

Illusion of Media in Timothy Mo's The Redundancy of Courage

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ABSTRACT

The concept of reality is an issue that has intrigued the minds of people throughout centuries. Since it is possible to perceive the world around us depending on various perspectives, it turns out to be a rather conspicuous topic. This multiplicity of perspectives takes the issue to a further point in which realities are intermingled with illusions; that is to say, it becomes difficult to differentiate illusion from the real. While realities are accepted to be existing as long as they are perceived through the sensory organs in an objective way, illusions are merely the uncorroborated beliefs or assumptions. In other words, illusions are one way of creating false realities. Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, which is grounded on the existence of these false realities, covers the illusionary world we live in the modern world. An abundance of illusions is also applied by literary people in their works since fictitious narration also embodies the features of illusion and does not have to be based on factual data. However, when it comes to the illusions in real life, media tools are to be scrutinized because creating illusions is one way of manipulating the actual events, something frequently used in representations of media. Media, whose popularity has increased in accordance with the high use of technology in modern times, presents the incidents happening outside people's own world. At times, it is the best way to keep up with the rest of the world. However, the contingencies of interpreting an event put the reliability of media into question. Within this framework, the aim of this paper is to examine Timothy Mo's novel, *The Redundancy of Courage*, in terms of the illusions created by the media tools. The use of media in the plot structure of the novel is aimed to be discussed in detail and explained through the examples from the novel.

Keywords: *Media, Illusion, Manipulation, The Redundancy of Courage, Timothy Mo*

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Research Article - Submit Date: 11.03.2021, Acceptance Date: 13.05.2021

DOI: 10.17932/IAU.IJMCL.2015.014/ijmcl_v07i2004

ÖZ

Gerçeklik, yüzyıllardır insanların aklını meşgul etmekte olan bir kavramdır. İçinde bulunduğumuz dünyayı farklı açılardan algılamanın mümkün olması konuyu daha da cazip hale getirmektedir. Diğer taraftan, bakış açılarının çok yönlü olmasıyla gerçek ve illüzyonun birbirine girdiği noktada konu karmaşık bir hale gelmektedir, diğer bir deyişle illüzyonu gerçekten ayırmak zorlaşmıştır. Gerçeklik, nesnel olarak duyu organları ile algılandığı müddetçe var olduğu kabul edilen bir olgu iken, illüzyon doğruluğu kanıtlanmamış varsayımlar ya da inanışlar şeklinde tanımlanabilir. Bir başka deyişle, illüzyonlar sahte gerçeklikler oluşturma yollarının arasında yer alır. Edebiyat dünyasında kurgusal anlatım, gerçeklere dayalı olmak zorunda olmadığı ve illüzyon özelliklerini de içinde barındırdığı için, edebi eserlerde illüzyon kullanımı sıklıkla karşımıza çıkan bir durumdur. Ancak, konu gerçek hayatta karşılaşılan illüzyonlara gelince, medyanın sıklıkla başvurduğu bir yöntem olması nedeniyle, medya kullanımının irdelenmesi gerektirmektedir. Modern zamanların beraberinde getirdiği teknoloji kullanımı ile daha çok gündeme gelen medya araçları, insanlara kendi dünyalarının dışında yaşananlarla ilgili bilgi vermektedir. Hatta dünyanın kalanına ayak uydurmanın en iyi yolu olduğu bile söylenebilir. Ancak, yaşanmış bir olayın farklı şekillerde yorumlanabilme olasılığı medyanın güvenilirliğinin sorgulanması gereğine yol açmıştır. Bu bağlamda, mevcut çalışmanın amacı Timothy Mo'nun *The Redundancy of Courage* romanının medya araçlarının ortaya çıkardığı illüzyonlar açısından incelenmesidir. Olay örgüsünde yer alan medya kullanımının farklı yönleri ile tartışılması ve roman örnekleme ile açıklanması amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Medya, İllüzyon, Manipülasyon, The Redundancy of Courage, Timothy Mo*

INTRODUCTION

In the accelerated technology of this age, it is rather easy to reach information no matter which part of the world a person lives. Media tools let the events be witnessed by people as if they occur in their living rooms. Thus, media tools are seen as the means of learning what is happening all around the world, which paves the way to inquire the reliability of knowledge gained through media tools. Timothy Mo, a writer of modern times, sets his novel, *The Redundancy of Courage*, in a small fictional island called Danu and he narrates the events through multiple perspectives. Mo's novel sets a true setting to look into the use of media due to the fact that there is an ongoing struggle within the novel about managing people's perceptions through media. Thus, the present article is aimed at analyzing the way media operates during the invasion of Danu.

Among the many ways of perceiving the world around us, sticking to what is caught through the physical receptors can be seen as reliable. Whereas life is such a broad entity that cannot be based only upon the sensory details. Almost everyone has aspirations and beliefs within the scope of their lives. Through their beliefs,

people's conceptions are enriched as well. Thus, illusions, which can be referred to as misleading beliefs, come up as one way of confronting realities since they enable one to avoid the cruel side of the world that makes life difficult. Gerato (1976) claims that "since pleasure cannot be found in reality, one turns to imagination, which is the source of both hope and illusion" (p. 121). In other words, illusion is the possible outcome of people's attempts to cover the realities. The more a person flees from realities, the more s/he dives into the realm of illusions. The greatest risk is, however, distinguishing the realities from illusions, or to put it in another way, the false realities that people hide themselves behind. Gerato (1976) regards the two forms of realities as different:

the true reality, or the world in which we live (nature), and the false reality, which is the world of illusion. The first is characterized by the life of man, who is doomed to suffering and pain; the second is characterized by our aspirations and ideals which, even though they will never be fulfilled, at least bring to man temporary joy and relief. (p. 124)

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to figure out the nature of illusions, Jean Baudrillard and his outstanding theory of simulation are worth mentioning since the base of his theory, as he explains in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, is on the same assumptions and versions of reality. Simulation, which is defined as "different from a fiction or lie in that it not only presents an absence as a presence, the imaginary as the real, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself" and simulacrum, as "something that looks like or represents something else" (Poster, 1988, p. 6) share the common point of being in contrast with reality. Baudrillard (1994) claims that the signs have replaced reality, and so reality does not exist any longer: "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" (p. 2). According to Baudrillard's idea, there is only artificiality, hence distinguishing artifice from reality is getting harder as time goes on:

The act of simulation is one in which there is no longer any reference to reality, instead what we have is a simulation that is generated without allusion to something real, but rather to a code or model that finds its origins outside of concrete reality. (as cited in Haladyn et al, 2010, p. 263)

Taking the cultural phenomena into the center of his claims on simulacra and simulacrum, Baudrillard suggests that there is also a shift from the constituted thoughts to the fragments in the age of modernity. In his *The Precession of Simulacra*, he claims that "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" (1994, p. 1). That there is no way to reach absolute truth is strengthened through Baudrillard's idea of hyperreal, another form of illusion.

Within this sense, Baudrillard (1988) divides the orders of simulacra into three categories. The first order is “the classical epoch, from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution” (p. 135). This order can be referred to as the time when imitations of reality start to replace the real. He offers Industrial Revolution as the beginning of the second order, and it is called “production” (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 135). This is the spot where representation is drawn apart from the image. Due to the technological and industrial innovations, it is at the same time mass production’s rise into the stage of history. Therefore, it would not be daring to accept it as the introduction of misrepresentations of reality. “Simulation is the dominant scheme of the present phase of history, governed by the code” (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 135) at Baudrillard’s last order. The concept of hyper-real suggests that the conventional sense of reality has been uprooted because there is a “new linguistic condition of society, rendering impotent theories that still rely on materialist reductionism or rationalist referentiality” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2).

Since this is the age where only simulacrum exists, media ranks at the first place to be blamed for this hyper-reality. Ever since such mass-communication tools as television walked into people’s lives, it has become a must question to what extent the realities are reliable.

In the era of digital technology, the act of simulation is one in which there is no longer any reference to reality, instead what we have is a simulation that is generated without allusion to something real, but rather to a code or model that finds its origins outside of concrete reality (Haladyn, 2010, p. 253).



Figure 1: Media vs. Reality²

The illustrious image, which denotes the gap between what real is and how it can be converted into an illusion, puts a strong emphasis on the unreliability of media and its relevant tools almost in any resources that are concerned with this

² The image retrieved from <https://tr.pinterest.com/pin/186336503302970959> (24.01.2021)

issue. “We know so much about the mass media that we are not able to trust these sources. Our way of dealing with this is to suspect that there is manipulation at work” (Luhmann, 2000, p. 1). As Luhmann suggests, the reason why it is referred to as such unreliable is that what is presented may not be true, for sure. Malcolm X’s well-known saying about the power of media stands as a justification of this argument: “the media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” (as cited in Iorgulescu, 2016, 101). The following part of this article is intended as an analysis on media use and its illusionary effect in *The Redundancy of Courage* since media’s effect on a nation’s future trajectory is brought into light in Timothy Mo’s narration, as well.

Having a prominent place in literature, Timothy Mo’s works have attracted the researchers with an interest in cultural identities, immigrant experiences and ethnic people within the post-colonial context. Timothy Mo’s novels are referenced in terms of gender, cultural discourse, and food as identity marker, as well. One of the professors at The University of Hong Kong, Elaine Ho has articles and a book on Mo’s fiction, which can be accepted as a guide for reading and interpreting Mo’s fiction. She analyzes each novel from various perspectives. In addition, Keith Lawrence (2016) has a review titled “An Opinion or Two” on *The Redundancy of Courage*. Rajiva Wijesinha (1993) has an article titled “Timothy Mo’s *The Redundancy of Courage*: An Outsider’s View of Identity”, which gives an insight into identity matters in the novel. This paper distinguishes from the other works in its dealing with the use of media specifically since of all the studies on Timothy Mo’s fiction, media’s illusionary effect has been a topic that has not been touched upon.

TIMOTHY MO & *THE REDUNDANCY OF COURAGE*

As an Anglo-Chinese writer, Timothy Mo has a prominent role in representing the Chinese minority within the Western literary world. In his fiction, Mo’s protagonists are mostly the immigrants coming from different ethnic backgrounds and living in diaspora. For this reason, Mo draws the characters as individuals who are subjugated to different perception managements by the superior powers with whom they are forced to live in conformity. In *The Redundancy of Courage*, Mo narrates the history of an imaginary island, Danu, and the recurring events Danuese people experience due to the invasion of Danu land by *malais* people. The power struggle between the Danuese and the occupiers sets a perfect setting to study the nature of perception management applied via media by power holders.

Timothy Mo introduces the protagonist Adolph Ng. as an outsider who is caught between the two fires during the invasion. He is “an educated man... a man of (the) modern world” (1992, p. 24) who can portray the things happening around from both sides. In order to have a full grasp of the story and follow the events, it is of much importance to have a clear idea about Adolph’s way of living and his perceptions in these different time periods. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim defines Adolph

as follows:

The narrator-protagonist, Adolph Ng, is a citizen of Danu, a state which is a thinly disguised version of Portuguese Timor. Adolph is self-consciously reflexive of his multiple identities... He possesses a recognizable core of psychological features, among them worldly intelligence, sensitivity to his problematical identity as Chinese diasporic and citizen of a non-Chinese state, loyalty and affection to friends, and a strong will to survive. (1997:98)

Adolph Ng is a cultural hybrid. He was born as Chinese, he gets educated in Toronto and he is a citizen of Danu. In a way, he is “a man of the modern world” (Mo, 1992: 24) as he defines himself. The compilation of his experiences in different cultural backgrounds contributes much to his multicultural identity. In the novel, he emphasizes that “the world of televisions, of universities, of advertising, of instant communications made me what I am. It made me a citizen of the great world” (Mo, 1992: 24). That is to say, the things he has experienced so far constitute “complex elements that go together to make Adolph Ng’s character – his ethnicity, his sexuality, his cosmopolitan upbringing, his wit and irony” (Spark, 2011: 172).

The fact that he does not belong to any of the passionate groups lets him a two-folded position to narrate the events clearly. That is to say, Adolph lives in Danu, but he is not a native Danuese. Besides, he does not hesitate to agree with the invaders although he is not one of them. Thus, rather than taking an active part within the confusion of the country, Adolph only cares for himself and his priority is the will to survive. He explains his sense of non-belonging as: “the world of televisions, of universities, of advertising, of instant communications made me what I am. It made me a citizen of the great world” (Mo, 1992, p. 24). The concept of being “a man of the world” gives Adolph a chance to have an adaptable attitude to everything he experiences, which is strongly juxtaposed with vigorous advocates of Danu, known as FAKOUM.

FAKOUM members are the active defenders that try to repulse the invaders both with military tactics and psychological manipulations playing on the patriotic feelings. It is not only the FAKOUM members, but also the occupiers who appeal to the ways of manipulation for the sake of victory. It is possible to say that both sides try to take over the control of the island regardless of what it costs. On one hand, there is Osvaldo, the leader of freedom fighters, who skillfully makes use of the nationalistic pattern for gathering people. On the other side, though they are not manifested so, there are *malais* people who are the “ruthless, implacable killer[s]” (Mo, 1992, p. 102). The striking point is that either in a brutal or philanthropic way, both parties create illusions so that they can sustain their reign in the region.

Regarding the ways of manipulation, Timothy Mo takes a cynical stand against the media’s power that distorts the realities while he is touching minorities’ trouble of being non-represented in the majority at the same time. In *Orientalism*, Edward

Said (1978) claims on the clash of East and West that “if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job for the West” (p. 23) clarifying Mo’s point of view on this issue in the novel. Said’s claim is that the realities are told by means of Westernized way of thinking when the Orient do not have their own words. In this case, Orient is the one that is excluded and most importantly humiliated, accordingly. Hence, in the novel, FAKOUM takes active steps to spread what Danuese people live to the world and tell the others what is happening there in reality. This need is also of great importance for the Danuese people because they are also aware of the fact that letting the others know the reality is the only way out for them. The illusion of media, which draws on Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulation and simulacra, is an agent that can condemn them as terrorists who betray their country as well as heroes who fight for their independence.

In *The Redundancy of Courage*, “Timothy Mo illustrates the impossibility for media to report the truth even in the more globalized society in the 20th century” (Guo, 2008, p. 55). In fact, there is a meta-layer of manifestations within the novel which signifies the different perceptions and illusions, as well. In the novel, the events are presented through Danuese people’s point of view; they are also narrated by Adolph, and media shows a different version of the same events. The most distinctive example of this variation is denoted through the deaths of some Australian filmmakers and journalists. As the occupation starts to be heard, the members of media, whose task is to report the events, are murdered by the malais forces. However, by the media, which is under the hegemony of the invaders, it is reported as one of the cruel deeds of anarchist Danuese soldiers. The soldiers, whose main concern is to defend their soil, are portrayed as a group of terrorists that are posed as threatening the peace of the nation. In this way, the illusion created by media lets invaders another much easier way to plot against Danuese people. In other words, with the perception management of invaders’ propaganda, those who do not know what is actually happening there, are manipulated, or that is to say, deceived.

The manipulation of people’s ideas through media also reminds “interpellation” in Althusser’s terms and brings it to the foreground of this argument: “we tend to feel free, though we are constrained by our identities within a system of ideological categories” (Mauer, 2017, p. 2). In other words, what Danuese people experience are not their choice, neither *malais* people might have decided on the invasion. Rather, Mo points at an ideological apparatus holding the power for the current situation the island is in.



Figure 2: Media control by supreme powers³

In the novel, Mo also draws a picture that complies with the image in which the hand holding the rope of media controls all the other people as a whole. Mo, similarly, suggests that the occupation of Danu island is further than a simple power struggle between two nations or a local invasion; rather, it is a part of a barely known strategical plan of the US. While it is not clear during the course of the events, the reader learns through the end of the novel that under the island there is a channel which is “one of only three in the whole archipelago that will allow a nuclear submarine safe passage” (Mo, 1992, p. 405). Upon this revelation, the fact that “the American President and his advisor were in the malais capital” (Mo, 1992, p. 405) gets out of being a coincidence for such outstanding figures to be there. This also reminds of a former explanation about the occupation within the novel: “from the start, our fate was determined not by ourselves, not locally or by the invader even, but abroad, in Canberra and Washington” (Mo, 1992, p. 110), which again reminds the above-demonstrated figure.

The fictional Danu Island is accepted to be representing East Timor, an island in the north of Australia, and the reason for this assumption is the shared similar historical reflections between the two places. As a former colony of Portuguese, East Timor was invaded by Indonesia soon after their declaration of independence. Since a left-dominant administration would be a threat for the West, behind the scenes of the occupation a greater power was accepted to hold a place. In *The Redundancy of Courage*, “East Timor becomes ‘Danu’, FRETILIN, the resistance movement, becomes FAKINTIL [FAKOUUM], and Indonesians become the *malais*” (Lanchester, 1990), but the recurring events are the same.

Mo has a critical point of view on the manipulations of the leaders and media’s effects on people’s perceptions. He gives another role of manipulating to Mrs. Goreng, one of the influential figures in the *malais* invasion. She invites some journalists “all from the West” (Mo, 1992, p. 338) for interview. Mrs. Goreng’s “guiding part in what she called ‘these media arrangements’” (Mo, 1992, p. 339)

³The image retrieved from https://twitter.com/_bbradley/status/719947454854995968 (24.01.2021)

plays a role for the changes in the conjuncture of the events in Danu:

They'd chosen journalists very carefully, of course. Rather, they'd selected newspapers, which while endowed with authoritative reputations, were sympathetic to the malais government – in a nutshell, quality right-wing newspapers which weren't soft on Communism. (Mo, 1992, p. 341)

Sharing similar interests with the dominant powers, journalists make it easy for Mrs. Goreng's manipulation, and they are not hesitant to manufacture history through one single angle. Mrs. Goreng makes up:

lies about the close relations between the old malais half of the island and ours which had, she said, made them indistinguishable for all practical purposes: for example, it was not an invasion but a reunion. ... A whole series of lies about Revolution, FAKOUM, The IP and the Civil War followed. (Mo, 1992, p. 342)

A simulation of "reunion" is created intentionally, and journalists are given a role to spread this to the rest of the world. The fabricated data provided by Mrs. Goreng is a way of justifying the invasion. These false realities serve for the fate they are determined to be living. Therefore, the title of the novel is also an elaboration of how *redundant* it would be to stand against it. All the characters are portrayed as acting the given roles in a game that is prescribed by those who hold the rope in their hands. In other words, what happens is beyond their control: "we were correct to think that we had no control over our destinies: to consider that resistance was futile and bravery superfluous" (Mo, 1992, p. 110).

In the novel, there is a perception management on the local and global scale: "The *malais* needed to win friends and influence people... This was the directive from their President... [they] needed collaborators to legitimise the regime in the international forum" (Mo, 1992, p. 118). Thus, the pseudo realities that Danuese people and the rest of the world are presented go along with the military intervention. All their attempts on the media and the endeavors to get integrated into the society points at the legitimization of the invasion before the public. The unreliability of perceptions is also affirmed by a representative of government-oriented media; journalist Speich. He explains this to Adolph as: "truth is relative, Mr Ng. Like beauty it is in the eye of the beholder" (Mo, 1992, p. 359). In a way, this is to accept the reality that the dominant ideologies twist the truths as they wish.

The illusionary effect of media is also accentuated with the following statement from the novel: "if it doesn't get on to the TV in the West, it hasn't happened" (Mo, 1992, p. 91). Mo puts a twofold denouncement through this claim. On one side, the power of media is accentuated as it is given the only way for something to be recognized in the West. On the other hand, since people take up what is given on TV without questioning its reliability, the subjugation of Western people through media is highlighted. Given as the core principle of western ideology, exploitation

of the weaker ones is strengthened through media tools. People are left with no choice but to believe in what they are told with full submission; as stated in the novel, the invaders have “thrown dust in the world’s eyes” (Mo, 1992, p. 91) even before Danuese island is confiscated in order to ensure that there will be no vacancies for resistance either at home or on the global scale.

Another form of illusion created by the media in the novel is peace-making process. In reality, Adolph draws a picture of war while describing the invasion he witnesses: “My first sight on that day... stronger than the bad things which came later was of parachutes dropping... it was reinforced battalion, as I now know” (Mo, 1992, p. 3). Adolph personally witnesses the tyranny of the occupiers, “gang-raped them in many instances, this hadn’t stopped them from shooting or stabbing some of the woman afterwards” (Mo, 1992, p. 105). In fact, he draws a vivid picture from a war scene: as the bombs fall from the sky, Adolph’s “whole world had come down to tiny things, the flies, the seeds, a few blades of grass, a couple of pebbles. They started to assume a momentous significance for” (Mo, 1992, p. 12) him and the other Danuese people, which made them get aware of the extent of the turmoil they are pulled into. Adolph Ng.’s position as the narrator-protagonist in the novel also raises an awareness for the reliability of truths that were distorted by the media and the invaders. As Robert Spencer (2009) claims the novel’s

aim is then to articulate its protagonist’s awareness that this insight is essential but insufficient. It shows, via the media’s gullibility and incuriosity, for example, that the discrepancy between official and actual truth must be addressed in addition to being acknowledged. (p. 77)

Though not voluntarily, Adolph is given the task to assert that the *malais* people’s aim is to bring stability to Danu. The Colonel warns him that he should not have any ideas: “we’ll tell you what to say. And you say what we want to hear, or you take a long walk” (Mo, 1992, p. 339). However, by distorting realities, *malais* people try to create illusions by even re-inscribing the historical facts and depict the invasion as if it were a union for the sake of Danu people’s welfare. In this way, their so-called betterment would be justified before the other people’s eyes.

CONCLUSION

All in all, given through all the above-mentioned explanations, media can be accepted as a powerful weapon that can manipulate the truths and present them different from the real. Within this sense, it would not be daring to say that whoever holds the ropes can let the events be perceived as they wish through the illusions created by media tools. Timothy Mo emphasizes the pervasiveness and the power of media through the invaders’ tricky policies in his novel, *The Redundancy of Courage*. A possible conclusion that can be derived from his narration is the unreliability of media tools since among the main ways of creating perception management

media keeps the first rank. Mo draws attention to FAKOUM leaders' endeavors to reveal the malign ambitions of the invaders through the alternative narrations of the same events by different perspectives. "We had to get into the frame of that bigger world" (Mo, 1992, p. 88) is a remark from the novel which denotes that Danu, as a small island, can also take an active part in the world's history. Thus, the developing technologies as well as globalization's effect enhances the chances of a more interconnected world:

where traditional national paradigms are disrupted by a larger global perspective, as the media beam pictures of international crises, often from the other side of the world, into our living rooms instantaneously, making us feel part of the events, and indeed forcing us to consider our own relation to them. (Spark, 2011, p. 18-19)

Similar to Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, the world is defined as shrinking since the faraway places are even accessible in this way. No matter how far away a place is, it is possible to be informed right after something happened thanks to media tools. The claim of this paper is that what we are given is all the time under the risk of manipulation and Mo's depiction of invasion of Danu island in a two-fold way sets a perfect sample for this case. The illusions that media leads people to believe as well as the defenders' attempts to prove the opposite both stands for the unreliability of media that this paper has intended to shed light on. In addition to the illusions, the excessive use of media at modern times can also be discussed further in terms of the loss of borders and the concept of world citizenship.

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