



12

**A BRIEF STUDY ON JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S USE OF POSTMODERNISM AS A
CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE ERA OF MEDIA REPRODUCTION**

Dr. Bharat Arvind Tupere

Head & Assistant Professor

Department of English

S. R. M. College, Kudal, Dist. Sindhudurg
MS., India

Abstract:

History is a continuous process, divided into different periods ranging from ancient to postmodern. The postmodern period is defined by technology, science, the internet, and networks, leading to a shrinking globe and a variety of concerns and problems. In the beginning of media reproduction, Jean Baudrillard proposed two crucial phrases or concepts: simulacra and hyper-reality, which have become his weapons against technology. Simulacra is a replica without an original, whereas hyperreality is a concept in which imitations or fakes gain precedence over and supersede the genuine. For Baudrillard, the simulacrum is essentially the copy of a copy, that is to say, the copy of something that is not itself an original, and is hence an utterly degraded form(Oxford Dictionary). 'Hyper-reality' is described by Baudrillard as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"; hyper-reality is a representation, a symbol that lacks an original referent. He established his critique on technology as 'The era of reproduction and simulation has caused opposites to become interchangeable, leading to a collapse in social fabric. Baudrillard's writing has been controversial, particularly when he claimed the 1991 Gulf War did not take place and in 2001 referred to the 'spirit of terrorism'. He was accused of denying material facts and justifying terrorism, but this is no longer the point.' According to Oxford Learners dictionary 'postmodernism is a style and movement in art, architecture, literature, etc. in the late 20th century that reacted against modern styles, for example by mixing features from traditional and modern styles.' This research paper brings a brief study of Baudrillard argued that if the virtual and symbolic, along with an accompanying digital technoculture, are dominant, and then the world would become the height of predictability. This would lead to crises of theory and predictive science, as a world of pure appearances would be easy to manage. However, such a media world does not exist, even in imagination.

Keywords: *Simulacra, Hyper-reality, Postmodernism, Baudrillard, etc.*

Historians split humanity's history into epochs. If we accept historians' partition of our history, we are living in a postmodern society dominated by science, technology, and information technology. It has both positive and negative consequences on human existence. The migration of people from villages to cities is the most significant element of this epoch. According to Oxford Learners dictionary 'postmodernism is a style and movement in art, architecture, literature, etc. in the late 20th century that reacted against modern styles, for example by mixing features from traditional and modern styles.'

Jean Baudrillard was a postmodern critic who began his career by asking questions to both Marxism and Structuralism. Then, he started arguing for the dominance in modern capitalist societies of consumption over production and of the signifier over the signified. For him, capitalist societies of consumption are signifier, whereas production is signified. During the 1970s and 1980s, he focused on



reworking postmodernism, using it as a criticism of technology in the era of media reproduction. He created two key concepts to describe today's world: simulacra and hyper-reality. For him, simulacra refer to a copy that lacks an original, and hyper-reality refers to the idea that imitations or fakes take precedence over and displace the genuine. Simulacra are things that replace their depiction. He defines it as, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without original or reality: a hyperreal.... It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard, 2009).

For Baudrillard, the simulacrum is essentially the copy of a copy, that is to say, the copy of something that is not itself an original, and is hence an utterly degraded form (Oxford Dictionary). 'Hyper-reality' is described by Baudrillard as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"; hyper-reality is a representation, a symbol that lacks an original referent. He established his critique on technology as "The era of reproduction and simulation has caused opposites to become interchangeable, leading to a collapse in social fabric. Baudrillard's writing has been controversial; particularly when he claimed the 1991 Gulf War did not take place and in 2001 referred to the 'spirit of terrorism'. He was accused of denying material facts and justifying terrorism, but this is no longer the point" (Lechte, 2008).

Fredric Jameson provides a similar definition in his book- Postmodernism, or, the *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), 'The simulacrum's peculiar function lies in what Sartre would have called the derealization of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality.'

His most impactful book – *Simulacra et Simulation* (1981) explores this depthless world of unreflecting images. The book also clearly points out that how Baudrillard made use of postmodernism to critique on media reproduction. The code has elevated simulation to new levels of relevance in social life, allowing reality to be bypassed and generating the possibility of reversibility, where all finalities vanish and nothing exists outside the system. This is most evident in simulation and simulacra. When referring to the system of signs, Baudrillard used the term 'code'. While this phrase may have existed as a synonym for system or language (Saussure's langue), in his most significant book of the mid-1970s, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the concept of 'code' takes on a relevance that is difficult to overstate. Unlike Eco, Baudrillard does not spend much time articulating the nature and nuances of the concept of code. Indeed, we might observe in passing that he seldom explains his major concepts in anything resembling a comprehensive manner, with the sense coming mostly from context and the notion that Baudrillard takes advancements in semiotics and other areas as granted. However, the definition of 'code' in this context is pretty straightforward: the code is the binary code of computer technology; it is the DNA code in biology, or the digital code in television and sound recording, as it is the code in information technology.

We believe on whatever we watch on Media-print and electronic media. The real defined in terms of the media in which it moves. Media, for him, is the image creating postmodern communication technologies. He places specific focus on television, which promotes the spread of self-generating images over the postmodern surface. In his own words, that experience is now derivative and literally shallow everywhere, and has gained its final 'utopian' from the immediate wealth and banality of the cultureless civilization of the United States, particularly in Disneyland (Selden, 2009).

He went on to investigate postmodernism as a critic of contemporary technology in media reproduction in his own writings from the late 1980s and early 1990s, including *America, Fatal Strategies*, and *The Illusion of the End*. His war on media replication is intensifying as a result of all of his work. Throughout his writing, he expresses postmodernism as the absence of meaning, inertia, fatigue, and ends, whether of history or subjectivity. Several other modern works, most notably



Francis Fukuyama's comments on the ramifications of communism's demise, bear similarly on the issue of the end of history. For everything is on show, flowing ceaselessly and openly over the surface where there is no control, no stabilising reference, and no possibility of alteration. Perhaps his most provocative statement along these lines was that the gulf war of 1991 was not real but a television war, a media event or spectacle. War is unreal to him; it appears to be war without the signs of war. He perceived in this incident the evolution of a deterrence logic from a hot to a cold war and therefore to battling over the corpse of war. Conflict cannot escape the web of postmodern stimulation because "TV is our strategic location, a big simulator," which makes conflict a virtual reality (Selden, 2009).

In order to offer a criticism of media reproduction, he addressed problems such as 9/11 and its depiction in print and electronic media. Baudrillard has lately remarked on the events of 9/11, echoing his former remarks on the Gulf War. In his article *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2003), he sees the World Trade Centre assault as validating the virtual-mediated aspect of reality and weakening other established binary distinctions. America and the West, according to Baudrillard, are complicit in the attacks because the hijackers plotted from within the US, like a virus within its host, and because we all harbour a dream, according to Baudrillard, of striking at the global power embodied in other states' hegemony and its symbolic expression in an edifice like the World Trade Centre. Furthermore, the event has confounded normal norms of military engagement because the US has no response to suicide assaults and has muddled any official, obvious designation of the adversary. As a result, we must reconsider traditional classifications and distinctions. 'Terrorism is morally repugnant,' argues Baudrillard. 'The World Trade Centre event, that symbolic challenge, is immoral, and it is a response to an unethical globalization. So let us be immoral, and if we want to have any knowledge of all of this, let us go beyond good and evil. The widespread belief that the 9/11 attack was a calculated, media-savvy act of symbol war has given renewed currency to Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary cultural trends, though many would argue that this and other terrorist acts are matters of pure spectacle. His remark that the fall of the World Trade Centre buildings, while unthinkable, was not enough to make it a genuine event—along with Karlheinz Stockhausen's iconic scream that the assault was 'the greatest piece of art there has ever been!'—were received with dismay (Selden, 2009).

The Spirit of Terrorism is unique among Baudrillard's later works in that it refers to a specific incident. More often than not, he has neglected the intricacies of social, cultural, or artistic forms while speaking about them in a style that combines telling aperçus with scary exaggeration. In this world of simulation, spectacle, and unreality, art can only aspire to replicate and reassemble recycled shards of a lost past. The implicit Baudrillard aesthetic mode is therefore that of pastiche, a feature of postmodern society. In literature, there is a close correlation with and even anticipation of Baudrillard's thought in the early 1960 novel, *Crash*, by the science fiction novelist J. G. Ballard, on which Baudrillard wrote an essay that is the *simulacra and simulation* in 1994.

More recently, the implications of hyper-reality and the simulacra have been explored in the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and others—for Jameson, 'the supreme literary expression' of postmodernism or late capitalism—as well as a generation of feature films, ranging from *Blade Runner* to the *Terminator* and *Matrix* films. In such cases, human characters are tasked with redefining the 'human' in new relationships with intrusive postmodern technology, in parallel but not necessarily in total agreement with Baudrillard's thesis that humanity can only succumb to a world of images and simulations. In regard to the figure of the cyborg, this issue is taken up most interestingly, and not necessarily pessimistically, in both philosophy and fiction. Indeed, as Best and Kellner have indicated, reading Baudrillard's work as speculative fiction may be the best way to approach it. His personal views along these lines give a sad extreme against which to assess various current literary and other theories about the millennium's end and the fate of human action.



To conclude, Jean Baudrillard was a postmodern critic who coined the terms simulacra and hyper-reality to describe the world of today. Hyper-reality is the idea that imitations or fakes take precedence over and supplant the genuine, and simulacra are copies that lack an original. Writings by Baudrillard have drawn criticism, especially after he asserted that the Gulf War of 1991 never happened and mentioned the "spirit of terrorism" in 2001. In, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard delves into the concept of hyper-reality, where the line between reality and simulation becomes blurred. He argues that in a world saturated with media images, we lose touch with the real and become immersed in a world of simulacra. Baudrillard critiques the media's reproduction of images, arguing that they are no longer representations of reality but rather simulations that have replaced it. He also examines the idea of 'code', which he sees as a fundamental part of our technological society. The digital code used in television and sound recording, the binary code used in computer technology, and the code found in information technology all contribute to this flat world of unreflecting images. Baudrillard's work has had a profound impact on postmodern theory and continues to be relevant today as we grapple with issues related to technology, media, and representation.

References

- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Precession of Simulacra*. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. Harlow: Pearson, 2009. Print.
- Cambridge Advanced Learner Dictionary. London: Cambridge University Press. 2015. Print.
- *Compact Oxford Dictionary: Thesaurus and Word Power Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.
- <https://literariness.org/2018/02/26/key-theories-of-jean-baudrillard/> Web.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of the late Capitalism*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991. Print.
- Lechte, John. *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers From Structuralism To Post-Humanism*, Second Edition, Routledge 2008. Print.
- Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Selden, Raman, *Poststructuralist theories, A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theories*, New Delhi: Pearson Education and Dorling Kindersley, 2009. Print.
- www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100507502. Web.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

To Cite the Article: Tupere, Bharat, "A Brief Study on Jean Baudrillard's Use of Postmodernism as a Critique of Technology in the Era of Media Reproduction". Literary Cognizance, IV - 2 (September, 2023): 68-71. Web.