



THE SUBSTITUTION OF REALITY: MADONNA AS A TOOL OF MASS MEDIA

Nikola Govedarica^{1}, Stevan Lutovac², Lakatoš I. Ana²*

¹Museum 21st oktober, Kragujevac, Serbia,

²Faculty of management, Sremski Karlovci, University „Union-Nikola Tesla“, Serbia
e-mail: ngovedarica1@gmail.com, stevan.lutovac@fam.ns.edu.rs, lakatos@famns.edu.rs

Abstract: Using qualitative research methods, we will explicate how the internet and other modern technologies directly impact the reality presented. Through specific segments of this study, we will analyze the democratization of art, fashion, and image in contemporary society, focusing primarily on its real, current, and true-media publication through the phenomenon of Madonna. Employing methods of textual analysis and interpretation, we will examine the works of philosophers Jean Baudrillard, cultural theorist Paul Virilio, and Douglas Kellner. In doing so, we will explain the significance of media manipulation. The primary objective of this study is to depict media through postmodern theory, presenting them as leading factors in contemporary social processes. Postmodern theorists emphasize that the media system, which has dominated reality since the early 21st century, is unable to summon the past, causing human existence to fall into a state of perpetual schizophrenic present. This incapacity results in the simulation of past events, which now return as a series of anachronistic media representations, creating the illusion of historical continuity. This leads to a state of historical amnesia, where the sense of connection to the past is lost. In such a context, everyday human experience becomes fragmented and disoriented. Media, as the primary intermediaries between reality and perception, create a new reality detached from historical continuity and deeply rooted in the present moment. This new reality, shaped by media representations, blurs the boundary between the real and the simulated, further amplifying the sense of temporal dislocation.

Keywords: media, culture, syberpunk, madonna, information, phenomenon.

Introduction

Modern mass media represent a powerful tool for influencing the public and shaping collective consciousness. The media have long abandoned their primary role of providing information, no longer reporting on reality but transforming it into an alternate reality. As such, the media possess and exert significant psychological influence on people and their environment. Through the media, behavior dispositions are profoundly impacted, affecting opinions, true values, personal attitudes, beliefs, and more. Under such influence, even the unconscious part of an individual's personality can be paralyzed, making people victims of the media. Media are exceptionally effective in various fields: advertising, propaganda, various entertainment industries, indoctrination, and more.

Just a few centuries after science, with Copernicus and Galileo, had the primary role of presenting relative truth, today that same science has become the science of the disappearance of truth, accompanied by the advent of knowledge that is less encyclopedic and more cybernetic, knowledge that denies an objective reality. Consequently, having significantly contributed to the acceleration of different ways of depicting the world—from optics and electrooptics to the recent use of virtual reality space—modern sciences are engaged in the obscuration of reality, in the aesthetics of scientific disappearance.

With the development of new media, from television and radio to the internet, the creation of live broadcasts, driven by the introduction of extreme speed, transforms today's television into a grand planetary optic. Audiovisual continuity progressively replaces the importance of territorial contact between nations: political boundaries will shift from the real space of geopolitics to the time of image and sound transmission. On one hand, there is a distance resulting from temporal separation, while on the other hand, there is generalization on the path of tele-surveillance. All of this encompasses visualization as an essential aspect of what we call virtualization today. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, the intention

*Corresponding author: ngovedarica1@gmail.com





of multimedia is to transform our old television into a kind of home telescope to view the emerging world. The goal is to turn the computer screen into the ultimate window, a window that would allow not so much the acquisition of data, but the observation of the horizon of globalization, that is, urban virtualization.

One of the early critics of the cyber world, Paul Virilio, and media theorist Douglas Kellner, demonstrate an interactive anticipatory system in depicting the emergence of the cyber bomb—a terrifying chain reaction where the exchange of information becomes a serious global force. According to Virilio, the 20th century was not, as claimed, “the century of the image,” but rather the century of optical illusion (Virilio, 2000, p. 32). In this era, today’s active optics have fundamentally renewed the traditional use of passive optics from the era of Galileo’s telescope, as if the loss of the geographical perspective’s horizon line required the establishment of a new artificial horizon of screens or monitors capable of continuously proclaiming the supremacy of the media perspective.

Similarly, Jean Baudrillard argues that to strengthen the new media image and create a new reality, the new social formation has initiated the disappearance of the subject, political economy, meaning, truth, and sociality. Baudrillard describes the emergence of the new postmodern society as organized simulation, where models, codes, communication, information, and media have radically severed ties with modernist society. Baudrillard’s world is one of dramatic implosion, where classes, genders, political differences, and previously autonomous domains of society and culture interpenetrate, erasing boundaries and differences in his postmodern kaleidoscope. His style and method of writing are also implosive, as he combines materials from completely different fields, interspersed with examples from media culture, in a new form of postmodernist theory that blurs the boundaries of all disciplines.

For Baudrillard, the postmodern universe represents a sphere of hyperrealism, where models and codes determine ways of thinking and behaving, and where media of entertainment, information, and communication provide more intense and comprehensive experiences than scenes from everyday life. In such a postmodern world, individuals abandon reality in search of the ecstasy of hyperrealism and the new world of media and technological experience. Baudrillard and cyberpunk have become phenomena of media culture, offering theoretical and fictional visions of a society increasingly dominated by media and information (Kellner, 2004, p. 492). The term “cyber” comes from the Greek root meaning “control,” contained in the concept of cybernetics, which denotes control systems of high technology, combining computers, new technology, and artificial reality with strategies of system maintenance and control points.

One of the early critics of the cyber world, Paul Virilio, along with media theorist Douglas Kellner, demonstrates an interactive anticipatory system in depicting the emergence of the cyber bomb. In other words, a terrifying chain reaction where the exchange of information becomes a serious global force. According to Virilio, the 20th century was not, as claimed, “the century of the image,” but rather the century of optical illusion (Virilio, 2000, p. 32). In this era, today’s active optics have fundamentally renewed the traditional use of passive optics from the era of Galileo’s telescope, as if the loss of the geographical perspective’s horizon line required the establishment of a new artificial horizon of screens or monitors capable of continuously proclaiming the supremacy of the media perspective.

Similarly, Jean Baudrillard argues that to strengthen the new media image and create a new reality, the new social formation has initiated the disappearance of the subject, political economy, meaning, truth, and sociality. Baudrillard describes the emergence of the new postmodern society as organized simulation, where models, codes, communication, information, and media have radically severed ties with modernist society. Baudrillard’s world is one of dramatic implosion, where classes, genders, political differences, and previously autonomous domains of society and culture interpenetrate, erasing boundaries and differences in his postmodern kaleidoscope. His style and method of writing are also implosive, as he combines materials from completely different fields, interspersed with examples from media culture, in a new form of postmodernist theory that blurs the boundaries of all disciplines.

For Baudrillard, the postmodern universe represents a sphere of hyperrealism, where models and codes determine ways of thinking and behaving, and where media of entertainment, information, and communication provide more intense and comprehensive experiences than scenes from everyday life. In such a postmodern world, individuals abandon reality in search of the ecstasy of hyperrealism and the new world of media and technological experience. Baudrillard and cyberpunk have become phenomena of media culture, offering theoretical and fictional visions of a society increasingly dominated by media and information (Kellner, 2004, p. 492). The term “cyber” comes from the Greek root meaning “control,” contained in the concept of cybernetics, which denotes control systems of high technology, combining computers, new technology, and artificial reality with strategies of system maintenance and control points.

The term “punk” originates from the punk rock movement and signifies the experience of harsh urban life, family and social problems, drugs, violence, and anti-authoritarian rebellion within the frameworks of lifestyle, pop culture, and fashion. Taken together, the terms “cyber” and “punk” refer to a fusion of



hightech subculture with grassroots street culture, blending artistic technology with bohemian sub-culture.

As a genre, cyberpunk can be understood as a warning system, a cautionary tale presenting a future beyond human control and shaping according to their needs. "Cyberpunk depicts a universe already in a state of serious disturbance, rapidly moving towards a likely frightening future, where anything is possible and survival becomes increasingly complicated. Cyberpunk narrative is fast-paced and energetic, filled with bizarre characters, twists, and surprises—just like life in high-tech society" (Kellner, 2004, p. 497).

As a product of the technological explosion, cyberpunk comes with a flood of media, computers, and new technologies. Traditionally, there has been a cultural divide between the natural and human sciences: a chasm between literary culture, the formal world of art and politics, and scientific culture, the world of technology and industry. However, this divide is unexpectedly disappearing. Baudrillard's thoughts focus on the agony of all that is real and rational, leading us into an era of simulation. He explains that the technical culture has spiraled out of control, bringing no good.

The advancement of science is so radical, disturbing, worrying, and revolutionary that it can no longer be controlled. It penetrates deeply into culture, racing uncontrollably in all directions (Baudrillard, 2004, p. 497). Traditional structures of power and institutions have lost control over the speed of these changes (Kellner, 2004, p. 498). According to Kellner, when Marshall McLuhan said, "the medium is the message," he indicated not only the end of the message but also the end of the medium. This implies that there are no more media as intermediary instances between the real and the viewer. The medium is reality, the medium is the event, and reality as such is abolished. Cyberpunk fiction responds to this situation by attempting to describe the contemporary technological, economic, social, political, and cultural reality. It depicts the enormous changes, their intensity and dynamics, as well as the new possibilities and threats that humans face. Thus, postmodernist theory and culture, and cyberpunk fiction are products of the same high-tech environment, both dealing with describing and explaining it.

Reading Baudrillard gives the impression that from now on, directly or indirectly, we are witnesses to the production of sensory reality, where direct and mediated perception merge into the immediate representation of space and the surrounding environment. The great chasm between the reality of temporal and spatial distances and the distancing of various videographic and infographic representations is over. Direct observation of visible phenomena paves the way for tele-observation, where the observer has no close contact with the observed reality (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 99). It is not surprising that Baudrillard wrote an article in the early 1990s entitled "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place," referring to the American-Iraqi Gulf War. As Douglas Kellner states in his book *Media Culture*, no truth about that war appeared in the U.S. press before the war began and during the war itself. Thus, the residents of the United States and Iraq watched the same programs on television, eager to see what was "really" happening. Baudrillard considers it a media spectacle, not a war.

The phenomenon of Madonna

Madonna (Madonna Louise Ciccone) is an American pop star known for her often scandalous music videos and performances. She is considered one of the most successful entertainers, encompassing her roles as a singer, actress, and commercial personality. Madonna is an intriguing example because her popularity and influence reveal significant characteristics about the nature and functioning of not only fashion and image but also the entire concept of identity in the contemporary world, particularly through the lens of modern media manipulation. To properly understand the phenomenon of Madonna, we must consider the mechanisms by which she transformed into the so-called Superstar .

In a cultural sense, so-called Superstars can be viewed as a way of resolving the role and position of the individual and their potentials in modern society, highlighting the symbolic power that Superstars have in shaping cultural and personal identity. Stars thus unite "the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary." This juxtaposition of the ideal and the usual makes the so-called stars appear to the public as possessing both human and superhuman qualities simultaneously.

This contradiction was noted by cultural theorist Edgar Morin, who, in his book "The Spirit of the Times," calls the so-called Superstars "new Olympians" and points to their dual nature, which shapes the different ways the public perceives them.

According to Morin: "The new Olympians are simultaneously magnetized by both the imaginary and the real, they are ideals that cannot be imitated and models that can be supported; their dual nature is analogous to the theological dual nature of the Godhero in the Christian religion: the Olympians are superhuman in the role they embody, human in their personal life" (Morin, 1979, p. 129).

In other words, the public needs to admire the idealized and unattainable glamour and beauty of stars, qualities they do not have or wish to possess, while, on the other hand, they seek what in the stars'



image is close to them.

Perhaps the most obvious example is Madonna, who, from her early beginnings in the 1980s, showed closeness to the audience, allowing them to indirectly equate and identify with her. Madonna is one of the most influential public rebellious figures, where through her image, the identity of young people in the era of conservatism changed. Her early music videos and concerts transcended traditional boundaries of fashion, openly flirting with the edges of decent behavior. Thus, from the very beginning, Madonna became one of the most scandalous female icons in the repertoire of cultural industry characters. Almost everything was known about her life: who her first love was, her favorite book, life with her mother, and later stepmother; she was simply accessible to the wider masses.

An interesting explanation for the so-called success and popularity of Madonna, which has lasted for more than thirty-five years, is provided by Jamie Anderson in his book "The Fine Art of Success," where he meticulously explicates, in my opinion naively, the reasons for her success. In his book, he writes about five basic factors most responsible for her success: vision, understanding the audience, highlighting strengths and hiding weaknesses, consistent implementation, and continuous renewal and upgrading of the career. Although we fully agree that all his listed elements are very important for the development of the phenomenon of a contemporary Superstar, we cannot escape the impression that he ultimately marginalized the role of what he calls "supporting" segments, namely the entire marketing team, which he sees as a loyal servant rather than a master, in which we sincerely believe.

If we recognize that Madonna represents one of the greatest public relations machinery in history, supported by top agents, publicists, and a creative team shaping her image, we arrive at the simple conclusion that a large organization stands behind the phenomenon of Madonna. The ultimate result is that her success is largely a marketing success, and her music, videos, and other products represent the triumph of exceptionally successful media production strategies. This method of promotion greatly resembles part of Jean Baudrillard's essay "Supermarket" and "Supermarket Goods," which explicates the creation and display of goods in detail; in this case, the final product would be Madonna as a phenomenon.

Baudrillard says: "There are clerks who only deal with tidying up the front stage, the surface appearance of shelves, where consumer interventions might have created some voids. Self-service further contributes to this absence of depth: the same homogeneous space, without mediation, gathers people and things—a space of immediate manipulation. The question arises who or what manipulates whom or what?" (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 80).

Baudrillard undoubtedly alludes to the changes of the present day, the influence of machines, technology, and all the "good/bad" new elements. The media present their own vision of reality to the public: by choosing events and personalities to report on and determining the character of media portrayals, they create a new reality, or simulacrum. Baudrillard suggests that media images, technology, and consumerism have led to the separation of the once natural connection between signs and reality. There is no longer a clear distinction between reality and its illusion, and the media truth shaped by cameras and journalistic reports becomes the only view of the world for the mass audience craving entertainment.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we unequivocally and fully agree with the theorists Baudrillard, Virilio, and Kellner. We believe that man is no longer the measure of the world, not the measure of all things. With the comprehensiveness of real-time telecommunications and the medium as a wild model of management, the information revolution has revealed itself to be a revolution of systemic delivery. This has caused a panic of rumors, which not only undermined the foundation of the ethics of truth but also the freedom of the press. These signs indicate that the revolution of real information also represents a revolution of virtual disinformation, or history being written in the same moment.

Screen against screen, the home computer monitor and the television screen oppose each other in the battle for dominance in the market of global perception, the control of which will start a new era tomorrow, both ethically and aesthetically. In this new era, someone like Madonna, with all her successes, is ultimately nothing more than a tool of new media—a true example of media manipulation.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.



References

- Virilio, P.(2000). Information Bomb, Svetovi.
Kellner, D.(2004). Media Culture, Clio.
Baudrillard, J.(1991). Simulacra and Simulation, Svetovi.
Morin, E.(1979). Spirit of the Time I, 20th Century.
Vukadinović, M.(2013). Stars of Supermarket Culture, Clio.
McLuhan, M.(1962). The Gutenberg Galaxy, University of Toronto Press.

