

Hyperreality in Media and Literature: An Overview of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*

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Abstract

Hyperreality is a critical theory of postmodernism. The negative impacts of hyperreality are visible in our media and literature fields and it is a threat to contemporary society in association with reality and its copies. Illusions of reality are always formed, and they pretend as the originals. Jean Baudrillard through his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, originally published in French in 1981 and translated to English in 1983 traces out the fake realities that are promoted by media and literature. He is a well-known critic of postmodernism, his theory of hyperreality is better applicable in postmodern literature and media. People are living in a world where they are always confused with reality and blended reality, even the reality is suppressed under fantasies and illusions, these imaginations often control the world. Media and literature are always influenced by hyperreality, films, advertisements, news, social media, etc. represent artificial realities so that the present world cannot realize the truth and originality. People admire fictional heroes and superficial characters in both media and literature. The kids and youngsters are under the influence of modern technology and communication, IT revolution always accelerated to cope with an imaginative world. Technology created a new world order where people find simulacra are more comfortable and attractive to live with. Hyperreality would gradually lead the people to chaos and confusion, as a result, everything will lose its own identity, originality, and essence.

Key Words: Hyperreality, Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, Media, Literature, Postmodernism.

New inventions and the development of science carried out a lot of variations in every area of the social and cultural realm. If we analyse literature in particular, literature has certainly reached the Postmodern period with several theoretical frameworks. Postmodernism perceived new perceptions, styles, concepts, and development in the field of literature. The first half of the 20th century witnessed war-related chaos and absurdities everywhere in the world. The post-world war period brought theoretical and ideological changes in all cultural and literary traditions. Innovative writers and thinkers emerged in literature with new world views and concepts particularly from the atrocities and dilemmas of the post-war tensions. The notable postmodern theorists and critics are Jean Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Frederic Jameson, Michael Foucault, etc. Various postmodern theories like Deconstruction, Hyperreality, Post-structuralism, Queer theory are also developed by this time. We know that we are living in a world where there are some exaggerated elements and facts in every field of human life. Communication, technology, and media always control humanity, sometimes they provide misinterpretations and ideas.

Jean Baudrillard is regarded as a French philosopher, sociologist, and cultural theorist. Baudrillard questioned tenets of both Marxism and Structuralism, he is a critic of technology in the era of media representation and domination. His works are apocalyptic and provocative, as a postmodern critic he does not provide any solution for the postmodern condition, instead, he is critically observing the flaws of postmodernism. In the literary world, he is best known for his theory of *Simulacra and Simulation*. He was a critique as well as an analyst of contemporary culture, media, and technological communication. His works include subjects like consumerism, gender relations, economics, art, social studies, western foreign policy, and popular culture. His reputed works are *Seduction*, *Simulacra and Simulation*, *America*, and *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. His works are frequently associated with postmodern theories and views.

Luke, in his article "Power and Politics in Hyperreality: The Critical Project of Jean Baudrillard" (1991) deals with the critical thinking of Jean Baudrillard to his viewpoints on postmodernism.

According to him, hyperreality is a fabricated reality and it limits human participation in the world just as a consumer, hence he criticises that Baudrillard highlights and promotes consumer culture through his work.

According to Mark Poster "*Simulacra and Simulation* is arguably Baudrillard's most important book. In it he moves from a theory of consumer society governed by a 'code' to a general theory of culture that problematizes 'reality.' His idea of the hyperreal informs most discussions" (*Simulacra and Simulation*). Douglas Kellner credits "Baudrillard's studies in *Simulacra and Simulation* are among his most important work, particularly as they pertain to his concept of postmodernity and analyses of postmodern culture" (*Simulacra and Simulation*).

Nunes in his article "Jean Baudrillard in Cyberspace: Internet, Virtuality, and Postmodernity." (1995) says about the influence of hyperreality in media and communication especially Nunes deals with 'internet' by explaining two metaphors "information superhighway" and "cyberspace" (Nunes 314). As the internet develops the virtual reality becomes just a simulacrum and finally, they form simulations.

In the technologically sophisticated postmodern society people are confused with reality and its simulation, as a result, we cannot distinguish what is real and what is artificial that are happenings around us. Jean Baudrillard's Hyperreality or *Simulacra and Simulation* is notable among various theories that would help us to understand postmodern absurdities. The French writer and postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard's concept of "loss of reality" is quite applicable in postmodern vulnerability and chaos due to the exaggeration and falsification of reality by media, images, and films. These exaggerations and fake realities are known as "hyperreality" in the postmodern world. He is referred to as the 'high priest of postmodernism' his key ideas 'simulacra and simulation', and 'the hyperreal' are often used in postmodern discussions. Baudrillard defined "hyperreality" as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard 1); hyperreality is a representation, a sign, without an original referent. It is a semiotic concept. Baudrillard believes hyperreality drives further than confusing or blending the 'real' with the symbol which represents it; it comprises creating a symbol or set of signifiers which represent something that does not exist, like Santa Claus.

Hyperreality allows mingling the physical reality with virtual reality. According to Baudrillard neither representation nor real exists instead there is only hyperreal that exists forever. *Simulacra* are copies that describe things that either had no original or that no longer have an original. A 'simulation' is a copy or imitation that substitutes for reality. Through *Simulacra and Simulation*, he criticizes American culture, consumer culture, television, capitalism, science, technology, and politics. According to Baudrillard postmodern society has replaced all reality and meaning with signs and symbols as a result fiction and fictional characters got dominance over human thoughts and feelings. The theory *Simulacra and Simulation* is of utmost known for its discussion of signs, symbols and how do they relate to contemporaneity. Baudrillard entitlements that our society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs and that human experience is a simulation of reality:

Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle 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. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum (6)

Hyperreality is visible in every field of human culture its aspects are quite visible in art, literature, media, politics, economics, architecture, advertisements, television, films, and so on. The consumers of all these areas are often confused with realities and artificialities that are being developed by the technological advancements of modern times. The false realities always attract the people, and their impacts influence them so that they consider these fake realities as real and original. In the postmodern world loss of the real is much more visible in every arena; mass media and multimedia are always dealing with signs and images; these signs and images often replace the actual reality hence the reality becomes subordinate to the representation and it creates

superficiality. Simulacrum can be represented as the sign of the lost reality and simulation is the state of the hyperreal.

Hyperreality describes the signed order into four phases; the first phase is Reflection; it can be identified as a faithful copy or image that represents the actuality or the reality. The second phase is Mask; it is the perversion of reality, here the representation is not original so it can be counted as an unfaithful image or copy. The third phase is Illusion; it is the absence of a profound reality, here the sign pretends to be a faithful image or copy, but it is not original. The fourth stage can be considered as a Pure Simulacrum or representation, in which the simulacrum does not have any relationship to reality. Baudrillard explains:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the absence of a profound reality;

it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum (6)

“In the first case, the image is a good appearance - representation is of the sacramental order. In the second, it is an evil appearance - it is of the order of maleficence. In the third, it plays at being an appearance - it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation” (6).

Baudrillard was an expert media theorist, according to him hyperreality harms society especially related to media. Today people highly depend on and trust various media as a result media have a great influence on people's minds. Hyperreality is highly visible in all media forms; today's movies, advertisements, cartoons, news, social media, etc. are highly influenced by hyperreality. Baudrillard brings Disney Land as a good example of hyperreality. “Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms: The Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to ensure the success of the operation” (12). Here the reality is replaced with illusion and this imagination takes the people to a better experience than the real world. Baudrillard says:

The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp. Whence the debility of this imaginary, its infantile degeneration. This world wants to be childish to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere - that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child to foster illusions as to their real childishness (13).

The films like *The Matrix* (1999), *Solaris* (1972), *The Truman Show* (1998), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Inception* (2010), *Her* (2013), etc. are depicting the elements of hyperreality. These films take the people to an imaginative world and the viewers think that these illusions are better than the real world, hence they neglect reality instead they prefer certain simulacra and simulation. The graphics and other visual treats in the films give a lot of pleasurable and enjoyable sense to the spectators.

In the technological era people highly depend on Television as a source of truth and knowledge, but TV is also promoting hyperreality, we cannot trust TV for the real image or knowledge: “The eye of TV is no longer the source of an absolute gaze, and the ideal of control is no longer that of transparency” (31). “It is in this sense that one can say: TV is watching us, TV alienates us, TV manipulates us, TV informs us ... In all this, one remains dependent on the analytical conception of the media, on an external active and effective agent, on "perspectival" information with the horizon of the real and of meaning as the vanishing point” (32). Nowadays most of the TV shows, especially reality shows form pure simulacra and simulations. With modern technologies and graphic representation reality shows always promote fake realities. News channels are also promoting exaggerated and fake news, and they endorse false realities. Currently, the Television Channels through their reality shows as well as News Hours are often promoting hyperreality. The cut zooms and editing always hide the reality and they promote hyperreality with technological advancements. Even the reality is suppressed by the news channels for their particular interest and motives, hence certain fake news is being circulated to us. Political parties and corporates manipulate the mass media with hyperreality to achieve their targets.

Advertisements are also playing a major role in the order of hyperreality, they highly influence the sense of human minds and take them to the world of hyperreality, where they are not able to distinguish the reality and its copies: “Advertising, therefore, like information: destroyer of intensities, the accelerator of inertia. See how all the artifices of meaning and nonmeaning are repeated in it with lassitude, like all the procedures, all the mechanisms of the language of communication, how all of that is staged exactly like sex in pornography, that is to say without any faith, with the same tired obscenity” (92).

Modern technology and social media are also under the strict influence of hyperreality, we can consider a photo that is uploaded in one of the social media sites, especially on Instagram is the best example of hyperreality; this particular photograph may be edited, modified, and beautified with photoshop or other computer application, after these modifications it is posted in Instagram, the followers or viewers of that particular photograph think that this is original and they neglect the real photograph. Cartoons, computer games, etc. are also revealing hyperreality in a large amount, people prefer graphics and effects for their visual treats, and they create hyperreality: “Thus the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses. And this is only the macroscopic extension of the implosion of meaning at the microscopic level of the sign” (81).

Hyperreality is an important theory in postmodern literature. We can find out reality through different aspects. The postmodern critics say that reality is disappeared from various literary forms, now fake realities are controlling the literary taste of the readers. We are reading many novels and other fictional works; they lead us to certain misconceptions and imaginations hence we think that they are real and original at this point the elements of hyperreality take place in literature. According to Baudrillard, the real art is dead, now in every field the reality becomes subordinate and the artificiality predominant. “Reality could go beyond fiction: that was the surest sign of the possibility of an ever-increasing imaginary. But the real cannot surpass the model - it is nothing but its alibi” (119). If we analyze the literary works of all types, we will be able to see that due to the fictional elements the originality had lost its relevance, and imaginations and fantasies were highlighted:

Perhaps science fiction from the cybernetic and hyperreal era can only exhaust itself, in its artificial resurrection of "historical" worlds, can only try to reconstruct in vitro, down to the smallest details, the perimeters of a prior world, the events, the people, the ideologies of the past, emptied of meaning, of their original process, but hallucinatory with retrospective truth. Thus in *Simulacra* by Philip K. Dick, the war of Secession. Gigantic hologram in three dimensions, in which fiction will never again be a mirror held toward the future, but a desperate rehallucination of the past (120).

We can consider a novel as the best example of simulacra and simulation or hyperreality, suppose this novel is related to a real-life event if the novelist is narrating the exact story of the characters of the novel it will not get any appreciation from the readers. Hence in the narrating process of a particular novel or a literary work, in the initial stage, it is closely related with the actual life situation, therefore, it is a reflection, then in the second stage, it masks the reality and perverting the reality, in the third stage this story creates some illusion related with the reality and in the final stage it creates its pure simulacrum. Here the outcome or final transcript of the story is far away from reality:

Today, literary works especially the science fictions highly promote hyperreality: Science fiction would no longer be a romantic expansion with all the freedom and naivete that the charm of discovery gave it, but, quite the contrary, it would evolve implosively in the very image of our current conception of the universe, attempting to revitalize, reactualize, requotidianize fragments of simulation, fragments of this universal simulation that have become for us the so-called real world (121).

Hyperreality is not a new concept in literature, throughout the history of literature, the elements of hyperreality are visible but in the postmodern literary context, its elements are highly visible.

Today, we live in a world, where the communication technologies and media influence and control our day today life. Baudrillard through his theory of hyperreality reveals to the world that we are always confused with what is real and what is artificial. His work *Simulacra and Simulation*

is much relevant in today's media and literature studies. The images and signs of the contemporary world take the people to a new order, most of the time we live with fake realities and absurdities. People are always controlled by media and technology, under the influence of them, we often neglect the truths and realities. The fake realities or hyperreality are always fascinating the thoughts and views of people. Because of the influence of hyperreality and consumerism, the images and signs do not reveal the truth, instead, they manipulate the entire reality and make its pure simulacrum. Jean Baudrillard with his theory of hyperreality criticizes the postmodern condition and exhorts the people to understand the realities and truths that are happening around us. Sometimes media and literature are very far away from the actual truth, this realization helps us to get a better knowledge and understanding of the present scenario.

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