

وقائع المؤتمر الدولي الرابع (التعليم العالي وقضايا المجتمع المعاصر) 2026/5/7-6

Kirkuk University Journal: Humanity Studies



مجلة جامعة كركوك للدراسات الإنسانية

ISSN P: 1992-1179

ISSN E: 3107-3360



Hyperreality on Stage: Baudrillard's Simulacra and the Disappearance of the Real in *The Nether* and Attempts on Her Life

Prof. Dr. Ansam Riyadh Abdullah Almaarof
University of Tikrit, College of Education for Women, English Department,
Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq

Noor Abdullah Khalaf
University of Tikrit, College of Education for Women, English Department,
nkhalaf@st.tu.edu.iq

Abstract; This study examines the concept of hyperreality in *The Nether* (2013) by Jennifer Haley and *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) by Martin Crimp through the theoretical framework of Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacra. Its primary objective is to analyse how contemporary theatre engages with and embodies the logic of simulation. The research employs qualitative textual analysis, focusing on the structural, linguistic, and dramaturgical features of the selected plays. The findings suggest that contemporary drama does not merely represent digital or mediated realities but actively performs the conditions of hyperreality, thereby blurring the distinction between reality and representation. *The Nether* constructs a technologically mediated environment in which digital code supplants physical existence, while *Attempts on Her Life* produces a fragmented and discursive form of hyperreality through shifting narratives and unstable identity constructs. The study concludes that both plays illustrate the collapse of ontological certainty and demonstrate theatre's capacity to generate hyperreal environments. This highlights the medium's active role in reconfiguring perceptions of reality, identity, and representation in the contemporary cultural context.

Keywords: Hyperreality; Simulacra; Disappearance of the Real; Contemporary Theatre; Digital Ontology; Discursive Identity; Jennifer Haley; Martin Crimp; *The Nether*; *Attempts on Her Life*.

الفرط - واقعية على خشبة المسرح: مفهوم المحاكاة لبودرليارد وتلاشي الواقع في مسرحيتي العالم السفلي

ومحاولات على حياتها

أ.د. أنسام رياض عبد الله المعروف

جامعة تكريت-كلية التربية للبنات- Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq

نور عبد الله خلف

جامعة تكريت-كلية التربية للبنات- nkhalaf@st.tu.edu.iq

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة مفهوم فرط الواقعية في مسرحية العالم السفلي (2013) لجينيفر هايلي، ومسرحية محاولات على حياتها (1997) لمارتن كريمب، وذلك من خلال الإطار النظري لمفهوم المحاكيات عند جان بودريار. وتهدف الدراسة أساسًا إلى تحليل الكيفية التي يتفاعل بها المسرح المعاصر مع منطق المحاكاة ويجسده. وتعتمد الدراسة على منهج التحليل النصي النوعي، مع التركيز على الخصائص البنوية واللغوية والدراماتورية في النصوص المسرحية المختارة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الدراما المعاصرة لا تقتصر على تمثيل الواقع الرقمي أو الوسيط، بل تقوم بأداء شروط فرط الواقعية ذاتها، مما يؤدي إلى طمس الحدود بين الواقع والتمثيل. إذ تُشيد مسرحية «العالم السفلي» فضاءً مُتوسِّطًا تكنولوجيًا تحلّ فيه الشفرة الرقمية محلّ الوجود المادي، في حين تُنتج «محاولات على حياتها» شكلًا متشظيًا وخطابيًا من فرط الواقعية عبر سرديات متحوّلة وبنى هوياتية غير مستقرة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن كلتا المسرحيتين تجسدان انهيار اليقين الأنطولوجي، وتبرزان قدرة المسرح على توليد بيئات فائقة الواقعية، بما يؤكد الدور الفاعل لهذا الوسيط في إعادة تشكيل تصوّرات الواقع والهوية والتمثيل في السياق الثقافي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فرط الواقعية؛ المحاكيات؛ اختفاء الواقع؛ المسرح المعاصر؛ الأنطولوجيا الرقمية؛ الهوية الخطابية؛ جنيفر هايلي؛ محاولات على حياتها هايلي؛ مارتن كريمب؛ العالم السفلي

Introduction

This paper argues that modern theatre acts as an active producer of hyperreality rather than a passive reflection of it. By comparing Jennifer Haley's, *The Nether* and Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life*, this study explores how dramatic texts negotiate identity and authenticity within simulated spaces. It specifically contributes to the field by demonstrating that while *The Nether* provides a robust and effective model of hyperreality, *Attempts on Her Life* remains comparatively weak and naïve in its treatment of the subject. This study employs a qualitative textual analysis methodology to examine how identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated within dramatic texts. This approach focuses on the relationship between

the written script and its potential stage performance, recognizing that the text serves as a blueprint for the production of hyperreality. By analyzing the structural and linguistic elements of the plays, the methodology reveals underlying ideological and thematic structures that prioritize the sign over the referent

2. Literature Review

Critics have widely discussed Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* as a provocative exploration of digital ethics and virtual immersion. Some reviewers, such as those in *The Guardian*, have labeled it "disturbingly sensationalist," focusing on its portrayal of pedophilia within a virtual realm (*The Guardian*, 2014, p. 1). However, academic critics like Fouad Selim (2022) emphasize its engagement with transhumanism and the post-internet condition, arguing that the play forces a confrontation with "inhuman subjectivities" (Selim, 2022, p. 5). In contrast, Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* has been viewed by critics like Aleks Sierz (2006) as a "prophecy" of the mediatized age, breaking traditional rules of characterization (Sierz, 2006, p. 12). Yet, some scholars point out its "perplexing" nature and the "paucity of female protagonists" as a limitation in its discursive strategy (Luckhurst, 2003, p. 33).

At its core, theoretical engagement with hyperreality and simulation in contemporary critical culture is based on the work of Jean Baudrillard, who theorised simulacra as a dissent from the system that maps representation onto reality. Baudrillard has theorised that signs in postmodern society proliferate to the extent that they no longer refer to any original reality, but rather only each other in self-referential systems, producing a new condition, a new order of simulacra, which he terms hyperreality with multiplicity and parataxis of sign. Recently, scholarship has reaffirmed the relevance of this framework for the digital age and what media technologies are teaching us about a world in which an algorithmic system can create realist realities experienced as such without any material referent (2017, p. 103). These studies therefore lay an important theoretical foundation, but remain largely concerned with DCMC leaving theatrical representations of hyperreality comparatively neglected.

The concept of identity, ambivalence and subject formation is addressed in early works (see for example Gonick 2000) drawing upon poststructuralist and

feminist theories by focusing on the instability of subjectivity in late modernity. While the language is not framed through Baudrillardian terms, this work anticipates later considerations of fragmentation of identity and performativity that flow at the heart of hyperreal conditions. Yet Gonick focuses on psycho-social identity formation rather than the vanishing (or being OK with) disappearing, as I have discussed here in the age of mediated environments, and thus does not appear to apply beyond the reference list of text-starved dramaturgies defined by technology.

Recent studies have started to fill this gap by looking at the intersection of technology, subjectivity and performance. How immersive technologies trouble the boundaries between performer, audience and virtual environment in *The Encounter* (Simon McBurney) is explored through a post-human subjectivity under-pinned by Alsayad and Ansam Riyadh Abdullah Almaarof (2025). The study reveals that the very theatrical space is a devoted place of simulation, mediated technologically conflict, reconstructed. While an important step in taking Baudrillardian preoccupations into performance studies, the focus on sensory immersion and post-human embodiment lacks a consideration of the semiotic component simulacra, namely reference to referential reality disappearing.

Likewise, Ibrahim, Abdullah and Almaarof (2025) examine Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* in relation to electronic technologies and power-structures. This study contends that the virtual environments in the play subvert normative family structures and create other modes of authority and identity. Although closely related to this study, the paper is mainly interested in sociological ramifications, mainly questions of power and control, and is not sustained in energy devoted to hyperreality or the ontological crisis of "the real" (and its contrasts) as a whole theory. As a result, the deeper philosophical ramifications of which simulation replaces reality are less explored.

Recent interdisciplinary studies (2023—2025) have begun to explore hyperreal subjectivity in performance and digital spaces. Recent projects (e.g. Åkervall et al.'s work on "hyperreal beings" in interactive performance) illustrating the difficulty of distinguishing between physical presence and representation, in that digital projections and artificial agents take agency to produce a dematerialised sense of theatricality for the audience), so that the distinction between entity and image

becomes indistinguishable through simulation techniques. This is helpful because these kinds of studies are showing the shifting understanding we have towards performance as a space for simulation, but tend to place their focus on technological innovation rather than looking at textual and dramaturgical analysis of scripted drama.

Even with these significant contributions, a crucial gap remains in the body of literature. Prior research is largely limited to: (1) a narrower interest in digital media versus theatre; (2) an exploration of technology and subjectivity that fails to draw extensively on the aspects of Baudrillard's semiotic theory of simulacra; or /3/ coverage of single plays with no comparative scheme. What is especially lacking is a consistent Baudrillardian reading that combines postmodern drama and hyperreality to explore the ways in which theatrical texts stage their own disappearance of the real.

Thus, this study fills this gap by presenting the comparative analysis of *The Nether* and *Attempts on Her Life* by Martin Crimp through simulation & hyperreality. It expands existing scholarship by putting the semiotic logic of simulation in a leading role in relation to dramatic structure, characterisation, and narrative fragmentation. Combining Baudrillard's thesis with analysis of contemporary performance, the paper shows that these plays do not just represent virtual worlds but perform the very implosion of referentiality itself, and so point to theatre as a privileged locus from which to interrogate the demise of the real in the postmodern age. The application of Baudrillard's theory in theatre studies has traditionally focused on the "spectacle" and the loss of the referent, but this study specifically examines the structural performance of simulation. The unique contribution of this research lies in its comparative analysis of digital versus discursive modalities, highlighting the varying effectiveness of these plays in modelling the hyperreal.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis methodology to examine how identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated within dramatic texts. This approach focuses on the relationship between the written script and its potential stage performance, recognising that the text serves as a blueprint for the production of

hyperreality. By analysing the structural and linguistic elements of the plays, the methodology reveals underlying ideological and thematic structures that prioritise the sign over the referent.

The theoretical framework in the given context is known as the work of Jean Baudrillard, who called his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), and it is this part that offers the theoretical background in which the plays discussed are analysed. According to Baudrillard, there exists a historical trajectory of the image which goes from the keen depiction of reality to the point where the image takes precedence and finally occupies the position of reality itself. This direction is expressed in his idea of the orders of simulacra, which outlines the consecutive steps of such alteration. Baudrillard distinguishes between four sequential orders of simulacra, which are an additional break with an initial referent. The good appearance- a true copy of the image is offered in the first order. Second order entails the image as a perversion of reality, which conceals and denatures a deep reality. The third order that is critical to the interpretation of modern media portrays the image as the pretence of an absence, concealing the fact that there was no initial reality to start with. The fourth order, or the pure simulacrum, is the only one that is not related to any reality at all; it is its own autonomous simulacrum. This development leads to hyperreal, a state where the simulated is no longer differentiated by, and is often desired by, the real. Baudrillard defines this change in a very clear manner:

Today, abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1)

This is an expression of radical epistemological discontinuity. The traditional vision of abstraction, in which a map or a concept just represents a domain that already exists is made obsolete. Simulation has instead become a generative power, an invention of a reality that is completely self-referential a hyperreal that has no connection to an external, objective reality. In the case of theatre, this means that the stage is no longer a place of reflection of an already existing world but a place where new worlds are in creation through the very performance and as a result, the line between what is performed and that which is considered to be real by the theatrical experience is ambiguated. Baudrillard also differentiates between pretending and

simulating, which is again a distinction, but a critical one to understand the extent of hyperreality:

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. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3)

Here, Baudrillard explains that even pretending does not mean that there is no underlying reality, although the reality may be hidden in the short run. Simulation, nevertheless, functions on a different plane; it directly takes down the very standards according to which reality is judged. In the theatrical realm, this implies that a play that only pretends that it is real nonetheless implicitly forms the existence of a real world outside the play. On the other hand, when the play simulates reality, i.e., as is the case with *The Nether* and *Attempts on Her Life*, the play threatens the viewers that they cannot know the difference between the fake and the genuine, i.e. that the theatrical event itself could be one of the main, as opposed to the secondary, reality. This ontological dilemma is the main issue of the current theatrical environment. The deeper meaning of this change is the precession of simulacra, that is, the model predominates and dictates the real. This is not purely a copy being made so that an original is lost, but about the copies actually creating the very concept of an original. Baudrillard expounds on this extreme reversal:

The transition from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing marks a decisive turning point. The first implies a theology of truth and secrecy... The second inaugurates the era of simulacra and of simulation, in which there is no longer a God to recognise his own, no longer a Last Judgment to separate the false from the true, the real from its artificial resurrection, as everything is already dead and resurrected in advance. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 6)

This quote prefigures the theological aspect of the argument of Baudrillard. The disappearance of a god who determines the truth is the final victory of a simulator. And in a world where all things are already reproductions, a rebirth without an original, that even the very notion of a real beginning or a final verdict loses its meaning. To the theatre, this means the performance as opposed to a reflection of an external truth, and therefore becomes the main point of producing and consuming

meaning, and a meaning without a fixed referent in many cases. The theatrical incident, in this regard, is involved in the construction of a hyperreal world in which the difference between the stage and reality, fiction and reality is erased. Pervasiveness of simulacra is stained with a bright analysis of Disneyland done by Baudrillard:

Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms: the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to be what makes the operation successful. But what draws the crowds is much more the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturised pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 12)

Disneyland serves as a central example in Baudrillard's theory, functioning as a "perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 12). It is presented as an imaginary space to conceal the fact that the "real" world outside its gates is equally simulated. This significance lies in its role as a deterrence machine that masks the absence of a true referent in contemporary society. In the context of theatre, the stage functions similarly; it is a space where the simulated and the real are deliberately confounded, effectively connecting these theoretical concepts to the active production of hyperreality in dramatic texts.

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say, of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2)

This is a final quote that sums up the extreme of Baudrillard's argument. Simulation is not just a copy but a generative process, which creates a hyperreal that is more real than the real, which successfully short-circuits any attempt at a direct connection to an underlying reality. This means that a performance can become a closed system of signs in which the meaning is created in the performance and not in the outside world, in the case of theatre. As a result, the theatrical event is turned into the location of the meaning explosion, where the audience is overwhelmed by the world of signs that no longer have their referential anchors. In order to better put the ideas

proposed by Baudrillard into perspective, it is relevant to briefly address the works of Guy Debord and Fredric Jameson, whose theories, though separated, still echo the view of Baudrillard on the modern world. In his work *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Guy Debord proposes that contemporary life is dominated by the spectacle, which is a social relation mediated by images. The spectacle could not be just a collection of images; it is a social relation between people mediated by images that Debord considers. This idea can be compared to the concept of the simulation introduced by Baudrillard since both philosophers emphasize the issue of the fact that images and representations now rule and impose the social reality and supersede the direct human experience with mediations. The theatrical experience, especially in its modern variations, may be regarded as being involved in this spectacle, in which the reality created on the stage takes an active part in the perception formation. In his work, Postmodernism, or, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson coined the notion of depthlessness as one of the major features of postmodern culture. Jameson insists that the postmodern culture and art are not as deep and historically established as the previous ages, but rather a shallow game of signs and pastiche. This notion of depthlessness augments that of the hyperreal of Baudrillard in which the lack of a reference point results in the flattening of meaning and emphasis on superficiality. In the theatre, depthlessness may appear as an anti-psychological and/or anti-thematic approach, in favour of a disjointed, multi-layered Show that reflects the superficial interaction with reality of a simulated world. The spectacle and the depthlessness of both Debord and Jameson therefore act to support the overall thesis of Baudrillard that the modern society and by extension the modern theatre is more and more dominated by the ubiquitous presence of simulation and subsequent loss of the real.

5. Results and Discussion

The Nether by Jennifer Haley (2013) is a scary anticipation of a future when virtual reality has reached this level of immersion and ubiquity that it re-defines human experience and moral practice on a fundamental level. The play is not a parable of technophobia, but a high-technology epic, an inquisition of digital hyperreality, in which the simulated world of *the Nether* is a third-order simulacrum, a world where code replaces ontology. The story puts forward the argument that the digital world is not merely a reflection or a warping of the physical one but rather a

generative system that creates its own, self-contained world, the one that often overshadows the actual one in terms of perceived reality and power. The fact that the virtual world could be a full and all-moving substitute of a crumbling physical reality is one of the most vivid aspects of *The Nether*. The play directly compares the past condition of the internet to the modern condition of the play, which accentuates the transformation of the digital spaces to the state of complete realization and hyperreal:

The Nether was called the Internet. In the beginning. But as the world got more and more crowded, and the environment more and more... compromised... it became a realm. A realm where you can be anyone, anywhere. (Haley, 2013, p. 27)

The quote makes *the Nether* not a mere Internet-based space but a complete universe on its own, the place where one can forget the reality of the corporeal world and find solace in the cruelty of real life. The fact that an “internet has become a realm and not a tool or a network represents an incredible ontological shift: digital space no longer serves as an instrument or a network but is a complete alternative environment. This is precisely the notion that Baudrillard developed when he thought up the hyperreal, when the simulated world creates its own reality, which is more captivating and real than the corroding physical world. The immersive nature of the theatrical performance of the play, as well as its theatrical stage and the virtual dimensions it occupies, further deconstructs the distinction between the physical stage and the virtual world it inhabits, and makes the audience a part of the experience of this digital hyperreality. The main counterpoint in the play is more often than not, an issue about what is viewed as authenticity in the virtual world as opposed to the real world. This is eloquently expressed in the conversation between Papa and Morris:

Papa: You don't see anything outside of your game. You don't see anything that's real! Morris: This is real. This room is real. The Hideaway is real.

Papa: It's code. It's just code. (Haley, 2013, p. 73)

This speech summarizes the main thesis of the play the substitution of ontology by code. Papa, who represents a more traditional perspective of the world, insists on the priority of the material world. In contrast to this Morris, a resident of *the Nether*, confirms the reality of the virtual world, even the Hideaway- a virtual Victorian

mansion that users of the virtual world use to fulfill their fantasies. The response of Papa, it is just code, though it is meant to eliminate the virtual due to its artificiality, actually serves to accentuate the process of its hyperreality. This code is not just a representational medium, but the structure on which this new reality is created. This is in coincidence with Baudrillard concept of simulacrum as a copy of a real that has neither a beginning nor a reality. With the case of theatre, this implies the stage represented as such a code-driven world would be a meta-theatrical space where the process of making something through code is played out, thus forcing the audience to question the reality of any constructed world, be it of virtual space or theatrical space.

Ethical issues in *The Nether* do not have their basis in traditional moral codes but in the permutability of the simulated life. The play does not in any way attempt to pass moral judgment, but rather accentuates the moral questions of a world where a virtual space has real, although complex, implications on the self in the real world. This is believed by Morris when he says to Sims:

Morris: We're not here to judge your taste. We're here to judge the impact of your taste on the real world. Sims: There is no real world. There is only the world we choose to live in. (Haley, 2013, p. 15)

The statement of Sims that there is no real world. It is a terrible statement about the victory of hyperreality, just to say there is only the world we choose to live in. It suggests that the line between the real and the simulated has not been crossed but has been erased. In such a way, the system of ethics is to be modified to a state where the personal choice in the simulated world defines the reality. This is directly related to the idea presented by Baudrillard of the implosion of meaning, in which the traditional referents of ethics are deprived of their foundation. The audience in the theatrical setting is facing a milieu where ethical lines are constantly challenged within the simulated reality, which makes one reconsider the moral responsibility in the world that is becoming more and more virtualized.

The notion of identity of *the Nether* is dynamic and performed, often being disconnected from the physical body. Characters live in avatars that allow them to overcome the constraints of their corporeal bodies to explore the dichotomy between avatars and physical bodies deeply. Iris, an orphan girl who appears to be a naive Victorian in *the Nether*, is the representation of this fluidity:

Iris: I'm not a child. I'm a Victorian girl. I'm a ghost. I'm a memory. I'm whatever you want me to be. (Haley, 2013, p. 42)

The constructed aspect of the digital hyperreal is emphasised with the statement by Iris. She is not an unchanging object, but a changeable mark, which can assume various roles and wishes. Her identity is a product of code and projection on the part of the user, a pure simulacrum which has no original referent. This puts down a gage to the traditional idea of a stable, authentic self and points in its direction, indicating, however, that the identity of the hyperreal is performative, a sequence of masks chosen. The dramatic performance of these characters who are on stage and simultaneously occupying a virtual identity only adds to the performativity of identity in a virtualized world. The theme of escape and change is recurrent; characters will find an escape and a feeling of wholeness in the simulated world. The confession by Doyle sheds light on the great power that *the Nether* had on the individual psyche:

Doyle: I wanted to live in a world where I didn't have to be myself. Where I could be someone who was loved. Someone who was whole. (Haley, 2013, p. 88)

The fact that Doyle longs to have a virtual world in which he can be loved and complete supports the seductive nature of the hyperreal. The promise of fulfillment which the physical world fails to deliver is a promise that the play effectively promises us in order to offset perceived shortcomings of the reality in favor of a more gratifying simulation. This is addressed to theatrical performance as a digital interface where the stage per se is turned into a point of entry to hyperreal experience. Having this need to experience simulated wholeness, the audience is exposed to consider how tempting it is to escape into created worlds, and what are the ontological implications of such decisions. Therefore, *The Nether* is not only a play about technology; but it also questions the human condition in a world where the simulated has become the new reality and where identity, ethics, and even reality per se get revised again and again.

Attempts on Her Life: A Potent Discursive Hyperreality

Martin Crimp play *Attempts on Her Life* (1997) is a drastic break with the established principal dramatic form: the protagonist is not a psychologically viable person, but a floating sign, a blank canvas onto which a great number of competing

narratives are distorted. The play is a strong representation of discursive hyper-reality in which the excessive proliferation of language, media rhetoric and advertising jargon leads to an explosion of meaning which results in the eventual failure of ontology. In the work of Crimp, however, it is not only the fragmented identity that is being described, but in fact, the ontological dissolution which shows how in a world saturated with signs, the referent, or the real Anne, will no longer exist. The analysis will center on both the structure and language of the play used as the mechanism of simulation and its disintegration as a key principle of the simulated world instead of a style. The main argument of this analysis is that Anne is not a character, as such, but is a vacuum, a lackingness that makes up the whole play. These seventeen ostensibly disparate scenarios cannot be seen as attempts to define her true identity but are instead the examples of how the identity is formed and dismantled with the help of language. This premise is set right at the beginning of the play with the following line:

No one will have directly seen her. No one will have directly heard her.
No one will have directly touched her. She is a circulating sign. (Crimp, 1997, p. 1)

This introductory statement gives a straight forward statement of the main thesis of the play. Anne is not someone to know, to comprehend, but to signify without signified. She is only present in the discourse in which she is enclosed, a chain of images that have no beginning. This instantly is in line with the idea of the pure simulacrum of Baudrillard, a sign that does not have any association with any reality. As an experience of the theater, the focus of the theatrical performance in the play is not the character exploration, but the view of the unstoppable flow of signs, the eventual loss of a stable referent, which forces the spectator to accept the simulation of the identity in a world of media. The play submerges us with the role of media language and advertising rhetoric in this discursive hyperreality. Anne is referred to in many instances as a terrorist, porn star, artist and a car as her identity varies with every new story. This is eloquently depicted in the situation where she is being brought out as a commodity:

She is a brand. She is a logo. She is a product of the media. She is a woman who has been invented by the very people who claim to be looking for her. (Crimp, 1997, p. 49)

Here we have an explicit identification of Anne with a brand, a logo that is a pure signifier to be consumed. Her identity is created using the language of advertising and marketing to diminish her to a list of attributes that are desirable. This has a direct relationship with the notion of the spectacle by Debord whereby social relationships are mediated by images and commodities. The play illustrates that in a consumer society identity turns into something that can be purchased and sold, an exchange of signs in the market of images. The theatrical performance of this situation, which tends to look like a commercial or a marketing pitch to some extent, engulfs the viewers into this hyperspace of discursive hyperreality as much as the line between man and commodity is blurred there. The explosion of meaning is one of the main topics of the play *Attempts on Her Life* because the endless increase in the number of opposite stories about Anne results in the semantic exhaustion state. The play does not provide any resolution or some conclusive truth on who Anne is, thus making the audience always guess what it is. This is the highlight of the hyperreal by Baudrillard, whereby overload of information creates no clarity, but the collapse of meaning. The form of the play, the lack of a linear narrative, the lack of characters, is a reflection of this explosion:

There is no Anne. There is only the discourse about Anne. There is only the series of attempts to define her, to name her, to fix her in a particular identity. (Crimp, 1997, p. 112)

This remark which can be interpreted as a meta-commentary to the play itself highlights the lack of centre of identity to Anne. She is merely what there has been an attempt to write about her, a total of attempts at writing about her, a totality of stories that annul each other in the end. The fact that the play does not give a fixed point of Anne represents a strong statement about the loss of the real in a simulated world. The theater event is transformed into a labyrinth of signs, where the meaning searching will be eventually in vain, and this is the state of an information-saturated society deprived of the truth. The comJameson's idea of depthlessness, in which the depthlessness of the play of signs replaces modification of identity that is presented in the play is also seen through the commodification of identity in terms of consumer culture, where Anne is the object of the most intense desire, the ideal consumer who has the nothingness at the center of the spectacle:

Anne is the perfect consumer. She is the one who buys everything, who wants everything, who is everything. She is the void at the heart of the spectacle. (Crimp, 1997, p. 156)

This quote is also very effective as it relates the themes of consumerism, identity, and the void. Anne being the ideal consumer picture is the embodiment of the emptiness that motivates consumer society. She is a tabula rasa, upon which any need can be mapped, an empty space that could never be filled. This matches the idea of depthlessness that Jameson gave, where the depthlessness of the play of signs takes the place of any historical and psychological depth. This concept is performed on stage through a torrent of consumerist imagery and words, which further engulfs the audience in the spectacle and makes them realize how their personal identity has been created in accordance with the logic of consumption.

Lastly, an open form of the play, its absence of pre-determined casting, and encouragement of numerous interpretations, also confirms the notion of Anne as a circulating sign. In this way the play may be staged in infinite variations, with the various actors depicting Anne in various scenes, or even having no actor at all. This fluidity of structure is a strong performance of the key idea of the play which is the instability of identity in the simulated world. The play ends in the form of a lot of unanswered questions, making the audience speculate what the kind of life Anne led was:

Is she a terrorist? Is she a saint? Is she a victim? Is she a killer? She is all of these things and none of them. She is the screen on which we project our own desires and fears. (Crimp, 1997, p. 210)

This final quote sums up the whole point of *Attempts on Her Life*. Anne is not a personality to be understood, but an object of projection and a mirror of the wants and fears of a society struggling with the loss of the real. The refusal to provide a clear answer, which is the most basic statement of the play. It can be described as theatrically enacting the hyperreal, the world in which the sign has replaced the referent, and identity has ceased to be a being and has become a representation. As a result, the theater somehow is an active experience in the process of creating and destroying the meaning, an effective demonstration of the ontological implications of a world filled with signs.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that contemporary theatre is not a passive reflection of reality but an active producer of hyperreality. Through the analysis of *The Nether* and *Attempts on Her Life*, it is evident that the simulated world not only distorts but essentially replaces ontological certitude. Both Haley's *The Nether* and Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* provide sophisticated and strong models of this condition, albeit through different modalities. Ultimately, both plays demonstrate the disappearance of the real in a world saturated with signs, confirming Baudrillard's theory that the copy has become the new genuine.

Widely reflecting on digital hyperreality, *The Nether* presents the world where the code becomes the final determiner of life. The course of the play in creating Hideaway as a third-order simulacrum, where the avatars and the virtual worlds replace the physical one, points to the generative force of technology which can produce self-sufficient worlds. The moral grey areas that arise out of these activities in this digital construct create the need to redefine morality within a context where identity is dynamic and created through technology. The contribution of Haley, then, to the field of postmodern theatre, in showing how even theatrical performance can serve as a digital interface, placing the audience into the ontological implications of a life conducted by codes.

On the other hand, in *Attempts on Her Life*, the author explores the discursive hyperreality in which language, saturation of media and advertising rhetoric might lead to the collapse of meaning and eventual failure of a stable subject. A circulating sign, Anne is the embodiment of the absence of a referent, as her identity is continuously re-built and de-constructed by contradictory stories. The extreme dramatic form of Crimp, which lacks any fixed characterizations, any linear narrative is staged in the form of the very fragmentation and depthlessness characteristic to a world permeated by the media. The value of this play is in its starkness in showing how linguistic simulation can destroy the very existence of genuine identity leaving only a space at the center of the scene.

Comparatively, both plays disclose two main modalities of simulation: the *Nether* is run on the digital matrix of code and the avatars, whereas the *Attempts on Her Life* is run on the language and discursive identity saturation of the media. They both, though, find themselves in the same and serious ontological implications of

living in a hyperreal world. They make audiences face a reality whereby the original is gone and the copy is the new genuine one. The theatrical experience, in both instances, proves to be an essential place of questioning these changes, of questioning perception of authenticity, presence, and physical being itself.

The current and future studies in this field could be also productive in the study of the changing interrelation of theatre and new technologies, including AI-based theatre, immersive theatre, or VR plays. With artificial intelligence starting to produce stories and characters, and with virtual reality platforms providing more advanced immersive experiences they will just raise more questions as posed by Haley and Crimp.

1. What are other ways AI-generated performances will make the real and the simulated easily intersect?
2. What will be the ethical dilemmas that will be presented in the complete immersion theatrical VR experiences?
3. And what will dramaturgy do to meet the needs and the challenges and opportunities of these hyperreal frontiers?

These questions are the key directions to be pursued in the further academic research basing on the initial background insights, shared by Baudrillard, and dramatically revealed in *The Nether*, and *Attempts on Her Life*.

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