

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the era of postmodernism, the virtual world's existence has been known to enter the humans' sphere. The virtual world has become a necessity to create comfort within humans. According to Jameson (1984), postmodern society lives in a 'reality' which is defined by images and representations or something that can be easily replaced by something new if it has a higher value than anything else that can be said to be postmodern. The word modernism contains all meaning: forward, sparkling, and progressive.

Postmodernism in architecture places itself as a kind of aesthetic populism, as the very title of Venturi's influential manifesto, *learning from Las Vegas* (Jameson 1984). Jameson's analysis shows a great effort to revitalize Marxism by building a synthesis between the discourse of postmodernism and Marxism. Jameson sees postmodernism as a social, cultural, economic, political, and historical totality that marks the latest social phenomena since the 1950s, along with the emergence of a new structure of society referred to in various academic discussions as a post-industrial society, or consumer society and media society. Jameson's theory later develops as others try to paint a new social formation that is different from the old social structure of capitalism, namely a socio-cultural formation which is more a product of the cultural logic of multinational capitalism.

The most evident issue in the era of post-modern is hyperreality. According to Baudrillard (1994), hyperreality is a condition when people cannot distinguish

between the real world and the virtual world. Hyperreality is not grounded in reality beyond itself. However, in hyperreality, our knowledge of the world floats free from any verifying reference (King 1998). A hyperrealist can be seen as someone who is going through the process of simulation and simulacrum. Someone more inclined to focus on virtual life will create an impact on their actual life. This process signifies a hyperreality circle because one cannot distinguish where the real world or the virtual world itself. In this era, many virtual identities have also evolved from era to era. Those virtual identities are duplicates of a new identity but in virtual form.

Virtual identity can be seen as one of the hyperreal conditions. The virtual identity is sure of their false identity in cyberspace, or the virtual becomes one of the benchmarks of their freedom in starting a new life in cyberspace alone (Robins 1995, 25). Creating a new identity in cyberspace cannot be said as a right or wrong. However, people should not tend to prioritize the virtual reality world. These people have a difficult time distinguishing the virtual and the real world. This condition can also be said to be a hyperreal condition in which the media intermediaries and supporters also influence a person being able to survive in the condition of hyperreality.

Virtual identity in a game can be one example of hyperreality in the postmodern era. Nowadays, many people combine physical reality and virtual reality, as well as human intelligence and artificial intelligence. The virtual game is a form of human intelligence that can virtually create a game and can attract other people to share the game world. The cyberspace phenomenon is more than just

building maps of experience in the real world. Acceleration of the development of communication technology that is very fast has brought people to an order where distance and time are no longer a problem to communicate (Astuti 2015).

Virtual Identity on video games creates a division between the hyperreal and the real, but what it ultimately represents is the triumph of the hyperreal and the manufactured image. Specifically, when consciousness loses its ability to distinguish reality from fantasy and begins to engage with the latter without understanding what it is doing, it has shifted into the world of the hyperreal (Chin-Yi 2007).

Another example of hyperreality is television. Television becomes one of the products of postmodernism in which it makes people perceive television as reality. A copy of these simulacra or hyperreal precedes our lives, which makes the television to appear more 'alive' to us than real people who play the character. Baudrillard (1994) began to study how media influences our perception of reality and the world. He believes that in a post-modern media-laden society. People lived in a hyperreal world by connecting more and more deeply with things like television sitcoms, music videos, virtual reality games, and things that come to simulate reality. He argues that in a post-modern culture dominated by the virtual game, film, the Internet, and media, everything that exists is a simulation of reality.

Baudrillard (1994) is one of the figures who try to uncover changes in the character of modern society. He wants to reveal the form of change that is taking place in today's society, which he calls a simulation and hyperreal society. He develops his thoughts, which can be used to see reality in modern society, especially

consumer society. Baudrillard argues that we regard television and reality films as more real than our real lives (Selden 2017). This copy of simulacra or hyperreal precedes our lives, and the virtual game may look alive to us than real people who play the characters. Baudrillard (1994, 10) points to a simulation process in which representation of creating models of reality, illusion, and also he can say as “*The Production of Real World.*” This mass collection of simulations has resulted in a condition of hyperreality, where the only experience prepared realities such as edited war recordings or reality in the virtual game and the difference between real and simulation has collapsed. Simulation is the process of creating models of reality. The simulation produces simulacrum. Thus, they can see the simulacrum as the boundary between reality and imagination, which cannot be said to be clear anymore, thus creating hyperreality. Hyperreality is a condition where something unreal is believed as real, more real than the real. According to Baudrillard (1994, 7), the concept of signs no longer corresponds to or masks their ‘real-life.’

The concept of hyperreality, which creates an issue of identity, becomes one of the focus of reference in this research. Identity can be a natural thing, such as nationality, sex, or it can be something that is constructed, such as profession or wealth, based on the composition (Culler 2000). The identity that is constructed means that someone’s identity is formed as the result of the person’s interaction with other people in a particular environment. The development of identity makes it something that is not fixed. Instead, it is continuously changing. The changes of identity happen in the modern world because a person makes constant interaction with the external world, such as; virtual games, in which it involves a person that

becomes a different person to escape their reality. They choose the person that they want to appear to be in the virtual world by picking an Avatar. Thus, making the person develops in order to adapt to the external world and the people in surroundings (Baldwin 2004, 224).

An identity of a person never reaches a final state of the condition as it is caused by society and the environment in which a person lives are continually changing. Identity in the postmodern era is viewed as a liquid, fluid, dissolved, mediated, short-time-oriented, and is 'never taken seriously (Virtual)' (Degele 2008). According to postmodernists, all that is left is the difference. They must acknowledge, they say, that each person shapes his or her concepts of reality (Bressler 2007). Reality then becomes a human construct that is shaped by each individual's dominant social group. There exists no center, nor one all-encompassing objective reality, but as many realities as there are people. Each person's interpretation of reality will necessarily be different. No one has a claim to absolute truth.

The novel *Ready Player One* shows issues of technology created by the virtual game, which can be analyzed in this study. Virtual game on *Ready Player One* novel is one of the dystopian technology forms that create hyperreality. According to this novel, dystopia refers to a world that seems full of imperfections due to social and economic inequalities influenced by technology. This state of dystopia often illustrates of various situations in the future, as if giving a warning to the reader about how terrible the world would be, if a certain propaganda took over the control of the world. The hyperreality in this novel is represented by

cyberspace, virtual reality, and video games. Virtual reality and cyberspace are commonly imagined in terms of reaction against, or opposition to, the real world. They are readily associated with a set of ideas about new and innovative forms of society and sociality. In some instances, these are presented in terms of some kind of Utopian project (Cyber Culture 2019, 35).

Ready Player One is a 2011 debut science fiction novel of American author Ernest Cline which has successfully gained its attention in the world. The novel has received many awards, such as Goodreads Choice Awards and LA Times Book Prize, a New York Times bestseller. Among those praising the book were Entertainment Weekly, The Boston Globe, and The A.V. Club, since its publication in 2011. *Ready Player One* has earned the Prometheus Award for Science Fiction and the American Library Association's Alex Award (both in 2012). The story is set in a dystopian world in precisely in the year 2044. Therefore, this story can be said as a picture of the future where everyone needs to escape from their lives; the story also takes a virtual world (OASIS) as a concept.

The novel *Ready Player One* tells a story about virtual reality game which immerses the reader to the story by making them feel like they are experiencing the simulated reality firsthand, primarily by stimulating their vision and hearing. Running away from life is not wrong, but the characters of this story bring the virtual world, or in this novel is called OASIS, into the real world. The characters compete with each other and learn about the lives and identities of themselves as virtual characters. In the real world, they do not get what they wanted. They only focus on the world in which they can show the appearance of multiple identities.

The main character Wade shows two different identities that can be analyzed. Wade's first identity was a man who lived life in a village, and his second identity was an avatar in OASIS. Wade, as the main character in this novel, said that the OASIS, "this is the only place where I feel like I mean anything" – in which that cannot and will not happen. It can be inferred that visual reality can be used as an escape method or a method to enrich the real world and make the real world better.

After reading the novel, the writer is interested in doing in-depth research about hyperreality. The hyperreality process in Wade's virtual identity is researched and analyzed thoroughly. The writer chooses Wade as the character to be further analyzed because the main character tends to feel comfortable in the world of OASIS. His two separate identities can be related to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality through the three orders of simulation.

In this story, hyperreality is created by using VR glasses, in which Wade, as the main character, can enter into OASIS, a virtual reality game. There must be a media that can connect to the virtual world. Wade's desire to learn something that is not real can be categorized as a simulation concept, where he is studying how to make it possible for him to survive in the virtual world. The world in this story is called OASIS. Wade tries to learn the game that is held at OASIS, he tries to win and manages all his life to be perfect in OASIS. In the real world, before Wade enters his life in the OASIS, he has no friends, no family care about him, and no money. However, in OASIS, he has fame, wealth, friends, and goals in life. The benefits of his escape of reality towards his real life and community are questionable.

In order for the writer to support the analysis made, the writer used several related and previous studies. The writer found a few similar concepts that can be used to compare the related and previous studies have done over the past few years. The first study is from Justin Nordstrom (2016), which explains about *Ready Player One* by providing significant insights into two critical theories of game. He found that people being multiplayer massively in a VR world. *Ready Player One* as an expression that demonstrates the interplay between utopia and dystopia. The second study is an undergraduate thesis written by Andrew Barton (2018). Barton found that the dystopian physical world of the novel contrasts with the seemingly-utopian virtual reality, the OASIS. The OASIS, then, becomes a source of temptation to the hero (Barton 2018, 6).

The writer also found some related studies by the students of Universitas Airlangga who analyze the concept of hyperreality in Postmodernism and formal elements in fiction work. The first related study is a thesis by Dhini Parianti (2006), who defines about hyperreal identity in the main character of the novel *Catch Me If You Can*. Parianti found that the instability happens because the formation of identity depends on the external factors, such as family (Parianti 2006). The instability of identity can be explained in the point of view of hyperreality, which is called hyperreal identity. Another related study is from a thesis by Alana Amoretta (2017), who found that hyperreality is brought by technological development. Virtual reality games provide comfort for people to become part of hyperreality (Amoretta 2017).

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the issues explained before, the research questions are formulated as follow:

1. How is the simulation process in the virtual world in *Ready Player One* novel?
2. How does Wade's identity in the OASIS become a hyperreal identity?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems presented above, the main objectives of the study can be summarized as the following:

1. The study aims to identify the simulation process of the virtual world in *Ready Player One* novel.
2. The study aims to analyze the process of Wade's hyperreal identity in OASIS.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Hyperreality is where many conditions are found in people's daily lives. This issue can also be seen from many societies where they accidentally have a phenomenon where they cannot distinguish between the real world and the virtual world itself. Along with the changing times, virtual reality games are prevalent among young people and adults. With the development of technology creation, some people unwittingly prioritize their interests in the virtual world rather than in

the real world. This novel is not only an appealing object for literary research, but it also contains contemporary issues.

In terms of contemporary issues, it can be said that these issues are current and can contribute to discussing literature research through the theme of virtual identity on games. This study also can help other researchers analyze Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality with a specific issue in a virtual reality game. Also, this study aims to contribute and increase the comprehension of hyperreality and how hyperreal identity is portrayed in virtual reality.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Hyperreality : A condition where something unreal is believed as a reality, more real than the real (Baudrillard 1994).

Virtual Reality Game : A game that uses a simulation of reality that is presented by high technology such as sensory stimuli then brings a person to access the virtual environment (Parisi 2015).

Identity : Identity “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities” (Jenkins 1996).

Virtual World : A virtual world is a spatially based depiction of a persistent virtual environment, which can be experienced by numerous participants at once, who

are represented within the space by avatars (Bell 2004).

Log away : An activity to escape as far as possible from the real world and get a second life in the virtual world (Cline 2011).