citations.	Synopsis.	Contribution.
1	Alvesson, M. (1990). Organization: From substance to image? Organization studies, *11*(3), 373-394.	There is an ongoing transition of modern organizational theory from one of substance and systems control to another of image construction and development. This means that the emphasis of management is more on peoples' impressions and definitions of reality.	Corporate image works to reduce the complexity of organizational systems. The image is unifying for various stakeholders. The image is constructive, even if it is interpretive. Baudrillard nihilism is not useful, as it is the reality of impression that actually has utility for organizational theory.
2	Knights, D. & Morgan, G. (1993). Organization theory and consumption in a post-modern era. Organization studies, *14*(2), 211-234.	The study of organizations cannot be done without the study of consumption. The sociology of the postmodern identity is bound to consumer society. Through this paradigm, new conceptualizations of organizational theory and research can be explored.	Marxist theory about production is being replaced with postmodern theory of consumption. The dominant discourse of production is being undermined by the hypperreality—where consumption is not subordinated to production (p. 212).

3	Gabriel, Y. (1995). The unmanaged organization: Stories, fantasies and subjectivity. Organization studies, *16*(3), 477-501.	Within every organization, the world of dreams and of fantasy cannot be managed. These are the machinations of employees and their own personal impressions and goals of their professional lives. These worlds take on mythical structures, and it would be futile to try to control them.	In spite of efforts to control systems, organizational members work to subvert structures through fantasy and dream. Personal stories and anecdotes, in effect, become truths that undermine the simulation of the organizational structure. Through narrative, subordinates find agency.
4	Parker, M. (1995). Critique in the name of what? Postmodernism and critical approaches to organization. Organization studies, *16*(4), 553-564.	Argues that Baudrillard's postmodernism is a "dangerous and potentially disabling set of ideas" (p. 553) for organization theorists to employ. Relativity of truth must be allowed in order not to give in to the defeatism of nihilism. While truth claims are dubious, organization theorists can observe clear patterns.	This critique infuses optimism into the postmodern paradigm for research. Pure postmodern relativism is a way avoiding responsibility. He says that postmodern theory can be used to challenge the influences it has on reality construction.
5	Montuori, A. & Purser, R. (1996). Ecological futures: Systems theory, postmodernism, and participative learning in an age of uncertainty. In Boje, D., Gephart D., & Joseph T. (Eds.). Postmodernism and organization theory. (pp. 181-201).	There is a need for a model of organizational theory that allows systems thinking to not be construed as totalitarian according to postmodern critiques. "Systems" do not need to be understood as totalizing and homogenizing (p. 3). Social creativity can break the controlling nature of systems thinking and also the nihilism of postmodern thought.	Social and ecological realities need to be made part of organizational theory, as these realities are not external to the conceptualization of contemporary society and life.

	Newbury Park: Sage.		

| 6 | Hancock, P. (1999). Baudrillard and the metaphysics of motivation: A reappraisal of corporate culturalism in the light of the work and ideas of Jean Baudrillard. Journal of management studies, *36*(2), 155-175. | This paper challenges the notion of corporate culturalism as a basis for employee motivation by invoking the critical theory of Baudrillard. The same processes that engender nihilism in society are at work in corporate life and have negative consequences for motivation. | The emptiness that is revealed in the symbology of the corporate culture becomes evident, so efforts to engender morale and motivation by fusing employee identity with corporate identity results in an implosion of self and therefore the loss of identity and motivation. |
| 7 | Grandy, G. & Mills, A. J. (2004). Strategy | Despite the recognition of organizations as complex | This review illuminates the value of Baudrillard's work on |

	as simulacra? A radical reflexive look at the discipline and practice of strategy. Journal of management studies, *41*(7), 1153-1170.	interacting systems, organizational strategy continues to be reductionist (such as SWOT analysis). If strategies themselves were understood as hyperreal simulacra, new approaches to strategy development could arise.	simulation and implosion to the development of technocratic and organizational strategy-making.
8	Rehn, A. & O'Doherty, D. (2007). Organization: On the theory and practice of excess. Culture and organization, *13*(2), 99-113.	The concept of excess has not been properly explored in organizational theory. Excess and risk has dominated modern management, and a postmodern critique exposes the functional inability of financial industries to observe the fallacies by which they operate.	The world of modern management operates in a hyperreality; therefore, even attempts to regulate are an example of excess, because they are operating under paradoxical assumptions about need and waste.
9	Alvesson, M., Hardy, C., & Harley, B. (2008). Reflecting on reflexivity: Reflexive textual practices in organization and management theory. Journal of management studies, *45*(3), 480-501.	This paper reviews the ways in which Organization and Management Theory (OMT) has promoted reflexivity. These include multi-perspective, multi-voicing, positioning, and destabilizing. This conceptualization is aimed at boosting the usefulness of reflexivity research in organization management.	Reflexivity research can be paradoxical because it produces authoritative textual analysis, which demeans the true experiences of research participants. The research produced in effect becomes a simulacrum of the data collection.
10	Bryer, T. A. & Zavattaro, S. M. (2011). Social media and public administration.	For transparency and consumer engagement, organizations may simply launch a social media presence or campaign,	Organizations are becoming aware of the importance of controlling their online identity, and the ethical implications of online

	Administrative theory and praxis, *33*(3), 325-340.	which become simulations – an image of authenticity – but not actually be (or achieve) the goal of open communication.	participation of organization members in the organizational social media accounts.
11	Esposito, E. (2011). Originality through imitation: The rationality of fashion. Organization studies, *32*(5), 603-613.	Fashion reconciles disorder and conformity. As fashion challenges social norms, it becomes normal because of the desire to be original. Fashion is the rationalization of the irrational (p. 604).	It is a "trivial mystery" (p. 610) how meaning is attributed to fashion, but it shows transition in interpretation, which rejects Baudrillard's claims of nihilism. Transition in meaning is a human truth, which has implications for organizational theory.
12	Ford, J. & Harding, N. (2011). The impossibility of the "true self" of authentic leadership. Leadership, *7*(4), 463-479.	Despite its popularity, the concept of "authentic leadership" is an impossibility. Moreover, its attempted implementation could be harmful.	This paper applies objects-relations theory to leadership-studies. This paper shows how an attempt at being "authentic" can actually force one to betray their core values (p. 472). Authenticity itself is a simulacrum.
13	Alvesson, M. & Spicer, A. (2012). A stupidity-based theory of organization. Journal of management studies, *49*(7), 1194-1220.	There is an absence of reflexivity in organizational work, referred to as "functional stupidity" (p. 1198), which hinders organizational development and learning. This has a corrosive effect as it reinforces "stupid" decision-making.	Modern management theory can actually promote the cultivation of functional stupidity (p. 1205), which is not a result of intellectual deficiency, but of political and managerial expediency (p. 1214).
14	Zavattaro, S. M. (2012). Management movements and phases of the image: Potential for closing	New Public Management (NPM) is looked to for fixing ineffective government, but in fact there is nothing new or innovative about it. Old	NPM and other such reforms serve only to mask the "absence of a profound reality in public administration" (p. 105). NPM is a set of

	the loop. Administration and society, *45*(1), 97-118.	democratic principles are being repackaged as new theory, which is explained by Baudrillard's phases of image transformation.	rhetorical deceptions rather than a set of management principles, which pushes real reform further into simulation (p. 111).
15	Dawson, D. R. (2015). "Who are we online?": Changing perspectives toward organizational identity in social media context. The journal of social media in society, *4*(2), 28-72.	On-line and social media presence has fractured organizational identity. Members have disparate ideas of who they are as an organization because of their perceptions of their participation in different online platforms.	Organizational identity on social media marks a shift in power from the organization to the social media users. Identity construction is developed through a wider narrative built beyond the control of the organization.