



Consciousness, Simulation And Locale: The Influence Of Postmodernism In Posthuman Fiction

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Abstract: By engaging with one of the most important movements in history like Postmodernism. This paper will highlight the Influence of Postmodernism in the select works of Posthuman writers, Bruce Sterling and Greg Egan. Posthumanism being the new theory much related to our present-day scenario and a window to our future. Through these select novels, we will explore the Posthuman Characteristics like the advancement in technology and the locale coupled with the play of consciousness and mechanism of simulation embedded in the texts. My argument put forward in this paper is that as an evolution from the days of enlightenment, Posthumanism depicts the turning point from all these movements and suggests an urge for expansion.

Index Terms - Postmodernism, Posthumanism, Technology, Consciousness, Simulation, Locale, Evolution, Enlightenment, Expansion, Humanity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Jean Francoise Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on knowledge* was a breakthrough Postmodern work published in 1979, where he establishes the idea of the replacement of Metanarratives to Mini narratives. Lyotard here questioned the grand narratives that modernism so frequently employed. Similarly, Postmodernism stepped into a mature recognition of what its movement have evolved into and analysed what the Postmodern culture reflected in the contemporary works of art and literature. Postmodernism as Tim Woods believed was defined by "an identity, consciousness, or ego which is deferred, displaced, fragmented or marginalised within a structure." (Woods 11)

In many respects, self-consciousness is one of the central tenets of Postmodernism. Simply put, self-consciousness is the process by which a Postmodernist work, whether it's a short story or novel, shows the reader that it is aware that it is a work of fiction. This differs from conventional works of fiction, which are generally meant to be read as if they were actually real, though the reader knows that it is make-believe. For instance, if we take episode fifteen of *Ulysses* by James Joyce, which exhibits several postmodernist characteristics in this sequence, we learn about how it is written in the style of a play script. Leopold Bloom wanders through the red-light district of Dublin and experiences a great deal of hallucinations involving characters encountered previously in the book. These experiences are excessively outlandish, as they involve impossible events, such as Bloom's establishment of a fictional city called Bloomusalem, talking soap, and an encounter with the End of the World, which is personified as a two-headed octopus with a Scottish accent. The absurdity of these visions, along with the overly artificial style of the form of the text, brings attention to the fact that you are, in fact, reading a work of fiction. Moreover, many scholars take these hallucinations not to be the product of Bloom, but rather of the book itself. The novel's self-consciousness is most evident in this chapter because all of the themes, characters, and ideas it has wrestled

with come to the surface, bringing attention to the book's artificial consciousness. This is a prime example of Postmodernism's concept of self-consciousness.

Another major theorist of Postmodernism is the contemporary French writer Jean Baudrillard, whose book *Simulations* marks his entry into this field. Baudrillard is associated with what is usually known as 'the loss of the real', which is the view that in contemporary life the pervasive influence of images from film, TV, and advertising has led to a loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth. The result is the culture of 'hyperrealists', in which distinctions between these are eroded. According to Baudrillard, in the Postmodern society there are no originals, only copies or what he calls 'Simulacra'. By the 1970's his work moves entirely away from the analysis of political economy to a concern with the culture of 'hyperreality' where models replace the real and determine the real. For example, Disneyland becomes America, this shows that hyperreality is everyday reality. Here according to Simulacra, media messages saturate the cultural and social field so entirely that the masses are reduced through this overload of information to an inert and silent majority. Reality was not what it always meant; in fact there were too many narratives and perspectives that the essence of realness had succumbed to a surreal and ambiguous nature.

Now, the human locale and psyche has gone through a transformation with movements like Modernism and Postmodernism in history. Patricia Waugh in her book *Practising Postmodernism, Reading Modernism* asserts that "the sense of transition is Powerful, but inevitably accompanied by the spectre of decadence: the feeling that we are at the end of an era. Postmodernism is apocalyptic" (Waugh 9). Concurring from Patricia Waugh's assertion, we see a section of authors and critical thinkers who argue that the Postmodernist discourse has stepped into another realm almost shedding its original qualities and embodying a new type of culture that depicts the Posthumanist characteristics. There are also a few others who have incorporated and channelled the Postmodern elements in the Posthuman discourse but with the influences of advancement in technology and the urge for expansion which is pivotal to Posthumanism. We learn from Manuel Castells that "In the last quarter of the twentieth century, a technological revolution, centred around information, transformed the way we think, we produce, we consume, we trade, we manage, we communicate, we live, we die, we make war, and we make love." (Castells 1)

The term 'Posthumanism' has previously been applied within the field of Philosophy to describe a collection of arguments against the conception of humanity in a humanist tradition, but also to describe the effects on humans caused by a massive development within the fields of genetics and (medical) technology. It is with Literature that Posthumanism which has always been attached to, paved the way for its innovation and creativity. Now, one questions what exactly Posthumanism is. Are we fully equipped to comprehend or be aware of its meanings in terms of time and space? Interestingly, here again the answer lies in Literature to enlighten or practice this very discourse.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which has been viewed through myriad perspectives in the literary field, also contributes as one of the first texts that claim to be a novel with Posthuman elements. For many readers, analyzing the text with a critical mind shed light on its Posthuman perspectives and while coming across with the word 'Posthumanism', this novel is an example that has been attached to and remembered ever since. In literature we attribute the theory of Posthumanism to the genre of Science Fiction and its subgenre's such as cyberpunk, Dystopian SF, Robot SF. Authors such as Greg Egan, H.G. wells, Isaac Asimov, Bruce Sterling, Frederik Pohl, Greg Bear, Peter Watts and Ken MacLeod have experimented with culture, society and evolution and established a Posthuman future in their literary works and fictions.

With one of the earliest glimpses into Posthumanism, H.G. Wells, who had studied for a while at the Normal School of Science under Darwin's disciple, T.H. Huxley, recognized that evolution was an unending process, and in his first novel, *The Time Machine*, introduced a future humanity that had divided into two separate and antagonistic species, the Morlocks and the Eloi. For the first time, science fiction raised the question of what might come after humanity, as we know it today. In the Twenty first century we are beginning to realise that, far from being a mere tool, technology is at the centre of critical thought about culture and about nature. With Posthumanism, technology and the artificial intelligence almost becomes a synonym. Almost like a prediction with what the future of Modernism would hold, Albert Borgman in his book *Crossing the Postmodern divide* says that "various sections of Modernist appealed to the image of rationality incorporated in the machine, the power of contemporary technology, or the City as 'living

machines' The acceptance of rationality was reflected in the use of technology and machine production. These modernists believed that technological progress would ensure human emancipation." (Borgmann 31)

In defining Posthumanism we have understood that it is a historical phenomenon where advances in technology or discoveries about animals are leading to fundamental changes in the human species and its relationship with the world. Francis Fukuyama in his book *Our Posthuman Future* dwells upon this similar idea about the consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution. He says that "the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a "Posthuman" stage of history." (Fukuyama 7)

II. POSTMODERN AND POSTHUMAN ELEMENTS IN BRUCE STERLING AND GREG EGAN'S NOVELS

The fictional works by Bruce Sterling and Greg Egan, two of the renowned Posthuman authors, is pregnant with narratives that fall into the Posthuman genre dominated by features like technology and augmented mechanisms which claim to take over the world and humanity in the future. In this paper we will attempt to trace the influences of Postmodernism, with references to elements like the Consciousness, Simulation and locale through Bruce Sterling's science fiction novel *Schismatrix* and Greg Egan's *Permutation City*.

Simulation

Schismatrix is a science fiction novel by Bruce Sterling, originally published in 1985. Sterling's writings have been very influential in the cyberpunk movement in literature where he was one of the progenitors. *Schismatrix* gives us a glimpse of what the future might hold for Earth and its inhabitants and the novel begins when Earth is dividing. There's a war on the battlefields of ideology, one must choose between humanity's numerous factions, the most important being the Shapers—those who alter their bodies through genetic modification and mental training—and the Mechanists—those who modify their bodies through computer software and external prosthetics (e.g., cyberware). In this balkanized future, countless schisms continue to divide Posthumans into branching splinter groups based on technology and philosophy. Abelard Lindsay is the protagonist in the novel who is an exiled Shaper diplomat turned outlaw sundog. Betrayed by his friend and colleague Phillip Constantine, Lindsay begins his own grand tour of known space, falling back on his kinesics and genetic training as he crosses paths with the numerous factions that spring up over hundreds of years of Posthumanity's history.

As far as the postmodernist elements present in the text depict. Baudrillard's Postmodern life as consumer lifestyle resonates to a certain degree with the Posthuman lifestyle in *Schismatrix*. The circumlunar colonies in the novel which belongs to the various factions and the plight of how planet Earth has been portrayed gives us enough evidences of a Postmodern element present in a Posthuman novel. The solar system has been colonized. Most colonists live on space stations or asteroids, each operating as an independent government, some consisting of a handful of people. These imitations or a new version of different colonies with government replicate the one we have in planet earth with nations and the government. Essentially, this particular aspect of the plot voices Baudrillard's Postmodern theory where his focus has been largely technologically determinist, developing earlier theories of modernity as a 'society of the spectacle' into the notion of a culture of the 'Simulacrum'. Therefore, the circumlunar colonies are seen as a copy or models of what Sterling has seen on planet earth with our human species. Similarly, the same Postmodern theory runs in the other select novel, where Baudrillard's theory of Simulacra is incorporated to the mechanisms of the plot and theme. As the book *Interdisciplinary perspectives on modernity* talks about how the employment of an:

increasing emphasis on the instrument of reason and disciplinary ordering of society which gradually resulted in the creation of a technocratic culture which anticipated today's "virtual Reality" characterized by the increasing "digitalization" of the world threatening the privacy of the individual. In the hyper- reality of the cyber age everything that we experience around us becomes a veritable simulation of the real that has permanently disappeared. (Pandhya and Kar 10)

This aspect of simulation is exactly what Greg Egan captures through his novel *Permutation City*. Greg Egan is an important writer in the tradition of Azimov, Verne and Wells. Like them, he explores the feasible technologies of his era and expands their scope and implications for individuals and civilization. *Permutation City* addresses immortality, cloning and the utility of life in unique ways and in depth.

Permutation City also examines both corporeal and virtual body images and boundaries, (virtual) immortality, the ontological status of digital “Copies,” creationist mythologies and, the relationship between bodies, subjects, and digital topologies, various evolutionary models, and the desire to meet the “alien Other.” Here, different permutations of the same characters exist in alternative forms, that is, digital Copies and clones of Copies “running” in various “environments.”

Consciousness

In literature works that defined Postmodernism as an important movement, exuberated with new forms of poems like that of T.S Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “The Waste Land”, plays like “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett and novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, which significantly portrays the fragmented setting and narrative coupled with the characters having a different mental state. The evolution in the human kind can be reflected by these characters with a huge resonance to the change in society and the surroundings that they were located in.

The term Consciousness is a recurring element in both these two concepts, like the Stream of Consciousness that permeates in Postmodernist technique of writing in contrast with the entity of Consciousness that has been applied as a corporeal experiment in the Posthuman world.

In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” Eliot's primary aim was an exploration of consciousness. The poem presents the contents and processes of its protagonist's mind, with its private associative network revealed but not explained. We are conscious as readers that our presence is not taken into account by Prufrock. And the monologue does express varying levels of consciousness: for example, the opening line -- "Let us go then, you and I" ...shows operation of the will, and is consequently an example of thought near the surface of consciousness; while the line "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each" discloses a private symbol, and is thus making use of an archetype in the 'collective unconscious'. Interior monologue presents consciousness directly to the reader with negligible author interference; that is, there is either a complete or near-complete disappearance of the author from the page.

Subsequently, Self Consciousness in Posthumanism is encapsulated in the novel *Schismatrix*, Shapers like Lindsay have been psychologically trained to become the ultimate diplomats who are not only able to manipulate other people but also able to control their own bodies. As Sterling described it, “...for ten years the Psychotechs has poured training into him,” (Sterling, 9) the use of words such as "Psychotech" and "poured" evoke imagery of intense mental conditioning along with tempering the Lindsay’s self consciousness rather than physical modification.

Locale / Setting

Another element that is traced in both Postmodernist and Posthuman works is the Setting or the Locale of a text. They might vary in terms of the evolution and transformation of the surroundings, but we do see the journey and influence of technology which has transcended from the period of Modernism to Postmodernism and on to Posthumanism. T.S Eliot’s famous poem “The Waste Land” is rich in evocation detail:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
 And the dry stone no sound of water. (Eliot 19- 24)

Through this poem we imagine a picture of the setting which as the poet depicts is a barren land, useless and almost reflecting the existential angst present after the two world wars. As far as the Posthuman theory goes novels such as Greg Egan's *Permutation City* is a perfect example of how this journey from Postmodernism to Posthumanism has evolved. Through the element of the setting in the novels we can study the transcendental power of evolution. Virtual reality which was a much talked about phenomenon among the Postmodern critical thinkers when predicting the future of our living conditions, we see a similarity in how Posthuman novels have incorporated this same perspective. In *Permutation City* the human mind can be scanned and downloaded into virtual environments. Paul Durham is the protagonist in the novel and through the "Autoverse" which is an artificial life simulator he not only makes copies of himself and many other wealthy people but his ultimate goal in the novel is to create a virtual Garden -of -Eden for the copies to reside.

III. CONCLUSION

It is important in today's world to constantly remind ourselves that the political, economic and social system that has accompanied us since the end of the Second World War is no longer sustainable. We have to dwell more on the realms of theories like Posthumanism in order to foresee our future and follow the lines of this journey from the days of enlightenment till this present day and the future. As we are constantly augmenting and expanding our knowledge for a lure for longevity on one hand and debating about what our future might hold for us on the other. Reflections on these changes through these Posthuman novels are crucial. As Rossi Braidotti rightfully points out in her book *The Posthuman* she says that "The Posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming." (Braidotti 12) Therefore, it truly is a concept or theory which establishes the profound question on our existence and the future of our humanity and what we are becoming.

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