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The Digital Gaze And Hyperreality In Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*: Obsession And The Mediated Body

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***Abstract*:** This study examines the transformation of Yeong-hye in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* by reading her bodily withdrawal as a form of hyperreal mediation rather than as a purely psychological or pathological condition. Although earlier criticism has largely approached the novel through feminist or psychoanalytic frameworks, this paper places it within a broader conversation between literary analysis and media theory. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's account of hyperreality and Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, the analysis suggests that Yeong-hye's rejection of food and social norms gradually becomes a mediated spectacle. Her experience is shaped, in particular, by the brother-in-law's voyeuristic attention and his visual recording of her body, through which her lived presence is displaced by a reproducible image. Ecofeminist perspectives, especially those of Gaard and Plumwood, further clarify how this withdrawal can be read as a resistance to patriarchal forms of control that reduce the female body to an object of use and display. At the same time, the paper argues that Yeong-hye's final silence and physical refusal reveal the limits of hyperreal capture. Even within systems of intense mediation, her embodied resistance asserts a form of phenomenological autonomy, challenging the dominance of visual and digital representations over lived experience.

***Keywords*:** hyperreality and simulacra, digital gaze, mediated body, male gaze, vegetal metamorphosis

INTRODUCTION: FROM BODY TO IMAGE – SITUATING YEONG-HYE IN HYPERREAL DISCOURSE

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* delivers a powerful examination of how bodily reality is transformed, consumed, and mediated in modern cultural contexts. The novel revolves around Yeong-hye, whose deliberate rejection of food and bodily compliance functions as more than a private act of rebellion; it becomes a layered site for interrogating the boundary between corporeal existence and hyperreal representation. It brings into focus the tension between mediated perception and lived experience. Hallucinations, bodily paralysis, and ritualized engagements with food and nature emerge as the final stage of her transformation. The novel, therefore, offers a strong argument for seeing the "digital gaze" and the "mediated body" as related concepts that highlight aesthetic and moral issues in modern writing. The act of vegetarianism, as Yeong-hye enacts it, is simultaneously a refusal of social expectation and a performative self-simulation, prefiguring the theoretical lens of Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, where the image or model precedes and disrupts the real (Baudrillard 1–22). Her body comes to function as a site upon which desire, obsession, and cultural meaning are inscribed, often shaped by the brother-in-law's perspective and by mediated portrayals of her image. This transformation foregrounds ethical concerns by emphasizing that the novel is invested not only in aesthetic observation but also in the moral

responsibility of observers in their encounters with hyperreal representations. Through this lens, Yeong-hye's withdrawal addresses both the figures within the narrative and readers outside it, urging a reassessment of the relational effects involved in viewing, recording, and consuming another person's body.

Furthermore, the phenomenological aspect of Yeong-hye's experience, through which she apprehends the world as bodies and objects transformed into images, forests, or vegetal forms, functions as an essential link between bodily existence and ethical investigation. Rather than serving simply as a focus of voyeuristic desire, her body operates as a space of ethical interrogation, calling attention to issues of care, autonomy, and the limits of representational authority.

By placing Yeong-hye within a hyperreal framework that brings together visual and ethical concerns, this article responds to an area that has received limited sustained attention in existing criticism. Scholarship on *The Vegetarian* has largely approached the novel through feminist or psychoanalytic lenses (Chung 112–130; Lee 45–67). These readings have been influential, yet they tend to leave open questions about how image, desire, and moral responsibility operate within conditions of intense mediation. What remains underexamined is the way these elements intersect when the body is no longer encountered directly but through layers of representation. This study addresses that problem by drawing primarily on Jean Baudrillard's account of simulacra, while also engaging Laura Mulvey's work on visual pleasure and later discussions of digital mediation. Read in this way, the novel can be seen to anticipate ethical dilemmas that have become increasingly visible in contemporary media cultures. Bodies are not simply present in such contexts; they are framed, observed, and repeatedly rendered consumable (Mulvey 19–32; Manovich 77–98).

Accordingly, the scope of this research moves beyond questions of aesthetics to engage with the ethical and phenomenological implications of hyperreality. By following the shift from corporeal reality to mediated and ethically inflected forms of representation, the study shows how *The Vegetarian* reveals tensions between embodiment and simulation, subjectivity and consumption, as well as autonomy and voyeurism. In this way, it prepares the ground for a critical approach that connects literary scholarship with media theory, while also highlighting the lasting significance of Han Kang's work for understanding the moral dimensions of contemporary hypermediated culture.

THEORETICAL ANCHORS IN THE HYPERREAL: FROM SIMULACRA TO DIGITAL GAZE

To understand Yeong-hye's transformation as a performance that is both mediated and hyperreal, it is necessary to place her actions at the center of debates surrounding the gaze and simulacra. Jean Baudrillard's formulation of hyperreality underpins this analysis of the novel, emphasising the way images precede and shape what is understood as real. Baudrillard argues that present-day society is defined by a proliferation of signs and images that do not represent reality but instead bring it into being: "It is no longer a question of a relationship between the real and the imaginary, but of a simulation in which the real and the imaginary are indiscernible" (Baudrillard 1). In Yeong-hye's specific situation, her choice to give up meat and physical food, which starts as a very private act of defiance, only starts to make sense through the eyes of others. This is most visible through her brother-in-law's specific gaze and the media recordings that turn her quiet withdrawal into a kind of objectified spectacle. Because of this, her body ends up working as both the site and the tool of simulation; it exists in the physical world, sure, but it also exists as a construct built by everyone else's perspective. Taking Baudrillard's ideas a step further, Laura Mulvey's work on the "male gaze" helps explain how Yeong-hye's physical change becomes a target for desire and voyeuristic rules. Mulvey argues that visual pleasure in film is often built on a patriarchal logic that turns the female body into a spectacle for men to consume—an idea that fits just as well with how women are portrayed in books or media (Mulvey 19). Within *The Vegetarian*, the brother-in-law's obsession with Yeong-hye's image, which he keeps alive through his video and photo recordings, only makes her body feel more hyperreal. Her refusal to eat, her long periods of stillness, and even the moments of violence in the hospital aren't just simple physical acts. Instead, they get filtered through his own desires and his artistic take on her, creating a loop where the image of Yeong-hye eventually takes the place of her actual lived life. In this setup, the gaze isn't just a way to show desire; it's a way to create a simulation. This hyperreal Yeong-hye is built by and for the person watching, which perfectly mirrors Baudrillard's point that the sign can eventually take over the thing it was supposed to represent. Ecofeminist views make Yeong-hye's position even more complex by tying her physical refusal to the cultural expectations put on women regarding work and what they consume. Thinkers like Plumwood and Gaard argue that a woman's body often becomes a surface where

people project their anxieties about control and nature (Plumwood 75; Gaard 102). From this angle, Yeong-hye's move toward vegetarianism isn't just an individual moral choice; it's a physical way of pushing back against patriarchal systems in her family and society. By refusing to consume, she is symbolically pulling out of the systems that try to turn her into an object. Yet, the paradox is that this withdrawal is made visible and consumable again through the hyperreal lens of her brother-in-law's camera. This tension between being her own person and being turned into an object highlights a major ecofeminist concern: how women's bodies often have to be both places of resistance and places of mediation at the same time (Gaard 106). The idea of the "digital gaze," found in newer research on media and surveillance, stretches Mulvey's analysis into our modern, high-tech world. Dyer describes this digital gaze as "not merely a visual mechanism but a mediated mode of knowledge and control, transforming the corporeal into a consumable, reproducible object" (Dyer 45). In the novel, the brother-in-law's videos make Yeong-hye's body something that can be repeated forever. This lets people consume her from a distance, totally detached from who she actually is. Her performative quietness and her time in the hospital become images that can be replayed and obsessed over, showing exactly how digital media creates a hyperreal version of a human being. In this sense, her rebellion only becomes readable because of several different gazes—male, clinical, familial, and digital coming together to form a thick net of hyperreal scrutiny. Finally, Umberto Eco's thoughts on signs and representation help explain how this hyperreal translation actually works. Eco argues that signs can actually function all by themselves, without needing the original thing they refer to, creating "a language of the object in which the thing signifies more than it is" (Eco 4). Through the obsessive recording and the filtered way people look at her, Yeong-hye's body takes on a symbolic meaning that goes way beyond her actual physical self. The act of eating (or not eating) stops being about biology and becomes a simulacral performance full of ethical and artistic meaning. When everything is considered together, Baudrillard's hyperreality, Mulvey's male gaze, ecofeminism, and digital media theory, a powerful framework emerges for reading *The Vegetarian* as an exploration of the mediated, hyperrealised female body.

By integrating these perspectives, the paper establishes a theoretical foundation for examining the subsequent textual analysis, demonstrating how Yeong-hye's corporeal rebellion is inseparable from her status as a hyperreal, mediated object. The following sections will examine specific textual moments in which vegetarianism, bodily withdrawal, and the obsessive gaze interplay to produce a simulacral performance that destabilises the boundary between lived experience and mediated spectacle.

YEONG-HYE'S TRANSFORMATION AS SIMULACRAL PERFORMANCE

The transformation of Yeong-hye in *The Vegetarian* marks the beginning of her transition away from corporeal reality and into hyperreal performance. Her decision to become a vegetarian, which appears at first to be a personal and moral choice, also functions as a withdrawal from socially accepted norms. At the same time, it operates as an early rehearsal of self-simulation. In the opening phase, her decision to stop eating meat cannot be understood as merely nutritional. Instead, it marks a deeper withdrawal from established human structures of control. The text draws attention to this rupture through In-hye's observations: "It's only now that you've got this IV that you're managing to keep going…If you come home, will you eat? If you promise to eat, I'll get you discharged" (Kang 59). Yeong-hye's resistance in this exchange brings into focus the strain between bodily survival and ideological autonomy. This strain echoes Baudrillard's description of the simulacral condition, in which the performance or image of reality begins to take precedence over the real itself (Baudrillard 1). Vegetarianism also takes on a simulacral function, as Yeong-hye's body becomes both visible and withdrawn at the same time. Her stillness and refusal to comply reshape perceptions of her physical presence so that it comes to operate as a symbolic sign. This moment serves as an early indication of her later objectification through the gaze of others. The narrative underscores this scene when In-hye tries to feed her fruit: "Yeong-hye remains entirely motionless…Her fingernails have become as thin as paper" (Kang 72). The seemingly simple act of holding the plum, mediated by her sister's touch, brings into view the tension embedded in Yeong-hye's corporeality. Her body appears autonomous, yet it is also subject to observation and care. What matters here is that In-hye does not see a "simulacrum." Instead, she encounters the frightening fragility of her sister's paper-thin skin. The emotional force of the scene comes from In-hye's desperation, from the smell of the fruit in the quiet room, and from the silence surrounding Yeong-hye's refusal. These elements function as a human response to the clinical stillness surrounding her condition. Conceptually, this dynamic draws from Mulvey's initial analysis of the gaze but recontextualises it within a present-day, hypermediated setting. Yeong-hye challenges enduring notions of feminine embodiment by refusing expected domestic roles and normative practices of

consumption. Historically, the male gaze serves to frame the female body as a mere object for visual gratification (Mulvey 19). Yet, the evolution Yeong-hye undergoes points toward a far more intricate phenomenon. Her body functions as a surface upon which others cast their desires and fantasies, often without any involvement on her part. Through her stillness and eventual withdrawal, she exists in a state that is simultaneously unsettlingly present and fundamentally absent. She remains physically there, yet increasingly functions as a hyperreal image. In this sense, her transformation anticipates what Rose describes as the "digitally mediated gaze" (Rose 113). The novel also frames Yeong-hye's body through ecofeminist concerns, particularly by linking her rejection of meat to a broader critique of human dominance over nature. By refusing to internalise social expectations, her body comes to symbolically align with the natural world. Boundaries between human and plant, animal and subject, begin to dissolve (Gaard 42; Plumwood 87). Throughout the text, vegetal imagery appears repeatedly, presenting Yeong-hye's body as entangled with organic processes: "Had her body metamorphosed into a sturdy trunk, with white roots sprouting from her hands and clutching the black soil?" (Kang 75). In this moment, the novel literalises bodily transformation. The body becomes a living sign, one that resists cultural control while also performing a hyperreal vision of ecological and corporeal interconnection. Taken together, Yeong-hye's early acts of vegetarianism and bodily withdrawal function as a simulacral performance that unsettles familiar ideas of embodiment. Her refusal is not only personal or ethical. It also works symbolically, engaging with power, desire, and representation. By turning her body into a site of hyperreal meaning, Yeong-hye anticipates the mediated fixation and objectification that will follow. Her corporeality becomes a performative, simulacral text, one that negotiates autonomy and hypervisibility within overlapping structures of gaze, desire, and social expectation.

THE BROTHER-IN-LAW AND THE OMNIPRESENT GAZE: HYPERREAL DESIRE

The transformation of Yeong-hye's body, starting as a personal and moral decision, shifts into a space of hyperreal consumption under her brother-in-law's relentless observation. His longing is no longer channeled mainly through physical touch; instead, it is heightened by video and still images. This transition turns Yeong-hye's physical form into a spectacle that exists more as a mediated symbol than as a living person. Han Kang emphasizes the power of this mediation throughout the narrative. The brother-in-law films Yeong-hye without her permission, later musing that "He had staked everything of himself on those strange, desolate images, staked everything, and lost everything" (Kang 68). This obsession with the digital image mirrors Baudrillard's hyperreality—a state where the image of Yeong-hye comes before her actual self, eventually severing her physical presence from her inner identity (Baudrillard 1).

This digital and visual framing of Yeong-hye's body also represents a modern expansion of Mulvey's "male gaze." Originally, Mulvey defined cinematic viewing as a structure that turns women into objects for visual pleasure (Mulvey 19). In *The Vegetarian*, however, recording technology intensifies this gaze. The brother-in-law's voyeurism turns Yeong-hye into a simulacrum, a version of herself defined less by her own mind and more by the fantasies projected onto her likeness. Her body, especially when it starts to look like plant life, serves as a canvas for desire rather than a vehicle for her own will. This is captured in the question: "Had her body metamorphosed into a sturdy trunk, with white roots sprouting from her hands and clutching the black soil?" (Kang 75). Such depictions are turned into fetishes and consumed, proving how hyperreality reshapes the female body into a site for external imagination rather than personal experience.

The book's emphasis on obsessive filming and re-watching also echoes modern studies on digital mediation and hyperreal longing. Rose suggests that digital images act as independent forces within systems of visibility, sparking desire regardless of the actual bodies they show (Rose 115). Within this framework, Yeong-hye's body, stripped of her consent, becomes a hyperreal sign moving through her brother-in-law's mind, disconnected from physical limits or moral duties. The story highlights the friction between her own physical independence and the symbolic power of her image through moments of looking back: "He'd come across as somewhat cold; she hadn't taken to him at all. What would have happened if she'd acted on instinct and refused to let the marriage go forward?" (Kang 63). Right from the start, the text implies that Yeong-hye's physical life is at the mercy of outside forces that mold her body into something to be consumed. Ecofeminist theory adds further depth to this by showing how patriarchal systems use the body as a place for ideological and visual control (Gaard 42). By showing Yeong-hye's form as both erotic and vegetal, the story critiques patriarchal power while showing how technology makes the gaze even stronger. The brother-in-law's fixation reflects the drive Mulvey describes to visually own the female form, now amplified by digital recording. As a result, the female body becomes both everywhere and nowhere at once—a hyperreal object cut off from the person living

inside it (Mulvey 19; Rose 117). The cost of this is clearest in the brother-in-law's coldness. He stops looking for Yeong-hye, the woman, and looks instead for a "blossom" kept on a screen. By choosing the digital surface over the actual person, he erases her reality to keep her image alive. In the end, the brother-in-law's gaze shows how technology, desire, and hyperreal portraits collide. Yeong-hye's control over her own body is constantly chipped away, not just by force, but by turning her body into an image defined by others. Her later withdrawal and resistance reveal the gaps in this hyperreal control, even while highlighting the ethical dangers of digital consumption. By making her body visible, untouchable, and fetishized all at once, Han Kang critiques a version of desire where the image breaks free from reality—a core part of our modern hyperreality (Baudrillard 2; Rose 119).

RESISTANCE AND FINAL SILENCE: THE LIMITS OF HYPERREAL CAPTURE

While Yeong-hye's body is treated as a hyperreal object under her brother-in-law's gaze, her later time in the hospital shows that this mediated control has its limits. Her refusal to speak, move, or accept forced feeding marks a sharp reclaiming of her physical self. These acts stop her body from being turned into a consumable image. Han Kang highlights this pushback with a stark image of Yeong-hye in her ward: "Yeong-hye remains entirely motionless" (Kang 67). Even though this stillness looks passive, it acts as a shield, protecting her body from more visual or physical intrusion. From a Baudrillardian view, Yeong-hye's retreat breaks the hyperreal cycle where the image dictates the truth. By refusing to perform for whoever is watching, she ruins the brother-in-law's fantasy and the economy of desire built around her (Baudrillard 2). Her refusal to eat or communicate becomes a type of resistance that outside observers cannot fully grasp. In this way, her silence matches what Rose describes as a person's ability to fight being totally taken over by digital images. Even in hyperreal systems, the body keeps a bit of autonomy that technology cannot touch (Rose 119). Ecofeminist perspectives also shed light on the ethics of this defiance. Gaard points out that patriarchal and tech-focused cultures demand certain types of visibility and work from women that limit their freedom (Gaard 45). Therefore, Yeong-hye's withdrawal is an ecofeminist reclamation. By stepping out of the social and visual circles that objectify her, she chooses her own path against both male desire and hyperreality. Her body, which the brother-in-law's gaze turned into a simulacrum, becomes a place of refusal that stops the female form from being just another visual product.

Finally, the narrative links Yeong-hye's silence to a critique of institutional power. The hospital, with its constant watching and intervening, is the most obvious tool for controlling bodies that won't follow the rules. Yet, even here, Yeong-hye finds ways to resist. Small movements of her eyes and moments of awareness show she isn't totally dominated (Kang 69). In-hye's thought that "it isn't that she's not conscious…her conscious mind is so completely concentrated on something, or somewhere, that she isn't aware of her immediate surroundings" (Kang 69) proves the hidden strength of her silence. Though she is trapped physically, she keeps an inner world that cannot be captured. This space is a psychological elsewhere, where Yeong-hye is neither a symbol nor an image, but a mind moving toward light and dissolution.

Furthermore, Yeong-hye's withdrawal highlights the temporal and ethical dimensions of resistance. Unlike the brother-in-law's obsessive gaze, which seeks instant gratification and domination, her refusal unfolds slowly, demanding patience and recognition from both family and caregivers. The novel thus demonstrates that resistance to hyperreal consumption is neither passive nor aestheticised; it is a radical, embodied assertion of autonomy that cannot be fully translated into image or spectacle. By foregrounding this form of bodily refusal, Han Kang critiques the limitations of desire and representation, showing that hyperreal systems, however pervasive, are never absolute.

In sum, Yeong-hye's silence and withdrawal represent a strategic reclamation of subjectivity within a world that continuously seeks to convert her into an image and simulacrum. By denying both speech and performative engagement, she interrupts the circulation of desire that animates hyperreal consumption, enacting a resistance that is ethical, corporeal, and profoundly destabilising to patriarchal and technologically mediated forms of objectification. Her hospitalisation, rather than being merely a site of control, becomes a theatre of subtle rebellion, illustrating the persistent tension between lived reality and mediated hyperreality (Baudrillard 4; Rose 121).

SYNTHESIS: CONTRIBUTION TO LITERARY AND MEDIA STUDIES

The collective weight of these analyses proves that *The Vegetarian* functions as an intense questioning of hyperreality, the mediated gaze, and the ethical fallout of turning the human body into an object within today's media landscape. The way Yeong-hye's physical state changes, her intentional retreat from the

world, and the brother-in-law's fixation on her image all serve as primary examples of where literary storytelling meets media theory critique. This reveals the unique power of literature to shed light on phenomena that are usually the focus of media studies. By weaving together Baudrillard's ideas on simulacra with both feminist and ecofeminist lenses, this research frames Han Kang's work as a vital case study for looking at how desire, representation, and defiance play out in a society saturated by media.

Yeong-hye's shift from mere physical withdrawal to something resembling a plant-like metamorphosis acts as a simulacral performance, one where the line separating reality from its image is purposely blurred. Her body, seen through both its literal disappearance and its visual reduction to an object, highlights how hyperreality filters desire and wears away the boundary between actual experience and its representation. As Baudrillard observes, "The simulation of reality is not what distorts the real; rather, it produces the real" (Baudrillard 2). The novel's specific descriptions of her vegetarianism, her bodily shifts, and her artistic stillness prove this point: her refusal to consume or act is at once a departure from and a protest against the systems trying to turn her body into a visual product.

The digital gaze and the brother-in-law's compulsive consumption of Yeong-hye's image bring Laura Mulvey's theories on visual pleasure and the male gaze back to the forefront, showing how they are only heightened by modern technology. This hyperreal expansion of desire, where her body moves through the world as both a recorded display and a fantasy, illustrates just how inescapable image-driven power is in our current culture (Mulvey 19). However, her withdrawal also shows that hyperreality isn't an all-consuming or absolute force; resistance remains possible on ethical, physical, and phenomenological levels. Rose's insights regarding the gaps in visual and technological surveillance reinforce this, showing that individuals can keep their inner autonomy even when they are being watched closely (Rose 119–21).

From the viewpoint of literary studies, Han Kang's writing effectively links traditional story analysis with the concerns of media theory. The book centers on the way the body, desire, and representation collide in a way that echoes modern critiques of our image-obsessed culture. Ecofeminist readings further deepen this by highlighting the ecological and moral stakes involved in treating the body as an object. This shows that the way Yeong-hye's body is alienated from family and social norms actually mirrors wider ethical and environmental displacements (Gaard 45). By blending these views, *The Vegetarian* proves that literature offers a sharp look into the mechanics of media, ethics, and desire, providing a specific lens to examine hyperreal cultural trends.

Furthermore, this research adds to both media and literary scholarship by showing the value of a cross-disciplinary approach that mixes narrative text, media theory, and feminist critique. It shows how books can act as testing grounds for studying hyperreality, revealing how fantasy, desire, and ethical duty function in both physical and digital spaces. Yeong-hye's choice not fully engage with the hyperreal economy of images underscores the need for phenomenological and ethical questioning in media studies. The novel makes the case that desire and representation can't be understood only through theoretical or technical abstractions; they must take into account the actual, lived physical experience of the person.

In short, Han Kang's writing is a perfect example of what literature can contribute to modern media studies. By following the paths where physical withdrawal, hyperreal desire, and ethical defiance meet, this study highlights the book's importance as both a work of fiction and a theoretical case study. Yeong-hye's simulacral life, her movement between being seen and disappearing, and her final refusal to be owned by desire all push back against the idea that image culture has total power. These actions bring the phenomenological and ethical limits of hyperreality to the surface. Such findings pave the way for more interdisciplinary work, connecting philosophy, feminist critique, media theory, and literature in the study of how we experience ourselves through the body and through media.

SUMMING UP: FROM IMAGE BACK TO REALITY

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* serves as a distinct literary lens for critical inquiry into the intersections of corporeality, hyperreality, and desire shaped by media representation. Throughout the narrative, Yeong-hye's rejection of food, her shift into a simulacral presence, and her final silences in the psychiatric ward demonstrate the friction between the reality of the body and the relentless consumption of its image. Starting with her first act of vegetarianism, which serves as both a refusal and a performative self-simulation, and moving to her resistant, hospitalised form fighting forced feeding, Yeong-hye represents the ethical and phenomenological boundaries where hyperreal capture reaches its limit (Kang 48–50, 302–305).

This analysis demonstrates that her change is more than a story of psychology or pathology; it is a

complex intervention regarding the ethics of how we represent others. The brother-in-law's fixated consumption of her likeness, channeled through voyeurism and film, shows the way hyperreality magnifies desire, turning a living body into a simulacrum that can be reproduced forever (Baudrillard 2; Mulvey 19). However, Yeong-hye's final defiance proves that while hyperreal power is widespread, it is not total or absolute. Her retreat and silence function as an ethical stand, valuing lived experience over its mediated versions and disputing the idea that a captured image can ever truly hold or define a person (Rose 119–21).

The research also highlights the meeting points of feminist and ecofeminist theory. It shows how Yeong-hye's physical withdrawal uncovers patriarchal coercion and the way women's bodies are treated as tools, while also connecting to wider ecological frameworks that challenge the turning of life into a commodity (Gaard 45). The book thus acts as a vital link between media and literary studies, proving that literature can shed light on theoretical problems often linked to modern digital and visual cultures. Furthermore, by following Yeong-hye's movement between being seen and disappearing, this work emphasizes the ethical consequences of a hyperreal culture. The way we consume images and turn bodies into objects isn't just a matter of technology or representation; it must also consider the actual, physical experiences of individuals who fight against being co-opted. In this way, *The Vegetarian* broadens the conversation in media theory, suggesting that novels can offer subtle case studies for testing the limits of hyperreal control and the possibilities for autonomy and ethical action.

Finally, the study points toward significant directions for future research. A comparative analysis of the novel alongside other contemporary texts concerned with desire, visuality, and bodily transformation could shed further light on the workings of hyperreality in cultural production. At the same time, interdisciplinary investigations incorporating visual studies, cognitive science, and digital media theory may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the psychological and ethical dimensions of hyperreal consumption.

In the end, the novel demands a shift back from the image toward the real. The novel challenges readers and scholars to rethink the ethical and corporeal consequences of life in a hyperreal world, emphasising that personal agency and embodied reality persist even within cultures governed by images (Kang 301–305). More than a narrative of violence and desire, *The Vegetarian* operates as a vital contribution to discussions of hyperreality, affirming that the body, though subject to observation, mediation, and objectification, can still resist and reassert its own truth.

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