

An Analytical Study of Reproduction of Reality in Cinema

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Abstract

The representation system was developed based on Plato's words in the seventh chapter of the Republic, according to which simulacra are copies of reality. The representation of reality or the nature of the image-reality relationship, has always been an essential topic of study in the philosophy of art. The mechanical recording and reproduction of the world by the camera in the modern era is the turning point in the representation of reality, ultimately leading to the collapse of the representation system. This study investigates the image-reality relationship using a descriptive-analytical approach to identify the relationship of cinematic images with reality. It first discusses the Realism in Film Theory centered on Andre Bazin and then Jean Baudrillard's thoughts on Hyperreality in postmodernism. The study shows that Realism in Film Theory has also addressed the problem of the representation of reality in cinema within the framework of the traditional concept of representation and based on the principle of referring images to external reality. However, by questioning the idea of representation in postmodernism and analyzing the process of separating reality from its visual signs, Baudrillard offers a new reading of the image-reality relationship.

Keywords: Cinema, Reproduction, postmodernism, Hyperreality, Baudrillard

Introduction

The mechanical recording and reproduction

Reproduction means the mechanical production of multiple identical copies. It refers to the mass production of images and sounds through analog and digital cameras as well as other electronic recording and playback devices. Representation refers to the depiction and description of existence and all its entities, including humans, objects, and even abstract concepts, in different ways, such as literature, drama, painting, photography, cinema, and other media. Plato first used this concept in the sense that it was close to imitation. This philosopher considered representation based on imitation. However, according to Arthur Danto, representation is a common feature of all arts, and all works of art are a type of representation.

The main problem was the production and reproduction of reality in the different reproducible arts, i.e., cinema and photography. In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) asserted that a different nature opens itself to the camera (photography) and then opens to the naked eye (Wells, 2015: 428). Because the images produced by a camera have, both technically and aesthetically, a unique relationship with the real world. The indexical effect and iconic form gave photographs and films an aura of authenticity. Thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) also argued that cinema is the closest to the real world of all the arts, real people on a real farm (Totaro, 2003). Also, theorists of Realism in Film such as Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), and André Bazin (1918-1958), relied on the principle of mechanical reproduction of the world by the camera and the hypothesis of the ontological relationship of the image with reality, considered cinema to be essentially a realist medium. André Bazin even went beyond this, considering this issue to be more than a technical event and a logical result of the natural evolution of the arts. Realists within the framework of this theory were opposed to formalists such as Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) and Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007), who relied on the formalistic approach and factors such as montage and considered the importance of cinema to lie in deviation from reality. The realists adopted a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is based on the philosophical movement of phenomenology, originated by Edmund Husserl. It focuses on consciousness and the process of giving meaning to phenomena in consciousness. Phenomenology is divided into two types: hermeneutic and subjective. The hermeneutic method is used by Martin Heidegger to explain existence and the question of being, while the subjective method is specific to describing consciousness and the processes of perceiving

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things. Trying to maintain the film at the same level as phenomena. Later, Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) described Hyperreality and revealed the groundless reality in a world saturated with simulacra, thereby providing a distinctive perception of the image-reality relationship in the postmodern.

Postmodernism, literally meaning after modernity represents a critique of the limitations of modernism. Postmodernism signals the death of metanarratives, certainty, and mono semantics, in the field of semiotics, it represents the dissolution of fixed and specific relationships between signs and their referents. According to him, In the Hyperreality space, the mental signs of reality (signifiers) have overcome and replaced the physical reality (signified). According to Baudrillard, signs are no longer a reflection of reality as they were in the past, and the Platonic principle that a simulacrum is a false copy of reality is no longer valid. In fact, with this theory, Baudrillard frees signs from the constraint of external reference (Baudrillard, 1994). By analyzing and describing such a process from the development of Realism in Film Theory to Baudrillard's Hyperreality, this study attempts to answer the question, what is the relationship of cinematic images with reality? Providing an answer to this question requires analyzing the effect of mechanical reproduction of the image on the representation of reality in the modern era and the collapse of the representation system with the separation of reality from its visual signs in the post-modern era when the logical order and sequence of the production and reproduction of reality have disappeared and images have surpassed the real.

Literature Review

A historical review of the theory of realism shows that all the prominent figures of realism in cinema, such as Dziga Vertov, Kracauer, and André Bazin, considered this medium to be basically realistic for more or less similar reasons by emphasizing the automatic and mechanical recording of the world. Dziga Vertov was more concerned with theory than with filmmaking. He was a filmmaker who sought to realize pure documentary in cinema by developing the Kino-Eye School. After that, Siegfried Kracauer wrote the book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, in which he analyzed and described cinema's dependence on reality as its primary raw material. He considered cinema to be a kind of redemption of physical reality.

Shortly after him, Andre Bazin wrote a series of essays in *Cahiers du Cinema Magazine* to explain the ontological image-reality relationship. For Bazin and other realists, any distortion and fragmentation of images through montage or the formalistic use of different elements takes cinema away from its realistic mission and nature. They sought to analyze the strong relationship of the image with reality by relying on the Platonic principle. However, Baudrillard offered a new reading of the image-reality relationship by developing concepts such as Hyperreality and simulation. In the books *Simulacra and Simulation* (French: *Simulacra's ET Simulation*) and *Simulations*, published in 1981 and 1983, respectively, he ultimately challenged the representation system. In these books, he changed the paradigm. A paradigm is a dominant framework and pattern of thinking at a given time. This term was first used in this specific way by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

By re-evaluating the concept of representation, he put forward a new theory about the relationship between images produced in the media and external reality. However, it should be noted that despite numerous books and articles dealing separately with realism in cinema and Baudrillard's theories, no research has focused on the opposition and interaction of these two theories.

Methodology

A descriptive-analytical study tries to explore the concept of reality reproduction in cinema as an ideal medium in the postmodern condition by analyzing concepts such as realism, Hyperreality, and simulation. To this aim, it first explains the representation system and explores the image-reality interaction. Then, it examines the different effects of new media from the perspective of cinema on the nature of the image-reality relationship in postmodernism.

Theoretical Framework

Cinema and Reality

When cinema was born, theorists thought that images produced in this medium were the complete representations of reality. It was believed that mechanical images can ultimately reveal and display the reality of the world. Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov is considered one of the pioneers of realism, based on his manifesto our eyes see very little and very badly. Therefore, we always need lenses to see well. We dreamed of the microscope to let us see invisible phenomena, the telescope to know distant worlds, and the cine camera to penetrate more deeply into the visible world (Ahmadi, 2015:269). Based on this logic, Dziga Vertov and his associates tried to record and reproduce reality by making films such as *Man with a Movie Camera*. He describes his cinematic style:... I am Kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I show you the world as only I can see it. Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, then away from objects, I fling myself along their resultant, maneuvering in the chaos of movement, recording movement. My road is toward a fresh perception of the world. Thus, I decipher in a new way the world unknown to you (Barno, 1993).

Therefore, according to one of the first pioneers of realism, cinema can reveal the dark side of reality by recording and reproducing a mechanical image of the world, the true reality that has remained hidden due to its representation by humans and its processing by human perception. To achieve this goal, Dziga Vertov made numerous documentary films, such as *Man with a Movie Camera*, believing that the complete representation of reality is possible only in pure documentary cinema. However, the other pioneers of realism, namely Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin, did not consider the manifestation of reality exclusive to documentary cinema. Kracauer valued reality in fictional films much more. In his opinion, the elimination of the story leads to presenting a superficial visual display of the world. For this reason, he sought to establish a balance between documentary and fiction cinema. To him, the early films of Italian neorealism were the best examples of realistic cinema, which he referred to as the film of the self-found story. Kracauer, whose famous work was entitled *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, considered the film to be the great savior of physical reality because it brought us into direct contact with reality in an age when the world is excessively expressed through verbal forms (Pamerleau, 2009:68). By emphasizing the reflection of physical reality in cinema, he considered the raw material of photography and cinema to be the same. Hence he opposed the formalistic use of montage and other elements in cinema. Bazin also considered the mechanical reproduction of the image by the camera to be of key importance in defining the realistic nature of the emerging media of cinema and photography. To him, all the based on the presence of man, and only photography derives an advantage from his absence (Bazin, 2004).

In his opinion, photography and cinema, unlike all other arts such as painting and literature characterized by the presence of an inanimate intermediary between phenomena and their representation, called the camera, which presents an extremely realistic and impartial image of the material world. Therefore, the starting point of Bazin's realistic approach, like that of Kracauer and Dziga Vertov, is the photographic reproduction of the world in cinema. Thus, according to him, the aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, can present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love. Although the Realism in Film Theory generally based on the mechanical reproduction of reality, André Bazin's theory had a subtle difference from others. As an existentialist thinker, he believed that the existence of cinema precedes its essence. In his view, the mechanical representation of reality is the result of the natural evolution of the arts. Hence any description of cinema written solely based on technical inventions is of little value. Because he considers cinema to be the logical result of the realization of something that has obscurely dominated all the techniques of mechanical reconstruction of reality in the nineteenth century. From photography to

the phonograph. Phonograph is the name of a device invented by Thomas Edison in 1877 to play recorded sound. This device and its subsequent versions became known as the gramophone. There is a tendency towards complete realism in all of them or an attempt to recreate the world in its image. Based on such an analysis, André Bazin attached great importance to cinema as a medium for the reproduction of reality.

In contrast to the formalists who emphasized the role of montage in cinema, he based his realism theory on *mise-en-scène*. In his opinion, montage, as used by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, or Abel Gance, did not show us the event itself; it alluded to it... In this case, the final significance of the film found to reside in the ordering of these elements much more than in their objective content. This was in contrast to Bazin's view that the value of every image lies in what it reveals of reality rather than in what it adds to it (Bazin, 2004). For this reason, Bazin praised the courage of directors such as Orson Welles and William Wyler in using deep resolution and *mise-en-scène*. In his view, the praise given to *Citizen Kane* was not excessive. Entire scenes from the film were filmed in a single shot and with a fixed camera, using deep resolution; and dramatic effects that were previously created through montage. As a result, André Bazin considered reality and everything supporting it to make up the essence of cinema... and any kind of visual distortion with elements such as montage to stand against the ability of film to represent reality. In his opinion, crushing time and space through editing and adopting formalist approaches distorts rather than reveals reality. Therefore, it can be said that André Bazin's perception of reality is similar to the concept of *Aletheia*. *Aletheia* is a Greek term meaning truth and disclosure. Martin Heidegger revived this term and used it in his philosophy to redefine truth in the sense of concealment and revealing of being.

In Martin Heidegger's thought, he also sees reality as a hidden truth revealed by mechanical representation. This way of thinking within the framework of the film theory was in contrast to the view of formalists such as Arnheim and Eisenstein, who considered the cinema medium to be valuable only when it produced a distinct copy of reality. However, the formalists, like the realists, believed that cinema mechanically reconstructs reality. This commonality stemmed from their belief in the ideal principle of the representation system, that images always have a perfect and indissoluble connection with their visual representation. This existential bond had its roots in André Bazin's phenomenological and existentialist approach to reality because in his opinion, to have a regard for reality does not mean that what one does is to pile up appearances. On the contrary, it means that one strips the appearances (Williams, 2017: 72). He considered the Italian neorealist cinema and the films of directors such as Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica to have such conditions, which is why he attached importance to neorealist cinema, because he considered neorealism a description of reality conceived of as whole by a consciousness (*ibid.*: 68). To him, eliminating the ideological use of montage despite its original realistic intention and portraying the life experience of ordinary people using non-actors in real locations were aimed at achieving such a goal. For this reason, in Bazin's mind, the unit of cinematic narrative in *Paisà* is not the shot, an abstract view of a reality which is being analyzed, but the fact. With such arguments, he praised the neorealist movement and films such as *Germany Year Zero*, *The Bicycle Thief*, and *Rome, Open City*, as ideal examples of realistic cinema, because he considered reality rather than shot to be their smallest compositional unit. In other words, for Bazin, these films were no longer representations of reality but the reality itself. In general, Bazin's critics of neorealism indicate an undeniable tendency to ignore the fact that these films were not reconstructions and representations of an actual event, but rather the event itself.

End of the Age of Innocence of Images

With the decline of modernism in the late 1960s, the mechanical reproduction and ontological relationship of photographic images to reality quickly took on a different meaning for postmodern thinkers, i.e., two principles underlying the justification of cinematic realism for Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin. Frederic Jameson, for example, believes that we have entered an era when photography no longer references to create a self-organizing image that has no external counterpart (Jameson, 1991:179). The emergence of digital technology and the obsolescence of analog.

Analog representation is where the image is composed of continuous forms and shapes of light. This representation is based on constant coding, while digital media is based on discrete coding. Film, which has made it possible to manipulate photographs and movies, has also played a significant role in developing

such interpretations. Reference able and moving photographs and images seemed to meet only the needs of an era dominated by science and industrialization because it gradually became clear that photography, contrary to the claim about its reference ability, does not record the real so much as it represents it (Rayan, 1997:214). Thus, the distinctive nature of the semiotic system of photographic representation was challenged, a distinction based on indexical signs and the indexical nature of photographs within the framework of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. The indexical quality of photographs is related more to presence than to realism. It is the only sign of the existence of something that was once in front of the camera (Batchen, 2001: 139). Thus, the era of Innocence of images came to an end very soon in the postmodern era by challenging the indexical quality of photographs, which had been considered an essential and obvious principle in explaining photographic realism and film theory since the early days of the invention of the camera.

In such conditions, Jean Baudrillard offered a new definition of the nature of the relationship of images with reality in the postmodern era. In his lecture, *The Evil Demon of Images*, at the University of Sydney in 1987, he stated, it is the reference principle of images which must be doubted, this strategy using which they always appear to refer to a real world, to real objects, and to reproduce something which is logically and chronologically anterior to themselves. None of this is true..., Images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction (Ward, 2010). To him, the hypothesis that there was first an external reality then depicted makes no sense in the contemporary world. Hence, representation takes precedence in Baudrillard's world, because he considers reality to have little relation with images and other forms of representation. It is the reality that is less important than representation (Ward, 2014:109). Therefore, Baudrillard criticizes the representation system in order to explain the relationship between reality and images. In his view, representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent. Conversely, simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference (Baudrillard, 1994). In other words, Baudrillard's problem is less about the depiction of reality than about the reality of images and how media such as cinema and television interfere with the nature of reality. He believes that simulating an image, masks not only the reflection of a profound reality but also its absence. He offered the following phases to describe such a process. In the first phase, the image reflects a profound reality. In the second phase, the image masks and denatures a profound reality. In the third phase, the image masks the absence of a profound reality. And finally, the image has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

In fact, by formulating such a chain, Baudrillard seeks to reveal the unfounded reality and free the signs from the old forced constraint. In his view, man enters an era when the simulation of reality replaces the representation of reality. In other words, Baudrillard's world is characterized by the lack of a distinction between simulation and reality, because we live in an era when the way an event is depicted is much more important than the event itself. As a result, we predict reality in a way and use it through a mass of signs and images. In a consumer society, the reproduction of reality replaces its production based on the logic of representation. Accordingly, the disruption of the order of things causes them to turn to their own signs by leaving their functional domain and entering the stage of symbolic valuation. In other words, with the disruption of the logical order and sequence of the production and reproduction of reality, the experience of simulations replaces the understanding of the real.

Thus, the concept of authenticity in postmodernism does not or should not have a meaning as it had in the past. Baudrillard uses Borges's fable to explain this philosophical issue. In this fable, the imperial cartographers prepare such an exact map that it covers the space of the entire empire. The map frayed and flaked as the empire declined, and only some pieces of it could be found in the desert. In other words, a man in the pre-modern era could easily distinguish a counterfeit copy from reality. Realm (Baudrillard, 2005). Although the boundary between fake and reality disappeared in the modern era, there was still a reference to reality and an original copy. However, there was no such distinction in the postmodern condition. An essential point in the myth is that re-establishing the empire requires finding the pieces of the map again and putting them together because simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance for Baudrillard. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a

hyperreal. The realm no longer precedes the map, and it does not remain after the map. The map takes precedence over the realm (Baudrillard, 1994). Thus, when simulation takes precedence over the actual reality, the isolated pieces of this map are currently much more important than the material realm of the empire. He inverts the common thought about the logical order of reality and its reproduction. As a result, images not only intersect with the real but also surpass it and predict, absorb, and produce it. Even in the above examples, Baudrillard claims that reality is the manifestation of representation (Ward, 2010). Baudrillard considers Disneyland and America to be perfect examples of such a process because they are unreal and their boundaries into the real world. In his view, America's reality is already produced and consumed in television images, movies, and news reports. However, a critical event happens at the opposite point, where real-life figures such as Marilyn Monroe, Andy Warhol, John F. Kennedy, and John Wayne become symbolic icons of themselves. Landscape as photography, women as the sexual scenario, thoughts as writing, terrorism as fashion and the media, events as television. Things seem only to exist by this strange destiny. You wonder if the world itself is not just here to serve as advertising copy in some other world (Baudrillard, 2010:42).

In other words, everything in America has the potential to quickly become a sign of itself and appear as a simulation, whether it is a soda can, a president, or a golden-haired woman, because, in postmodern society, it is a simulation that determines and produces reality. Therefore, the copy is indistinguishable from the original. Baudrillard's statement that simulations are copies without originals can be seen as an outcome of Benjamin's argument that mass-scale reproduction has reduced the importance of authenticity and credibility. However, the dominance of simulation not only does not eliminate the aura of authenticity but instead leaves nothing but this aura.

To better understand the simulation concept, Glenn Ward begins with the genealogy of the word. In dictionaries, simulation is defined by words such as imitation, fake, unreal, and artificial. Baudrillard retains these meanings, but to such an extent that simulation may not fall in clear opposition to truth. In general, simulation is either the result of reproduction or a presupposed truth. This means that simulation and reality are interconnected. However, this connection has long been broken down in Baudrillard's view. Thus, simulation can no longer be an imitation or distortion of reality or a copy of the original (Ward, 2010). As a result of this disconnection, we have entered a new era which, for Baudrillard, can be explained by the concept of Hyperreality. In this new era, simulacra precede Hyperreality. The function of Hyperreality is defined in the realm of the simulacra. Today, reality itself is a form of Hyperreality. (Baudrillard, 1984:1018). In this hyperspace, the signs of reality, contrary to structuralism semiotics, not only do not have a specific instance, but they themselves reproduce a reality without an origin. In such a condition, the signs of reality (signifiers) have overcome and replaced the reality (signified) itself, or the reference of signs to each other in an endless cycle masks the non-existence of the signified, and hyperspace is thus a space made of signs, not things (Baudrillard, 1994:99). Thus, with the disappearance of the Marxist production logic of production that forms the basis of modern societies and the capitalist system, the logic of consumption and reproduction replaced it. Therefore, Hyperreality is a world whose components are only signified and have no reference to anything outside themselves. In such a world, reality has completely become a game of reality. The representation of such a semiotic game can be seen in postmodern cinema. For example, films such as *Kill Bill* and *Pulp Fiction* by Tarantino, *Lost Highway*, and *Mulholland Drive* by David Lynch, or some of Woody Allen's films such as *Annie Hall* are full of signs and references to other films and other forms of representation. According to Baudrillard, nowadays, films no longer refer to the real world. For example, in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, we are not supposed to get outraged by seeing violent acts. Critical reactions to this film also avoid discussing the representation of racism and sexism in Tarantino's work, because such films seem to put everything inside cinematic quotation marks and we can never accept that this film shows us anything other than its cinematic world. The film does not seek to reveal to us the true nature of things (Ward, 2010: 118). Postmodern cinema tends more to reproduce representations than to represent reality and refer to real events, which is the result of the precedence of representation over realism in the culture of postmodern society. For this reason, to create various scenes such as war and terror express emotional feelings, these films are influenced by other films and images produced in the media rather than based on the real world, because it is real events such as wars, terror, and emotional relationships that are nowadays modeled after films and television images. In the film *The Matrix*, these two worlds are so

intertwined that there is no reality outside the cybernetic. Cybernetics is a discipline that studies the nature of control in humans, machines, and animals. One important branch of this theory studies how humans interact with intelligent machines.

Before embarking on the journey in the Matrix, Neo asks Morpheus, How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world? This question has a clear message. Neo has no way of knowing for sure what is real and what is not (Irwin, 2002). Just as Baudrillard attached great importance to cinema as an ideal form of media in postmodern society, cinema also portrays the key concepts of Baudrillard's thought in films such as the Wachowskis' Matrix trilogy. The story of The Matrix is based on the idea of Hyperreality. This film depicts a digital world in the future that is merely a simulation of the real world. In The Matrix, reality has completely disappeared and the world is entirely surrounded by signs and representations, so the reference copy has no existence in the real world.

Conclusion

With these interpretations, it can be concluded that although the theory of classical realism focused all its attention on the representation of reality, André Bazin, the most crucial figure of this theory, and his other co-thinkers considered realism to be connected to representation because the existential bond between fact and pictures is one of the principles of Bazin's aesthetics. However, Baudrillard offers a new reading of the relationship between reality and images. In Baudrillard's intellectual system, reality has little relation with pictures and other forms of representation, a reality that can be easily manipulated as a result of technical advances and the emergence of digital cameras. Consequently, the real in the contemporary world is not only something that can be reproduced but also something that has consistently been reproduced in advance. He draws our attention to the fact that we live in a world of things along with their representation, whether it is linguistic representation, representation of images, or representation of signs. In other words, according to Baudrillard, this has progressed to the point where representations and simulations have taken over the material world to the point where the boundary between copy and original has become blurred. This is the reason why Baudrillard considers cinema to be the perfect symbol of art and media in consumer society.

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