Jean Baudrillard’s “The Precession of Simulacra” critiques the idea of reality in the sense that everything is tangible as opposed to only ideas. As a post-modern critic, Baudrillard is skeptical of the real and questions the validity of the human idea of truth. The creation of simulacrums is his basis for his skepticism. Simulacrums are simulations of a person or thing that are developed as a substitute for reality. He articulates that “truths” are often made up representations of ideas and this makes him skeptical of reality. The differences between the simulations and reality can become skewed or unknown because people do not know where the truth ends and the simulacra begins. The simulations become so real that they are mistaken for the actuality. Baudrillard laments the loss of reality and is unsure of when simulacrums became more common. Baudrillard creates a strong argument that the truth and simulations mix together, leading to an unclear difference between reality and simulacrums; these simulacrums are evident in religion, memories, reality and truth.

Baudrillard claims there is a lack of distinction between the simulacra and reality. He defines a simulacrum as a simulation of an idea based on a concrete image; reality, for Baudrillard, is becoming more scarce, but the simulations are becoming more common. He writes, “It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational” (1557). By this he means that simulacrums are so closely related to actuality that it becomes difficult to separate them. The “real” no longer has to make sense because the simulation does. This means that the simulacra takes the place of the real. After time, the simulation created is referred to as the real and the original might be thought of as a fake. This debatable divide is another point in Baudrillard’s argument. Baudrillard comments, “Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle
intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the
difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’, between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’” (1558). Here Baudrillard
states that despite the lack of distinction, there is a difference between the real and simulacrums.
The variations are unclear, but if looked at close enough the differences can be seen. It is
important that the divide exists because it allows people to be more aware of the continuations of
simulacrums. The simulations are not real, no matter how much they appear so. Baudrillard
connects this in many ways to contemporary life.

In real life, people do not always realize that they are referring to or believing in
something that is not real. People assume that what is in front of them has to be real because it is
substantial. People assume that simulations cannot exist outside the realms of imagination.
However, simulacrums are created through thoughts, actions and ideas. Baudrillard writes,
“Why should simulation stop at the portals of the unconscious? Why couldn’t the ‘work’ of the
unconscious be ‘produced’ in the same way as any other symptom in classical medicine?
Dreams already are” (1558). Here he expresses the idea that dreams can become simulations for
reality. The existence of dreams outside of the mind creates the obscure differences between
reality and the simulacrum. In this statement, he is referring to medicine, but that could extend
to other daily life ideas such as memories, history or relationships. To some, separating the idea
of a dream from reality is more difficult and is not as tangible as discovering a new medicine.
He states, “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is
rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself” (1557). People are able to
manipulate the fake ideas and make them seem real. The simulations just have to pass as the
real. The real does not have to exist, but the mere idea of its existence could be enough to create
it in the minds of some people. Since “signs of the real” are being substituted for the real it
becomes difficult to know the difference. An example in literature is G.K. Chesterton’s novel
*The Man Who Was Thursday*. When the men on the anarchist council are revealing themselves
as policemen, Professor de Worms admits that he is not actually Professor de Worms. He has
taken the real professor’s traits so well that everyone believes he is actually the professor and
that real professor is the fake. In this example, the fake and real become so jumbled that society
does not know what is real and mistakes it for being fake. It cannot be known if what is believed
is real or just designed to make people believe it is real. Religion is another subject that can be
designed to make people believe in something that is not real.

Baudrillard claims that God is an idea and that religion is based on simulacrums.
Baudrillard writes, “Or is it volatilized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp and power
of fascination- the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea
of God?” (1559). This is in reference to the idea that faith brings a level to life that cannot be
replicated. It also brings into question the existence of a higher power by claiming there is only
an “idea of God.” In his argument, Baudrillard claims that the existence in God can be
substituted just by a belief that a god exists. He argues that this is represented every day and was
feared by the Iconoclasts because “They sensed this omnipotence of simulacra, this facility they
have of effacing God...” (1559). His argument is that there is merely an idea of God, but an
omnipresent figure does not actually exist. The idea of God is what brings people together; they
are connected by this one idea, but that does not mean that the idea is true. The “idea of God” is
that people want a God to exist, so in their mind one does.
He writes that the Iconoclasts knew that they were just replicating the idea of their faith. They no longer had to believe in God, they only had to believe in the idea of God. Baudrillard comments, “The overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum” (1559). He claims that God has never actually existed but is merely a replication of an idea. Baudrillard’s argument is that God never existed, but enough people believed in His existence to sustain the idea. The mass belief in the idea of God creates the simulacra; a god did not have to be real. By starting with this argument Baudrillard paves the way of recognizing simulacra in multiple aspects of life.

Memory is built off simulacra because people remember situations in fragments. People make mistakes and memories are shaped by people, so there are often mistakes within those memories. What is remembered may not always be true, it may be only a simulation of what actually happened. This simulation would create a simulacra of the event and that would spread instead of the actual event. Baudrillard writes, “When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning” (1561). The real is replaced by a fond memory of an event, even if that memory is incorrect. A person may not remember the exact details of an event, but what they remember is connected to how they feel. This causes them to alter a memory and inadvertently give it new meaning. From there, it becomes difficult to know what actually happened and what the person has designed in their head. The new memory becomes a simulacra and replaces the reality of the old memory. This example of a simulacra is why Baudrillard is mourns the loss of what people claim to be truth. He comments, “There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object
and substance have disappeared” (1561). Simulacrum are created every day from human memories. People explain what they think is the truth, but it is actually made up of pieces of what they remember and what they have heard. No one will know, not even the person with the memory, what the truth is because the memory has been altered. The simulacra becomes believed by many and is then mistaken for reality.

The idea of truth is arbitrary and contains representations of reality. A clear-cut definition of truth cannot exist, and for this Baudrillard argues that this leads to simulacrum. A truth can be interpreted in different ways and this can cause simulations of the real. Bauldrillard comments, “Against it classical reason armed itself with all its categories. But it is this [the lack of distinction between simulators and lunatics] today which again outflanks them, submerging the truth principle” (1559). The idea of truth is drowned in interpretations and simulations. Baudrillard is arguing that because of simulations nothing can be thought of as completely true. The truth can be manipulated to fit a situation, and becomes a simulacra when what was once false becomes so well believed that it becomes true.

Much like the study of history, students can read about history, but will only know what is given to them in a textbook because they were not there to witness it themselves; the knowledge and feelings they get about that event will only be a simulacrum. The feelings cannot be replicated. There is no way to make a 21st century student understand the impact of major historical events that happened in the 20th century or earlier. Baudrillard claims that the attempts create simulacrum. Baudrillard writes, “We too live in a universe everywhere strangely similar to the original-- here things are duplicated by their own scenario” (1564). He means that in today’s society simulations can be made that are nearly impossible to tell they are fake.
Replication can be nearly perfect, but it is still a simulacra. Baudrillard fears the society will become too reliant on the simulacrums, and that reality will be less important. The simulation of the real will always be fake, but it can be so believable that it makes the real look fake.

Baudrillard argues that reality is actually three types of “real.” He writes, “This is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us -- a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence” (1561). With these three different types of real, it is easy for a simulation to invade the idea of the real. Baudrillard argues that the three types of real leads to “a panic-stricken production of the real” (1561). This means that people focus on creating the real, but this leads to more simulacrums. Without a clear real, simulacrums are more likely to be formed. The real includes the tangible items that exist, the neo-real is a modified version of the real. Baudrillard defines the hyperreal as, “models of a real without origin or reality” (1557). Hyperreal is an extension of the “real.” The neo-real and hyperreal simulations can occur because both are different takes on the real. Baudrillard writes, “Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum” (1560). Simulacrums can be created to simulate an idea that is already being represented by something else. Simulations can be based on false truths which leads to false representations. However, this false representation could develop into a real simulation. From there, what was once false becomes the interpretation of the real; this could lead to the real being believed as being false. Since simulacrums and real ideas can be so closely related, it soon becomes nearly impossible to tell the difference between the two.
Baudrillard asks: how can the difference be seen, how does society ever know what is truly real? He states, “It is possible that the very memory of the original caves will fade in the mind of future generations, but from now on there is no longer any difference: the duplication is sufficient to render both artificial” (1563). The future generations will not know the real caves, but they will assume the pictures are an exact replication. Baudrillard argues that this devalues the real because the real will be left unknown and the simulations will suffice. He also writes, “They are already purged of death, and are even better than in life; more smiling, more authentic, in light of their model, like the faces in funeral parlors” (1564). A simulacra of a person’s life is exhibited at many funerals. Baudrillard asserts that this creates a false reality of the person. A person could walk through and attempt to understand that person’s life, but they will only know what is shared at the funeral. The simulation can create the idea so that, knowing a person and studying the same person, become interchangeable because both can yield a similar idea of knowing. Baudrillard argues that this leads to the loss of reality because a complete understanding of a person cannot be obtained just through studying.

Baudrillard uses the development of simulacrum in contemporary life to criticize the idea of reality. Reality cannot be known because it is full of simulations. In life there are so many substitutes that can be mistaken for being real. Baudrillard claims that knowing about the existence of simulacrum just replaces the real. His main argument is written, “The name, our knowledge, replaces the thing” (1555). He writes that this is causing the loss of reality and knowledge. He criticizes the use of simulacrum because they leave the world believing a falsity. He says that religion is based on an idea of an all-powerful being, but there is no proof. He writes that people want a god to exist, but that does not mean that one does but the idea has
become so powerful that people truly believe that there is a god. Baudrillard argues that memory and truth are merely arbitrary because interpretations can be different and both memory and truth can be altered over time. Neither are unchangeable, which leads to simulacrums being formed. He argues that reality is broken into three forms that cause the formation of simulacrums based on the ideas of reality. What is real may not exist, because reality and simulacrums have become so interchangeable that what was once thought to be real may soon be just a simulacra.