



**SIMULACRA AND HYPERREALITY IN *BLADE RUNNER 2049* (2017)**

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**Abstract**

Today's world is characterized by the era of simulation and hyperreality, with many artificial realities that take over or even replace reality itself. Many aspects can now be created or simulated through the manipulation of advanced technology, Jean Baudrillard calls this the phenomenon of "hyperreality". The movie *Blade Runner 2049* tells the story of this condition where artificial things are flooding the reality, and the replicants can even replace the role of humans themselves. In this movie, the artificially engineered human is called 'replicant'. Jean Baudrillard's simulacra analysis is the methodology that the researcher uses to analyze the film, as well as taking a qualitative approach. This method is done by observing the entire content of the movie, as well as examining various signs, both verbal and non-verbal, to see the relationship between the *Blade Runner 2049* with Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality concept. The phenomenon of artificial humans or replicants, as well as advanced virtual technology and advanced manipulation by technology is very representative of Baudrillard's thinking. Where the world of the future, depicted as full of darkness due to the development of technology itself. Not only does it replace the role of humans, but even trying to surpass God.

Keywords: Simulacra, Hyperreality, Artificial, Simulated, Virtual, Augmented

## I. INTRODUCTION

Blurring the lines of reality, simulacra and hyperreality combine together create a strong construct of blurred image of the world where the distinction between the real and constructed is slim Christanti, M. F. (2021), simulacra are not just copies, but the representation that have become detached from the original as explored by philosopher Baudrillard, J. (1983), he argued that our world is increasingly dominated by simulacra, especially through social media and technology. We experience things like Disneyland or social media that create a sense of reality that may not have a basis in real world, this in turn blur the lines between what is real and what is simulated Jordan, B. (2009). In the world of blade runner 2049 sets as a prime example of how the ideas of simulacra and hyperreality concept is being explored by which the concept is developed by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. Simulacra in this movie are portrayed in many ways, the first one is between replicants versus humans, here lies the central conflicts on the difficulty of distinguishing between replicants, a bio engineered beings that possess near identical physical bodies, implanted memories,

and even the capacity to feel emotions, and the humans. Memories that's supposed to be a marker of authenticity that traditionally mark someone's unique past and identity are easily manipulated in this world. These blurs the line between the real and the copy, a core concept of simulacra Baudrillard, J. (1983). And artificial versus real, the movie creates a world that saturated with artificial experiences. Joi, K's AI companion, that provides companionship that indistinguishable almost from a human relationship that feel genuine, even physical environment like Las Vegas are portrayed as constructed, and impermanent, where holographic display creating a dazzling yet impermanent world that left the audience wondering if there's anything truly authentic left in this hyper simulated world. In the hyper reality side of the movie where the simulation takes over and the fading importance of the original, the distinction between the real and the simulated become irrelevant like memories, experiences, even emotion can be manufactured, which means the concept of original fades away and starts to lose meaning, and with the domination of the simulacrum in the movies that paints pictures where the simulated world

takes as the center core, the replicants yearning for a real past and K's search for his own origin highlighting the pervasiveness of the simulated world. This issue is already quite the challenge in the real world as of today where social media and new technology arises that further sets apart the reality from the original world we live in, in forms of what is original and simulated, social media is not that alien to most people in this era since the generation that in the prime age as of right now are flooded with social media stimulations that already alter the behavior of the masses, to the point of it filled with persona's instead of genuine expression of one's originality due to various aspect that drives them to comply to such narrow ideals that derived from comparison culture that embedded within the fabric of society that got amplified by the lacking direct interaction or physically in place, and the interplay with the idea of filtered perfection that unrealistically becomes standard settings that distort the original reality further Storey, J. (2015). With the technology that follows such as device that allow the user to experience virtual 3D world via virtual reality (VR) that becomes even more advance that combines them with augmented reality (AR) and mesh the

two together and simulated constructed worlds with the real world that seemingly blend in and sever the originality of the reality.

## **II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The world depicted inside the movie Blade Runner 2049 is a collection of dystopian mosaic, that being pieced together from elements such as the flickering neon signs, and the melancholic hum of rain-soaked streets in the night. Beneath the surface of the spectacle up front, there lies a deeper existential crisis behind it, that blurred the lines between the reality and the simulated within.

This research delves in the concept of simulacra and hyperreality that are present within Blade Runner 2049, as theorized by French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, with the analysing of the movie Blade Runner 2049 that masterfully portray a world, where the distinction between the replicants (artificial humans) and the humans themselves that is increasingly difficult to discern between each other. In the works titled *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard describing that a world where the hyperreality is at its center, world of a simulated reality, that

surpasses the original ones, that later becomes the phenomenon. In the movie the original is gradually eclipsed by its copies, that leading to a state where the distinction between them becomes irrelevant. This is evident in the Los Angeles of Blade Runner 2049. Memories, implanted into the replicants to provide a fabricated sense of identity to them, become indistinguishable from lived experiences that traditionally exist. K, the protagonist, a blade runner tasked with retiring the older replicants, grapples with his own implanted memories, questioning his own place in a world where authenticity is a dubious commodity.

The film utilizes visual elements to reinforce the concept of the hyperreal. The frequent use of holographic advertisements that projects idealized versions of life in the movie, create a stark contrast with the bleak reality that inhabited by most of the characters. These advertisements are not just mere marketing tools, they are carefully crafted simulacra that designed to evoke emotions, desires, and a sense of belonging in a world that desperately need them. Furthermore, the concept of replicants themselves embodies the notion of simulacra. A bioengineered to be near identical to humans, they

blurred the line between the artificial and the organic. The Voight-Kampff test, test that originally used to identify the replicants, becomes increasingly unreliable as replicants beginning to develop the capacity for emotional responses.

The film challenges the audience to question what truly defines humanity, is it simply biological origin? or is there something more intangible to it at play? K's quest for his own memories reflects the Baudrillardian idea of the loss of the real. His implanted memories create a sense of belonging to a past that never truly existed. This fabricated past serves as a simulacrum, a copy with no original, leaving K adrift in a sea of uncertainty. His pursuit of Rachel, a replicant believed to be the product of a forbidden humanreplicant relationship, further complicates the notion of what is real. Rachel's existence in the world, if true, would shatter the established order, blurring the lines between human and replicant even further apart. In the film, the concept of the simulacrum is explored in relation to human relationships. Relationships that in this world are often transactional and fleeting. Joi, K's holographic girlfriend, that exists solely just to fulfil his emotional

needs, that highlighting the artificiality and disposability of human connection in this dystopian world. Even Deckard, the blade runner from the original film, becomes a subject of speculation, his existence shrouded in a mystery and doubt. The audience is left wondering is Deckard itself even real in the first place? or is he simply another carefully constructed simulacrum? Blade Runner 2049 doesn't offer easy answers to the phenomenon.

Instead, it presents a world where the lines between the real and the simulated are constantly shifting altogether. The film serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of a world that saturated with simulacra, where the very essence of human experience itself is at stake. By utilizing Baudrillard's theory, Blade Runner 2049 forces us to confront the increasing rate of blurring the reality in our own world, the one we lived, a world where technology and media that constantly bombard us with simulated experiences Zhu, Y. Q. (2015). This film serves as a cautionary tale, that urging us to critically examine the narratives and experiences that we consume, or we become lost in a labyrinth of our own making.

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

In the exploration of the intricate world within Blade Runner 2049, where the line between the real and the simulated crumbles apart, a qualitative research approach is chosen as it proves most effective. Quantitative methods on the other hand, which rely more on numerical data and statistical analysis, are rather less suited for this task Creswell, J. W. (2009). Instead, qualitative research is chosen to delve into the subjective experiences and meanings that are embedded within the film. It allows the researcher to analyze the film's visual language, narrative structure, and thematic implications, that leading to a deeper understanding of how it portrays the concept of simulacra as theorized by Jean Baudrillard. The method of quantitative research is excels at measuring and analyzing the objective of the phenomena.

However, Blade Runner 2049 presents more complex social commentary that is built on a foundation of symbolism and ambiguous interpretation. Counting the numbers of holographic advertisements or measuring the length of K's implanted memory sequences wouldn't reveal the deeper anxieties about artificiality and the erosion of

the real that the film provokes. Qualitative research on the other hand, thrives better on interpreting the meaning and exploring the why, behind what the audience sees on the screen. It allows the researcher to analyze the narrative arc that is present in the film, the emotional responses of the characters within it, and the visual elements that contribute to the overall world building. By examining these various aspects, the researcher can gain nuanced understanding of how the film reflects and critiques Baudrillard's theories of simulacra. This method involves a thorough examination of the movie itself, and paying close attention to the details like dialogue, camerawork, editing choices, and mise-en-scène that present. For instance, the recurring motif of rain-drenched streets could be interpreted as a symbol of the constant blurring of lines between artificial environments and the "natural" world.

In the analyzing process, here focus on the shifts to the broader cultural context. Examining the film within the framework of science fiction as a genre, and in relation to the contemporary anxieties about technological advancements, it helps illuminate the themes that are being explored within the narrative. This

approach also analyzes the film's use of signs and symbols. For example, the holographic advertisements that might be seen as simulacra of human desires and aspirations, masking a reality that is far more bleak and nullified.

Qualitative research is an iterative process. One method that often informs the others, that leading to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the film Mack, N. (2005). Utilizing these techniques the researcher is set to open the layers of symbolism and the meaning that are hiding within the movie Blade Runner 2049, and reveal how it depicts a world where it is consumed by hyperreality, mirroring the concerns of Baudrillard's theory. Utilizing qualitative research approach, it allows the deconstruction of the intricacies in the Blade Runner 2049 and its exploration of the simulacra concept Gautam, V. (2023). This method allows the researcher to move beyond the surface of observations and delve deeper into the film's thematic depths, illuminating its social commentary and the philosophical complexities. By analyzing the interplay of visuals, narrative, and symbolism, the researcher can gain valuable insights into the film's exploration of a world,

where the distinction between the real and the simulated is forever dissolving.

#### IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In the neo-noir masterpiece *Blade Runner 2049*, Los Angeles lies under a permanent curtain of artificial rain, the ideal atmosphere for a world saturated with simulation where most things appear vaguely Simmons, J. (2019). Here, Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulation and surrealism found fertile ground. The film not only depicts a futuristic cityscape that being dominated by giant and blaring advertisements but also explores the blurred lines between humans and the replicants, memory and implants, and ultimately raises the questions about the nature of what constitutes reality itself. This research will address these Baudrillardian concept, arguing that *Blade Runner 2049* is not simply a sci-fi spectacle but also a profound meditation on the erosion of authenticity, where reality in a world, is increasingly dominated by surrealism. The movie *Blade Runner 2049*, serves as a significant representation of Baudrillard's theories of simulacra and hyperreality. The film's portrayal of Los Angeles as a world so saturated with simulations

everywhere, where the lines between memory and reality, human and replicant, are constantly blurred. But the film also suggests the longing for the authentic, a desire for connection that persists even in a hyperreal environment Baudrillard, J. (1994). In exploring these concepts of reality and originality, the movie *Blade Runner 2049* becoming a cautionary tale about the impact of technology and our sense of self and the enduring human search for meaning in a world that is increasingly dominated by simulated experience.



Figure 1. The close up panning of K with Joi that partially transparent kissing K.

Here can be seen where the artificially simulated experience meets the longing of a replicant in form of Joi, a virtual companion that in a form of hologram, kissing K's cheeks, a replicant, that symbolize an intimacy between the two, they both classified as an artificially engineered being with the purpose of fulfilling one's need

that also can be in place of need itself that indistinguishable from the thing he replicate, the human, the creator of their existence that brought them to life that goes on par with them. The movie Blade Runner 2049 not only offers a stunning visual experience for the eyes, in a dystopian world of Los Angeles.

But it is also a movie that offers exploration of our relationship with reality in the age that dominated by simulations and artificial stimulation. Through the lens of Jean Baudrillard the concept of simulacra and hyperreality in the movie is studied and found to be portraying a world where the line between the real and the simulated has become an increasingly blurred and vague concept.

The movie itself is not just offering a science fiction tale but it's also a form of meditation on the erosion of authenticity in a world that is saturated with manufactured experiences. What's happening is that our contemporary world prioritize more of simulated everything over the real Baudrillard, J. (1983). These simulacra copies that without originality in turns have become the dominant reality. In the movie this concept permeates every aspect of life. The sprawling cityscape of Los Angeles is dominated by colossal

holographic advertisement that projects Idyllic landscapes and idealize lifestyles.

The purpose of these advertisement is not just as marketing tools, but as a constant reminder of a world beyond the pollution and decay that blanket the real Los Angeles. The characters themselves become entangled in a web of simulacra. K (Ryan Gosling), the protagonist's replicant blade runner, relies on the implanted memories to connect a seemingly human past. These artificial memories shaped his identity and emotional experiences, yet the authenticity of it is constantly under questioning, K is left to grapple with the possibility that the foundation of his very existence of being is a manufactured construct.

The movie dive deeper into the problem of concept of the real through the complex relationship between humans and replicants. The replicants as bioengineered beings with advanced sentience and emotional capacity are designed to serve the humans. The Voigt-Kampff test validity is crumbling when K, the replicant with implanted memories of a childhood exhibit genuine emotional responses. These things throw the entire concept of human authenticity into disarray. If

replicants that are not in a human, can process seemingly genuine memories and emotions, then what really distinguishes them from humans? Are humans simply more sophisticated replicants, are their memories and experience is just yet another layer of simulations that in turns blur the lines between the two Mesaros, L.

## V. CONCLUSION

The complex intricacies of artificial stimulation that present in the world poses a risk that requires attention, especially right now where in the world is composed of reality that filled with labyrinth of simulations. The movie blade runner 2049 compels us the questions the very nature of our existence as a human being. Are we merely replicants in our own lives, shape by implanted memories and societal construct? The movie offers an answer that challenge us to determine and examine our own relationship with the real and the simulated. Perhaps in the labyrinth there is a remains of spark of authenticity waiting to be discovered and engage, flicker of empathy in the fastness of world that can bridge the gap between the simulator and the real ones. In this search for meaning in a hyper real

dominated world Maine became an ongoing struggle for all of us, but Blade Runner 2049 reminds us that the human capacity for a connection, even if it's built upon a foundation of simulacra, can offer a path to move forward, to move on.

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