

# THE PORTRAYAL AND THE EFFECTS OF HYPERREALITY IN *READY PLAYER ONE* MOVIE BY STEVEN SPIELBERG (THE APPLICATION OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S THEORY)

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## ABSTRACT

Technology has become one of the parts of human life that is difficult to leave. Technology can create a hyperreality, hyperreality is an artificial reality that feels real. Hyperreality is formed from a combination of delusion and reality, truth and error, and the past and future are all became one and form a new reality so it is difficult to distinguish. The portrayal of hyperreality is illustrated I one of the science-fiction movie named *Ready Player One* by Steven Spielberg. This study aims to analyze the portrayal and the effect of hyperreality that occurs in society of Columbus, Ohio in *Ready Player One* movie. based on the objective of this study, the writer use Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. In this study, the writer used descriptive qualitative method to analyze and explain how hyperreality portrayed and affected society of Columbus, Ohio in *Ready Player One* movie. in this study, the writer finds out that hyperreality is formed and portrayed through the simulation of technology. James Halliday is the famous expert and developer of games in Ohio who created a virtual world named the Oasis. People in Ohio use virtual reality as a tool to connect the Oasis and the real world. People spend their time in the Oasis because they can get freedom, money, and pleasure at the Oasis. it makes them rarely to socialize in the real world. They also do not have jobs in the real world. Those are the effects of hyperreality that happened in *Ready Player One* movie by Steven Spielberg.

**Keywords:** *Simulation of technology, virtual reality, hyperreality*

## INTRODUCTION

Today digital technology has dominated the world. People have been influenced by the digital technology so that they are dependant and continue to consume digital technology. This can affects their social lives, economic, and even their personal lives. Digital technology continues to be developed through various simulations, simulation is a process to create and imitate a real object. Simulations continue to be carried out to produce new objects that will be consumed by people. The production and consumption that continues to be carried out by people will create a simulacra. Baudrillard introduces the distinctive character of Western society today as a simulated society. This is a society that lives with a cross of codes, signs, and models that are regulated as production and reproduction in a simulacrum (Lechte, 1994: 235). Simulacra is a term that is created from various facts, signs, images, and codes. Simulacra is currently born as a consequence of the development of science and information technology. Where signs and values are more important and become a reference for people to determine their status, relationships

with others and even their identity. Baudrillard defines simulacra as a counterfeit reality that no longer refers to the actual reality or the meaning of the actual reality has changed into a new reality which then creates a hyperreality. Hyperreality is a theory of Jean Baudrillard. Hyperreality is an artificial reality that feels real that is formed from a combination of delusion and reality, truth and error, and the past and future are all fused into one and become a new reality so it is difficult to distinguish. Ready Player One is one of the movies that contains hyperreality. This movie adapted from Ernest Cline's novel in the same name. The movie was released in March 2018, seven years after the novel was published. The genre of this movie is a science fiction, adventure. It was directed by Steven Spielberg, and the screenwriters are Ernest Cline and Zak Pann.

From the beginning of the story of this movie, hyperreality has been presented with the background of the story in the year 2045. In 2045, Columbus Ohio became a very advanced city where simulation of technology is developing very rapidly. Technological advances that occurred in Columbus Ohio at that time do not make the society of Ohio lives better. As a result of the development of the technology, people in Ohio have to live in a very bad environment. Piles of Iron and cars just thrown away, and that makes the environment polluted. Society in Ohio used those piles of iron and cars to make the buildings and homes. They are poor and also do not have good jobs. That makes them feel confused and frustrated to face the reality. James Halliday the expert and developer of games in Columbus, Ohio give people solution. He built gregarious games and created the Oasis with his best friend Ogden Morrow in 2025. The Oasis is a virtual world that can give the real experiences for people to get an entertainment. Every people can used virtual reality as a tool to enter the Oasis. There are not limit of age to accesses the Oasis. As long as people use virtual reality to enter the Oasis, they can do everything that they want to do, go anywhere, and become whatever they want such as changes their faces, gender, become robots, animals and monsters. With the sophistication of the technology people only have to use their imagination to enjoy all the facilities and life in the Oasis. There is no limits in the Oasis, the limits of reality is only the imagination of people.

Hyperreality provides a more pleasant experience than in the real world, and it makes people in Ohio prefer to spend their time at the Oasis than in the real world. They use virtual reality every day so that they do not care about their lives in the real world. It affects the social and economic lives of people in Columbus, Ohio. They rarely socialize in the real world, and it is hard to trust others because their identity at the Oasis should not be known by anyone, especially in the real world. When their identities are known, their lives in the real world can be threatened. They can be used by IOI (Innovative Online Industries) to become forced labor without pay. IOI is a second company games after Gregarious Games of Halliday. Beside social effects, the economic lives of people in Ohio are also affected. They do not have a permanent job in the real world. Their economic lives depend on the games and prizes offered at Oasis. And when they lose all things and money at the Oasis, they can also lose their money and everything that they have in the real world to get back their money and goods at the Oasis.

Those conditions make the real life of people in Columbus, Ohio into a mess. Various negative effects due to excessive use of technology appear mainly in the social and economic fields. They have lived in a virtual world that was largely created from the result of simulation of technology and imagination. Conditions and situations that happened in Ready Player One movie are related to the Baudrillard theory of hyperreality where the imagination feels very real and it is difficult to distinguish. So that is the reason of the writer chose Ready Player One movie as the object to analyze. The writer limits this study on Ready Player One movie as the object to be analyzed in order to give clear understanding about hyperreality, and the effects of hyperreality.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research method is a way or strategy to describe an analysis of the research questions. There are two research methods: first is quantitative research and the second one is qualitative research. According to Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) quantitative research is an inquiry into a social problem, explain phenomena by gathering numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods e.g. in particular statistics. Meanwhile, qualitative research is a research strategy that indicates the relationship between theory and research and usually emphasizes on how theories were generated (Bryman and Bell: 2007). In this study the writer used the descriptive qualitative method to describe the portrayal and effects of hyperreality in *Ready Player One* movie by Steven Spielberg.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Hyperreality in *Ready Player One* movie**

*Ready Player One* movie is a science fiction movie that set in Columbus, Ohio. At 2045 Columbus, Ohio became a very advance city because of James Halliday, he is a gamer who created a virtual world that could be enjoyed by everyone. James Halliday is someone who does not know to socialize he feels scared and uncomfortable in the real world. He continued to play games and eventually founded a game company called Gregarious Games with his best friend Ogden Morrow. James Halliday created the virtual world called the Oasis and released it for the first time in 2025. He created the Oasis through the technology of simulation. Jean Baudrillard state that simulation is a stage or process to create a new model that has no origin or does not match the reality of the original model being emulated. Simulation can create a new condition and experience that is different from reality. In the *Ready Player One* movie simulation is supported by the sophistication of technology that creates a new condition and experience that is so different from the reality in the real world. The technology of simulation in the *Ready Player One* movie forms a hyperreality that makes people affected and continues to consume it. They are not aware that they have been influenced by hyperreality, something artificial or unclear that was created through a simulation and not based on reality that exists or goes beyond a reality. They are influenced by the results of the simulation which are displayed very interesting, fun, and satisfying, but in reality what is displayed through the media does not match the actual reality, and continues to create feelings that are never satisfied. Attractive visuals, pleasant

feelings and unlimited imagination in the Ready Player One movie make the people in this movie prefer to spend their time in a virtual world rather than in the real world. The comfort and excitement created through this technology simulation have affected many people, making it difficult to distinguish between reality and imagination. The bad life in the real world also increasingly makes them feel better and live in a virtual world.

## **1. The Oasis**

In *Ready Player One* movie hyperreality has become the part of people's lives all of them almost spend their time in the Oasis. They can enter and explore the Oasis by using virtual reality. Many people suffer especially when the occurrence of Corn Syrup Droughts and after the Bandwidth Riots. People who cannot stand trying to find pleasure to forget the bad reality that happened until finally Oasis opened and can be enjoyed by everyone through a virtual reality. At that time Halliday emerged with his discovery which made him considered a savior and was praised as a God for succeeding in creating a new place and world that was more pleasant than a reality that existed for many people. Oasis is the biggest achievement of the technology simulation that is able to create new spaces for many people to live and live there, one's imagination can be connected directly to the sophistication of the technology after using virtual reality. People only need to use a virtual reality to be able to enter the world of Oasis.

Most of the scenes in Ready Player One are set in Oasis, not in the real world. Oasis is a virtual world that is similar to what exists in the real world but is very different from reality in a world where the scope of Oasis has no limits except one's imagination. When Wade uses virtual reality and enters the world of Oasis he shows the appearance of the Oasis, there is outer space, a beautiful city, a planet to play golf, a vacation planet, and also a casino planet and many other places. What is shown by Wade when entering into the Oasis also exists in the real world, but the difference is what is in Oasis has exceeded the reality. At the Oasis people can do anything and go wherever they want, they can play the games they want, go on vacation to Hawaii, ski in the pyramids even climb Mount Everest. Except eating, drinking and going to the bathroom, they have to do it in the real world. They can do anything and go wherever they want without having to go anywhere in the real world.

At the Oasis many places of entertainment can be visited, besides that the oasis also provides a place for people who want to play to get money and artifacts one of the places called Planet Doom. Picture below shows the view of Planet Doom. Planet Doom is the dangerous place in the Oasis, people come in Planet Doom to get a lot of coins, money, and artifacts.

People are not just looking for fun or just playing at the Oasis, they also looking for coins and one of the best places to get a lot of coins is Planet Doom. Planet Doom is a dangerous place in the Oasis, where people with different levels can compete freely to get a lot of coins and various artifacts or items that can be sent in the real world. James Halliday provides a variety of interesting and strong objects at the Oasis that can be enjoyed by every people, and to get it they have to win the games that have been prepared at Planet Doom.

When competing on Planet Doom those who lose the match will lose their lives, all coins, items, weapons, clothes, and everything they have ever gotten at Oasis. Because many people spend their time at the Oasis, they begin to lose their minds and stress when they lose coins, money, various kinds of equipment, and their lives in the Oasis. Even though their avatars can come back to life at the Oasis, they have to start their lives from scratch at the Oasis, starting every game from the first level to get coins and other objects. That is why Planet Doom said to be a dangerous place in the Oasis and can affect people of Columbus, Ohio in the real world.

Besides being free to go wherever they want, Halliday also provides choices for people who enter Oasis to be whatever they want. They are free to determine the avatar or character they want in Oasis just by their imagination. They can be beautiful, tall, become monsters, robots, or whatever. They can change their appearance as they wish. In Oasis they also cannot reveal their real identity so they must use a fake name for the avatar they use at Oasis. They use fake identities so that their privacy in the real world is not threatened by people or a group who intend to use their abilities to solve challenges in various games in Oasis.

Wade Watts uses the name Parzival as his avatar at Oasis. Parzival is an individual character that does not have a clan or a community or group in Oasis. But he has several close friends at the Oasis, they have never met in the real world nor know each other's real identities. Parzival's friends at Oasis are Daito, Sho, and Aech. They are all the same as Parzival does not have any clans or groups. Besides Daito, Sho, and Aech, there was a girl who was liked by Parzival at the Oasis named Artemis. Artemis was a girl who opposed Sixer because for her Sixer was dangerous people who had to be resisted. Sixer itself is an avatar for people who work for IOI (Innovative Online Industries), the second-largest company in the world after the Gregarious Games led by Nolan Sorrento. Nolan intends to take control of Oasis and make IOI the largest company in the world by employing many people as Sixers at the Oasis to win the challenges from Halliday.

## **2. Easter Egg**

Easter egg have two meanings, the first is in Christianity and the second in the media. In Christianity is a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus which is the good news for Christians. Easter Egg symbolizes sacrifice to achieve happiness and recovery from a bad life to a better life. Easter Egg is a symbol of a new life and to enlighten Christians. The meaning of Easter Egg in the media is a hidden message or feature in a video game, movie, or computer program.

In *Ready Player One* movie Easter Egg have two meanings. The first as the hidden treasure that have a hidden message, there are three challenges to get the three keys used to open three gates to Easter Egg. Easter Egg was officially announced immediately after Halliday died, and the announcement was made by Halliday which later turned into Anarok avatar from Halliday. The Easter Egg announcement was made at Oasis and also broadcast in the real world through TV, computers and sophisticated transparent gadgets. The first person to succeed in getting

Easter Egg will inherit all of the shares owned by Halliday at the Gregarious Games, and take full control of Oasis control. Easter Egg is not easy to get, Halliday made three keys to three hidden challenges aimed at testing who deserves Easter Egg.

The announcement made many people competing to win all the challenges given. But no one managed to win it until in the end, Parzival became the only person who completed all the challenges. Easter Egg is not just a game to gain power in the Oasis and Gregarious Games. Easter Egg in this movie is to hide the guilt and the regrets of Halliday during his lifetime and this is what Parzival began to realize when searching for answers to the first challenge given by Halliday. Halliday hates rules and he does not want to make rules or restrictions at the Oasis except the imagination of each person. And that makes people turn to the Oasis where they are free to be anything, and do anything so they feel that the real world is not important. Because there are no restrictions or rules in the Oasis, many people choose to live there so they forget the real world. This is what is regretted by Halliday and then makes it the main keyword in the first hidden challenge, where to win it people must break the rules of play.

Halliday's regret that he used as the keyword for the second challenge was that he was unable to make a leap in his life and run away from past life. The point of this is that Halliday was afraid to invite the woman he loved to dance and try to forget the woman he loved. The last regret of Halliday is to make Morrow give up the shares he has at the Gregarious Games and this is the last hidden challenge that Parzival did not sign a contract to get Oasis, he did not want to make the same mistakes that Halliday had made. Halliday makes Oasis and Easter Egg because he never feels comfortable in the real world, he doesn't know how to socialize and it's hard to express his regrets so he wants people to be able to feel his feelings through Oasis and Easter Egg games.

The second meaning of Easter Egg in Ready Player One is enlightenment, happiness and victory. When Wade won the game and got Easter Egg everyone was very happy. Halliday, who died as if returning to life at the end of the story. When Halliday gave Easter Egg to Parzival in the Oasis world, he changed from the form of his avatar named Anorak to the original form of humans. Halliday spoke directly to Parzival and Halliday also introduced a child that Parzival saw playing a game is he when he was a child. That was made Parzival confused because the person who spoke to him at that time was neither an avatar nor Halliday himself. It is difficult to explain why this happened and the incident was also not explained clearly in this film. This is what is meant by Baudrillard as hyperreality, where reality and imagination are difficult to distinguish and also explain their authenticity.

The Oasis is the virtual world that create hyperreality to every people in Columbus, Ohio. Halliday created the Oasis because he felt uncomfortable in the real world, so he try to escape and spent his time to play the games and creating games. He regretted and realized it was wrong when he was very old and people had been affected by the world of his creation so that before he died he created Easter Eggs. He hopes that one day someone can win the games he designed and

get an Easter Egg to represent thousands of people who have long lived in a virtual world. Wade Watts or Parzival managed to make it happen, he got an Easter Egg and brought happiness, victory, and enlighten for everyone.

Wade managed to make everyone happy and reunited in the real world. He not only won the games, but he also managed to win Nolan Sorrento, a person who had been mean to dominate Oasis and the real world. Through his victory he then conveyed an enlightenment of what he had gone through while battling evil to get happiness. The enlightenment conveyed by Wade to everyone is the hope of Halliday so that all people appreciate their lives more, socialize and continue to live life in the real world despite the painful real world. In addition, Wade also makes new regulations on Oasis and the real world where Oasis will be closed every Tuesday and Thursday, when Oasis is closed, everyone must carry out their activities in the real world.

## **2. Effects of hyperreality in *Ready Player One* movie**

### **1. Economic**

Technological developments make Ohio a very rapidly developing city in the world but the development of these technologies does not guarantee a good life for all Ohio people. Economic factors are one of the problems that occur in Columbus, Ohio caused by hyperreality. The people of Columbus, Ohio continue to consume digital simulations made by Halliday, Oasis. They continue to play, look for fun, and make money only at Oasis. They are not aware that they have been influenced by digital simulations which are an illusion that makes them able to do anything to get objects or money in the real world just to renew their level and needs at the Oasis. They continue to play, look for fun, and make money only at the Oasis. They are not aware that they have been influenced by digital simulations which are an illusion that makes them able to do anything to get objects or money in the real world just to renew their level and needs at Oasis.

Wade is an ordinary young man, he lives with his aunt Alice and Alice's boyfriend named Rick in Unit56K, Columbus Stacks, a slum in Columbus, Ohio. Their residence is made of used car irons arranged like an apartment with a construction that looks irregular. Just like everyone else Alice and Rick also played at the Oasis to get money. They play to get lots of coins and money that they can use in the real world. Even so, what they get at Oasis cannot guarantee all their wants and needs are achieved in the real world and at Oasis. Many people do not have real wealth in the real world but they can have lots of coins and money in Oasis, but they can lose it all the time at the Oasis.

The loss of goods, money, coins, and even their lives in Oasis can affect their lives in the real world because most people in Columbus, Ohio live and choose to live in Oasis, they do not have time to make money in the real world so this can have an impact on their economy. They will feel pressured, uneasy and will try to restore it as before and to restore it all they are even willing to owe in the real world or sell their goods. The beautiful life at the Oasis makes it hard for many people to let go. They are just busy fulfilling the necessities of their lives at Oasis and

forget their lives in the real world to work or socialize. They are difficult to control themselves and their lives so that when they lose money, coins or lives at the Oasis they are confused about where to get money to meet their needs in the real world and at Oasis. This is also experienced by Wade and Alice, Alice was confused about having to get money from where to need and rent their homes because Rick had used all their money to buy a level increase at the Oasis.

The same thing happened to Samantha or Artemis. She was caught by IOI and worked for them because of her father's debt. Her father died at the loyalty center, a place reserved for people who have debts to IOI. Those at the loyalty center must continue to work without pay to pay off their debt to IOI. They do not work in the real world but they work in Oasis. Artemis' father borrowed equipment and owed it to IOI, he promised to succeed in earning a lot of money, but he failed so that IOI raised his living expenses then he fell ill and eventually died. IOI makes the weaknesses of people in the material as an advantage. They lend equipment and money to many people and then increase their living costs. Because of this Artemis opposed IOI and tried to destroy them. While at the loyalty center, Artemis and others who had debts to IOI worked in a small room equipped with virtual IOI equipment, they were forced to install a boom at Oasis. And they will be tortured using electrical shock if they do not work according to the procedures.

Playing games at the Oasis does not promise anyone can get money easily and enjoy it in the real world. That is because they have to compete against anyone who becomes their enemy and if they lose, they will lose everything that they have in the Oasis, money, coins, and all the equipment they have ever gotten before. This is what makes many people still poor even poorer. They do not have jobs in the real world and continue to rely on digital simulations that are not real. They impose their will to meet the needs that they consider very important at the Oasis compared to the real world, and when they lose what they have at the Oasis, they experience an economic crisis in the real world. So, they try to do anything to get back their lives, coins, and money in the Oasis by taking other people's equipment or owes to IOI.

## **2. Social**

Social life is important in the real world. communication, helping each other, and needing one another are human nature. But the development of technology and the high level of consumerism of people towards technology have neglected their communication and social environment. This is what happened in Columbus, Ohio. People are busy with their lives in the virtual world or the Oasis and leave their social life in the real world. Spending a lot of time in the Oasis makes many people rarely even never socialize in the real world. The social life in this movie is very bad where people are more concerned with their pleasures compared to others. In some scenes, it is seen that people do not care about the situation in the real world and only focus on the games they play at Oasis so that their social life is not good.

The effect of hyperreality in this movie makes people only have friends at the Oasis even though they do not know the real identity of their friends. This experienced by Wade and his friends. In the real world, Wade has no friends at all and only has friends in the Oasis. Besides that, the relationship between Wade and Alice in the real world is also not harmonious. They



fought because of Rick, Rick used Alice's haptic gloves that given by Wade and the gloves did not work. Rick blamed Wade for losing everything he had at the Oasis after using haptic gloves and money of Alice.

Wade had never known or met Aech, Sho, Daito and Artemis in the real world. That is because they cannot give information about their real identity at Oasis because it is very dangerous. they cannot trust anyone at Oasis because IOI (Innovative Online Industries) always lurks everyone at Oasis and if they mention their true identity IOI will use it in the real world and at the Oasis. This is what happened to Parzival, he said his real name was Wade while dancing with Artemis. When IOI found out the real identity of Wade, they immediately came to him in the real world and offered Wade to collaborate with IOI to get Easter Egg. But Wade refused so IOI threatened to blow up his residence with Alice. When Wade called Alice to get out of their house, Rick picked up the phone and ignored Wade's words.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions of this study, the writer concluded that Ready Player One is a movie that contains hyperreality. The hyperreality in this movie was originally formed by a digital simulation conducted by James Halliday. The result of this digital simulation is the Oasis, a virtual world that can be enjoyed by everyone. When people enter the Oasis they are free to do anything and become whatever they want just by their imaginations. This imagination can form hyperreality, because in this movie the limit of reality is imagination. There are no limits other than imagination. Where people can do whatever they can do at the Oasis that they cannot do in the real world. Their imagination was formed and looks more real because of the digital simulation they use, even they can feel the real touch on their skin while play the games and do their activities at the Oasis. Hyperreality in this movie not only formed by digital simulation but also through people's imagination that makes the virtual world or the Oasis looks real. Digital simulations, imaginations, and reality in this movie merge and form hyperreality. That makes people difficult to distinguish between reality and the imagination. Hyperreality in *Ready Player One* movie makes people more concerned with life in virtual world of Oasis so that it gives negative effects in the social economic fields. They rarely socialize in the real world so when communicating in the real world they are rude and ignorant. They also do not have a job and prefer to look for money un the Oasis. When they lose everything that they have in the Oasis, they also do not have anything in the real world. They will do everything to earn money and restore their level in the Oasis.

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