



Hyperreality as a Theme and Technique in the Film Truman Show

Susee Bharathi T* and Ajit I

School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Chennai Campus, 600127, Tamilnadu, India

*Corresponding author: Susee Bharathi T, Research Associate, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Chennai Campus, 600127, Tamilnadu, India, Tel: 91-416-2243091; E-mail: suseebharathi@outlook.com

Received date: Aug 08, 2017; Accepted date: Jan 31, 2018; Published date: Feb 8, 2018

Copyright: © 2018 Susee Bharathi T, et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Citation: Susee Bharathi T, Ajit I. Hyperreality as a Theme and Technique in the Film Truman Show. Global Media Journal 2018, 16:30.

Abstract

Film is an upgraded version of book in this virtual age. Like in the literature, film started to talk about many issues and portray the real problems faced in the world. In the postmodern world there is no the truth it is just a perspective of different person. In a film, hyperreality is primarily a visual language as it works better with images in order to give a hyperreal experience to the audience. An individual is taken to the hyperreal scenario by images which showcase his/her desires and needs. The study questions whether the world shown by the media is reel or real. It also attempts to find out the techniques used in the film "The Truman show", which bring the hyperreal experience to the audience. The paper finds out the hyperreality used by media in the current age through the film "The Truman show", which portrays the current situation of the real world.

Keywords: Hyperreality; Postmodernism; Reality; Media; Society

Introduction

Human beings have constantly nurtured the desire to live a complete life replete with happiness. What occurs, however, in between is the yearning to split their worlds into two halves: the actual and tangible world which they crave and the "reel" world which has over the years grown into and invaded the households and minds of many. In the process, they fail to differentiate between the two and lose the knowledge and ability to recognize both worlds. This leads to the state of hyperreality which can be defined as below. Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. Hyperreality is primarily about the visual language. For example, advertising. It depends on surface appearance and tones down the complexity of emotions or human behavior. We can say that hyperreality relies on a form than content [1]. Hyperreality works better with images because it immediately

brings out a response. Images can directly talk to our desires and needs and easily take us into the hyperreal.

Literature is the mirror of life which has always tried to explore and discover truth from the societies we all live in. Writers and authors have constantly endeavored via their knowledge and research of subjects to convey the truth to the world through literature. Likewise, a film is a major tool to express the thoughts and ideas of a society as seen through the eyes of the director. A film is the upgraded version of books in this world. A film can also be termed as a fantasy world, because it creates unreal characters and stories in a visual image. The power films have to influence modern day societies is awesome and is therefore the most important media in this postmodern world. The 20th century is totally different from other ages and eras that our world has experienced. After the end of the Second World War, there was chaos everywhere. Societies have to be rebuilt after the ravages of this ruinous conflict that has affected so many nations and claimed the lives of millions.

This period and especially the latter part of the century have witnessed the birth of a new style and concept in the arts, architecture, literature and criticism. It has represented a departure from modernism and came to be called the era of Postmodernism [2].

Postmodernism: An Overview

Postmodernist assumptions reject the difference between high and low. It started to challenge and deconstruct universally established ideas. In times when industrial growth and technology reached its peak, postmodernism established itself in the fields of art, architecture, literature, films, painting and music. It is difficult to define postmodernism because there is no such concrete definition for this theory. It is believed that postmodernism is not even a theory; it is simply a way of experiencing everything. Postmodernism consists of multiple directives showing not just the mind of one person but of many. It has disjointed narratives and reliable narrators. It usually mixes the genres to create hybrid forms and multiple realities, as reality is considered to be non-existent anyway. Most commonly used themes in postmodernism films are shamanism, dystopia, hyperreality, virtual reality, cyberspace and cyberpunk, and the techniques used are usually nonlinear

plots, satire, fragmentation, irony, playfulness comedy and inter-textuality. In the book contemporary literary and cultural theory by Pramod K Nayar "Lyotard inaugurated the key theoretical note in postmodernism when he characterized it as a resistance to grand narratives and focused on the marginal, the luminal and the fragmented, arguing against totalizing systems of thought".

Each one of us during our young and formative years has felt the notion of being in a hyper real world. If one pursued his journey through this path, he would end up as a philosopher or a saint. If he does not heed his instincts, he wound up being an ordinary human being living an ordinary and mundane existence. If he found himself between these two stages, he would dabble with films that speak about hyper reality. What one perceives as real can be illusory and on the other hand, what one believed to happen only in dreams can be real. One thing that should be steered clear of is one's logical reasoning, because hyper reality has to be felt rather than being taught [3].

Hyperreality in Films

In films dealing with the Hyperreality theme, there is a jargon in the literary register termed "willing suspension of disbelief". When we watch a film, we do know that it is a story that has been written by a writer or writers and that the people who are appearing on the screen are mere actors who have been paid to enact their respective roles in the film. But we willingly suspend that truth from our consciousness. We do that deliberately. But there are films where you need not take offers to suspend the disbelief [4]. Such films make viewers go to the extent of believing that whatever unfolds in the film must be real. Such films make you doubt the existence of a filmmaker who made the film and you have to watch it or were destined to watch. Such films make you believe that you are a solipsist; that you are living in matrix; that you are God; that the whole universe is an experiment lab for someone; that this writing was not written by me but was already decided that you should read this. View the below examples: from the film named (MATRIX) the character Morpheus questions: Morpheus: "Have you ever had a Dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream, Neo? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?" from the film ("MATRIX").

"It is the real that has become our true utopia - but a utopia that is no longer in the realm of the possible, that can only be dreamt as one would dream of a lost object." from Hyper reality theorist Jean Baudrillard.

In his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues the "imaginary world" of Disneyland magnetizes people inside and has been presented as "imaginary" to make people believe that all its surroundings are "real". He believes that the Los Angeles area is not real; thus it is hyperreal. Disneyland is a set of apparatuses which tries to bring imagination and fiction to what is called "real". This concerns the American values and way of life in a sense and "concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle."

To express eloquently the idea of postmodernism, we are living in an era where people are questioning everything in order to find out the truth. This era is controlled by the various Medias and social networks. We are in the control of technology which we cannot realize in this virtual world, everything is simulation. People are under surveillance of machines and technology. Film is also a kind of technology which is used to simulate the reality in this world. Films like "Matrix", "Blade Runner", "The Truman Show", "Vanilla Sky", "The Minority Report" and "Inception" display the idea of hyper reality in a clear cut way [5].

Man, in the earlier stages of civilization had to deal with and tackle many obstacles like natural disasters, hostile animals, hunger and cold, it was the intelligence of the human mind that helped to come up with solutions to counter such hurdles. When he has no such issues to tackle, man begins to nurture idle feelings which in return give birth to art forms. Arts have for long been a way to channelize the brutal instincts in humans. The most recent arrival in the art form is film, which projects life in the most believable form. Psychologically speaking, films are the most powerful medium in creating an impact on human minds precisely because they are visual [6].

If we closely examine our society's addiction to social media companionship and 24*7 reality TV shows, the natural question that arises is 'how do these forced technologies impact our reality and existence'?

The brilliant, visionary drama Truman Show puts forth this question through the story of regular guy Truman Burbank. Born on TV and legally adopted by an unseen genius producer, Truman's life is broadcasted 24 hour-a-day. Although everything about Truman's life is carefully crafted, the guy caught in a life he can't escape starts questioning the meaning of his 'reality'. Written by Andrew Niccol and directed by Peter Weir, Truman Show is a work of geniuses. The movie is simple narrative surface surprisingly withholds profound subtext. It could be seen as a statement on the post-modern human life, lived under the shadow of ever-changing technologies. It is an enjoyable indictment of the media's obsession to control and neatly package reality. Eventually, it is also a celebration of human spirit which desires to leaps over restrictive, invisible boundaries. The rest of the paper focuses on the techniques and themes in the film "The Truman Show".

Themes

Power of media

Whatever happens in this world reaches every nook and corner through media. Media can be any form like newspaper, television news, film, etc. Media can create any sort of news which is not true. In the book *Introducing Baudrillard* mentions about the baudrillard perspective states that the gulf of war and 9/11 are not real incidents that happened as the media showed. Media make the audience or readers to believe to the historical incidents they present. After the capitalism, everything in this world became products because world functions according to corporate society. But there is a kind of

fake idea that everything functions according to customers. Corporate manipulates customers through the medium of media and makes them to buy their product. In this postmodern age, finding truth is too difficult. Truth is in the hand of media; whatever they try to circulate can be spread easily.

Nowadays, the power of media is immeasurable; people have become the product of media. The face of media is changing day by day. The title of the film Truman show itself projects the concept. The film is based on the show about a boy who is adopted by a corporate channel.

Except the character named Truman others are actors. The shows motto is to bring the happiest face of man without any sort of trouble and bring out the real emotion from Truman through reel world and the reel characters surrounded by him. The director of the show is the controller for the activities of the character Truman indirectly by controlling the other characters. He wants Truman to live a life which is created by him, a utopia where there are no miseries and sadness [7].

The director makes the 24*7 show because each and every one who watches that show should feel to live the life of Truman. Like in the film, these days in media, through serials, reality shows, etc. they are manipulating the audience. Especially, media in the name of reality show, which is created and scripted by the creator to make the audience to believe everything, is real. Truman can't find what kind of life he is living. He is like a puppet of that show's creator. Likewise, the people in the real world are puppets for media; everything that is presented through the media is believed by them, whereas the truth is that it is a world created by media. Christof controls Truman mentally and physically in the show. Whenever Truman tries to find the truth, the creator has other plans and makes him engage with others. In a scene, he tries to find Fiji Island, which is the place of his ex-girlfriend who has warned him that he is in a trap and is being watched by others. In that moment, the creator has forced Truman to concentrate on his family issues and economy which may divert him temporarily from the truth. As Baudrillard says, everything is simulated in the world. In the film, Truman tries to find the truth, but the truth there is not the absolute truth, but just another perspective of life is happening outside the studio. Studio is the stimulated version of utopia of real man's desire.

When power comes to rule, everything is right according to that power. In this virtual world, media take many forms to control the world like the Christ of controls Truman in the Truman show. 'Everything believes to be true' because everything is the simulated truth of truth according to Baudrillard. His Images about simulation fourth image explains there is no truth in this world.

Universes

These three factors the film focuses on: fake, hyperreal world of Truman; the outer 'reality' which is also a movie universe; then the real 'real' – the one we are watching the movie from. In reality, our virtues won't always be rewarded with a gift or something. In the universe of a movie, the

opposite happens. The ending can be analysed to show how actual the reality outside 'Truman's world' looks like. A happy ending is seen to make the viewer to believe that Truman is going to re-join with his lover on the outside. Millions of viewers applaud this development. But we are only led to believe that Truman has escaped into reality. It is the perfect happy ending for casual viewers but one that's thought-provoking for others. All of us think that there is 'true reality' to be experienced outside our finite world. This ending may be an indication of that. Similarly, in a consumerist society, we can't escape from the feeling that our world is hyperreal and there is 'reality' outside it. Plato mentions this too: "that we see physical universe as something that lacks meaning for the 'forms' and so we are convinced that meaning could be derived from an alternate 'reality'".

Matrix in the Truman show

From a cultural perspective, it can be discussed how the media has ultimately gone out of control, concentrating only on different schemes to create entertainment. "You never see anything anyway. They always turn the camera and play music". Two security guards in the booth tell how they never see Truman having sex and instead they cut to abstract images like winds blowing. Although they know the lack of sex doesn't confirm to their perception of truth or reality the viewer's stay glued to the screen. It's the way of showing how a creator could overturn certain truths and yet has the power to keep up our attention. The audience also jokes about the old American TV shows (Still continues in Indian TV shows) in which characters are like non-sexual beings. "Before we begin, I'd like to thank you..." In this scene, Christ gives an interview to television. The interviewer thanks him telling 'how jealously Christ guards his privacy'. This scene has a good political perspective. It's an ironic statement that shows how a man who strips privacy of others (Truman) conceals himself from the scrutiny of public. This is what happens in a dictatorship regime where judgment and manipulation comes from the top. Sylvia is a minor character in this film. What she says is reasonable, but people are too involved with other more interesting aspects of "The Truman Show" that they don't bother about her accusations [8].

Whether Truman will feel the outside world as the 'real' one is left as an open ending, but one of the messages regarding his escape is the importance of breaking out of a contrived world. Everything in our pop culture-music, videos to movies to news-manipulate our emotions and intelligence. It builds layers of absurdity and false beliefs. The first step to escape from such a false and hyper real world is self-realization. The movie tells us to break the false, media-fabricated culture built around us. The central irony of this idea is that the movie 'Truman Show' itself is a form of media; a form that wants us to see manipulations of media by manipulating us with interesting script and characters. So, the very final and vital message we learn through good films like Truman Show is that we should use them to widen our perception; not surrender to it and allow it to manipulate us.

Techniques

Dialogues

“In case I don’t see you, good afternoon, good evening and good night” – this catchphrase/dialogue and the way it is filmed strengthens the whole ‘life as a TV show’ idea perspective. Everyone in the scene seems so overly joyful with no visible problems. But in reality, the situation won’t be such a joyful one. People are worried and suffering from myriads of problems around them. Truman doesn’t know about reality, but the people watching the film know that they desire to live a life like Truman’s, which in the first place is unreal and scripted accordingly.

“What about Atlantic City”....“Oh! You hate to gamble.....” The above is a piece of conversation between Truman and his wife Meryl. In this scene, Meryl, rejects Truman’s idea of traveling, saying something that he would not like about the place. The scene explains how in a limited social set-up (from both economic and mental perspectives), we often seek ‘new’ experiences, even if we are sure that they may not be ‘comforting’ ones.

“Why didn’t he just follow her to Fiji.....” This is from another scene in the film where two waitresses discuss why Truman didn’t follow Sylvia to the Fiji islands. This scene shows how people rationally pass on judgment on something they are detached from, yet strongly relate to.

It’s the kind of judgment people won’t do in their own lives.

Truman: “It feels like the whole world revolves around me somehow” Marlon:” It’s a lot of world for one man Truman”. Marlon says this to reject Truman’s good reasons to find fault with his reality. Truman is branded to be having paranoia or delusions. In the present social media era, this dialogue could be more related as everyone is caught in a private world, thinking everything revolves around what they say or do. In fact, doctors had come up with a term for this in modern times: ‘The Truman show Delusion’ this term was coined in 2008 by brothers Joel and Ian Gold.

Camera as tool for hyperreality

Why is the plot/story line of “The Truman Show” perfect for a movie than a book or any other art form? First and foremost, the camera is an important mechanical tool for creating hyperreality. Except for the final scene in the film, one shot is repeatedly used in the film: a close-up shot using a fish-eye lens (accompanied by a swish zoom). The fish-eye lens is employed to represent that Truman is an image in a (old) television screen. Majority of factors in a hyper-real world is kind of a saleable product. Two things are sold to audiences watching “The Truman Show”: the emotions and the products placed around the principal actor. However, the images other than close-up shots are focused; it can realize that he is real although everything around him is fake. Another interesting scene in the film comes when Truman is asked to take the ferry to finish a job. When he reaches the aisle to board it, his fear of drowning is stimulated. A camera beneath the water looks

up at him. The shot conveys two things: one it shows viewers Truman’s fear of water/drowning and then focuses on how viewers look at Truman’s world.

Symbols

Symbols in films are like hidden message to the society; in the naked eye, it does not mean anything, but if audiences see deeply, the message will be available for them. In the film Truman, there are many symbolic representations used to create the experience of hyperreality to the audience. Truman got confused with reality around him, he himself asks many questions and as well as asked the same question to his wife, who is an actor playing the role of Truman’s wife. He got tensed and confused asking many questions to her; in reality, in such a situation any one will give a logical answer to calm the person. But she did an irrelevant action to the current situation; she just took a coffee jar and with a smile replied: “whenever you drink this coffee you feel refresh and it is 100% percent natural”. Truman goes crazy after watching her reaction for his question. This is the same scenario in our reality that whenever watching shows in the television some irrelevant things happen to make product advertizing. This scene made audience to feel the experience of hyperreal because according to the film, the character Truman stands for the audience, whatever he feels, the audience will feel the same. From the perspective of camera angle, the main character is always watched over from above; symbolizing that he is being watched by a god-like identity. In the film, the creator of the show is Christof. In a scene, the audience can witness a rain which falls exclusively on Truman, suggesting that he is in a different reality.

Conclusion

“Dead Poet’s Society” is arguably one of the films that must be watched by every student of literature. A professor asks his students to tear off a particular page from their text book. This page contains an explanation on how to understand a particular poem. What the professor wanted his pupils to do was to perceive the poem on their own. You change the numbers and substitute them. In the same formula, what hyperreality films seek from their viewers is to perceive the concept of life. They want them to come out of the age-old definitions of life. They show them strikingly unorthodox concepts about life and help them to conceive concepts on their own. The world that we live in are based on the view on a daily basis is made up of so many things. There are people like politicians and other factors like the media, society, etc. which have the power to influence the world and the thought processes of its inhabitants. Hyperreality films help people to think on their own. They make people wise. If people can enjoy and interact with a film completely, it means that they have started to contemplate. Like literature, films also convey important lessons of life and reflect the world in which we live in. “The Truman Show” teaches some lessons which reflect on how the current era is controlled by the media. It shows that we living in the hyperreal world cannot figure out what is true?

The only way to get out of such a hyper real world is to reflect deeply and realize the truth from our own minds instead.

References

1. Weir P (1998) The Truman Show [Video file]. Hollywood.
2. Butler C (2002) Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford.
3. Appignanesi R, Garratt C, Sardar Z, Curry P (2013) Introducing Postmodernism. London: Icon.
4. John T, Terashima N (2005) Paradigm for the third millennium. Hyperreality.
5. Jean B (1994) Simulacra & Simulation (PDF). The Precession of Simulacra: University of Michigan Press.
6. Tim W (2013) Beginning Postmodernism. Manchester: Manchester UP.
7. Andrew M, Potts J (2002) Culture and Technology, Palgrave.
8. Pramod NK (2010) Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory. Dorling Kindersley published South Africa.