A Representation Of Boundless Horizon In Post-Cyberpunk Through The Deconstruction Of Race In Accelerando

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Abstract

This paper aspires to represent the deconstruction of race in Post-cyberpunk literature through the exemplification of Accelerando (2005). The researchers aim to depict the deconstruction of racial identity as social construct. The analysis is based upon the Postmodern lens of deconstruction of Metanarratives, Race as a Social Construction, and Gramsci's notion of Hegemony. Triangulation of the above theories tends to validate the ontological analysis of the selected novel. Critical works of prominent Cyberpunk/post-cyberpunk thinkers, theory of Race and Hegemony, and researches based on the novel Accelerando are briefly discussed in the literature review not only to suggest the contemporary significance of Post-cyberpunk as a medium to deconstruct social identities/realities but also to identify the gaps in the existing researches done of Accelerando. The socio-cognitive approach is used as a method of analysis for Critical Discourse Analysis specifically deals with power relations. The race is also a means of power through which the dominant seeks to control the subordinate. This research aims to suggest that race is socially constructed; therefore, it can be deconstructed. Post-cyberpunk literature exemplifies the current trends of today's world, whether social or technological. Racism is a socially constructed vice that divides humanity into segments; hence it is required of the contemporary discourses to decenter such grand narratives that perpetuate hegemonic boundaries. Critical discussion based upon the parameters mentioned above concludes that
Post-cyberpunk narratives are instrumental in the subversion of race and any such metanarratives that segregate humans into binaries.

**Keywords:** Race, Metanarratives, Identity, Hegemony, Deconstruction

**Introduction**

Post-cyberpunk literature is a sub-genre of Cyberpunk literature considered a part of Science Fiction until the early 80s. The publication of Neuromancer in 1984 by Gibson altered the status of Cyberpunk into an emerging contemporary genre of literature as it contained many elements of Postmodernist discourse. Cyberpunk's inspiration from other literary genres turned it into a Postmodernist literary genre other than the representative of Science Fiction literature. As cited in McCaffery (1991), Cyberpunk writers started to produce a different kind of Science Fiction that delineated human societies instead of alien-human encounters and space romances. Thus, in the words of Hollinger (1991), Cyberpunk became an "analysis of Postmodern identification of human and machine" (p. 205). The genre Post-cyberpunk emerged in the 1990s as a matured and more refined form of Cyberpunk. It is a contemporary discourse and represents the current information technology-oriented society. The transformation from crude Science Fiction to Postmodernist Cyberpunk finally capped into the more socially representative genre in 1998.

The term Post-cyberpunk was devised by Person (1999). According to Person, Post-cyberpunk is not just a name change, and rather it characterizes a thorough renovation in socio-historical background and themes. Murphy and Vint (2010) have also suggested a thematic and cultural change in Cyberpunk to Post-cyberpunk. Therefore, the discursivity in Post-cyberpunk themes and contemporary contextualization is proven through the debate of such techno-cultural theorists. Kelly and Kessel (2007) have proposed that the 'Post' in Post-cyberpunk represents the contemporary techno-social themes. Post-cyberpunk depicts a global society in which the marginalized characters are represented in the center. In Post-cyberpunk narratives, "Asians, Africans, and Latinos are no longer just sprinkled into stories as supporting characters as if they are some exotic seasoning. PCP writers attempt to bring them and their unique concerns to the center of their stories" (Kelly & Kessel, 2007, p. 15).

This paper does not distinguish between Cyberpunk/post-cyberpunk (that is, a separate field of study). Rather it aspires to depict the deconstruction of race in Post-cyberpunk narratives that exemplify the discursive aptitude of Post-cyberpunk as an evolving literary Postmodernist genre. The development in information technology has transformed the cultures of the world. It has deconstructed various predefined notions of identity-related to individuals and institutions. Nonetheless, the flow of information technology has subverted socially, culturally, and historically constructed grand narratives that use to perpetuate Hegemony. Thus, Post-cyberpunk literature is an icon of our present-day technological world, representing the subversion of power relations and hierarchy-based structures. It deconstructs the social constructs based upon predisposition, power, and control through any means.

The significance of this study is to represent the deconstruction of race as a hegemonic power narrative. Post-cyberpunk narratives deal with the two basic components of the current global
world, such as technology and social constructs. The race is one such socially constructed phenomenon that is perpetually deconstructed in Post-cyberpunk discourses. To quote Leary (1994), Post-cyberpunk is indeed a cultural progression. No doubt that Post-cyberpunk represents a woven technology world, yet it stands solid against the predefined parameters of stereotypical constructs.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a lens to scrutinize race and its presence in the world's central cultures. CRT intends to comprehend racism and its effect on individuals, and it also represents a counter-discourse to racial prejudice. According to prominent Critical Race theorists like Williams, Crenshaw, and Matsuda, the race is an everyday occurrence of American society. Racism is demonstrated through every kind of discourse, such as film, cartoon, and written literature. CRT incorporates the different notions of analyzing racism; some are a white privilege, microaggressions, institutionalized racism, and social construct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The application of CRT to literature is not merely a theoretical debate to identify race and racialized characters. As literature is a cultural expression, hence through the lens of CTR, it can examine and understand the social and cultural parameters that represent the racial perceptions and constructions. Thus, literary discourses are treated as indications of socio-cultural values and beliefs. Such discourses present race both as a theoretical and historical phenomenon that has affected the lives of millions. The pervasiveness of racism in society and culture has made it a permanent issue that every means needs to be deconstructed. Racism denies individuals of their rights and freedom of opinion. No doubt that CTR offers insight into analyzing victimized individual's identity; nonetheless, it also represents how a race with other socially formed identities like class and gender produces disillusionment (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory deals with race, racism, and power; hence race is a power narrative. As a race is a social construct, therefore it could be deconstructed. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2000), the social world and its practices, rules, power, and position are not static. Instead, it is constructed by the individuals and institutions with the aid of words, silence, divisions, and stories. If the world is socially constructed, then it can be deconstructed. The need is to speak against biased and un-sided notions. With the help of speaking and writing against such dichotomous aspects, one may construct a better world to live in.

**Deconstruction of Metanarratives**

As mentioned above, Post-cyberpunk being a Postmodernist in capacity, deconstructs the existing social structures and challenges the stereotypical trends. McHale (1987) has suggested that the Postmodernist narratives do not only hold a mirror to reality; rather, they have pluralized reality into diverse angles. Therefore, socially constructed markers of identity have become complicated and complex. The meaning is no longer fix; hence social identities such as class, caste, gender, race, sects, and occupations are no longer static. The multidimensionality of reality (meaning) has rendered the predefined notions of identification useless. Postmodernism circulates hybridity and deconstructs dichotomies. According to Hutcheon (1988), the decentered discourse has made the marginalized powerful. Thus, the
Postmodernist discourse is ex-centric. It does not entertain any identity based upon class, sex, race, and gender.

Hutcheon (1988) asserts that "To collapse hierarchies is not to collapse distinctions; however…. Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality…" (p. 61). Lyotard (1984) has argued that the metanarratives endeavor to expose the meaning of all the partitions they focus on a single truth inherent to them. The certainty of meaning terminates the spirit of diversity; thus, it needs to be deconstructed into mini-narratives. Metanarratives are inclined towards returning to the center, which is against the essence of Postmodernism as there is diversity in cultural aspects, so these aspects cannot be represented as similar. The mini-narratives to the contrary create 'paralogy'; therefore, a single meaning is never achieved. According to Lyotard (1984), "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation"(p. 37). Therefore, mini-narratives have become essential to comprehend the knowledge and to assume meanings.

**Hegemony**

Hegemony means dominance by consent. It is such a stage where the subordinated cultures, individuals, and nations acknowledge the dominant superiority. In racial terms, Hegemony refers to the subjugation of the so-called inferior (black, brown) races by the superior ones (whites). Hegemony is a platform created by stereotypical notions about the whites' superiority upon the blacks. It is socially constructed by the dominant cultures to rule upon and exploit the weaker cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007). "This broader meaning was coined and popularized in the 1930s by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who investigated why the ruling class was so successful in promoting its interests in society (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p.106). Hegemony is a power discourse of the ruling class to persuade weaker classes that its interests are based upon others' interests.

**Related Review based on Accelerando and Postmodern Science Fiction**

Cisowska (2015) has analyzed the ethical, social and psychological aspects of trans/posthumanism in Accelerando (2005) and Blindsight (2006). He asserts that transhumanism is a significant phenomenon while depicting future. He has discussed the social and psychological transformation due to transhumanism and posthumanism through the novels, Accelerando and Blindsight (2006). The main concern of this research is to represent the notion of Humanity+ as a contemporary paradigm. According to Cisowska (2015), “Critics try to prove that there is a visible border between what is moral and immoral, and who would be human, and who would be human no more” in the trans/posthuman era (p.13). Considering the above statement race has also become challengeable as a metanarrative or power discourse being a social and moral concept. As race is an ethical issue related to the question of human existence as subject rather than a social object

Rai (2017) has analyzed the posthuman reconstruction of the world as a simulation through Accelerando (2005). He has analyzed the importance of simulation both in the world of science and as well as in the area of philosophy. He has proved the point through Baudrillard’s
Theoretical framework of Simulacra and Simulation, and Stross’s science fiction novel Accelerando (2005); both the discourses do not treat “…simulation just as an abstract mathematical entity existing independently of human beings; rather they treat simulation as an indispensable step for mankind in their journey of ascension to the posthuman plane of existence” (p.138). He further asserts that:

Accelerando tries to depict an event not as the only possible outcome of our inevitable ascendance towards the peak of progress but as some probabilistic wave function of myriads of possibilities which simultaneously hold in superposed state many different states of alternative realities, none of them being real till the moment of their final manifestation and realization in the form of a bump or an event perceptible as a point in the grid fabric composed of several dynamically connected and mutually intersecting nodes of spacetime (p.138).

According to the above quoted lines Accelerando is capable of creating alternative realities by deconstructing the existing realities, hence race being a social reality passes through the different phases of deconstruction and reconstruction in a posthuman world of simulations. Raulerson (2010) has discussed singularity from the perspective of techno culture and transhumanism represented in science fiction of the 21st century.

Since the late twentieth century, prompted by the all-but-exponential growth of machine intelligence and global information networks, and by the still largely obscure but increasingly profound-seeming implications of emerging nanotechnology, futurists and fabulists alike have postulated an imminent historical threshold whereupon the nature of human existence will be radically and irrevocably transformed in a sudden explosion of technological development. This moment of transcendence, it is supposed, is at most only a few years off; indeed, some say, it may have already begun (Raulerson, 2010, p.1).

The discussed related literature has identified the gaps in the existing researches based on Accelerando (2005) that has led to the research questions mentioned under the theoretical structure.

Theoretical Structure

This research's selected approach is the Socio-cognitive Approach (Critical Discourse Analysis) by Van Dijk (2008). Social cognition suggests that there is a mediation between society, discourse, and cognition. The socio-cognitive approach is the best possible way to study the deconstruction of socially constructed markers of identification such as race, gender, and class. The social cognitive method interprets and analyzes the texts in the socio-cultural and political parameters. It includes both the ‘micro’ (linguistic) and ‘macro’ (social) structures (Van Dijk, 2008). Van Dijk (2009) has enumerated three dimensions of discourse: "the use of language, the communication of beliefs (cognition) and interaction in social situations" (p. 2).
Critical Race Theory is related to the notion of Hegemony and deconstruction as it induces from Gramsci and Derrida's philosophies. This research aspires to apply the notion of race as a 'Social Construction' to the selected Post-cyberpunk novel. Other than race, the theoretical angle deals with Hegemony and deconstruction of Metanarratives. The above-mentioned theoretical triangulation is incorporated with the Socio-cognitive Approach. There are various techniques to do social cognition. This study has adopted the themes, connotations, metaphors, and symbols as tools of analysis. To comprehend racism in the selected novel and thus to deconstruct it following research questions are formulated:

**Q1. How is race represented in Accelerando?**

**Q2. How does Accelerando deconstruct racism as a social construct?**

### The Deconstruction of Race in Accelerando

Postmodernism is an era of identity transformation. As mentioned above, the Postmodernist aptitude is to deconstruct the metanarrative; thus, race, being one of the socially constructed phenomena, has lost its center. As advocated by Strinati (1995), "The erosion of once secure collective identities has led to the increasing fragmentation of personal identities" (p. 226). Accelerando (2005) by Charles Stross is a collection of nine short stories divided into three parts following the three generations of Manfred's family. In short, Accelerando is a family saga that represents the deconstruction of many socially constructed grand narratives. However, this study is based on the deconstruction of race. It incorporates the Socio-cognitive tools such as themes, connotations, metaphors, and symbols for the subversion of race as a metanarrative.

The deconstruction of race is exemplified through numerous representations. Stross (2005) has deconstructed race through characters as well as through themes. The novel contains a variety of characters, both humans and nonhumans. These characters are portrayed so that they stand as symbols and metaphors of subversion for metanarratives. Webster (2002) has asserted that "postmodern identity is crucially about the individual choosing his or her identity, choosing this freely – but choosing alone and without guidance" (p. 37). Therefore, the characters of Accelerando chose to excel in the predefined parameters of socially constructed racial identity. They chose to alter such stereotypical notions and reconstruct their own identities in the arena of Post-cyberpunk. In this respect, Dr. Sadeq Khurasani is a significant character that dismantles the grand narrative of race. It is evident from his name that he is a Muslim, so he stands as a racial deconstruction symbol. He is introduced in the second part of the novel. Pamela's advisor is to assign her an Islamic verdict against Amber (Pamela and Manfred's daughter), who has run away from her mother's custody. He is not only a religious cleric but also a learned scholar who has great knowledge about technology. To consider the petition against Amber, he planned to meet her. Through his character, the race is amply deconstructed. He is represented as one of the main characters in the novel, along with the American characters. He is equally aware of information technology, and he has a liberal bend of mind. His character is brought into the limelight when Amber virtually communicated with him. He was opposed to the assumed role of an 'ayatollah.' "He looks nothing like her conception of an
ayatollah—whatever an ayatollah is—elderly, black-robed, vindictively fundamentalist” (p. 143).

Sadeq could communicate in fluent English, which deconstructs Muslim clerics' notion as laypersons who cannot speak the foreign languages. He is a theologian who embraces difference and is capable enough to tolerate cultural differences. His recollection of Iran when trapped into the Matrioshka brain in the space also exemplifies racial deconstruction. He is related to the theme of globalization that also marginalizes race. His character is a symbol of decenter race, while his marriage with Amber serves to be a metaphor for racial deconstruction. Their marriage dismantles the USA/Iran dichotomy connoting the subversion of Iran/USA paradoxical relations.

Sirhan-al-Khurasani is another character that deconstructs race. He is Amber and Sadiq's son. He appeared in the third part of the novel. Sirhan was born in Jupiter beyond the boundaries of the earth. He is shown dwelling in Saturn as a posthuman he is the survivor and the legacy barrier of Manfred's family. This importance attached to his character brings him into the center, therefore nulling his racial marginalization. His worth is exemplified through the following lines when he saved his parents and their crew members from annihilation:

My name is Sirhan-al-Khurasani, and I am the prime contractor in charge of this small corner of the temporary Saturn terraforming project. As some of you probably know, I am related by blood and design to your former captain, Amber Macx. I want to offer you the comfort of my home; you acclimatize yourselves to the changed circumstances prevailing in the system at large and work out where you want to go next. (pp. 303-304)

The lines mentioned above bring Sirhan into the center that decenters racial dichotomy based between Asia/America. Like his father, he is also a global character that links him with the theme of globalization. His religious ethnicity also deconstructs race. He is a metaphor as well as a symbol to dismantle the metanarrative of socially constructed identity. Similarly, his marriage with Rita, an American, is metaphorical that again connotes race's subversion.

There are many other minor characters in the novel that are primary to dismantle race. Gianni Vittoria is one such character among the many who decenters the grand narrative of race. He is introduced as a former Italian minister of economic affairs. The race is also dismantled through the Sameena, an Asian woman. She is introduced in the last chapter of the novel. "The woman he's talking to, wearing a green-and-gold sari and a medieval maharajah's ransom in gold and natural diamonds, nods thoughtfully" (p. 346). Thus, it is not wrong to suggest that Accelerando represents a world where race is not at all a significant marker of identity. Rather the novel speaks of humanity at parallel levels. It represents a globalized world that is heterogeneous, but every individual is significant and central. There is no domination of white over the black and European over the Asian. Annette is European, Gianni is Italian, Sadiq and Sirhan are Iranian, Amber and Manfred are Americans, and Su Ang is Chinese. Yet, they all constitute the tower of a society that is technologically transforming.
Throughout the novel, the scenario is shifting from China to Scotland and from Tehran to Amsterdam. At times, the readers are in Mexico the next moment they are wandering in India’s streets. The plot randomly shifts from one continent to another, which propagates the idea of a globalized world. The theme of globalization is also instrumental in the deconstruction of race. All the world cities are given equal importance; whether it is Japan, Kuwait, or Bangladesh, the essence of globalization is prevalent in the discourse negating race as an element of discrimination. It is represented through the following lines:

> The Bangladeshi economic miracle is typical of the age…. With cellphone ownership nearing eighty percent and literacy at ninety, the once-poor country is finally breaking out of its historical infrastructure trap and developing. In another generation, they'll be richer than in Japan (p. 147).

The reference to Ashura is another global element that deconstructs race. "It is Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram, according to a real-time clock still tuned to the pace of a different era: the one thousand, three hundred and fortieth anniversary of the martyrdom of the Third Imam, the Sayyid ash Shuhada" (p. 219).

The above analysis of the novel exemplifies the deconstruction of race through the theme of globalization and characters. The Socio-cognitive approach’s selected tools, such as metaphor, symbols, and connotations, have aptly justified the deconstruction of race as a hegemonic power narrative through the analysis of characters. Similarly, the selected theme of globalization has also dismantled racism as a social vile. The characters of Accelerando are citizens of a globalized world; they represent the entire world from Iran to America. They are the symbols and metaphors that connote the subversion of a race from different perspectives. They are not only the nationals of their countries, but they are also global, which decenters the edifice of racial binaries. They represent a universe free of creed, class, and racial discrimination. Muslims, Christians, Americans, Italians, or Asians stand for humanity and negate racism.

**Conclusion**

The critical discussion has projected that Accelerando represents racism through various aspects such as themes and characters. The analysis of themes and characters has deconstructed racism as a socially constructed vice that segregates the world into marginalized categories. The marginalization of humans into black/white, Asian/American, and Muslim/Christian compartments is a practice that needs to be dismantled. And it is possible through literary discourses like Post-cyberpunk to decenter such grand narratives that perpetuate Hegemony and hence control the margins. Suppose these metanarratives are uprooted from their center. In that case, there is no doubt that the marginalized small narratives will get prominence, and the world may tend to be rid of the dichotomies that are dividing humanity into parts.

**References**


