THE PORTRAYAL OF HYPERREALITY IN MOVIE *LATENCY* (2024)

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Abstract

This research analyzes the construction of hyperreality in the film Latency (2024) through a descriptive qualitative approach by focusing on Baudrillard's (1981) four stages of simulacra. The findings show that the movie gradually builds layers of simulation from the second stage of representation that deviates from reality, the third stage of signs that no longer reference reality but pretend to have a basis, and the fourth stage, hyperreality. This process is seen clearly through key scenes, such as Hana's ability to type with her mind and manipulate virtual objects, which blur the line between real reality and simulation. The climax occurs when Hana does not realize that she has killed her best friend in a VR hypnotic state, illustrating how immersive technology can erode the human ability to distinguish reality. The closing scene, in which Hana laughs in relief as her VR headset is removed, becomes a powerful metaphor for the dangers of hyperreality in the digital age. This research not only confirms Baudrillard's theory but also provides a clear example of how modern technology can lead us to a condition where simulation not only mimics reality, but completely replaces it.

Keywords: *Hyperreality, Simulation, Movie, Virtual reality, Latency*

I INTRODUCTION

The development of technology in recent decades has changed the perspective from which people view the world around them. One of the most visible and exciting innovations to explore is Virtual Reality (VR). A technology that allows people to enter an immersive digital world, which is not only used for entertainment purposes such as playing games, but also allows people to use these tools for therapy and education (Gerry et al., 2022; Yu, 2023). VR is a system that is created and simulated by a computer. This allows users who are usually called Avatars, which is a virtual representation of the user (González et al., 2013). Therefore, VR creates a new world called virtual world. Unlike social media platforms, VR gives the impression that users can actually feel the "presence" of other avatars in real time. Moreover, VR is different from social media platforms, such as Facebook, where there is a study (Susylowati, 2020) on how santri interact on the Facebook platform that only from text to text, there is no virtual room that can make them meet each other or feel each other presence in real time. Along with the advancement of VR, sci-fi movies have also started to explore themes around this VR technology, such as *The Matrix* (1999), *Ready Player One* (2018), and *Black Mirror* (2017). Depicting how VR can create realistic alternative worlds that are difficult to differentiate from the real world. These movies are not only entertaining but also triggerring reflection on how such technology can affect human perception, identity and even morality (Swaleh & Wabwobwa, 2023).

The relevant theory in the discussion of VR is Hyperreality, which was born from the theory of *Simulacra and Simulation*, a theory that was introduced by Jean Baudrillard (1981). Baudrillard explains that postmodern society lives in a world where simulation has lost its connection with real reality (1995, p. 3). This happens because the signs or representations that are meant to portray reality but eventually lose their connection to the real reality. Baudrillard describes this progression through four stages, where in the final stage, simulation is completely detached from the real reality and creates hyperreality. It refers to a condition where simulation becomes more real than reality itself (Ane, 2023). The virtual world of VR technology blurs the line between real world and virtual world, creating an experience that is often more believable than physical reality. This theory is increasingly relevant due to the growing development of technology, which allows us to create and live in a virtual world where people can be whatever they want. Film is an object that is most often used in analyzing a journal. Film is a bridge where today it is not just entertainment but also an object to put ideas in the form of philosophy or even politics (Nafisah, 2019). Films can be analyzed using various theories that are relevant to the object of the film itself, Hyperreality is one of them.

Previous studies have explored hyperreality using film as the object.One example is a study by Dalimu et al. (2020) entitled *The Portrayal and the Effects of Hyperreality in Ready Player One Movie by Steven Spielberg (The Application of Jean Baudrillard's Theory)*. Dalimu et al. (2020) uses a descriptive qualitative method, where they analyze and explain how hyperreality is portrayed in the society of Columbus, Ohio in the film.

Latency (2024) tells the story of a professional gamer named Hana, who suffers from acute agoraphobia. She is asked to try out new VR gaming equipment that uses AI to interact with her brain's electrical activity, which can improve her game skills. As Hana and Jen, her best friend, test out the new device, the line between reality and Hana's simulated subconscious quickly begins to blur, leaving her to question whether the device is helping her to improve her gaming skills or control her perspective. The movie explores how VR technology can change the way humans perceive reality and also depicts characters trapped in virtual worlds that are so real that they are difficult to differentiate from the real world. This research aims to analyze how the film *Latency* (2024) portrays the interaction between reality and the virtual world using Jean Baudrillard's Hyperreality theory. This theory is used to examine how the movie creates an experience that blurs the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds (Tapparan & Rahyadi, 2023), and how the characters in the movie interact with the virtual world.

II MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research method is an important framework used to collect and analyze data in a study, The research method is chosen based on the purpose of the research and the type of data needed (Patel & Patel, 2019). Research method itself serves as a guide for researchers as a helper to answer research questions that make research structured. There are two types of research methods: the first is quantitative method. according to Creswell (2018) quantitative method focus on collecting as well as analyzing numerical data, testing hypotheses and finding statistical patterns between variables, such as surveys, experiments and statistical analysis. The second is Qualitative Method which focuses on analyzing social phenomena, human behaviour and culture, this method uses non-numerical data such as text, images and videos to explore meaning (Susanto et al., 2024), such as case studies and content analysis.

This study uses descriptive qualitative methods to analyze how the film *Latency* (2024) portrays reality and virtual reality. The descriptive qualitative method was chosen because it provides an in-depth analysis and exploration of how hyperreality is portrayed in the film. The data sources in this research are scenes, visual elements, and dialog in *Latency* (2024). By using descriptive qualitative methods, this research is expected and aims to provide an understanding of how the film portrays the concept of hyperreality in the context of modern technological advances.

III FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In the movie *Latency* (2024), the analysis will focus on one main aspect, namely its the construction of hyperreality in the real reality and virtual reality. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, the discussion will connect the elements of the film with the postmodern discourse on hyperreality, while exploring its relevance to the development of VR technology in the film.

In the other hand, Hyperreality has no definite qualifications on its progress. The progress that Baudrillard mentions is how to sign each process of the simulation happening. According to Baudrillard (1995, p. 6), Hyperreality itself can have four stages, however, each stage does not have to be sequential to fulfil the conditions for hyperreality to occur. The four stages are only a sign to indicate the occurrence of hyperreality. However, Hyperreality or 4th sign is the product (1995, p. 56) while the 1st until 3rd sign is the form of the process of Hyperreality.

3.1 FIRST STAGE OR THE SACRAMENTAL ORDER

In the first stage, it can be described as a mirror, where the real reality is still clearly visible. an example of the first stage can be seen from the application of the Google Earth application, where the application is a form of the real world and is depicted in the form of an application. where people can still clearly see its authenticity. Unfortunately, in the movie *Latency* (2024) there is no sign that represents this first sign.

3.2 SECOND STAGE OR ORDER OF MALEFICENCE

In this stage, the representation begins to deviate from the real reality, although it still refers to it. Baudrillard calls it a “mask” that obscures the truth. An example of the second stage can be seen in photo content on Instagram where the photo is cropped or edited to remove certain objects, for example removing unknown people in the background of the photo. The sign is still rooted in the real reality, but even so, it has been distorted by the edits.

Figure 1. Hana playing virtual games in her own house/00:02:45 – 00:02:50

In the scene, Hana is testing a virtual game that is being developed by the game developer. Seen in the scene Hana plays the virtual game in her own home, but with the help of the virtual reality she uses, Hana can see monsters as part of the game. In the scene, it can be seen that there is a monster that has a bug or a condition where an error occurs in the game program. The monster is stuck in the wall of Hana's house. This scene is included in the second sign because virtual reality still has a relationship with the real reality. Although it has been manipulated using virtual reality, the real reality can still be seen when Hana opens her VR device. The scene still represents reality, but it is no longer fully real after Hana wears her VR.

3.3 THIRD STAGE OR ORDER OF SORCERY

At this stage, signs no longer refer to the real reality, but still pretend that "they" still have a basis in the real reality. An example is the creation of the Meta created by Facebook, a completely virtual world, where users interact with avatars, digital objects, and social rules that do not exist in the real world. However, this metaverse still claims to be an "alternate world" that can be accessed like a physical space.

Figure 2. Omnia talking inside Hana's head/00:16:09 – 00:16:12

In the scene, Omnia tries to talk to Hana to start the calibration of the tool. When Omnia speaks to Hana directly through the device, it is a sign of the third stage, where the sign no longer refers to find reality, but also creates kind of illusion is the reality exists. This is evidenced by Omnia's voice that only Hana hears because only Hana uses the device and Jen does not use it. Omnia's voice is a sign because the voice has separated from the find reality and pretends that the voice is indeed part of the real reality.

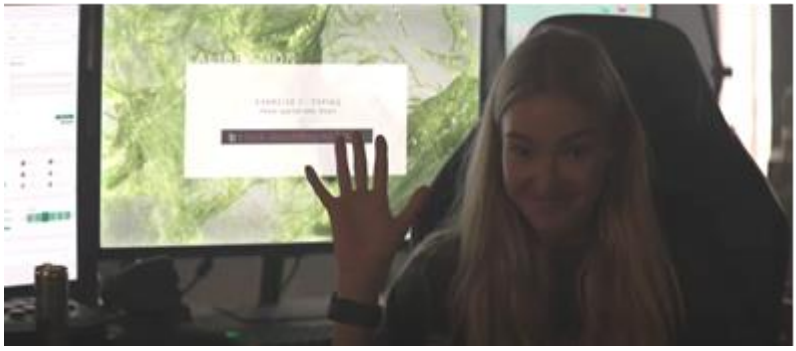

Figure 3. Type without touching/00:18:18 – 00:18:26

In this scene, Hana is typing using her mind, a vivid depiction of hyperreality where the virtual world becomes much more interesting and feels more “real” than the actual reality. This refers to Stage 3 of Baudrillard's simulacra, where Hana is able to do something that is impossible to do in the real reality, as Baudrillard explains in Stage 3, signs no longer represent the real reality, but rather pretend to be the reality itself.

Hana's scene precisely illustrates this condition, the activity of typing with the mind in the virtual world has no direct reference in real reality, but is presented as if it were a normal way of interacting. Hana's ability in this scene shows how virtual technology creates its own autonomous logic of reality. In Stage 3, the simulation no longer seeks to mimic the real reality, but constructs an entirely new system of meaning and action possibilities. As Hana types with her mind, we witness a perfect example of what Baudrillard calls “masking the absence of a profound reality” (1995, p. 6), where the simulation masks the absence of reference to the real reality by creating its own, completely independent version of reality.

Figure 4. Controlling device/00:18:18 – 00:18:26

In this scene, it is clear how Hana is able to control her friend Jen's phone without physically touching the device. She easily plays music from the playlist on Jen's phone, demonstrating an incredible level of control over her surroundings. This scene is a sign of the Third Stage, where digital representations are so advanced that they are able to create interactions that are completely detached from physical reality. Hana can do whatever she wants within this virtual space.

However, ironically, despite Hana's immense power of control over this virtual environment, she does not realize that everything she experiences is actually a virtual reality. She believes that this is her home, a belief that shows how perfectly the simulation deceives her perception. The house he sees and feels may have all the convincing details, the texture of the walls, the lighting, even the ambient sounds. But everything is a digital replica that has no physical reference in the real world. This is the main characteristic of the Third Stage of simulacra, a virtual reality that is so convincing that it is able to mask the absence of the real reality it is supposed to represent.

Figure 5. Omnia saying things in Hana mind/00:30:16 – 00:30:31

In the scene, Omnia talk with Hana, “You even forget it's there”, is a strong marker of the transition to the fourth stage of simulation in Baudrillard's theory, hyperreality. Unlike the third stage where signs merely conceal the absence of the real reality, the fourth stage is characterized by the creation of a new reality that is completely autonomous and no longer dependent on any references in the real world. In this scene, the sentence implies that Hana begins to lose the ability to distinguish between physical reality and the virtual world she explores through VR technology. When someone like Hana reaches the point where she “forgets” that the technology exists, meaning that she no longer

realizes that what she is about to experience is virtual reality, then simulation is no longer just a representation, but has turned into reality itself.

3.4 FOURTH STAGE OR HYPERREALITY

This stage is rather radical. Where Sign is not only detached from real reality, but also creates a new reality that is completely separated from the real world. An example is TikTok For Your Page recommendation algorithm that doesn't care about the truth. Viral content, even if fake, becomes "reality" for users, even more influential than facts. Another example that might explain is VR themed life on a new planet, where users can fully control the reality that exists there, they can be anything and anyone.

Figure 6. Bug Ball/00:33:56 – 00:34:04

This scene is a stage of hyperreality, which is formed through the process of the previous two stages that have been identified. In this scene, it is clear how a ball left by Hana suddenly moves on its own and mysteriously disappears, with visual effects that resemble a bug or error in a program. This scene represents Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where the virtual world created by the system has become so perfect that Hana is no longer able to recognize it from physical reality.

The moving ball itself is a metaphor for stage four simulacra, a sign completely separated from any reference to reality, yet perceived as more real by Hana's perception. The accompanying bug effect further emphasizes that what Hana perceives as the real reality is actually just a virtual reality that is beginning to show its flaws.

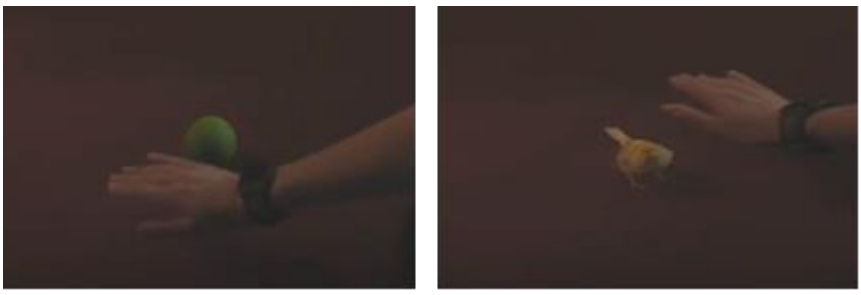

Figure 7. Hana manipulating the ball into bird/00:38:58 – 00:39:40

In the scene, Hana suddenly realizes her ability to manipulate the reality around her, where she can remove the ball lying on the floor (left image) and turn it into a free-flying bird (right image). This scene is a perfect representation of Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where the boundary between the real and the virtual is completely irrelevant. Hana is able to do whatever she wants to the objects around her, creating a new reality according to her will, without realizing that the world she is experiencing is actually just a form of virtual reality.

This situation constitutes hyperreality, where simulation not only replaces reality, but actually becomes more real and more influential than reality itself. Hana no longer needs a real reality to interact with her virtual environment, the ball that turns into a bird is a new reality that she creates herself. This shows how in hyperreality, the logic of the real world becomes inapplicable, replaced by new rules that are completely detached from any reference in the physical world.

Figure 8. Hana saw Jane can take the ball/00:40:19 – 00:40:20

In the scene, Hana looks confused when she realizes that Jen is able to touch a virtual ball that she should only be able to see through her VR device. This confusion comes from her assumption that only she is in a virtual world, while Jen and their home environment are part of physical reality. However, Jen's interaction with the virtual object is ironic evidence that Hana is actually trapped in a simulation that is far more complex than she thought. The fact that Jen can interact with elements of the virtual world reveals the shocking truth that not only is the ball a digital illusion, but the entire home environment and Jen herself is a virtual reality created by the system.

This discovery shows that the virtual world Hana experiences is not just an additional layer of reality, but an entire simulation that has completely replaced her perception of reality. This virtual space perfectly replicates every detail of her home environment, including the figure of Jen who turns out to be just an avatar in the simulation. The scene has a powerful meaning for how immersive technology can create an alternate reality so convincing that the line between real and virtual becomes impossible to distinguish.

Figure 9. From Rank 5 to 4/00:42:43

In this scene, Hana re-entered the game tournament that had made her lose before. This time, she is confident that she can win the competition with the help of the sophisticated device she is using. However, what Hana does not realize is that this scene is actually a perfect example of Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. In this virtual world, the boundaries between reality and virtual reality have been completely blurred, people can turn into whatever they want, creating new identities and abilities that far exceed the limitations of the real world.

Hana, who is still shackled by her past experience of defeat, does not realize that what she considers a second chance is actually just a virtual reality. The tournament she is participating in is not a real tournament, but a virtual reality that mimics the form of the original competition. Ironically, it is precisely in her attempt to overcome the real failures of the past that Hana falls deeper into the layers of hyperreality. She is caught up in the illusion that victory in this virtual world can make up for defeat in the real world, without realizing that it is not real.

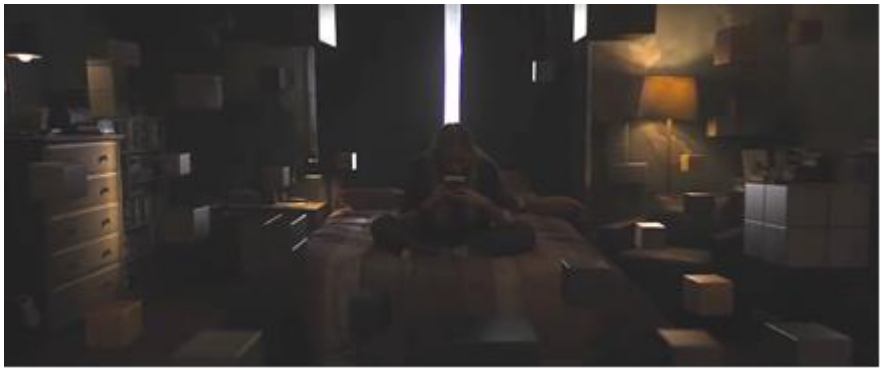

Figure 10. Room controlling, Blocks flying/00:49:54 – 00:50:22

In the scene, a striking manifestation of hyperreality is created through the simultaneous visualization of the floor, sound-dampening corks, and Mario's lucky block lights floating in the air. These elements not only serve as a backdrop, but actively shape a virtual space where the laws of physics and logic of the real world didn't apply. The camera spotlight that focuses on Hana sitting on the bed while playing the game further reinforces this concept of hyperreality, where the boundaries between physical reality and the virtual world are blurred.

Hana in this scene becomes the centre of the hyperreality, where she has the ability to do whatever she wants, including making objects around her levitate. This ability is a visual representation of the absolute power held in virtual space. The box-shaped items floating around her are not random elements but smart visual metaphors. These objects directly represent the environment of the Tetris game Hana is playing, where all the game elements consist of square blocks.

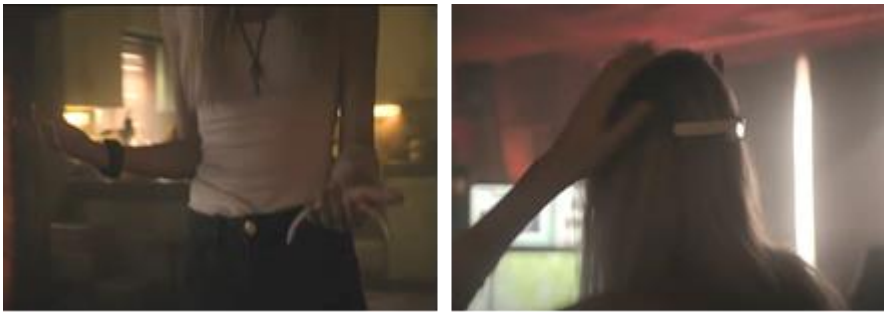

Figure 11. Hana trying to remove the device/01:11:31 – 01:11:37

In the scene, Hana tries to remove the VR device that connects her to the virtual world, but without realizing it, the device is still attached to her head. On left image, she trying to remove it, but on the right image, the device attached again. Hana's inability to fully detach herself from the device reflects the condition of modern humans who are increasingly trapped in virtual reality, where the boundaries between physical and virtual reality are becoming increasingly blurred.

This situation illustrates Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where virtual reality is no longer different from real reality. Hana, who is trapped in a virtual world, can no longer determine which experiences are real and which are just virtual reality. The two supposedly separate realities now merge in her perception, creating a hybrid reality that blurs all limits.

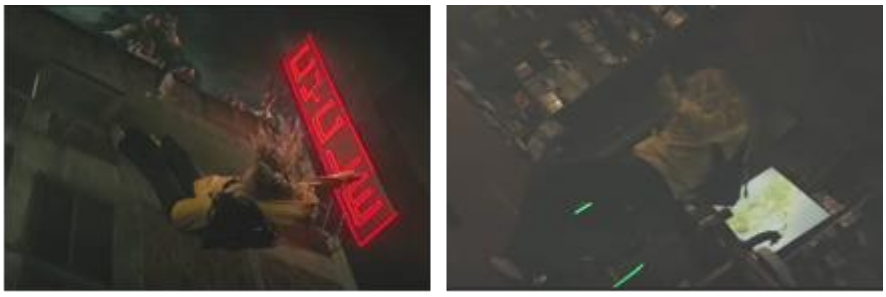

Figure 12. Hana falls from the rooftop and returned to her room/01:21:14 – 01:21:35

In this scene, Hana, who has been confined by her agoraphobia, is forced to jump from the rooftop of the apartment (left image) where she lives after being chased by a terrible monster in the virtual world. However, when she jumps, the birds flying around her suddenly show visual effects such as

glitches or program errors, as if the virtual world is experiencing technical problems. This is a crucial clue that Hana never actually left the simulation. When her body hits the ground, instead of dying, she is thrown back into her apartment room (right image) and falls right on top of her computer desk, as if the whole experience was just a virtual reality.

This scene illustrates how the virtual world has completely overtaken Hana's perception, blurring the lines between the real and the virtual. As an agoraphobic, Hana has never once dared to leave her safe space in physical reality. However, in this virtual world, she experiences adventures that are impossible in the real world, namely running outdoors, facing danger, and even jumping from heights. After she falls and returns to her apartment room, it is revealed that all of this is just a virtual reality designed to manipulate her perception. This scene clearly represents Baudrillard's stage of hyperreality, where simulation completely replaces it. Hana is trapped in a cycle of virtual experiences that she considers real, while the physical world becomes increasingly alien to her.

Figure13. Hana detached from the VR device/01:23:16 – 01:24:55

In this final scene, the police swiftly break down the door to Hana's apartment. The room of Hana's apartment is shabby and dirty, indicating that Hana has been trapped in the virtual world for so long that her apartment has been neglected. The police carefully searched every corner of the room until they found Jen's dead body in the bathtub, with a stab wound to her stomach. When the police cuffed her wrists and removed the VR device from her head, she laughed with relief. Slowly returning the

realization that she has been trapped in a perfect virtual simulation, while the real world has been torn apart. This scene becomes a realization about the dangers of hyperreality, where the boundaries between virtual and real are so indistinguishable that people can lose their grip on the real reality completely.

The movie Latency (2024) provides a strong visual portrayal of the concept of hyperreality through virtual reality technology. The analysis shows how the movie gradually builds up layers of simulation from the second to the fourth stage, where the boundary between the real and virtual reality is increasingly blurred before finally disappearing completely. Key scenes such as Hana typing without touching the keyboard (***Datum 3.2*** *00:18:18 – 00:18:26*) and manipulating a ball into a bird (***Datum 4.2*** *00:38:58 – 00:39:40*) that show the transition from the third stage of simulacra, where signs no longer refer to reality but pretend to have a basis, to the fourth stage where simulation creates its own autonomous reality.

An interesting finding in this analysis is how the movie depicts the process of hyperreality. Unlike the conventional VR narrative where the user is aware of entering the virtual world, Hana does not realize that she has been trapped in a simulation. The climactic scene where the police take off her VR headset (***Datum 4.8*** *01:23:16 – 01:24:55*) becomes a powerful metaphor for how VR technology can subtly replace reality without its users realizing it. The final scene where Hana laughs with relief when the police take off her VR headset is similar to the concept of digital awakening described by Louis (2015, pp. 141–142) as a moment of realization of the separation between the physical body and the digital avatar. According to Baudrillard's warning about postmodern society living in a desert of the real (1995, p. 3), where simulation not only mimics reality but actively destroys it.

The character Omnia in the movie becomes a system that creates hyperreality. Hana's interaction with Omnia, which only occurs in virtual space, represents how AI algorithms in modern technology shape our perceptions without us realizing it (Grewal et al., 2024). This situation is reinforced by dependence on virtual assistants which shows that people tend to trust AI more than humans after intensive use (Soferino et al., 2024). Unfortunately, although Hana has extensive control in the virtual world, she loses control over her physical reality. this is supported by Grau's (2003, p. 15) theory which states that the more perfect the simulation, the greater the potential for alienation from reality.

The film also provides a sharp criticism of the development of VR technology through the irony contained in the character of Omnia. As a virtual assistant who is supposed to help Hana overcome her agoraphobia, Omnia becomes a medium that plunges her into hyperreality. The dialogue “You even forget it’s there” (***Datum 3.4*** *00:30:16 – 00:30:31*) reveals the ultimate danger of immersive technology, when tools become so seamlessly integrated into perception that users forget their existence. This reflects the actual condition in the modern social media and VR era, where algorithms gradually reshape the user's reality without realizing it.

The representation of hyperreality in Latency reaches its peak in scenes where Hana cannot distinguish between virtual and physical experiences, such as when Jen can touch the virtual ball (***Datum 4.3*** *00:40:19 – 00:40:20*) or when the jump from the rooftop turns into a glitch (***Datum 4.7*** *01:21:14 – 01:21:35*). These scenes visually concretize Baudrillard's concept of pure simulacra, where references to the real reality have completely disappeared. What is more dangerous is how the movie shows that this process happens gradually and subtly, mirroring the way such VR technology works in real life that slowly but surely changes our perception of the world.

Although VR in the movie allows Hana to overcome agoraphobia (***Datum 4.7*** *01:21:14 – 01:21:35*), the same technology traps her in a more dangerous simulation. This is in line with Schroeder's (2018, pp. 93–95) argument in Social Theory after the Internet about loneliness in immersive technology. The findings reinforce Baudrillard's thesis that hyperreality not only replaces reality, but also creates a new, independent system of meaning.

IV CONCLUSION

The findings show that the film gradually builds up layers of simulation from the second stage, which is representation that deviates from reality, to the third stage, which is signs that no longer reference reality but pretend to have a basis, to the fourth stage, which is hyperreality.

This process of hyperreality development is clearly visible through various key scenes in the movie. In the early stages, VR technology still shows a connection with physical reality, as seen when Hana plays a game with a monster trapped in the wall of her house. But as the story progresses, the boundaries between real and virtual are increasingly blurred. Hana is able to do things that are impossible in the real world such as typing with her mind and manipulating virtual objects. The climax is when Hana is completely unable to distinguish between real reality and simulation, as seen in the scene where she doesn't realize she has killed her own best friend in a state of VR hypnosis.

This movie portrays how immersive technology like VR can slowly but surely erode the human ability to distinguish reality. The closing scene where Hana laughs in relief as her VR headset is removed is a powerful metaphor for the dangers of hyperreality in the digital age. This research not only confirms Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, but also provides a concrete example of how modern technology can lead us to a condition where simulation does not only mimic reality, but completely replaces it.

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