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Hyperreality: In Contrast to Reality and its Postmodern Characteristics

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Abstract:

Hyperreality deals with reality in complete contrast and opposite to it. It is an important feature of postmodern theory. This article deals with the basic concept of hyperreality and its certain features. Baudillard's concept of hyperreality comes mainly under discussion. This serves to get a better understanding of the main features of hyperreality in contrast to reality. It highlights the basic concept of hyperreality that reality is missing from the present world. Instead of it simulation has taken place. Different stages of hyperreality come under discussion in this article. This helps to view how hyperreality strengthens its hold on the individuals in society.

Keywords: Hyperreality, reality, codes, simulation, simulacra.

Hyperreality is an important aspect of postmodernism. It deals with the reality in different aspects. According to many postmodern theorists reality has disappeared. We are not aware of this fact unfortunately as we believe that whatever we receive through our senses is nothing but truth. It results in hindrance of the natural growth of a personality, and replaces at its wake fake goals and fake reality.

Postmodern theory deals with hyperreality. It breaks with the prominent tasks and assumptions, which guide modern theories of society, history, politics, and individual. On the other hand postmodern theorists embrace a variety of new principles. Postmodernism is a radical assault on tradition, which is nourished by, "bureaucratic, technocratic, and organizational imperatives of the capitalist economy and democratic policy" (Best and Kellner 13). It tends to claim that all solutions are nothing but mere human constructs, as Hutcheon says in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, "All repairs are both comforting and illusory" (8).

Brooker remarks in *Modernism/Postmodernism*, "Postmodern communication technologies, principally television, are said to flood the world with self-generating, self-mirroring images" (151). This 'self-mirroring' and 'self-generating' hyperreal phenomena directly results in fragmented and diminished souls. In postmodern theory notions like intertextuality, difference, deferral, metaphysics of presence, dissensus etc. come under discussion. Terms like simulacra and simulation, Baudrillard made consistent use of it.

Jean Baudrillard a famous sociologist and philosopher, made this point prominent that so called modern slogans of reality and individual freedom are nothing but simulation of reality. Reality did not exist as such; it was all a complicated form of simulation. This nihilistic theory of reality is a combination of Marx's principles, based on economy and consumption, and Saussure's explanation of semiology.

Baudrillard in *Simulations* brought to light the main difference between simulation and dissimulation to explain the main aspect of it. Dissimulation veils the presence of a thing, but on contrary simulation claims to have what actually is not out there. He further moves on to explain that feigning and simulating are completely two different things. Feigning illness means just to create a make believe environment. Whereas simulating illness means to actually produce the symptoms. In this way there remains a difference between reality and falsehood as one knows what is real and what is unreal. But in simulation this very difference between reality and falsehood is threatened. The outcome of such a situation is further more alarming as the illness simulated with symptoms are not possible to recover objectively. No medicine and psychological aid is possible in such a condition.

Civilization meant in pre-postmodern era a hindrance in the way of natural and abrupt human instincts. This very hindrance was imposed upon man by society that allowed human beings certain benefits if they submitted their will to the commands and demands of society. Freud specifically in this respect worked a lot to depict the inner condition of man's mind. In *Postmodernity and its Discontents* "Within the framework of a civilization that chose to limit freedom in the name of security, more order meant more discontent" (Bauman 2).

Bauman in *Postmodernity and its Discontents* further elaborated the difference between modern and postmodern frustrations in the following lines. "Compulsion and forced renunciation has turned from an irritating necessity into an unwarranted assault launched against individual freedom" (2).

Baudrillard tried to tell in his theory that modern society has lost its originality. Everything is fake and based on unreal and artificial scenario. Nothing is original, be it norms, values, relations, social and psychological behavior and anything that is linked with the human actions and desires. He proclaimed that this artificial reality, that he called simulation, got such a strong hold that old meanings and explanations had vanished. Instead new meanings have emerged. For him sign, that was divided into signifier and signified, no longer held its duality. Signifiers were not in relation with the signifiers any longer. This meant the absence of reality with presence of a mixed and indivisible signifier that had no signified.

The first glance at the theory of Baudrillard indicates that it is another vantage point of Jaques Derrida's deconstruction. Derrida's signifier comprised of vast meanings. It has multiple meanings. As a result to know them is entirely impossible. But in Baudrillard's theory the main issue is that signifier holds no meaning whatsoever. This emptiness creates hollowness. That bewilders the vision. In this way in comparison with Derrida's deconstruction, where signifier became dubious due to it multiple reference, quite contrary to that Baudrillard's signifier is void of meaning or any reference. This emptiness and hollowness becomes the main issue and it

brings with it the problems in personality development in any given society. As media and its role pervades the whole world at present.

Mediation of images plays a vital role according to Baudrillard in making or building a perception of a thing, personality, or a society as a whole. As Baudrillard claims that meanings are without any reference and reality does not exist as genuine. All that is told by media is real in this concern. Media is responsible for making or unmaking of an image. This causes direct impact on individual perceptions. Even if we claim to say that we are not entangled in this mediation of meaning, it would be a blurred perception altogether. We are all, whether we accept it or not directly or indirectly affected. This rules our daily routine life's perceptions unknowingly. We think that we hold our own opinion, but in fact reality is told to us by other means. Reality is nothing but a fabricated tool, to channelize the priorities of individuals. The crux of the matter is that we think that we are free in our perception or identification of reality. Tiffin and Terashima state in *Hyperreality*, "It is nothing more than the technological capability to intermix virtual reality (VR) with physical reality (PR) and artificial intelligence (AI) with human intelligence (HI) in a way that appears seamless and allows interaction" (4).

But in reality we are all bound. In this respect even if we try to come out of it, it becomes almost impossible, or seems impossible. In this regard here it seems somewhat strange that how mediation rules our perception? For example a person has two options to earn his or her livelihood. Both options carry equal opportunities of earning and prosperity. But the person will go for the one that is more likeable by the society and the people around him or her. In this regard personal liking directly get blurred. He or she has to take the decision according to the societal inclination. And this inclination is the direct outcome of mediation. It is nothing but constant mediation that gives society a meaning. In this all situation one thing that is very much noticeable, that is that these meanings and perceptions directly influence the subjectivity of individuals. We are unknowingly surrounded in the web of mediated meanings. This fact further complicates the visions and brings with it the horrible personality issues on individual levels. Meaninglessness becomes the direct outcome of such prevailing conditions. This very meaninglessness makes us take decisions that are fatal not just for the individuals but for the society as a whole. Baudrillard explains this in such a manner that this meaninglessness does not become visible at any stage, and it keeps on building and enhancing a perception to the level of absolute simulacra. It becomes sort of a puzzle for the individuals to solve.

According to Baudrillard consumption has become a sign of new values and morals in society. Unlike the old concepts of good and bad, consumption and denunciation has taken its place. It is basically the consuming power of the customer that decides his destiny. Baudrillard shows with full force that how technology administrators engender irrelevant and least profitable desires among the individuals. This has resulted directly in replacement of a new hegemonic society replacing the old differences in class system. Here the main focus is not on the utility of a product or a machine or an object. Rather the things and object are no more required on need based policy. Their need and consumption is not necessity based. So the things and objects are only society or desire based things. These desires are again inculcated among the individuals, via media, people, or literature. Baudrillard says in *The Mirror of Production*, "Marxism no longer furnishes in the long run a real alternative to capitalism. Assuming the generic schema of production and needs involves an incredible simplification of social exchange by the law of

value” (29). He further carries on to say in *The Mirror of Production*, “The analysis of all primitive or archaic organizations contradicts it, as does the feudal symbolic order ...’ since all perspectives opened up by the contradictions of the mode of production drive us hopelessly into political economy” (Baudrillard 29)

The hyperreality takes its strong hold gradually. It becomes strong not at its very outset. There are approximately four stages that are described in detail by Baudrillard. At first stage only the reflection of reality appears. There is still a sort of link between the reference and the referent. The image and the object are not separate. But a kind of appearance is there. There is still a relation between the object and the sign. This relevance and outward appearance is not strong enough to blur the surroundings. The second step of hyperreality starts masking and the hiding the reality. This stage begins to cloud the image. The relevance between the reference and the referent begins to dwindle. Here the connection and agreement of the object with its meanings starts to haze. At third stage the absolute reality is completely denied its presence. Only the sign the symbol holds the strong position of appearance. Any sort of connection is completely lost. As a result it has no contact with reality. At the final stage the symbol, the sign and code become so strong that everything at the background disappears completely. Now it is almost impossible to come out of the hyperreal atmosphere. The snare of the symbol is so strong that no escape is possible. The person ensnared in it does not even know that he or she is a prisoner or prey of this sign domination. The wall behind this sign is empty. There is actually no ground reality for any such sign. It is only a sheer meaninglessness for Baudrillard explains this in *Simulation and Simulacra*,

The transition from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing marks a decisive turning point. The first reflects a theology of truth and secrecy (to which the notion of ideology still belongs). The second inaugurates the era of simulacra and of simulation, in which there is no longer a God to recognize his own, no longer a Last Judgment to separate the false from the true, the real from its artificial resurrection, as everything is already dead and resurrected in advance. (6)

In Baudrillard’s theoretical concept the idea of code is very important. His idea of code tells that the plight of us as consumers is that we are directed by a remote social ideology. This code is established and actually meant to manipulate, neutralize and incorporate the social control. Its hold is decisive in social role and it actually serves to establish and serve the ideological norms. It basically works independently and it is the third stage of simulacra. The vague sign is the medium of code. Differences and margins are drawn with the help of the code. “The code simulates choice, difference and liberation, pacifying the deep divisions in consumer society by allowing the privileged term of binary oppositions to switch tactically or ‘flout’, for example by simulating equality between terms ..., so containing critical opposition” (Smith 35). He continues to define code, “The code is ‘indifferent’ and ‘aleatory’; it controls through tolerance, solicitation and incorporation” (Smith 35).

Conclusion

The work of Baudrillard consistently brings under discussion is reality, that is missing or suffering the most at the present scenario. This idea seems somewhat awkward that the reality comes under attack in the work of Baudrillard since it is considered something concrete and

exempt from any doubt. But for Baudrillard the real is a construct. It is something already given to assert the ideological norms. For example sign according to Saussure comprised of signifier, signified, and referent. Referent stands for something that is tangible, and outside the concept, something that we can observe and touch. Science provided an answer that anything that comes under observation is real. But the Baudrillardian concept takes us again back to the old mistrusting condition of reality. Here the sign is trained due to the advertisement of the media. It represents a non-reality. It creates a hyperreality. Hyperreality brings three concepts of Baudrillard under its theme. The catastrophe of sign is the third stage that Baudrillard presented, occupies the beginning of hyperreality. Here the original absorbs the sign. At the second stage the boundaries suffer of the old age. Hyperreal indicates the movement towards more than real image. As a result hyperreal does not represent reality at all. This is the very perspective of Baudrillard. Disillusionment is the only outcome of such hyperreal image. At the third stage a new sort of culture appears. In such a culture the difference between the real and the fake almost vanishes. Thus it completely engulfs not just the objective but also the subjective world of the individuals. Leaving no room for them but to face it with its hollow signs.

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