Hyperrealism of Advanced Technology and its Influences on Human Identity in Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*[1]

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ABSTRACT

Hyperreality as a significant concept of Jean Baudrillard signifies a situation when what is real and what is imaginary are merged together and thus, there is no clear difference amid where one finishes and the other one starts. This study intends to analyze Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* in order to examine the hyperreality of technology and its influence on human identity. In this novel technology and social media play very important roles and can be blamed for loneliness of human beings. Egan has presented the unreal as more truthful than reality itself, and by doing so, she has dragged her readers into the world of diversion and distraction attained through simulation.

Keywords: *Hyperreality; Jean Baudrillard; Identity; Technology*

INTRODUCTION

Jennifer Egan is an American writer who was born in 1962 in Chicago. Egan whose field of study is English literature has written a number of famous and admirable novels. For example, her novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2011. *The Candy House* as the subject of analysis in this paper is a novel which was published in 2022. It is believed that this novel is a sequel to Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, and many of the characters from *A Visit from the Goon Squad* appear in this novel while being updated.

The Candy House is regarded as an exciting, intensely touching narrative about the pursuit for genuineness, confidentiality, and rationality. The novel is set in 2010, and its protagonist, Bix Bouton as a bright tech businessperson is obsessed with reaching a novel idea. He is about forty and has four children. Bix's new technology is called Own Your Unconscious which, as suggested by its name, lets human beings have access to every memory they have had during their life, and also share their memory in return for having access to other human beings' reminiscences:

> In the thirteen years since Own Your Unconscious had been released, one of its ancillary features—the Collective Consciousness—had gradually become central. By uploading all or part of your externalized memory to an online "collective," you gained proportionate access to the anonymous thoughts and memories of everyone in the world, living or dead, who had done the same. (Egan, 2022, p. 54)

The Candy House is thus a brave, vivid conception of a world that is to a great extent different from our own world. Its main focus is on such issues as social media, gaming, and substitute worlds; this is the reason why the

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readers are able to move between diverse scopes. Egan has attempted to present a violent and frightening demonstration to the obstinacy and otherworldliness of human desire for real relationships, affection, family, secrecy, and renovation.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Candy House has been so far reviewed and analyzed by lots of critics; however, there remains a gap concerning its study through a postmodern approach; so, in order to fill the existing gap, the present paper is going to benefit from the viewpoints of Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) as a substantial postmodern theorist. What makes this philosopher even more important is that he has played a highly key role in the examination of media, contemporary culture, and technological communication, in addition to the construction of such notions as hyperreality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part is mainly divided into two sections. The first section means to review the theorist's main framework and then, the second section intends to review some of the researches done regarding *The Candy House*.

On Jean Baudrillard's Theory

Jean Baudrillard as one of the most well-known French sociologists and theorists, is renowned for his examination of postmodernism and post-structuralism. One of his imperative theories is hyperreality and simulacra and simulation. Normally, reality is compared with what is invented in the mind; however, Baudrillard assumed that real is vanished. By real he meant the appearance which indicates a sort of disappearance that the real disappearing; in this sense, disappearance is another type of appearance (as cited in Smith, 2010, p. 30).

Hyperreality is in fact a postmodern notion and is explained by Baudrillard (1994) as the present societal situation; it is the act of generating something false that is supposed to be real (p. 58). This hypothesis means that politics, nationalism, and religion have established a setting in which we exist but with a delusion (p. 94). Based on John Tiffin and Nobuyoshi Terashima (2001), hyperreality is a situation in which what is real and what is imaginary are pointlessly merged together so that there is no vibrant difference between where one ends and the other begins (p. 8).

According to Mike Gane (2010), the concept of hyperreality collects three of Baurillard's specifics together; the initial one is the condition that signs are already proclaimed. The second one is the method through that modern cultures are gathered, "in which they wipe out age-old boundaries or transgress boundaries, the more real than real"; and the last one is the establishment of a common culture that reveals the differences between the true and the false (pp. 95-96).

Baudrillard (1994) also referred to hyperreality "as the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (p. 6). He declared that hyperreality intends to form a symbol that signifies something which does not really happen (p. 3). Likewise, "The world we live in has been replaced by a copy world, where we seek simulated stimuli and nothing more" (p. 3).

One of the most significant works in this research is *Simulacra and Simulation*. In this book, Baudrillard has inspected the association between reality, signs, and society. The concept of simulacra refers to the copies that show things which either are derivative or have lost their innovation. Simulation also specifies replication of a real-life procedure over time (Banks, 2005, p. 3).

In "The Precession of Simulacra", it is stated by Baudrillard that what is occurring in postmodern culture is that our society is tremendously dependent on copies and consequently, we have lost our relationship with the real world. Reality itself is just duplication of the model, which now controls the real world: "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory" (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 342).

According to the postmodern simulation and simulacra, "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, 1991, p. 343). Baudrillard then discusses a number of issues which have excavated this loss, among which language, ideology, capitalism, and suburbanization are exceptionally domineering.

On Jennifer Egan

Jennifer Egan's Storyworlds: An Exploration along Organic Lines (2018) has examined four novels by Jennifer Egan, including *Invisible Circus* (1995), *Look at Me* (2001), *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), and *Manhattan Beach* (2017). This research aims at mapping Egan's illusory world, which is extremely multi-layered and miscellaneous regarding tones, genres, and narrative styles. Each novel has been investigated distinctly in order to present a detailed examination of Egan's imaginative progression in four different circumstances.

Lambert (2020) has also analyzed Jennifer Egan's novel *Look at Me* (2001), which shows "anti-postmodernist" features who are overwhelmed by the inauthenticity of the post-industrial world they live in. It is claimed that Egan's novel reveals the misogyny that inspires the expedition for genuineness and focusses on the precisely gendered outcomes of the systems of "value extraction inaugurated by neoliberal capital" (p. 394).

Kreilkamp (2022) in another study reviews Alexander Moran's *Understanding Jennifer Egan*. He believes that Moran has presented a consistently intellectual and perceptive deliberation of Egan's entire range of works that persuasively draws out a number of patterns and obsessions of her writing. Moran states that Egan has until recently "been largely absent from discussions of literary trends," "mentioned in footnotes or lists rather than at the center of debates" (p. 1). Moreover, Moran's most significant point of investigation is about the importance in all Egan's work of representations of "experiences of authenticity, particularly in regard to tourism, technology, genre, and memory" (p. 6).

Silcox (2022) has analyzed *The Candy House* and believes that it investigates the seclusion of "hyper-connectivity". It is noted that "her inventive peacocking, tech speculation and bricolage – the tales that work best in *The Candy House* are the least flamboyant. What felt playful in *Goon Squad* now feels a little stale: a sustained passage of back-and-forth emails is too conveniently expository".

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its analysis of a new novel. *The Candy House* is a newly published novel and thus, it is not surprising that there are a few published papers written about it. As a result, this research seeks to contribute to this novel's better understanding.

METHODOLOGY

The present study as stated already intends to benefit from Jean Baudrillard's viewpoints, specifically his notion of hyperreality. Hyperreality is a notion which signifies the procedure of the development of ideas of reality, resulting in a cultural situation of misperception amongst signs and symbols that are created so as to take the place of reality, and straight discernments of reality (Lawson & Garrod, 2001, p. 104). Hyperreality is regarded as a complaint in which, owing to the density of perceptions of reality in culture and media, what is normally observed as real and what is noticed as fiction are impeccably unified together so that there is no more any clear difference amid where one finishes and the other starts (Tiffin & Terashima, 2001).

The postmodern semiotic notion of hyperreality was initially developed by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Pavlik-Malone, 2018, p. 35). Baudrillard (1994) referred to "hyperreality" as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (p. 25). Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality was deeply inspired by such fields as phenomenology and semiotics. Baudrillard claimed that it is "the unlimited existence of "hyperreal" number or "non-standard reals", infinite and infinitesimal, that cluster about assumedly fixed or real numbers and factor through transference differentials" (Lincoln, 2009, p. 19). Arva (2008) notes:

> Certain contemporary theorists tend to consider Jean Baudrillard's term *hyperreality*(*Simulacra and Simulation*) not as an object and medium of the traumatic imagination—of the literary consciousness engaged in coping with and reconstructing the real—but as an elusive rhetorical chimera. Nevertheless, should anyone wish to look for such hybrid images, magical realist writing offers plenty of them. (p. 60)

DISCUSSION

This part seeks to analyze the way *The Candy House* as a postmodern novel establishes the literary concept of hyperreality in order to challenge the usual sense of interpretation. Invented by Jean Baudrillard, the term "hyperreality" is the outcome of the pervasiveness of his basic fundamental theory of simulacrum or simulacra. This

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simulacrum signifies a reproduction or an image with no orientation to the real or the innovative, that is still depending on its self-referentiality. In this way, Baudrillard's hyperreality represents an emblematic interaction of both the real and the imaginary.

The image or the signifier goes before its meaning, the signified, and progressively becomes central in the converse instruction of Saussurean structuralism, so that the concepts of reality, history, truth, and meaning become battered. Consequently, in his postmodern world of simulacra, the hyperreal turns into a self-conscious arrangement of a simulation that simulates itself (Amis, 2022, p. 81). The analysis of *The Candy House* shows that Egan has undermined the division between reality and fiction.

In fact, as a writer, she has employed the Baudrillardian theory of simulacra in her narrative in order to establish a kind of textual hyperreality. Egan has been addressed as an innovative writer by numerous critics and academics who have investigated her novels. The novels have also been the subject of many postmodern researches as they comprise lots of postmodern features. This study places Egan's novel within the realm of the postmodern and benefits from the philosophies of Baudrillard in its examination.

I believe that Egan makes a cognizant attempt to form such hyperreality with the creation of some signifiers in her fiction. Jennifer Egan's 2022 novel *The Candy House* evocatively revolves around the social and cultural condition of the current century. It depicts the advancement of technology and its influence on human beings' identity. As shown in the following quotation, technology results in a form of vacant identity as a way of revealing the reality that the real inhabitant of that identity has evacuated it:

> vacant online identities maintained by a third party in order to conceal the fact that their human occupants have eluded… most proxies are animated by "hermit crab programs" that maintain the established patterns of an individual's online activity—communication, commerce, and social media—as a way of hiding the reality that the original occupant of that identity has vacated it. Most proxying is orchestrated by Mondrian, a not-for-profit based in San Francisco. Mondrian's most sophisticated proxies are live professionals—usually fiction writers, I'm told—who impersonate multiple identities at once. (Egan, 2022, p. 74)

The realization of Egan's concern with the present circumstances can help the readers to understand the circumstantial quandaries that not only Egan, but also her readers might encounter at this epoch. In other words, the depiction of these postmodern conditions has caused Egan to explore the importance of meaning and interpretation in postmodern societies.

I suppose that Egan's *The Candy House* along with many other novels written by her represent a postmodern perspective of society. In postmodern society which Egan has displayed in *The Candy House*, language is see-through. Klages (2006, p. 169) claims that modern societies rely decidedly on the idea that signifiers always point to signifieds, and that reality exists in in signifieds. In postmodernism, though, there are only signifiers. The idea of any unchanging or perpetual reality vanishes. Rather, in postmodern societies, there are only signifiers with no signifieds and Baudrillard calls this division between the signifier and signified a simulacrum.

Through the postmodern perspective of Egan in *The Candy House*, reality is regarded as a disjointed and free structure with mechanisms that are formed by societal activities. Hyperreality in this novel is ascribed to the postmodern condition, specifically the way people in the postmodern world with all its technological developments search for stimulation by fashioning unreal worlds. Nothing in *The Candy House* is real, but all are boundless reproductions of reality, and because we do not envisage the reality of simulations, both unreal and real are equally hyperreal.

The reality in *The Candy House* is as Jean Baudrillard stated in *Simulacra and Simulation*, a short-circuited concept due to the interchangeability of cyphers in an epoch whose communicative and semantic functions are controlled by automatic media and numerical technologies. As a result, "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Luke, 1991, p. 347). In fact, there is nothing original as Egan herself says:

> There is nothing original about human behavior. Any idea I have is likely occurring to scores of others in my demographic categories. We live in similar ways, think similar thoughts. What the eluders want to restore, I suspect, is the uniqueness they felt before counting like ours revealed that they were an awful lot like everyone else. But where the eluders have it wrong is that quantifiability doesn't make human life any less

> remarkable, or even (this is counterintuitive, I know) less mysterious—any more than identifying the rhyme scheme in a poem devalues the poem itself. (Egan, 2022, p. 77)

The postmodern world that we notice in *The Candy House* is a world of simulacra, because human beings are not able to distinguish between real and artificial. In such a postmodern society, people have substituted reality with cyphers and codes; in other words, what is acknowledged as reality is only a reproduction of reality. The signs of culture and media that form reality establish the simulacrum, pervaded with image, sound, and other features of simulated realism.

The world of the simulacra exceeds the world of the real in *The Candy House*, and consequently, it becomes hyperreal due to being more real than what is real. The line between signs and reality disappears; merely the simulacrum is present, and inventiveness is believed as completely pointless. The postmodern world of Egan is now under the rule of technology.

In this novel, human beings are mostly under the control of technology and it seems as if they have lost their freedom. For example, even if they desire to go for a walk, they have to consider many security cameras. One night Bix decides to go outside; however, this action may be regarded as a violation:

> He decided to get dressed again and go outside. It was after eleven. It violated his board's security requirements for him to walk New York's streets alone at any hour, much less after dark, so he avoided the trademark deconstructed zoot suit he'd just taken o (inspired by the ska bands he'd loved in high school) and the small leather fedora he'd worn since leaving NYU fifteen years ago to assuage the weird exposure he'd felt after cutting o his dreads. (Egan, 2022, p. 8)

Mindy or Miranda Kline is another character who is an isolated, smart anthropologist. She has lived a long time in a distant Brazilian tribe and has thus established some patterns of kinship so that people can trust one another. However, these patterns have been weaponized by a number of social media corporations and particularly the firm that is managed by Bix. Technology in postmodern era has resulted in a sort of pessimism. It assuredly provokes a sense of dissatisfaction, unease, and threat in many people. Moreover, it discards the worldwide rationality of firm identity.

CONCLUSION

This study intended to analyze *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan through the concept of hyperrealism by Jean Baudrillard. It was stated that Egan has used a specific form of textual approaches that are mostly linked with postmodernism. What we see in *The Candy House* shows the procedure of the progression of reality, bringing about a condition of mix-up among signs and symbols that have been established in order to represent the reality. Egan has actually meant to prove that the consequences of hyperreality are highly pertinent in current societies due to technological developments which stand for simulated reality.

This also shows the way people in the postmodern world search for stimulation through forming illusory worlds. Generally speaking, it is proven that like many other postmodernist authors, Jennifer Egan is highly attracted to the social and official significances of technological revolution, the societal activities these developments give rise to, instead of the inventions themselves (McHale, 1987).

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