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Cinema and Hyperreality: A Philosophical Perspective

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Article Info	Abstract
  	The paper explores the Transformations in the realm of performing narratives resulting from the advancements like sound effects and VFX. The use of special effects -especially in science fiction movies- is erasing the line between real and hyperreal. It also contends that the movement of cinema towards hyperrealism diminished the importance of narrative, which is being overshadowed by the simulated world as a result of usage of special effects.

Human beings tend to express their desires, dreams and fears through various ways. Similar to most prevailing forms of expression, re-enactment started in its raw form, i.e. re-enacting local tales or beliefs like a shaman performing rituals and so. The concept of enacting stories is known long before the invention of television, though the television added a much better sense of reality to performances because of advanced technology. This is rooted in role playing which means that character parts and power positions are actually lived within a public sphere. It is aided with props to present the story in an authentic way. The art of re-enactment has come across a long way, plays from streets to stages and from stages to screens. Even from screens it moved to interaction.

One such movie is Mr. Payback, which was released in 1995 and that was first commercial interactive movie. The theme of movie is letting the audience to decide to take any action against criminals. It is sort of allowing oneself to take revenge of all misdeeds happened to one in his lifetime by pressing buttons next to the seats. The press release of movie goes something like, "Sit for a moment and think of all the injustices done to you during your life… makes you mad to even think about it. Imagine if there was some way you could get back to them, someone you could hire to get revenge for you. Fun idea for a movie, right? Now imagine if, while watching that movie, you, the audience, could decide what villains to pursue, you could decide the methods of revenge and you, the audience, could decide the ultimate payback". This movie wasn't successful, may be given the factor that audience didn't have sense of control over upcoming events in the movie because of voting with other members. But undoubtedly it offered a disturbing vision of possible futures that only a novelist like Stanislaw Lem could imagine.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show, screened in 1975 is a musical comedy horror film with Dr. Frank-N-Furter as central character, who was sexually obsessed extra-terrestrial, carrying on

no matter what sexual and aggressive impulses bubble to the surface. Besides from counting on simulation throughout the movie for both acting out fantasies and engaging in deception, Frank simulates a living symbolic arena for acting out in the form of Rocky Horror, who also reenacts roles from popular movies. It was an expression and announcement of arrival of new culture of free love, recreational drugs, simulated fantasy and bitter sexuality. It is perfect symbol for new culture, delivering its message clearly: "Don't dream it. Be it". It is in a world where everything is pretentious and full of movie pieces, thus making life an endless vaudeville revue (a genre of entertainment started at the end of the 19th century that included dramatic composition of light poetry, music and jokes, without any psychological or moral grounds). Thus, Frank-N-Furter is a second order simulation, created out simulations of Hollywood, imprisoned in hallucinosis virtual reality, captivated as a star in his fantasy world. Not to present the situation in an exaggerated way, but we do live in a society that presents sex, violence and prohibited fantasies as theatrical shows.

Pointing in Freudian sense, two mostly common supressed desires, sex and aggression, have been set loose and changed into amusement for masses in popular culture. In a fictional world, it is easy to violate the forbidden social customs and mores and new culture happens to be roller coaster that takes audience to the verge of social restrictions just for the adventure. But it is easy to carry on such fantasies in a simulated domain as it is just an appearance and has nothing to do with social customs. The essence is this that one can be evil in a virtual and simulated world and can return to reality without hurting delicate social image and status. As a matter of fact, we tend to tell ourselves different versions of the same story, trying to ascend, both as individuals and societies. Another version is expressed as science fiction and post-apocalyptic fiction which further covers mainly three aspects or forms –

i. Humanity blown by brutality i.e., Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome.
ii. World tricked to believe in paradise of high tech and simulations i.e., Logan's Run based on novel 'Logan's Run'.
iii. World in state of turmoil but retains technology i.e., Blade Runner based on

Philip K. Dick's novel 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep'?

There are various noteworthy movies in the sci-fi section, starting with Star Wars, The Extra-Terrestrial, Planet of Apes, Atlas Shrugged, Star Trek, Interstellar and many more.

All the movies present with more than one point, mostly all are a fight between moral and immoral, distorted future, fallen state of humanity etc. Apart from this, combination of technology and acting is taking cinema in pure world of simulation. It adds various special effects to the film and there is resentment for special effects among film critics especially for two reasons –

i. Firstly, it diverts the attention of viewers from important aspects of film, i.e., Narratives.
ii. Secondly, it poses the threat of what we may call as the indispensable realism of film.

Thus, as mentioned by Wheeler Winston Dixon in his book, "The transparency of Spectacle: Meditations on the Moving Image", new digital technologies, manipulates the purity of filmic image. Though the external montage is crucial in filmmaking but Digital Domain, ILM and such companies are creating montage within the frame which leads to the absence of all clues that makes us aware of the artificiality and fabrication of the image with another within same frame is a whole new concept than the images within images.

The film is supposed to be in pure or natural state, when the viewers are able to know that it is fabrication, but now with the help of new technology like CGI (computer generated imagery), VFX etc., that induces precise and perfect manipulation because of which film becomes unnatural. As discussed above, Wheeler only disapproves the manipulation of intrinsic nature i.e., internal montage and not external montage. He argues that an image, when it is rendered indistinguishable between the inside and out, it becomes a spectacle, a simulacrum. There are basically two points of views regarding the nature of special effects of films. The idealists focus on the materiality of film and maintains that fil does not reveal the

world rather divulges the viewer's set of beliefs and prejudices.

On the other hand, phenomenologists or realists insists on the representational nature of the materiality of film i.e., visuals and sounds; and are concerned with what these images represent of real world rather than how these images are constructed. The distinction between real and digital only concerns phenomenologists, as they look for the real referent of both the real and digital image, in contrast to idealists, for whom everything is constructed in a film. Noel Carroll, supporter of idealist viewpoint proclaims the nominal nature of cinematic representation against the ontological one. Carroll points out, "A shot is a nominal portrayal of a person, object or event when it represents a particular person, place or thing different from the person, place or thing that gave rise to the image"[i]. Scott Bukatman, goes one step farther than Carroll against realists and argues that the origination of simulation does not lies in digital manipulation of images, as all images – even those not digitally distorted are already simulacral. His analysis of simulation is established in historical transformation to a world dominated by IT and not in a specific type of image.

Bodily experience and cognitive understanding were thus both supplemented and largely replaced by a reliance on vision within a simulacrum of the real. If the visual was now largely removed from the confirmation of haptic experience (a fundamental of information age), then the visual would become a hyperbolically self-sufficient source of knowledge.[ii]

The change in the significance of two chief senses – the shift from touch to sight, from body to vision – is precisely shift from the real (the body) to the simulacrum (the image). Thus, simulation is equal to vision: all images, regardless of whether they are created with a real or a virtual camera, are already simulations of real, bodily experience.

The substantial use of special effects in sci-fi movies has raised the new debate, with which the old problem of representation has risen once again. In order to defend the visuality of sci-fi movies, Brooks Landon recommends to change our understanding of narrative, "from something conveyed with the semblance of a film to something conveyed by the mechanisms of film itself".[iii] We, instead of understanding the visual nature of film, views it as merely presenting science fiction novel or some story on which it is based because of our belittling attitude towards special effects. Landon further argues that cinema itself is science fictional since "the language or grammar of film consists in great part of nothing but special effects, the visual trickery inherent in montage, wipes, cutting, close-ups, impossible camera placement, panning, zooms, slow motion, multiple exposures and the virtually limited possibilities of editing, matting and so on".[iv]

Bukatman argues that, "Cinematic affect is rooted in cinematic technology, but effects emphasize those underpinnings: if cinema is rooted in illusions of light, for e.g., then optical effects endow light with an overwhelming physicality".[v]

It is interesting to note that computer data is invisible and thus any computer-generated data becomes the general trend towards invisibility, but it acts in a totally different manner. It returns us to the origin of perception and pure satisfaction of seeing for the sake of seeing. The abridging gap between real and unreal is achieved by the continuing perfection of special effects technology. The special effects, in order to represent imaginary as real, introduces the element of hyperreality. The amalgamation of imaginary object of representation with means of representation (latest tech) results in hyperreality. Various genres in film industry especially, sci-fi are set in or about future, questions one's hold over the interconnection of object and means of representation. The absence of differentiation between object and means of representation bring out hyperreal. From it, we can grasp that we can consider what is real on the traces of construction whereas hyperreal rules out such possibility and is always there.

Initially, the films were purely visual driven instead of narrative driven and special effects were used to create an imaginary world, different from that of ours. But the function of special effects has changed to increase the realism of representation, as can be seen in various contemporary films. There can basically be two

cases – the means of representation are simulacral but the object of representation of reality and the second is vice versa. It is important to note that as simulation is used to increase imitation of realism, it cannot be used to represent simulation itself; it is represented only through realistic means of representation. There are various noteworthy movies representing the above case like Total Recall, eXistenze and many more. However, movie 'The Matrix' presents with a different case in which simulation is both means and object of representation.

The use of simulations is not limited to science fiction movies but is extended to almost every genre of film industry. The developments like Ray tracing are growing every day and changing the graphic world. The first use of animation appeared on scene was in 1900 by J. Stuart Blackton. Since the animation industry have achieved a lot. We can't categorise it as hyperreality, but it has attained a certain sense of realism. Paul Wells, while defining animation states that despite the obvious artifice of medium, it strives for 'realism'. But the term 'hyperrealism' makes much sense as it is an attempt to represent reality in a medium predicted on artificiality. In the early animations, the features were squash and stretches and cartoon transformations. But the desire to pursue realism can be seen in Disney's Snow-White production. Hamilton Luske, in creating the details of Snow White, believes that it is necessary to add "enough form to it". The designs, situations, actions, body movement, behaviour, objects, characters and almost everything refers to the principles of real world. The features of multiple layer clothing, realistic motion of cloth and hair, sea waves can be seen now-a-days, which adds to more of a hyperreal sense.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of narrative enactment has undergone a profound change from raw imitation of local tales to refined simulations of contemporary world. Modern cinema has not only articulated a wide range of human experiences but also sketched out both benefits and challenges posed by audience interaction and transgression of societal norms. With the advancement of technology, the world of cinema is also wrestling between real and representation like any other sector. Technologies like CGI and VFX have led to substantial insignification of narrative with respect to visual and auditorial simulation. This decline questions our collective consciousness in the era of dominant technology and our stand on authenticity.

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[iv] Ibid, pp 90

[v] Op. cit., pp 271