



# Transformations in Art and Literature in Hyperreal Era: A Philosophical Exploration

Jagveer Kaur

Department of Philosophy, Punjabi University, Patiala, India  
Email: [yash28sran@gmail.com](mailto:yash28sran@gmail.com)

Received: 16 Mar 2025; Received in revised form: 11 Apr 2025; Accepted: 20 Apr 2025; Available online: 30 Apr 2025  
©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *This paper aims to explore the journey of art and literature from the early impressions of creativity and imagination i.e. prehistoric cave paintings to current scenario i.e. use of technology and NFT. While tracing the evolution of art, the influence of economy and technology on how an art object /work is produced or presented and perceived is also discussed. It contends that in the age of hyperreality, not only the distinction between real and simulated is getting blurred, rather the demarcation between physical and virtual is also collapsing as can be noted in the works of contemporary creators like Damein Hirst and Lans King.*



**Keywords**— *Art, Literature, Symbolism, Hyperreality, NFT, Technology, Illusion, Simulated Reality.*

The human race had been creating imitations of reality long before the inception of urban civilization. The oldest cave art as discovered by archaeologists is a life-sized picture of a wild pig that was painted at least 45,500 years ago in Indonesia. In northeast Brazil, Serra da Capivara National Park, human figures and animals are depicted. It also includes complex scenarios of supernatural beings, hunting, dancing, combats and sexual activities. The Lascaux Cave paintings, that are estimated to be around 17,000 years old are most famous and impressive cave paintings worldwide. Some paintings are trying to tell a story, others are peeps into then existing wildlife and animals they hunted for food. As per the archaeological records, the civilization which existed in Europe between 35,000 and 10,000 years ago, is the earliest, or among the earliest civilizations that produced the first complex visual representation. But, by that time, the early civilization wasn't producing only visual arts but also started performing rituals. A such instance is found un another caves Les Trois Freres, in which there is a 13,000-year-old wall painting of what appears to be a shaman from this same civilization, pulling a ritual role, in which he is seeming to depict an animal spirit. It depicts what we consider as fictional characters. The figure in Les Trois freres, stares at you from stone wall. It looks a bit odd by

contemporary standards, presenting a man wearing an animal costume and a tail, with antlers on his head. He seems to be bouncing, possibly in some sort of trance, representing animal spirit.

The most interesting thing about the formations is that they were ancestors of the symbolic and sensory realm of art, drama and literature, which intensified intricately with the progress of civilization. Each creation has provided the humanity to escape the bareness of its external world in different ways. It helped the mankind to raise itself and produce vision of other ways of living and to convince other possible worlds.

As we walk through the history of civilization, it can be concluded that we have used these forms of representation to create a 'human world' which is more interesting and lavish than the natural world. We have used our utilitarian tools and recreated future into surroundings which are safer, comfortable and mirrored our environment on the lines of our grandiose imagination. This is what the cave paintings depict, a world that presents our fears, desires and consciousness. Since the era of cave paintings, these "replica realities" have taken all kinds of forms, from board games, taletelling, paintings and theatrical productions, to funfair carnivals and fantasy saturated celebrations.

### Transformations in Art & Literature

Long before the advent of high technology and complicated expressions of replica, human civilization sort its nature of imitation into board games and sports combats. The board games were a kind of sign employing its players in a kind of simple immersion. Imitation, as human nature can be seen from the very childhood, as child, we tend to imitate the routine of parents and tasks of household with the help of miniatures or toys including burner, cookies, vegetables and utensils. From toys, as children we tend to leap towards simulations in the form of art and literature, as adults. It is human tendency to mould surroundings according to their wish and likeness. In the words of Northrop Frye, a literary critic, that its human nature to turn nature into 'human world' and we create it in two ways. The first way to do so is by reconstructing our physical surrounding, changing it into designs of our like and comfort by constructing roads, farms, cities etc. the other way is by composing literature. Northrop Frye, in his book "The Educated Imagination" tries to state the importance of literature toward life. In literature, we try to examine the possibilities of different human worlds by inventing fictional genre of reality that lets us see the glimpse of the mankind as the way we can visualize it and the way we want it. Same applies to art, we try to manipulate the reality by recreating it in accordance to our fears, dreams and anxiety. From the time of cave painting, art has gone tremendous change. Simulating through art is practically identical to recreating reality, e.g., for the hunter who painted bison in the Lascaux is convinced of evoking them and making them materialize outside the cave. Art holds a significant part of mythology and imagination, as according to ancient Greeks, Pygmalion carved a statue, portraying a girl so beautiful that he fell in love with her and pleaded the gods to turn her into woman of flesh and blood, suggesting the idea that man can imbue a part of his spirit into formless matter: blowing the animus, the breath of life. Another wonderful aspect of art was considered its propensity to simulate Nature by imitating it and its indistinguishability from the real object was sort of parameter of brilliance of art. Tietze, Viennese art historian, pointed that "Art helps us understand reality... the artists who provided humanity with the first conventions of visual perceptions were of no less use than those geniuses of prehistoric times who formed the first words". The famous example in relation to it is of Grape so well painted by Zeusi that even the birds tried to peck the berries. If we take a moment here to consider Plato's opinion that all sensible reality is an imperfect image of the world of ideas; the artist, by producing simulacrum or shadow copies, are thus besmirched with double delusion. With the rise of technology, art itself felt betrayed. When a mechanical means of accurate reproduction in the form of camera has

been invented, the need and motive of painting a portrait with realistic intentions stood in question. Art once again examined the invisible, the void of the psyche and the imagination, the innovation of photography, was in some way, the beginning of transformation from modernism to hyperreality.

Gisele Freud's study *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* traces the rise in photography with the rise in middle class. The author pointed out various procedures which played an important role in making portrait production easy and affordable. With the invention of camera, dispute of photography being an art arose. She pointed out that its claim to be an art was basically raised by those who were turning it into a business, means it is directly related to itself emerging as a commodity with all the products of society, in simple terms painting is also a commodity. He earned a great fortune with his idea of representation of works. As stated by Marx commodity has sensuous yet extrasensory properties and these act precisely as do fetishes. The Walter Benjamin is of the opinion that the nature of physical environment in which we move and character of historical moment in which we live – are in fact denied to us. He often described the world as 'phantasmagoria' and is of the opinion that we live in the optical illusion, points precisely to photography that has power to identify phantasmagoria. Benjamin in his above stated essay states the crises sensed by art. He also stated that with the invention of photography, the art becomes a mechanical process, that now we are able to develop a variety of prints from a single photographic negative. Photography not only threatened the originality of subject, but also puts it in the danger of adding malicious deception, which is an alluring attribute of hyperreality. Given the concept of hyperreality, another important aspect is the introduction of editions, which also leads to devaluation of art. Though the editions aren't something distinctively new to artwork, but contemporary technological properties truly decrease the noteworthiness of the original. In 2011, Harry Blain, introduced the online platform Sedition Art, which provides its customers various services of buying and selling editions of digital art. The primary idea behind this was really brilliant, providing the opportunities to bourgeoisie class to purchase a work of art created by giants of the contemporary art scene including Damein Hirst, Jenny Holzer and Tracy Emin. The mechanical produced editions are a spoilsport to the original work art. It not only overshadows the original piece but renders it unknown, which, as we already know, is the main sign of simulacra. Christiane Vleugels has taken the hyper realistic game to next level. Her paintings have an uncanny resemblance with the help of techniques, for e.g., she paints hair strokes using real hair. Talking about Damein Hirst, he is of the opinion

that art should be like that no one can differentiate between art and normal affair of things. Once a time, where his art was displayed in the museum the cleaning crew wiped the art thinking it, a sort of waste. He's got different and controversial style of art. Many of his artworks include real animals presented in glass wall tanks, well preserved. Some of his artworks are presented in totality, as works of art related with pharmacy. He explored this topic through different types of artworks such as his spot and remedy painting, the 13-print series, "The Last Supper" and the medicine cabinets. Alastir Sooke, an art critic, while visiting his exhibition "Schizophrenogenesis" which holds the surreal art of medicines in large sizes explains that artist is trying to interrogate the great void at the heart of contemporary life about the decline of religion and what have we collectively as a society replaced it with? It is somewhat compared to spirituality in two aspects. Firstly, medicines soothe pain to some extent, though not for long time and second is that art is therapeutical in itself. People often go to galleries to relax themselves. Hirst's work is deeply related with the attribute of Memento Mori. The ever-changing aspects of this world bought another form of digital art referred as NFT (Non-Fungible Token). NFTs are digital collectibles that can relate to the arts, like paintings, photos and songs and are based on blockchain technology which renders them unique and encrypted. NFTs are unique possessions in the digital world that can be traded like any other piece of property, but NFTs are intangible. Except digital art is easily subjected to duplicity. The NFTs can be bought and sold easily can be tokenised to generate a digital certificate of ownership. Last year, Hirst presented his project "The Currency" in two forms – physical and virtual. The first is 10,000 one-of-a kind hand painted A4 sheets covered in colourful dots. The second is the NFTs of these sheets. Hirst, after a year burnt the physical paintings of which the owner decided to keep in digital form. Though the ownership of a digital art over physical form baffles the majority of people. Hirst states that this confusion can be sorted by recognising two types of communities i.e., one who values traditional physical pieces and the one interested in NFT pieces. He points that the value of any art is ascribed by the cultural communities and each community is mystery to the other. But still, for most people, the mystery relies with NFT community. Many criticised Hirst for destroyed his own precious artwork. Eddy Frankel of Time Out, an art critic, stated that, "It's almost like Damein Hirst is so out of touch with the real world that he's basically transcended to another plane of existence, populated only by oligarchs and the once – edgy artists they collect"<sup>i</sup>. However, NFTs formed a great hype in the virtual world and were deemed to be answer for collectors as cryptocurrency was to cash (currency). These products have symbolic value, rather than

the immediate one and reminds Baudrillard's work, "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign": "Far from the primary status of the object being a pragmatic one which would subsequently come to overdetermine a social value of sign, it is the sign exchange value which is fundamental"<sup>ii</sup>. Another piece of art "Themis", is an evolving NFT that shows the inequality on a global scale.

Another noteworthy artist in the scene is Lans King. He is a British American contemporary interdisciplinary artist who is blurring the lines between virtual and real. His notable art work series, "The Hyperreality Show" integrates visual aesthetic components that are organic and synthetic, offline and online, analog and digital. His paintings in this series combines algorithms and digital printing with manual painting on canvas and are framed with an animation video/NFT on a bespoke video screen. He surgically implanted NFC microchip in his hand (This is my Body) to which all his works are connected to through NFTs, called digital capsules. His artworks are displayed on various leading virtual and physical platforms. When the King tokenized himself i.e., in his "This is my Body" project, he received a spectacular response from crypto market and his NFT sold within first minute. Further, he is interested in interweaving interactive brainwave patterns from his thoughts in collaboration with Institut, and an emotion detector to communicate how he's feeling at any given moment. EPOCH, an artist run virtual experiment is displaying King's artwork in its LIFELIKE edition along with various astonishing virtual artworks of some iconic artists. We can't basically address them as artworks, as they are thought generated virtual objects. The virtual sculpture was generated by King using a brain computer interface device that captures brain activity data. The figures are fed into generative algorithm and parametric software, and each channel is mapped to a specific parameter. The software transfigures a primary geometry into various new forms that are distinctive. This work was generated precisely for the Ocean Biome of Biosphere 2 based on Taoist philosophy about living in a state of flow. He began with the form of a water droplet and the final sculpture is generated as Lans meditated on the phrase "be like water", attributing Bruce Lee. This thought generated artwork also serves a prototype for a performance – generative artwork called The Cyborg Manifesto. In 2023, Lans will generate virtual sculptures in real time whilst wearing a brain computer interface device, on the lines of performance series.

"I want to capture data that is physical, emotional and maybe somehow spiritual, and feed it all into this capsule (chip) that will perhaps become a collection of the rest of my life. Every data point I can possibly offer." – Lans King<sup>iii</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Northrop Frye thinks literature as another way of constructing a customised reality, according to one's desires and dreams. There are various important factors related to fiction. Fiction is a disguised version of either reality or dreams. One can always co-relate to fiction by either storytelling or movies. It tends to relate to and free a person from both external i.e., literal and internal i.e., metaphorical exile. Any tale takes both the protagonist and self from unjust to a just world and from dull and down self to a confident one. The ending of any story leaves a far-reaching impact on us as we can strongly relate to characters and feel immense pleasure or pain throughout its journey because either it is our real-life journey or the fabricated and dreamy one. The effect on any story depends on the precise description of these elements – identification, imagined interaction and observation from outside the boundaries of action. The fiction not only caters our identification with love and altruism but it also relates to our sadistic side that drives to symbolic and physical violence. The authors have to play very carefully with sadism as the negation of it will render the movie dull and boring, and on the other hand the excess of it will imply the invitation to recreational evil and soulless society. Along with happy endings, sad ones also play important role as it provides one with the relief that all those hurtful experiences are only fictional and you are leading a prosperous life. Not only this, it also tries to evoke a resolve in us to never let the monstrosity depicted, happen in us to never let the monstrosity depicted, happen in real life. The portrayal of morality is also an important aspect of fiction. However, it is not necessary that idea of morality or good delivered by fiction is actually good, it can also present a distorted state of morality. It can provide us opportunities to act out rigid and malicious desires that are excuses against disturbing truths. For e.g., if any member of audience, as a child felt any sort of demeaning, manipulation and castration symbolically; he/she will be very likely to enjoy observing being done some to others in both disguised and open ways. There are various works of fiction that doesn't thrive by just picturing the morality but instead it presented the fallacious, feeble and rational version of ourselves, manipulated by events and shows us to love the imperfect version itself endeavouring for something more.

It is interesting to note that, every work of fiction no matter how progressive is always set in primary emotions and fantasies. It never is only a disguised childhood story, but also portrays social, cultural, political, psychological, mythical and scientific developments, thus giving us opportunities to symbolically resolve all dilemma and conflicts within personal and social sphere. Fiction gives us peep into various probabilities. Frye puts fiction as something that shows us the world as we want it and fear

what it might be, in which the possibilities of life are symbolically represented by heavens and hells. He also believes that through fiction we try to reverse the fallen state and restore our identity with nature and the world.

Marcuse, also like Frye thinks that through fiction we express our desire for liberation but instead of identification, he talked about the requirement of modification of our relation with nature, i.e., a shift from attitude of exploitation to that of love and passion. According to him, fiction is isolated expression of our authentic nature and our craving for a pleasing and hedonistic life, which is repeatedly denied by society. Undoubtedly, fiction has changed and developed over time. We can see history itself as a story of millions of selves, abandoned in nature, society and their own psychodynamics; but these aren't merely stranded. Referring back to the concept of hyperreality, there are various fictional stories that tend to merge the real and fictional plot in the story itself. Most of such stories are based on the futuristic worlds governed by science and technology. One such short story is 'The Veldt' written by Ray Bradbury in 1950. In this, author tries to depict the narrowing gap between real and simulations because of advancements in science. He also portrays the damage that simulations are doing and the damage that is already done. It is set in an automatic house referred as "Happy life Home" which does every household chore from cooking and cleaning to raising their kids. They also set a 'nursery' for their children which is room with 3D walls that display situations according to one's thoughts and feelings and is designed to help them with development of their neurosis. Their parents didn't like the appearance of nursery which was presenting South African forest infusing raw smell of grass in the room and sensation of hot day with all the wildlife roaming there. Parents get concerned about the psychological state of their children. Both of them felt replaced by automated house as they were unable to communicate and understand their children's emotions. They decide to shut the nursery and whole house on the advice of a psychologist who points out that children are in dire need of help and they are fixated on destruction and violence. The children threw tantrums and threatened their father on his decision of shutting down both nursery and house. At the end the story describes both the parents being eaten by lions and vultures while kids enjoy their meals. Ray tried to paint the picture of our growing dependence on technology and how it is blurring the difference between real and simulations.

In the same way, author Stanislaw Lem tries to portray the same blurriness in a short novel, "The Futurological Congress", published in 1971, under the effect of 'functionality' drugs. The novel starts with Ijon Tichy, the

main character, goes to the Eighth World Futurological Congress in Costa Rica. The novel is set in the wild hallucinogenic trips, which starts when he drinks tap water in his hotel room. The next day, he realizes that water supply has been drugged by the government with a drug that makes its users kind. Ijon finds himself in various unbearable hallucinations but relaxes every time when he comes to senses. He felt trapped in a world, where he is unable to distinguish between the real and illusion, as the psycho-chemical drugs can induce the realistic hallucinations. He also realizes the problems posed by this unreal set of experiences. He panics at the thought that what humanity has bought on itself: the ability to imitate the look and feel of reality. As the novel goes, there is increase in character's confusion and doubts. Ijon, at the end finds out that the reality as it appears, is not real at all. There is a pharmaceutical giant who is subjecting everyone with a set of drugs to induce a shared delusion. It lets people to perceive a utopic state with advanced technology, but in actual, everything is in chaos and at the verge of collapse. It turns out that, Symington, another character is the director of this false paradise in order to hide the end of the world.

Symington – “We keep this civilization narcotized for otherwise it could not endure itself. That is why its sleep must not be disturbed”<sup>iv</sup>.

“The year is 2098...with 69 billion inhabitants legally registered and approximately another 26 billion in hiding. The average annual temperature has fallen four degrees. In fifteen or twenty years there will be glaciers here. We have no way of averting or halting their advance... we can only keep it secret”.

Tichy – “I always thought there would be ice in hell” ... “and so you paint the gates with pretty pictures”<sup>v</sup>.

The author tried to point out television as a drug, which is not only confined to screen but tries to simulate the experiences of life itself. It bounds people in fantasy lands and fades its touch to reality. Most of the stories in movies and television shows, like in literature are based on someone's thoughts of what world should or could be.

## CONCLUSION

The journey that we have undergone as society shows profound and intricate relationship between real and reality. Human beings have not only the desire but also potential to influence and change their surroundings according to need, which is beyond mere survival desire. All forms of art represent fears, desires, intensities, dilemmas, dystopic aspects of our reality and utopia of our collective consciousness. The desire to recreate and modify reality is a key aspect of human consciousness. With the advent of technology, there is a profound shift in not only what art is and how we view it, but also the production, preservation and originality of art. The story- tellers also have a crucial role in analysing the role of simulations and illustrate repercussions of it. In the age of advanced technology, there is dire need to understand possible threats of simulated reality. As the gap between real and representations is abridging, it is important to ascertain how to navigate in the world of simulations and how to differentiate between technological counterfeits and real human experiences.

## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup>McIntosh, S. (2022, October 11). Damein Hirst burns his own Art after selling its NFTs. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-63218704>

<sup>ii</sup> Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a Critique of the Political economy of the Sign*. (Translated By Charles Levin). Telos Press: Candor NY, pp29

<sup>iii</sup> Ray, M. (2021, August 5). Hyperreality King: Lending a Hand for Data Sovereignty. Retrieved from <https://nfts.wtf/hyperreality-king-lending-a-hand-for-data-sovereignty/>

<sup>iv</sup> Lem, S. (1971). *The Futurological Congress*. Harcourt Inc.: New York, pp. 107

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, pp.108