

Characteristics of Inescapable Hyperreality in The Four Stages of Simulacra in *The Truman Show* Movie

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Abstract

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This study explores the hyperreality in literature by analysing “The Truman Show” movie that was released in 1998. Hyperreality can be understood as the collapsed boundaries between reality and simulation. It is created through the building blocks called simulacra. Using Baudrillard (1981)’s theory of hyperreality, the research examines what characteristics of inescapable hyperreality are pictured in each orders of the four stages of simulacra in the movie. This study aims to fill the gap from previous studies to provide a fresh perspective on how language constructs and reinforces hyperreality by focusing on the verbal elements. This study applied qualitative approach to analyse how “The Truman Show” illustrates these stages through its narrative elements. The findings reveal that each simulacrum stage builds upon the previous, showing a progressive distortion of reality: the first stage depicts idealized representations, the second adds the influence of media, the third introduces a loss of originality, and the fourth is a fully simulated world indistinguishable from the real. The conclusion emphasizes that The Truman Show serves as a powerful commentary on the saturation of media and the erosion of the real in contemporary life. The implications suggest a growing need to critically evaluate the media environments we inhabit, as language and representation increasingly shape our perception of reality.

Kata Kunci:

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi konsep hiperrealitas dalam karya sastra dengan menganalisis film “The Truman Show” yang dirilis pada tahun 1998. Hiperrealitas dapat dipahami sebagai runtuhnya batas antara kenyataan dan simulasi yang tercipta melalui elemen-elemen pembentuk yang disebut simulacra. Dengan menggunakan teori hiperrealitas dari Baudrillard (1981), penelitian ini mengkaji karakteristik hiperrealitas yang

tak terhindarkan sebagaimana tergambar dalam setiap tahapan dari empat tingkat simulacra dalam film tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kesenjangan penelitian dari studi-studi sebelumnya dengan menawarkan perspektif baru mengenai bagaimana bahasa membentuk dan memperkuat hiperrealitas, khususnya melalui unsur-unsur verbal. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif untuk menganalisis bagaimana “The Truman Show” merepresentasikan keempat tahap simulacra melalui elemen naratifnya. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa setiap tahap simulacra membangun distorsi realitas yang semakin kompleks: tahap pertama menampilkan representasi yang diidealikan, tahap kedua menambahkan pengaruh media, tahap ketiga menunjukkan hilangnya orisinalitas, dan tahap keempat mencerminkan dunia simulasi sepenuhnya yang tak dapat dibedakan dari kenyataan. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa “The Truman Show” merupakan kritik tajam terhadap kejemuhan media dan memudarnya realitas dalam kehidupan modern. Implikasi dari temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya mengevaluasi media yang kita hadapi secara kritis karena pemilihan bahasa dan representasi media membentuk cara kita memandang kenyataan.

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, reality is increasingly understood as a social construct—a product shaped by cultural norms, shared experiences, and institutional influences. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain, society is a human product and an objective reality, which in turn produces individuals as social products. This emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between individuals and the realities they inhabit. Similarly, postmodern thought argues that reality is shaped by the social context and communities in which individuals live (Grenz, 1996). The rise of mass media has complicated this idea by blurring the lines between what is real and what is simulated. Baudrillard (1981) discussed this issue with his theory of hyperreality and simulacra. He argued that in environments saturated with media, representations can replace and even exceed reality. Hyperreality occurs when

simulations become hard to tell apart from the real, while simulacra which are copies without originals, form the basis for these illusions.

The shift from traditional media like newspapers and radio to digital platforms such as television, film, and later social media has significantly changed how people see and experience reality. Simulated images and stories often seem more attractive and believable than actual experiences. As a result, people often follow mediated signs, buying lifestyles, products, and identities shaped by ads and media stories rather than their personal needs. In hyperreality, signs create reality instead of reflecting it. As Kellner (2003) argues, media culture helps shape people's views of the world, their identities, and desires, often blurring the boundaries between the real and the representational. Film, as one of the forms of digital media, often mirrors and reinforces these created realities. Although "The Truman Show" (1998) was released before the rise of social media, it critically reflects the era of television dominance and the growing influence of visual media. This movie illustrates this idea by showing Truman Burbank, a man unaware that he lives in a completely controlled, fake setting designed for broadcast. Every part of his life is crafted to seem real, acting as simulacra that influence his perception. Truman's ongoing struggle to escape this world shows how deep and unavoidable hyperreality can be.

Previous studies have examined The Truman Show using Baudrillard's ideas. For instance, Bharathi (2018) aimed to uncover whether the world shown by the media is real or reel, as well as analysing the techniques used in film to bring the hyperreal experience to the audience. However, this study mainly focuses on visual and technical aspects, often neglecting spoken dialogue, character behaviour, and the narrative in building simulacra. To fill this gap, the present study looks at The Truman Show by analysing verbal and narrative elements—specifically, spoken dialogue, character actions, and storyline development—as representations of simulacra. By categorizing these elements according to Baudrillard's four stages of simulacra, this research explores how they help portray the inescapable nature of hyperreality. This analysis provides a linguistic and narrative view of how media creates illusions that ultimately change the viewer's understanding of what is real.

Simulacra

Simulacra (Baudrillard, 1981) are representations that no longer relate to any original reality, essentially copies of copies. They exist as independent ideas that generate their own self-sustaining meanings. Barthes' (1957) statement supports this idea by showing how simulacra create illusions of authenticity and serve as the basic elements of hyperreality. He stated that myths can turn history into nature. He argued that cultural symbols and signs create myths that normalize ideologies and hide historical truths. These simulacra dominate modern society, replacing reality with artificial creations that feel real but are completely made up.

Inescapable Hyperreality

Baudrillard (1981) described hyperreality as a state where the line between the real and the simulated disappears. In hyperreality, simulations do not simply imitate reality but they can replace it entirely. This environment creates a world whereas signs and symbols shape perception. Eco's (1986) concept of "fake that is more real than real" supports Baudrillard's theory. He noted that consumers often receive a fantasy experience that feels not just real but better than reality. This situation is filled by the impact of media, advertising, and consumer culture, which create representations that seem more real than reality itself. Hyperreality becomes unavoidable when people cannot tell the difference between reality and the artificial elements that shape their experiences. Eco pointed out how fake environments imitate reality so well that they are seen as genuine. In this society, people find themselves caught in cycles of illusion, unable to access any true reality.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method to examine how hyperreality is portrayed in The Truman Show (1998) through Baudrillard's (1981) theory of simulacra. As the study focuses on a film rather than human subjects, the population is limited to the movie's narrative elements, including dialogue, character behaviour, and visual scenes. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling selecting scenes and utterances that best represent the characteristics of

simulacra and hyperreality. Data collection was conducted through repeated viewings of the film, with careful note-taking to identify relevant sentences and scenes. The primary research instrument in this study is the researcher who acts as the key tool for interpreting and analysing data based on theoretical frameworks. Data analysis involved categorizing the selected content into Baudrillard's stages of simulacra and examining how each contributes to the representation of inescapable hyperreality. The detailed method is described as follows:

Data Collection Method and Technique

This study used a documentary method as the main approach for data collection, referring to audiovisual materials—in this case, the film *The Truman Show* (1998). Following Creswell (2023), who identifies observation, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials as key data sources, this study focused on analysing the film as a document to understand how hyperreality is constructed. The data collection involved watching the film multiple times to identify relevant dialogues, character behaviours, and visual patterns that reflect Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality. A note-taking technique was applied to record specific scenes and sentences that align with the four stages of simulacra and the characteristics of inescapable hyperreality. Selected screenshots and accompanying dialogue were used to enhance the clarity and depth of the analysis.

Data Analysis Method and Technique

The study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyse the data. This involved classifying selected sentences into Baudrillard's (1981) four stages of simulacra:

1. First order, where signs directly reflect reality;
2. Second order, where signs distort but still relate to reality;
3. Third order, where signs mask the absence of reality; and
4. Fourth order, where signs have no relation to any reality at all.

These stages were then connected to the characteristics of inescapable hyperreality, including the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, the dominance of media in shaping perception, the absence of an original referent, and

the construction of idealized environments. The analysis focused on identifying simulacra in the film—such as scripted behaviours or artificial expressions—and interpreting how they shape Truman's perception of reality. A textual analysis was conducted to explore the deeper meaning of these elements and how they reflect Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality.

Data Presentation Method

To present the results, this study used an informal method of data presentation, as outlined by Sudaryanto (1993), which emphasizes verbal explanation over the use of formal symbols. The findings were conveyed through descriptive narratives that explain how the selected scenes and sentences represent different types of simulacra and contribute to the creation of inescapable hyperreality. This approach allows for a more accessible interpretation of the theoretical concepts applied to the film.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In *The Truman Show*, the theme of hyperreality is established through various constructed elements that make the artificial world of Seahaven appear genuine. Seahaven itself is designed to replicate reality so convincingly that Truman remains unaware of its fabricated nature. These constructions, referred to as simulacra, play a crucial role in maintaining the illusion. The hyperreality in the film can be identified through several characteristics, such as the blurred line between reality and simulation, the dominance of media, the disappearance of an original reality, and the presence of idealized settings. As Truman grows suspicious and attempts to escape, each of his efforts is systematically countered through these simulacra. These interventions reinforce his belief in the false reality and reflect the film's depiction of hyperreality as something that is nearly impossible to break free from. This section explores how each characteristic of inescapable hyperreality is expressed through different orders of simulacra presented in the film.

First Order of Simulacra

Baudrillard (1981) defines the first order of simulacra as a faithful representation of a deep reality—an image that reflects an original in a positive light. At this level, simulation still maintains a connection to reality, even if it simplifies or symbolically represents it. The first order in the film reflects hyperreality's characteristics of blurring boundary and idealized reality.

Data 1

“...there's nothing fake about Truman himself.”

This quote from Christof's interview highlights how Truman's emotions and authenticity are used to conceal the artificiality of his surroundings. By presenting Truman as real, Christof attempts to mask the simulation which contributes to the blurring of boundaries between reality and illusion. Thus, the characteristic that is pictured in this scene is blurring boundaries.

Data 2

“I thought we were going to try for a baby”

In this scene, Meryl manipulates Truman emotionally by bringing up a conventional expectation of married life, which is having children. Her reference to real-world responsibilities strengthens Truman's perception of the simulation as real. It simultaneously illustrates an idealized version of reality that encourages Truman to conform to societal expectations, reinforcing the illusion. Thus, the characteristic that is pictured in this scene is idealized reality.

Second Order of Simulacra

As Baudrillard (1981) explains, the second order distorts reality, where signs begin to mask and manipulate rather than reflect the truth. Representations become exaggerated and are used for specific purposes. In The Truman Show, this level illustrates how Seahaven manipulates reality to keep Truman unaware and compliant. This order embodies hyperreality through blurring boundaries, media influence, and idealized reality.

Data 3

“Never found a place like this, though.”

Marlon's attempt to comfort Truman uses emotional manipulation to reinforce the simulation's authenticity. His performance of friendship masks the constructed nature of their environment, causing Truman to accept the illusion as real and discouraging his desire to leave. Thus, the characteristic that is pictured in this scene is blurring boundaries.

Data 4

“A hymn of praise to small town life where we learn that you don't have to leave home to discover what the world's all about.”

The second order of simulacra also reflects the characteristic of media influence. This scripted broadcast reinforces the belief that Seahaven is a perfect, self-sufficient world. By praising the town and downplaying the need to explore, the media subtly shapes Truman's worldview, influencing his behaviour and thoughts. It illustrates how media constructs and disseminates idealized messages to sustain belief in the illusion.

Data 5

“Shhh... In just a moment, we'll see a lady on a red bike, a man with flowers, and a Volkswagen beetle with a dented fender.”

The second order of simulacra also represents the characteristic of idealized reality. This dialogue was spoken when Meryl suddenly appears while Truman is closely observing his surroundings. The predictability Truman observes in his environment shows the orchestration behind the scenes. The repeated choreography of people and events is a stylized portrayal of everyday life, idealized to maintain order and comfort. This false sense of stability masks the constructed nature of Seahaven and further immerses Truman in the simulation.

Third Order of Simulacra

According to Baudrillard (1981), the third order of simulacra occurs when signs no longer pretend to represent a reality but instead claim to stand in for reality itself. At the third stage, the simulation no longer even pretends to represent reality. Instead, it replaces reality entirely. The distinction between what is real and what is not collapses, and the simulated world becomes the only known reality. The third

order of simulacra represents the characteristics of inescapable hyperreality, which are blurring boundaries, media influence, and the absence of originality.

Data 6

“An aircraft in trouble began shedding parts as it flew over Seahaven just a few moments ago.”

From this radio announcement, the third order of simulacra appears to blur the boundaries between reality and simulation. The staged radio announcement following a falling stage light is crafted to maintain the illusion that Seahaven is part of the real world. This manipulation attempts to pacify Truman's suspicions by fabricating a believable explanation, making it harder for him to discern reality from simulation.

Data 7

“Here's a news flash just in...”

The third order of simulacra shows the media influence in constructing inescapable hyperreality. The media in this scene fabricates reality through a scripted broadcast. It does not mirror an actual event but creates a version of reality that suits the simulation's narrative. This highlights how media can construct truths, reinforcing Truman's entrapment in a hyperreal world.

Data 8

“Blocked at every turn.”

The third order of simulacra shows the absence of originality in constructing inescapable hyperreality. It is illustrated during the scene where Truman attempts to escape Seahaven with Meryl. Truman's attempt to flee is obstructed by a staged traffic jam that is created by the show's crew. The speed and precision of this response captures the artificiality of Seahaven while attempting to appear authentic. This moment illustrates the absence of originality, where events are choreographed to imitate real-world unpredictability.

Fourth Order of Simulacra

According to Baudrillard (1981, p. 6), the fourth order of simulacra appears when the simulation has no relation to any reality, so it is its own pure simulacrum.

occurs when simulation detaches entirely from any original reference. It becomes its own self-contained reality, where the distinction between fiction and truth dissolves. The fourth order of simulacra represents the characteristics of inescapable hyperreality, which are blurring boundaries, media influence, absence of originality and idealized reality.

Data 9

“We had to shut 'er down.”

From Data 9, a staged Nuclear Power Plant Emergency blocks Truman's way to get out of Seahaven by blurring the boundary between reality and simulation. The nuclear power plant emergency is a fabricated scenario staged with convincing detail. Complete with actors, warning signs, and barriers, the scene forces Truman to respond as if it were genuine, fully blurring reality and simulation. This illustrates how the fourth order of simulacra fully replaces the real that traps Truman in a hyperreality where differentiating between the reality and simulation is almost impossible.

Data 10

“Somewhere in the vicinity of five thousand.”

The fourth order of simulacra in an interview with Christof represents the characteristic of media influence in inescapable hyperreality. This statement from Christof's mention of the number of hidden cameras reflects how Truman's world is completely designed and monitored. The media no longer records Truman's reality, but rather manufactures it. Every moment of his life is manipulated and broadcast, eliminating any connection to an original or autonomous reality. It captures the characteristic of media influence since the cameras don't just observe but also construct the inescapable hyperreality for Truman.

Data 11

“Why don't you let me fix you some of this new Mococoa drink.”

The fourth order of simulacra in Meryl's monologue represents the absence of originality. In this moment, Meryl abruptly interrupts Truman's breakdown with a commercial line promoting a product as though she were in the middle of a live advertisement. This sudden change captures how deeply commercialism is

embedded in Seahaven's structure. It reveals how human relationships in Truman's world have been commodified and programmed to function within the consumerism. The absence of originality here is not only seen in the dialogue but in the collapse of authentic emotional response.

Data 12

“But in my world, you have nothing to fear.”

The fourth order of simulacra also represents the characteristic of an idealized reality. This line is spoken during a moment when Truman finally confronts Christof who tries to picture Seahaven as a place of safety and comfort. Christof offers emotional reassurance that conceals his manipulative control. His statement reflects the construction of an idealized reality which is the one that promises peace, stability, and protection. This statement exemplifies how hyperreality seduces its subjects into accepting the illusion as a preferable reality, masking domination through a carefully constructed sense of security.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how The Truman Show reveals the characteristics of inescapable hyperreality through Baudrillard's four stages of simulacra. The analysis shows that the film progresses from the first order of simulacra where signs reflect basic reality to the fourth order, where signs refer only to other signs and reality no longer exists. Truman's daily routines initially seem authentic (first order), but they gradually distort reality (second order), disguise its absence (third order), and ultimately present a fully constructed world without any original (fourth order). These stages illustrate a media-controlled environment where boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred, perception is shaped by scripted behaviour and emotional manipulation, and authenticity is lost. Each attempt by Truman to discover the truth is met with media-generated signs that maintain the illusion. The study highlights how language, behaviour, and representation play crucial roles in producing hyperreality not only through visuals, but also through dialogue and interaction.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on hyperreality by showing how Baudrillard's simulacra theory can be applied in film analysis to uncover the mechanisms of media manipulation and the erosion of the real. It underscores the importance of critically evaluating the media-saturated environments we inhabit, as our perceptions are increasingly shaped by constructed signs and narratives. Future research could extend this framework to other films or explore how simulacra shape everyday life in an era dominated by social media and algorithm-driven content. In other words, *The Truman Show* is not merely a fictional story, but a compelling reflection of our own entrapment in mediated realities which urges us to question the authenticity of what we see, hear, and believe in the digital age.

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