Examining different aspects of the novel “Gone Girl”

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Abstract
Gillian Flynn’s Gone Girl, as a postmodern novel, depicts a society in which reality is very instable and difficult to grasp, thus while reading the novel, the feeling of indeterminacy prevails. To gain a better understanding of this novel, a postmodern approach has been chosen. Jean Baudrillard who is one of the major postmodern thinkers, focuses on the nature of reality and its meaning. Baudrillard’s concepts of simulation and hyper-reality refer to a particular image which do not necessarily embody the reality and thus it is indistinguishable from real. In distortion of reality, Baudrillard contends media plays a substantial role. Consequently, the ideas of the media theorist, Marshal McLuhan is added to propose a comprehensive picture as to how and why reality is being constantly distorted in the media-saturated world of Gone Girl. According to McLuhan, Television has changed our normal perception and our understanding of the world. McLuhan holds that Television culture is a culture of simultaneity, discontinuity and all-at-one ness. The results show that under the pressure of media and pop culture Amy, the main character of Gone Girl, has lost her real self and turned into hyper-real version of herself. Similarly, Nick is changed from a hot character to a cool figure to meet the expectations of media at the expense of his real self. Moreover, throughout Gone Girl, reality is continuously being replaced by simulation without the possibility of separating the two.

Keywords: Agency; Baudrillard; Gone Girl; Hyper-real; Media Studies; McLuhan; Postmodernism; Simulation.

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1. Introduction
While reading Gone Girl the audience feels baffled and a sense of uncertainty or ambiguity prevails throughout the story. This feeling could be observed in the studies conducted so far resulting in so much controversy and disagreements about the novel since the day of Gone Girl’s publication. The majority of the criticisms scrutinized the novel and the movie from psychological point of view in particular to either justify or reject Amy’s actions (Osborne, 2014. Novadytia Nur Wahid, 2012. Orman, 2016). At the same time there are some critics such as Nile Cappello (2014) who censured the fiction accusing it of being misogynistic. There have been others who didn’t take the novel seriously and reduced it to be just another pop crime fiction.

Besides the discussed critical works, there have been a number of other elements overlooked or insufficiently mentioned by previous researches. Generally, critics zoomed on one aspect of the novel and therefore they were incapable of providing a thorough depiction of different aspects of the story. As such, there are still many ambiguities, contradictions and unanswered questions which create a gap in the analysis presented so far. This thesis attempts to focus on the postmodern outlook of the writer in creation of the novel. The concept of reality from postmodern point of view seems to be significant in uncovering the
ambiguities and uncertainties in Gone Girl. Media plays a substantial role in postmodern novels in general and in creation or distortion of reality in particular. Consequently, by a combination of Jean Baudrillard’s (1929-2007) postmodern theory and media theories of Marshal McLuhan (1911-1980), this study is going to show how the postmodern nature of the novel contributes to the feeling of uncertainty inherent within the story. Specifically, we will see how two critical concepts of hyperreality and simulation replace the reality and how media becomes an inalienable part of peoples’ life in a postmodern world depicted in Gone Girl. How could Baudrillard’s post-modern theory account for ambiguities and even contradictions within the story? How can Baudrillard’s notions of simulation and hyper-reality assist our understanding of the two main characters’ identities? How is reality being replaced by simulation and What is the role of media in shaping the reality in Gone Girl?

2. Methodology

2.1 Baudrillard’s postmodern notions:

Jean Baudrillard in word of Steven Best & Douglas Kellner (1991) “has developed the most striking and extreme theory of postmodernity yet produced and has been highly influential in cultural theory and discussions of contemporary media, art, and society (p. 111). Baudrillard was deeply under the influence of semiology, the science of the code which he believes control the way people live and not the other way around. Just like semiologists and structuralist Baudrillard sees human agency as negligent and instead highlight the role of consumer-driven, capitalist society as a sign system which dominates the life of modern people and could only be adapted by other sign-systems such as fashion. According to Best & Kellner (1991): “the subject (individual) faces a world of objects which attract, fascinate, and sometimes control the individual’s perception, thought, and behavior” (p. 113). Baudrillard himself describes the postmodern world we live in relation to the codes (chain of signifiers) as follows:

Today, the entire system is fluctuating in indeterminacy, all of reality absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and of simulation. It is now a principle of simulation, and not of reality, that regulates social life. The finalities have disappeared. Industrial machine corresponds the rational, referential, functional, historical consciousness. But it is the unconscious — non-referential, trans-referential, indeterminate, floating - that corresponds to the machin(ations) of the code (Poster & Murrain, pp. 120-121).

What Baudrillard is striving to say is in essence what many other poststructuralist thinkers maintained, that is to say in postmodern world all the meanings are relative and there isn’t an exact relationship between the signifiers and their signifieds and in effect signifiers are in the state of perpetual change and fluidity. In case of Baudrillard he seems to refer to the new world of information technology in which pictures, sounds and pulses replace the rigid reality we could experience in the past. All the boundaries between truth and fiction and real and unreal are shattered, signs do not represent some authentic reality rather they exist in a network and they mean something only in relation with other signs (negatively, good is good because it is not bad). To gain a better understanding of Baudrillard’s mindset, one should know two pivotal concepts of Simulation and hyper-reality to which he constantly refers throughout his work.

2.1.1 Simulation

Simulation means falseness and pretense and it refers to some kind of copying the real. In The Baudrillard Dictionary (2010) the author puts forward a very precise delineation for Simulation: In Latin, simulare (from the same Indo-European root as ‘same’ in English) means to copy. More recently it came to mean creating an analogue or mathematical model of something in order to study how it operates via artificially or abstractly producing its effects. With the advent of ‘realistic’ media (photography, film, sound recording, TV, digital media) it has also come to refer to an audio-visual experience that artfully mimics but otherwise has no connection with the reality it presents, as in a flight simulator used in pilot training and video games. Such an experience may at the same time heighten the senses and be more real than real: hyper-real. All these meanings are present in Baudrillard’s use of the term. But what ties them together is the notion of a kind of copy which is not merely indistinguishable from what it copies but in which the very distinction between copy and original disappears (Smith, P.199).

Baudrillard sees simulation as not merely the copy but as new reality which doesn’t disguise the former reality but distorts it. In Simulation and Simulacra (1995) Baudrillard explicates the difference between simulation and pretending:

To simulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn’t have. One implies a presence the other an absence. Therefore, pretending or dissimulating leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the true and the false, the real and the imaginary (p, 5).
This means that simulation is picture we have of reality which is indistinguishable from real. In a way it is both real and unreal. It is real because it is a part of reality, it is unreal because it doesn’t embody the truth. Real and representation are living side by side without the possibility of ever separating them; Like reality TV shows in which real and fabrication are merged in a level that no one can tell the difference.

2.1.2 Hyper-reality

Hyper-reality is one of the most complicated concepts of Baudrillard. While many considered it to be different with simulation as a magnified reality (Julien Wolfreys) a reality that is being heightened, some equate hyper-reality with simulation (Kellner, Gan). The truth is Baudrillard himself tended to use Hyper-reality and Simulation interchangeably. Hyper-reality is the third order-simulation that we explained in the previous part. Baudrillard in Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976) regarding the third order simulation and its relation to reality writes, “reality itself founders in simulation as a magnified reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer the object of representation, reality loops around itself in pure repetition” (Cited in Poster and Murrian, pp. 144,145). In the now famous example of Disneyland Baudrillard spells out the Disneyland and its relation to hyper-real: Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyper-real and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real (Baudrillard, 1983b, p.23).

Once again Baudrillard’s arguing that in postmodern world pictures, along with other pulses such as media, neon colors create a new version of reality which is neither reality nor fiction but at once both of them since real and unreal merged in together to a level that they create a system of ever changing networks of pulses that we observe everywhere and no more we cannot ignore. Hyper-real has a much bigger impact on our lives than we might expect. In his book Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, An Introduction (2018) John Storey provides us with some tangible examples of Hyper-real in our media-saturated world as follows:

The evidence for hyperrealism is said to be everywhere. For example, we live in a society in which people write letters to characters in soap operas, making them offers of marriage, sympathizing with their current difficulties, offering them new accommodation, or just writing to ask how they are coping with life. Television villains are regularly confronted in the street and warned about the possible future consequences of not altering their behavior. Television doctors, television lawyers and television detectives regularly receive requests for advice and help. I saw an American tourist on television enthusing about the beauty of the British Lake District. Searching for suitable words of praise, he said, ‘It’s just like Disneyland.’ I recently visited an Italian restaurant in Morpeth in which a painting of Marlon Brando as the ‘Godfather’ is exhibited as a mark of the restaurant’s genuine Italianicity. Visitors to New York can do tours that bus them around the city, not as ‘itself’ but as it appears in Sex and the City (p. 210).

Hyper-reality is very similar to the concept of simulation as could be seen. However hyper-real as it name suggests usually refers to a picture that is being heightened and exaggerated as the famous example of Disney land shows. Here an unreal picture is being fabricated by using beautiful colors and lights to inculcate the feeling of perfection. One can see that in the third degree simulated world of hyper-reality media plays a significant role so much so that it is practically impossible to imagine a world without its presence. In such a world people’s life are affected so much by media that they are not shaping the media content but media is shaping people’s life and that’s where our next part begins. This essay is going to investigate the media theories of Marshall McLuhan and Guy Debord in the coming part.

2.2 Media Studies: McLuhan and Baudrillard notions

As stated earlier media is one significant part of postmodern world. Baudrillard tends to believe with the prevailing existence of media specially television in every aspect of our lives reality is being invaded by the pictures presented by media so much so that real and simulation are no longer divisible. McLuhan whose ideas have a strong influence on Baudrillard’s theories depict television as a media which changed our perception entirely. Based on McLuhan’s view watching television, people cannot distinguish themselves from the picture presented from TV and therefore the border between real and what is taking place in television implodes.
2.2.1 Marshal McLuhan’s Theory of Media:

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) is considered to be one of the most important figures and one of the forefathers of Media studies. His ideas have inspired generations of thinkers and remain an accountable source of inspiration for the New Media theorists.

In his fragmented, notoriously difficult book McLuhan recounts 4 era of human communication which are respectively, oral communication, a literate culture with the coexistence of oral and handwritten script, the era of massproduced, mechanical printing (The Gutenberg Galaxy) and the culture of electric media, radio, television and computers. In the first era which is the primitive era of human’s live communication is only auditory and unmediated while the second era is a combination of both visual and auditory conception of the world around us. The third era with invention of print shatters the direct relationships existed in the two previous stages of human relationship with the world. This is the time in which: Stepping up of the visual component in experience . . . filled the field of attention. The culture was hypnotized by vision (mainly through its extensions as typography and print) and the ‘interplay of all the senses in haptic harmony’ dies. Fixed points of view and measured, separating distances come to structure the human subject’s relation to the world. With this in stressed concern with one sense only, the mechanical principle of abstraction and repetition emerges’, which means ‘the spelling out of one thing at a time, one sense at a time, one mental or physical operation at a time (McLuhan, 1994, PP. 17,18).

McLuhan is stressing the changes in people’s perception of the world from primitive era to the pre and modern time. What he means is that depending on the way we interact and communicate with each other, our understanding of the world alters and as technology progressed throughout history so did our understanding of the world. This is the logic behind the development of the fourth and the last era, the digital culture which is the present era, era of radio, television and computers to understand the present culture in which we are inhabiting one should know the concept of media is the message.

2.2.2 Media is the Message

McLuhan argues that since media is nothing but extension of our feelings in digital era there is a more complex relationship between us and the universe around us. In digital era we have the combination of auditory, visual and direct relations all at once. It is a culture of “simultaneity, indivisibility and sensory plentitude” (McLuhan, 1994, p. 32). As regards to fluidity and changeable nature of digital age McLuhan maintains:

When the environment of instant information becomes the hidden grounds of all perception, choice and preference, the ground that underlays the world of precise and quantifiable and scientific study is pushed aside or dissolved. All of our senses create spaces peculiar to themselves and all of these spaces are indivisible and immeasurable (1992, p,110).

What McLuhan intends to say by all this is that by extension of our senses our perception of the world around us has changed dramatically which means that the easy relationship we used to have with the world and people around us has been altered forever. That is why he declared his famous phrase: the media is the message referring to the fact that it doesn’t matter what the content of media is for “the content of media is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind” (1966, p.32) rather it is “how they are used that counts”. In other words, it’s not the content that matters but the way meaning is transferred in digital era and how we understand these meanings which create our world.

2.2.3 Hot/cool Media

The other critical and controversial concept in McLuhan’s work is that of hot versus cool media which he simply defines as:

There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in “high definition.” High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, “high definition.” A cartoon is “low definition,” simply because very little visual information is provided. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience. Naturally, therefore, a hot medium like radio has very different effects on the user from a cool medium like the telephone (McLuhan, 1994, pp.30-31).

McLuhan proceeds to explain hot/cool media with more tangible examples as he holds that any hot medium “allows of less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar and a book for less than dialogue” (p,33). As stated earlier McLuhan sees the digital era as an extension of human senses. These extension or better over-extension of our senses have had some consequences. One consequence is the total fragmentation of people and the possibility of experiencing several feelings simultaneously. This fragmentation and simultaneity are the most critical attributes of media and especially cold medias such as TV and Internet. McLuhan constantly emphasizes on elusiveness of meaning
which is the result of changes in the world around us. Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory (2011) summarizes McLuhan's view regarding hot/cool media as:

A hot medium is one that extends a single sense, is filled with information, and thus demands little participation. According to McLuhan, photographs, radio, movies, and print are hot media. In contrast, a cool medium provides less information up front; its gaps must be filled in by the listener/viewer/participant, rather like the pointillist dots of a Seurat painting must be "filled in" before the picture takes shape. Cool media such as the telephone, the hieroglyphic, and the television require high levels of participation. McLuhan sees Western society as caught between the compulsions of hot and cold, new and old media – we may live electrically but still think linearly.

McLuhan now classic example of cool media is Television is the debate between Richard Nixon and JFK in which according to McLuhan those who listened to the radio version were in favor of Nixon because as a hot media there is little space for imagination and participation and Nixon, a more qualified speaker won. Those who watch the TV debate however were drawn to JFK for he had a characteristic of a cool media because unlike Nixon whose neat, rather ordinary appearance inculcated a familiar personality, JFK's face and act were new and unfamiliar and as such instigated the people's imagination and participation and so therefore fitted the TV as a cool media much better. Because of the overarching power of cool media over warm media there was no wonder why kennedy turned out victorious in that election.

To recapitulate briefly, according to McLuhan the destruction of old ways of living has led to the creation of new dimensions of sensing the world. These changes have resulted in decentering of reality and change of our perception of the world.

3. Analysis

3.1 Amazing Amy or Hyper-real Amy

Baudrillard believes that as a result of the dominance of media culture some images without any reference replace the reality and since these images are usually adorned through technics such as lighting there exists a picture which is more beautiful than real, a picture which seems perfect but since it is exaggerated and decorated is not representing the reality but a manipulated version of reality. Baudrillard holds that reality and hyper reality are impossible to distinguish in fact he believes in third order simulacra “real absorbs the image” (1995, p. 64).

In the postmodern theory of Baudrillard the concept of hyper-real isn’t limited to images and their representations. People could turn in to hyper-real as well. Since when hyper real replaces the real “people whether be groups, nations, or individual, are no longer fighting alienation but a kind of total dispossession” (1983a, p. 19). People are subjects and “the subject faces a world of objects which attract, fascinate, and sometimes control the individual’s perception, thought, and behavior” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.62). This means that people are no more than signs whose existence and reality depends on external factors beyond his or her control. One such example of such people is Amy the main character of Gone Girl. It could be argued that Amy is example of hyper-real for she is neither real nor unreal but a vacillating figure, a sign without a referent, a signer whose signified is in constant flux and above all a simulation of perfect comic figure named Amazing Amy.

In real life Amy seems to be a very kind, naïve woman who genuinely loves her husband and only wants him to love her back. Soon we understand that Amy as a child was a heroin of a very popular comic series called Amazing Amy. Nick Dunne, Amy's husband in real life describes her as: “Amy, my girlfriend, was also quite wealthy, a treasured only child of creative-genius parents. An icon of sorts, thanks to a namesake book series that I thought I could remember as a kid. Amazing Amy” (p. 59).

Amazing Amy series is an adventurous story of a perfect little girl who can single-handedly solve all the problems. As the story unfolds we discover that Amazing Amy has a tremendous impact on Amy’s life herself. In association with the importance of Amazing Amy in Amy’s life Nick at one point of the story remembers:

My wife had a brilliant, popping brain, a greedy curiosity. But her obsessions tended to be fueled by competition: She needed to dazzle men and jealousy women: Of course Amy can cook French cuisine and speak fluent Spanish and garden and knit and run marathons and day-trade stocks and fly a plane and look like a runaway model doing it. She needed to be Amazing Amy, all the time (p.71).

This statement is perhaps the first clue to understand the essence of Amy’s character. The Amazing Amy series have so much influence on Amy that simply changed Amy’s life forever. This urge to perfection which is drawn from Amazing Amy, creates a new identity for her who is neither real nor unreal but hyper-real. Just like Amazing Amy, Amy herself thinks life is perfect and when she sees the harshness of marriage, she just can’t handle it. That is why she plots a perfect plan, one can say a hyper-plan to take a revenge on her cheating husband. Under the influence of pop culture and Amazing Amy series Amy turns in to hyper-real version of herself.
According to Baudrillard reality and hyper reality are living side by side and no longer distinct. Once every representation projected a reality but with the pervasive power of media and TV, representations don't manifest a reality. To put it in poststructuralist language, all that exist are the signifiers without a reference. Amy and Amazing Amy are both signifiers without a signified and neither of whom represent any truth or reference. Amy along with almost everyone else seems incapable of recognizing between her real self and the exaggerated version of herself, Amazing Amy and she herself as hero of a comic book. In Baudrillard's words hyper real is a kind of "frisson of real, a frisson of vertiginous, phony exactitude and magnification of an excessive transparency" (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 21). Aren't these the characteristics of Amy? A woman whose existence is exaggerated and phony at the same?

By a closer look at Amy's life we could see why she believes she is supernatural. Amy was born after 5 miscarriages. By knowing this fact Amy recalls "I grew up feeling special, proud. I was a girl who fought oblivion and won. The chances were about 1 percent, but I did it." (p.360). This incident together with Amazing Amy series create a situation in which Amy thinks she should be perfect and would do anything to maintain this perfection. This in away results in Amy's total destruction of her real identity. Even Amy knows that she doesn't possess an integrated personality as she reflects "Nick loved me but he didn't love me, me Nick loved a girl who doesn't exist. I was pretending, the way I often did. Pretending to have a personality. I can't help it. It's what I have always done: the way some people change fashion regularly I change personality" (p.360).

The character of Amazing Amy accompanied with her feeling of being a special girl inculcated by her parents, made Amy a vacillating figure between one to another personality. She does everything to become the perfect girl that she has been poisoned to believe she is. That is why she decides to embark upon such a complicated hyper-real plan to get back at her infidel husband. Amy's incongruent character and her ambivalent relationship with Amazing Amy is summarized in an article written by Pham Hoai Anh (2017) when she sates:

Amy spends much of her life trying to live up to others' impossible expectations, namely the "Amazing" version of her that her parents created. The line between Amy's life and the storybook becomes blurred, this cause Amy a bad habit of reinventing herself, moreover, reinventing her worldview to the exclusion of reality. Amy is able to improvise on anything the reality and/or the situation gives her (p. 20).

The burden of being Amazing Amy with all its demands leads to creation of a character which is ultimately fictional but Amy can't see this fictionality. Just like passengers who take Disneyland (a beautified version of America) as real America, Amy considers herself to be as perfect as Amazing Amy and hence creation of hyper-real Amy takes place. Because Amazing Amy (hyper-real Amy) cannot be just like any other typical woman as she maintains "so I may have gone a bit mad. I do know that framing your husband for murder is beyond the pale of what an average woman might do" (244), Amy's plan to frame her husband should also just like her character be something perfect. “I’ve always thought I could commit a perfect crime” (p.245). Baudrillard at one point of his book in regards to the concept of hyper-real and its characteristic maintains: "all the ingredients are there, in precise doses, not a single error, more real than real. This is how the real abolished" (1995, p.31). This is the reality of Amy's plan. There is not a single error in her entire scheme. This is why this is not a normal plan but a hyper-real one.

Amy under the influence of Amazing Amy which practically destroys her childhood always wants to be faultless and in creation of this feeling other people around her, including her parents are to blame too. Regarding the importance of Amazing Amy series. Muro Llorente declares, "these books present and improved a more perfect version of Amy, and she somehow considers that it is her responsibility to live up to that model until she eventually loses herself in the meantime" (2015, p.28). She is ready to do anything to maintain this unique position such as lying, manipulation and even murder. At one point she says about her husband “I want him dead” simply because Nick questioned this state of perfection and treated her like ordinary women for whom Amy has a deep hatred.

According to Baudrillard people are incapable of differentiating real from hyper-real. In their writings most critics adopt the psychological point of view to interpret Amy's character. Yet Baudrillard believes since reality and unreality are impossible to separate psychology is of no use when he maintains:

Simulation (Hyper-real) threatens the difference between true and false, the real and the imaginary. Is the simulator sick or not, given that he produces true symptoms? Objectively one can't treat him as being either ill or not ill. Psychology and medicine stop at this point, forestalled by the illness's undiscoverable truth. What can psychoanalysis do with the duplication of discourse of unconscious in the discourse of simulation that can never again be unmasked, since it is not false either? (1983b, p.8). Accordingly, it seems unfeasible to determine the real Amy again. Is the vengeful, manipulating Amy real? Or the kind, husband lover Amy? The answer seems to be neither of them and both of them. The
It makes sense that hyper-real Amy wants a hyper-real Nick as well, a flawless husband and since Nick doesn’t fit this stereotype Amy simply compels him to. In other words, Amy with a ruthless determination wants Nick to be a perfect figure just like her character in Amazing Amy without considering the reality of the circumstance and the reality of Nick’s feelings. If Nick can’t be that magical husband, she would force him to be that person. From now on Amy has the total control over the events of their life as she affirms: “I am officially in control of our story. It feels wonderfully symbolic. Isn’t that what every marriage is anyway? Just a lengthy game of he-said, she-said? well, she is saying and the world will listen, and Nick will have to smile and agree. I will write him the way I want him to be: romantic, thoughtful and very repentant” (p.436). But this is not the end for Amazing Amy or should we call her hyper-real Amy. After coming back and living with Amy, Nick who doesn’t have any evidence to support his version of what really took place decides to write a book in which he would tell his side of the story and expose Amy for everything that happened. But the day he finally finished the manuscript of the book he is hit by the tremendous news that Amy is pregnant. Nick says “it is obviously not mine” to which Amy responds: “oh it is, congratulations, Dad”. Nick is understandably shocked because “it wasn’t true, I hadn’t touched my wife since her return” (p.442). But when Nick began to gather the pieces of puzzle together he realizes:

I began to see it: the box of tissues, the vinyl recliner, the TV and porn and my semen in a hospital freezer somewhere. I’d left that will-destroy notice on the table, a limp guilt trip, and then notice disappeared, because my wife had taken action, as always, and that action wasn’t to get rid of the stuff but to save it (p.442). This means that when Amy finds out that Nick is trying to get back at her she executes the last part of her evil plot. To exert her total control over Nick she decides to get pregnant using Nick’s sperm without even having relationship with him. She wants to make sure that Nick would never cause any problem to her as she tells him: I’ll need to do a few things for my security, Nick. Just because I have to say it’s almost impossible to trust you. To start, you’ll have to delete your book, obviously. And just to put that other matter to rest, we’ll need an affidavit, and you’ll need to swear that it was you who bought the stuff in woodshed and hid the stuff in the woodshed, and that you did once think that I was framing you, but now you love me and I love you and everything is good (p. 442). This uncanny decision made by Amy, is perhaps the last and the most outlandish thing hyper-real Amy does. Throughout the course of the story Amy proves to be a woman who has lost touch with reality, a woman who can’t tell if she is a normal human being or she is a main character of a comic book and someone who justifies anything to attain her goals. Having grown up in a culture dominated by fictional characters in TV and supernatural character of Amazing Amy, real Amy is willing to make the oddest, most mind-blowing decisions imaginable.

In fact, Amy is hyper-real mostly because she has turned in to an enhanced version of herself, a perfect, faultless super-human who can easily sacrifice everyone very similar to fictional characters in novels and movies. Just like fictional characters who are exaggerated, Amazing Amy’s character is more real than real. Also like fictional characters she doesn’t represent a real person but a rather fictional one and that justifies Amy’s acts. She sees herself as that super hero and she appears incapable of ever separating the truth from fiction that is the reason she made all those uncanny decisions. Otherwise stated, Amy can’t recognize between her normal self with all her insufficiencies and Amazing Amy, the comic book hero who is an ideal girl in every aspect of life. As most postmodern thinkers claimed one of the most important characteristics of postmodern novels is a lack of any integrated characters. Amy is a good example of a postmodern character. Under the crushing power of media and pop-culture people are not united figures as previous modernist authors depicted them to be. Amy seems to vacillate between a normal, spoiled, rich girl and an exaggerated picture which she herself created out of this and in fact she is both of them and neither of them at once. Because she is the hyper-real version of herself.

3.2 Nick, From a Hot to a Cool Character

Aside from Amy who has a disintegrated character Nick’s character seems to be fluctuating and prone to change under the influence of media. This might be because according to postmodern theorists a strong unified character is an illusion. Or as Stuart Sim (2011) puts it: Postmodernism has rejected the concept of the individual, or ‘subject’, that has prevailed in Western thought for the last few centuries. For that latter tradition, the subject has been a privileged being right at the very heart of cultural process. For poststructuralists and postmodernists, the subject is a fragmented being that has no essential core of identity, and is to be regarded as a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed
identity or self that endures unchanged over time (p. 299).

This constant change is the most important characteristic of Nick's character. He changes throughout the story and without being conscious of it he is transformed from a hot figure to a cool character so as to gratify the demands of the society. Hot and cool media was discussed in previous chapter in details. According to McLuhan cool medias are those with low resolution and high participation of the viewers. Unlike hot medias in which the audience play a limited role in decoding the events cool medias and in particular Television require much more engagement of the audience. As such a TV character should offer certain qualities to fit the medium, someone who possess certain level of openness and sophistication so that he or she could appeal to viewers of Television (understanding media, p,228). McLuhan contends that in the famous presidential debate of 1960 between Richard Nixon and John. F. Kennedy its was Kennedy who emerged victorious since unlike Nixon who simulated the exact prototype of a rural man Kennedy, dashing and sophisticated instigatel people's imagination and therefore turned out to be a much better figure for the cool media of television. Nick Dunne's character could be analyzed from this perspective for Nick seems to be like a hot character who is gradually turning in to cool one. At first, Nick doesn't understand the power and influence of TV and also the seriousness of his situation. In his first media conference after Amy's missing nick plays a one-dimensional stereotypical of cheating husband which serves better for the negative characters of hot medias such as cinema rather than cool media of television. Nick himself after seeing the TV coverage of his interview writes: When I saw the broadcast later, I didn't recognize my voice. I barely recognized my face. The booze floating, sludge like, just beneath the surface of my skin made me look like a fleshy wastrel, just sensuous enough to be disreputable. I had worried about my voice wavering, so overacted and the words came out clipped, like I was reading a stock report. We just want Amy to get home safe...." Utterly unconvincing, disconnected (p.79).

However, as the story goes by both Nick and people around him starts to grasp a better understanding of the TV's function and as a result of which they begin to project a different picture of Nick which suits the TV better. All the evidence is against Nick and Amy's master plan to frame her cheating husband seems to be working perfectly well. In such an atmosphere Nick and his professional lawyer realize that TV representation is their only chance to change the public opinion which so far is entirely against Nick. Tanner Bolt who is a very successful lawyer when accepting Nick's case regarding the importance of changing people's opinions maintains: The media has turned on you and the public media has turned on you. We have got to fix your image because should this go to trial, it will influence the juror pool. Change of venue doesn't mean anything anymore- twenty-four-hour cable, internet, the whole world is your venue. So, I cannot tell you how key it is to start turning this whole thing around (pp, 232-233).

In other words, nothing is unbiased before media. TV has a significant impact on every aspect of human's life. Therefore, to succeed in media-orientated world individuals are needed to play based on TV's rules. For Nick this whole thing means that he has to change and turn in to a cool personality otherwise he will be devoured by media. Ergo that is what Nick is trying to become, a cool character which could attract more attention in cool media of TV. W. Terrence Gordon (2010) delineates the differences between hot/cool characters as follows:

The cool medium of television is unsuited to anyone who represents a type or a group with easily recognized features, because types deprive the viewer of the task of closure, in the sense of completion of the image. The nature of the medium itself, the sensory involvement it demands, and the habits of perception it imposes, conspire to make the viewer expect not a fixed image but one which must be fixed. Anyone whose physical appearance is a statement of role and status in life (this is high-definition stuff) overheats the cool television medium, with disastrous consequences for themselves. (Richard Nixon was a disaster on television; JFK was a success, because he was cool in McLuhan's sense.) (p. 10).

That is what Nick attempts to do; to try and project an unfixed and sophisticated picture of himself to people through media. In order to make a more substantial impact on people, Nick's lawyer insists that he have an interview in national television. But first Nick should prepare himself to change from a Nixonian hot character to a JFK like figure. To help Nick's transformation, Tanner Bolt introduces Nick to his wife Betsy, a former TV anchor that now has become a lawyer helping her husband. Betsy quickly spots Nick's poor performance in TV. Ironically she even mentions the name of Nixon as she mentions "your nose sweats when you got nervous, Nixon lost an election for it" (p,344). Betsy then reveals what she thinks of Nick in television: "you and TV. Aside from your bar- blog thingie, last night, you are awful". To which Nick responds, "there was a reason I went to print journalism, I see a camera, and my face freezes. Exactly, Betsy said. "You look like a mortician, so stiff. I got a trick to fix that" (p.338).
In what follows Betsy tells the things Nick should say and what he shouldn't say and how he should avoid being tense and nervous and above all act as a husband who is capable of loving his wife despite all the negative image being presented in media. As McLuhan maintains, “the success of any TV performer depends on his achieving a lowpressure style of presentation, although getting his act on the air may require much high-pressure organization” (1994, p. 342).

McLuhan means in order to be persuasive in TV one should present a participatory character, that is to say he has to become cool. That is exactly what Nick is trying to do. With all the practices Nick had done he went to the interview with the famous and respectful Sharon Scieber. In the end it seems to be a success. The influence of this interview is much more on Amy herself than public opinion. For she is the person who knows his husband much more than anyone else and thereby understands every nuance difference in her husband’s attitude as she observes:

I feel a gust of warmth toward Nick because he is wearing my favorite tie that I bought for him, that he thinks was too guilty- bright. It’s a peacocky purple that turns his eyes almost violet. He’s lost his satisfied- asshole paunch over the last month: his belly is gone, the fleshiness of his face has vanished, his chin is less clefty. His hair has been trimmed but not cut - he is wearing my tie and when he lifts his hand to make a gesture I see he is wearing my watch that I got him for his thirty- third birthday, that he never wore because it wasn’t him, even though it was completely him (p. 376).

What Amy doesn’t understand is the amount of work that has been done by Nick so as to “project an acceptable television persona through cool and casual verbal skill” (Gordon, 2010, p. 11).

In other words, Nick by gaining a better perception of nature of TV and by making an awful lot of preparation, has turned in to a highly sophisticated persona which could suit the medium of television. He has become a character that everybody from his lawyer, his sister and public opinion wanted him to be. In all his character is changed from a hot character to a cool one.

3.3 Nick, Torn Apart between Real and Simulation

However, this isn’t the end for Nick. Because now that he managed to project an image of a perfect husband, this image wouldn’t simply go away from his life. In effect Nick had been such a normal and ordinary man before all these events broke out. But with Amy’s disappearance Nick has turned in to a national hero, a popular figure. What would happen if he decides to divorce Amy? What would the media and public say? What would become of him if he left the Amazing Amy whom all the country love and adore? Amy sees the paradox in Nick’s situation as she tells him: You are an average, lazy, boring, cowardly, woman-fearing man. Without me, that’s what you would have kept on being, ad nauseam. But I made you into something. You were the best man you have ever been with me. And you know it. The only time in your life you’ve ever liked yourself was pretending to be someone I might like. Without me? You are just your dad (p. 422).

Amy’s statement implies that cool Nick, a sophisticated husband who is loved by media and pop culture has other side to himself which is real Nick (hot, ordinary husband) who isn’t after all someone special. Nick himself in a paragraph confirms Amy’s analysis in regard to himself:

Who would I be without Amy? Because she was right: as a man I had been my most impressive when I loved her and I was my next best self when I hated her. I only knew Amy for seven years but I couldn’t go back to life without her. I couldn’t return to an average life. I already pictured myself with a regular woman, a sweet, normal girl next door. But the indulged mama’s boy in me wouldn’t be able to find peace with this normal woman. Amy was exactly right, maybe there was no good end for me (p. 424).

To clarify more, Nick under the pressure of media developed a new character which could fit the media but his real self hasn’t simply vanished and hence he is torn apart between his real identity and the identity that Amy and media created out of him. In the end it seems he is both of them and neither of them since as discussed earlier there is no such thing as a unified character in postmodern world. Nick is a good example of a postmodern subject. He is made of two entirely contradictory characters. On the one hand we have the ordinary, hot, spoiled and distant Nick whom media hates and on the other the perfect, confident, affectionate and cool Nick whom is adored and respected by media. The question is which of these two constitutes the real Nick? The answer seems to be both of them and neither of them. According to Baudrillard humans are nothing more than signifiers without signify (1983a, p. 62). This means that there doesn’t exist one stable identity but there are multiple identities, none of which superior to the other. These identities only adopt meanings in relation to the outside factors such as society. In the case of Nick, the exterior factor seems to be media and public opinion. In consequence, reading Nick from Baudrillard’s view, one can see that neither cool nor hot Nick necessarily embodies the truth of his character because there is no such thing as truth anymore. The final judgment could be that hot and cool Nick are both simulations of one person, none of them more true than the other and Nick’s identity seems to be disrupted eternally.
3.4 Distortion of Reality

Baudrillard believes that reality and fiction are merged in the postmodern world that he postulates that the relation between reality and its simulation isn’t direct and distinguishable anymore but real lives side by side with simulation (1995, pp. 52-88). One reason for this inseparability is the emergence of Television and later on cyber-space as the ultimate disruptor of reality, one of the most visible characteristics of postmodern novels is the existence of media and its impact on both the events of the story and the reality itself.

Reading Gone Girl from Baudrillard’s prospective helps us to understand many of the ambiguities of the novel for presence of simulation is clearly felt throughout the story. Simulation as stated earlier is one of the most prominent concept of Baudrillard’s postmodern theory. As Brian Massumi explicates: “Floating images that no longer bear a relation to any reality whatsoever, is simulation, the substitution of signs of the real for the real. In simulations, signs no longer represent or refer to an external model. They stand for nothing but themselves, and refer only to other signs” (Cited in Lucy, 2016, p. 174).

That is to say if in the past every representation embodied a truth with the advent of media and information technology representations don’t manifest any truth. Now there are only different images(signifiers) without any fixed reality (signified) to which they infer. These images without reference are called simulations.

Baudrillard elaborates on the importance of Simulation in postmodern era: “the great event of this period, is the decline of strong referential, these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation” (1995, p.31).

Impossibility of separating real from simulation is deemed to be one of the major reason for existence of ambiguity and indeterminacy in postmodern novels such as Gone Girl. Regarding this destruction of all borderlines in postmodern world and total dominance of media Nick in a mesmerizing Baudrillardian monologue complains:

It seemed to me that there was nothing new to be discovered ever again. Our society was utterly, ruinously derivative. We were the first human beings who would never see anything for the first time. We stare at the wonders of the world, dully, underwhelmed. Mona Lisa, The Pyramids, the Empire state building. Jungle animals on attack, ancient icebergs collapsing, volcanoes erupting. I can’t recall a single amazing thing I have seen firsthand that I didn’t immediately reference to a movie or TV show. A fucking commercial. I have literally seen it all, and the worst thing, is: the secondhand experience is always better. The image is crisper, the view is keener, the camera angle and the soundtrack manipulate my emotions (pp, 90-91).

Here Nick is brilliantly uncovering the impossibility of ever recognizing real from simulation since based on both McLuhan and Baudrillard’s vision media and specially TV has changed our perception of the world around us. If in the past every image imitated reality in the media-saturated universe we inhabit, images of TV don’t necessarily epitomize reality. Perhaps reality imitates TV. No one can tell the difference.

In Gone Girl TV’s presence is so substantial that everything takes place in its relation to it. TV partakes in creation of reality and on a higher level in creation of meanings. Nick loses his wife but what concerns him the most is how to look convincing in TV since he knows everything is affected by it. Amy too an expert as she is in pop-cultural matters, carefully plans her evil plot and in doing so she uses the media and Television in particular as her ally.

Both these main characters help to disrupt the reality in a way that makes it really difficult to find who and what is real and who and what isn’t. this constant challenging of the reality contributes to the feeling of indeterminacy throughout the novel. This is what both McLuhan and Baudrillard mean by implosion which refers to the fact that TV with its unique characteristic devourers everything and everyone in it to a level that the borderline between TV presentation and reality is shattered. Real life and TV are essentially one thing and it’s hard to tell if TV imitates life or life imitates what is being shown in TV. But this impossibility of distinguishing reality from fiction and TV representation from truth according to McLuhan has something to do with the nature of TV. W. Terrence Gordon (2010) beautifully clarifies McLuhan’s vision as to how Television has changed our understanding:

He (McLuhan) believed that the shift from the attitude of detachment and private, individual identity fostered by print to the involvement stimulated by television could be explained only by the differences between visual and mosaic spaces. Television shifted the balance among our five physical senses and altered our mental processes. The shift was radical and irreversible. In the first place, the visual sense that had dominated Western culture for centuries, through the alphabet and the printing press, was suddenly dislocated by the new medium of television. Secondly, television ushered in an extension, a new intensity, for the sense of touch. Though received by the eye, the image on the screen has the type of texture associated with touch, which creates an interaction of all the senses. A television screen does not show a fixed image but a mesh of dots. Light shines through them with varying intensity and allows an image to form (pp. 89).
Put differently television has changed our perception of reality forever. There seems to be a new understanding of the environment around us. We are immersed in television culture in a way that we are no longer able to demarcate real from fiction in postmodern media age. Perhaps the reason why audience feel perplexed throughout Gone Girl is this inseparability of real from unreal. Since indeterminacy’s definition is none other than “radical unknowability of future and the real, something whose meaning is doubtful yet incontrovertible” (Taylor & Winquist, 2003, p. 189), in the novel as a result of incessant distortion of real by media, meaning and reality has become volatile and indeterminate.

Both Amy and Nick strive to prove their version of reality so as to affect the reality to their benefit. To do so Amy carefully fabricates a story to frame her husband and ruthlessly punish him while Nick desperately tries to fight back through neutralizing Amy’s careful plan. In order to do so each of them simulate their own version of reality. Nick is resolved to change the public opinion in his favor because he knows that everything is decided in TV. That’s what Nick attempts to do, to disseminate a picture more suitable to media hoping that he could turn around the deadly situation in which he seems to be trapped. Nick follows the lawyer’s suggestion to take part in an interview in national TV. In this carefully-planned interview Nick tries to show a meek and loving husband to the public opinion to gain their sympathy by confessing to his crime which is cheating on his wife:

Sharon I did a bad thing, an unforgivable thing. I can’t make any excuses for it. I let myself down- I’ve never thought of myself as a cheater. It’s inexcusable, its unforgivable, I just want Amy to come home so I can spend the rest of my life making her happy. Very pure. Maybe I was unfair, well, not unfair but confused. It really is true. Nick and I fit together. I need to get home to him (p,378).

But how and why did Amy fall for such transparent lie? The answer seems to relate to the nature of TV. According to McLuhan’s famous slogan “media is the message” the content of any particular media isn’t important but the medium in which it is transferred and how it is understood that counts. It is mostly because television according to McLuhan “demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being. It will not work as a background. It engages you. Perhaps this is why so many people feel that their identity has been threatened. In television, images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You feel that your identity has been threatened. In postmodern media age. Perhaps the reason why we are no longer able to demarcate real from fiction is that television makes a haunting impact on the audience to whom Amy belongs. Medium is the message also refers to the understanding of people from a particular message. While for Nick the whole interview is nothing but a despairing cry for help the message that Amy receives is that perhaps she was all wrong about her husband and maybe her husband is after all the perfect husband she so naively wants him to be.

Reading this pivotal scene through Baudrillard’s lens one can see that Amy is incapable of recognizing the real and instead goes for (or maybe deceive herself not to see the real) the hyper-real for in her life Amy has turned in to the hyper-real version of herself and thus it’s no wonder why instead of facing the brute reality that is her husband is lying to her and to the Americans, she is deceived to believe the hyper-real version which here appears to be that her husband has changed entirely and turned into a person she’s always wanted him to be.

However, this misunderstanding is not just Amy’s fault, it has also something to do with the power of television in postmodern era for according to Baudrillard all the distinction between “cause and effect, between active and passive, between subject and object, between the end and the means” are
gone and one can see how “TV is watching us, TV alienates us, TV manipulates us, TV informs us” (Baudrillard, 1995, p.22). To rephrase it TV distorts our normal understanding because of its tactile nature in which, "an extension of the sense of active, exploratory touch which involves all the senses simultaneously, rather than that of sight alone” (McLuhan, 2005, p. 67), takes place. When watching TV its extremely difficult to recognize between real and simulation. This is because the normal boundaries persistent in the past are now vanished. All the meanings are indeterminate or as Baudrillard puts it "we live in a world where there is more and more information and less and less meaning"(1995, p.55). Baudrillard later on elucidates as to how and why meanings are very illusive in postmodern world:

Video, interactive screens, multimedia, the Internet, virtual reality — we are threatened on all sides by interactivity. What was separated in the past is now everywhere merged; distance is abolished in all things: between the sexes, between opposite poles, between stage and auditorium, between the protagonists of action, between subject and object, between the real and its double. With this confusion of terms, this collision of poles, with the abolition of distance — of the 'pathos of distance' - everything becomes undecidable (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 75).

That is what happens in the story. With the abolishment of all the distances, all the poles and all the references, meanings are undecidable and realities are hard to distinguish. Amy seems incapable of discovering the truth mostly because media has long been distorting the truth. Despite her intelligence she mistakes reality with simulation or to put it differently the deceiver has been deceived.

Throughout the story of Gone Girl Amy manages to prove herself worthy for the media as a perfect wife and Nick even though late, understands the power of media and plays along with it. But in all this what is being sacrificed is reality itself. Reality is constantly being replaced by hyper-reality or simulation without the possibility of ever distinguishing them from each other. One reason for the fluidity of both meaning and reality is the essence of TV for according to both Baudrillard and McLuhan television challenges individual’s easy and direct perception of other media in a way that people can't demarcate normal distinctions and that is why everything becomes undecidable.

4. Conclusion

Hyper-real as one significant concept in Baudrillard’s theory refers to a sort of exaggerated reality. In Baudrillard’s view everything is a sign for something else and since sometimes these signs (images) are decorated, they could turn into stronger version of reality and thus hyper-reality. But hyper-real bears no relation to reality and therefore it's unreal. Since in Baudrillard's view people are no more than signs and they lack a strong and integrated entity, they could turn in to hyper-real as well. Amy Dunne is an example of a hyper-real character in that under the influence of media culture and a comic book series called Amazing Amy, she has turned in to a magnified version of her true self that deems herself infallible and justifies every action.

According to Marshal McLuhan there are two kinds of media; Cool and hot. Hot media are radio and cinema while television is the chief cool medium. In hot media the audience is only an observer while cool media because of its characteristics require active participation of the audience. Based on this prospective any successful television persona (cool figure) should be a multi-faceted character with many dimensions. Nick the main male character of the novel, experiences a transition from a hot figure to a cool character. While at the beginning of the story he offers a onedimensional, hot figure as the story unfolds he gradually turns in to a cool media figure with more sophistication. But once he adopts this second persona, he can't simply abandon it to move on with his life and therefore he is torn apart between these two contradictory characters.

In postmodern novels reality is being replaced by simulation. In Baudrillard’s semiotic view everything is a sign for something else. And since these signs are interfered by mass media and in particular television the line between reality and simulation is blurred. People take the TV representation as real and real as TV representation. Gone Girl saw the distortion of reality in every aspect of its story. There is no single reality anymore and media disrupts the easy perception of the world individuals used to have. In the third order simulacra which is the postmodern world reality and simulation are indistinguishable. People are incapable of ever recognizing real from fiction and in such a world truth as one unified concept doesn't exist.

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