



LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Virtual Neocolonialism: The Postmodern War of Economies

Mr. Subhadip Konar

Junior Research Fellow, Department of English, The University of Burdwan,
Burdwan, West Bengal, India.

Abstract

Neocolonialism is nothing but the continuation of colonialism sans military conquest and political control. The colonialism and neocolonialism, both zero in on the exploitation of the economy of a country. Neocolonialism operates in a subtle and silent way. But the most significant point is that geographical places used to play an indispensable role; though colonialism is all about economy, the geographical 'real' places are profoundly important. Colonialism could not be established unless the territory was under absolute control of the coloniser. Neocolonialism so far has not negated the importance of the 'real' places. But the neocolonialism of the virtual world wipes this out.

Keywords

Virtual Neocolonialism; Postmodern Era; Colonialism; Literary Theory.



The celebrated Hollywood movies like *Terminator* series, *The Transformers* series have forecasted the domination of the machines over humans. Indeed the 21st century is all about the transformation- from the so called human world to the machine world, the world of technology. The present world is controlled by a digital system. The editors Anne Burdick, Johana Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner and Jeffrey Schnapp of the book, *Digital Humanities* have opined in the preface of their book as follows:

We live in one of those rare moments of opportunity for the humanities, not unlike other great eras of cultural-historical transformation such as the shift from the scroll to the codex, the invention of moveable type, the encounter with the New World, and the Industrial Revolution. Ours is an era in which the humanities have the potential to play a vastly expanded creative role in public life. (*Digital Humanities* i)

Now humans communicate through machines, purchase through machines, make friends through machines, and play games through machines. The present world is a digital mechanized human world. The present paper will focus on how a virtual, unreal world is created; how a war of economy is operating in the virtual world; and finally how a new form of neocolonialism is emerging out of virtual space.

Before discussing at length about the crux of the paper a little should be known about what we call digital humanities. Wikipedia defines it as follows:

Digital humanities is an area of research and teaching at the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities developing from the field of humanities computing, humanistic computing and digital humanities praxis. Digital humanities embraces a variety of topics from curating online collections to data mining large cultural data sets. Digital humanities currently incorporates both digitized and born-digital materials and

combines the methodologies from traditional humanities discipline (such as history, philosophy, linguistics, literature, art, archaeology, music and cultural studies) and social sciences with tools provided by computing (such as data visualization, information retrieval, data mining, statistics, text mining, digital mapping) and digital publishing. (*Wikipedia*)

The roots of computational work in the humanities stretch back to 1949 when the Jesuit scholar Roberto Busa, working in collaboration with IBM, undertook the creation of an automated approach to his vast Index Thomisticus, a computer-generated concordance to the writings of Thomas Aquinas. By means of such early uses of mainframe computers to automate tasks such as word-searching, sorting, counting, and listing, scholars could process textual corpora on a scale unthinkable with prior methods that relied on handwritten or typed index cards. By the mid-1980s computational methods for linguistic analysis had become widespread enough that protocols for tagging digital texts were needed. This spurred the development of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). This important undertaking reshaped the field of electronic textual scholarship and led subsequent digital editing to be carried out in Extensible Markup Language (XML).

The first humanities-based experiments with database structures and hypertextual editing structured around links and nodes (rather than the linear conventions of print) date from this period, as do the many pilot projects in computational humanities in the United States sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and other agencies, organizations, and foundations. 1990s gave rise to a new generation of Digital Humanities work that was less text-centered and more design-driven. The desktop environment—with its graphical user interface, real-time WYSIWYG toolkit, and evolution from command lines to icons and window-based frames—not only vastly expanded the corpus of born-digital documents but also ushered in the

gradual integration of audio, video, and graphics. This integration has matured over the past decades and given Web culture its profoundly multi-media character. It also favored the enhancement of models of sharing, co-creation, publication, and community-building that have situated the Web at the center of contemporary social debates and socio-economic processes. The concept of the Web as a public sphere that extends the physical public spaces of contemporary life has, of course, been intensified thanks to smartphones, tablets, and other ubiquitous and pervasive computing and media device. Contemporary Digital Humanities stands not in opposition to the past, but on its shoulders. It honors the pioneering labors carried out over the past seven years. It is inspired by the same core conviction that animated computational humanities and early Digital Humanities pioneers: the conviction that computational tools have the potential to transform the content, scope, methodologies, and audience of humanistic inquiry.

How does a machine function? It tries to take into account the plasticity of digital forms and the way in which they point toward a new way of thinking. A digital device translates the object into the digital code that the device understands. An object is input and the device transforms it into the digital code. It is then internally transformed and eventually displayed as a final calculation usually in a visual form. Thus any object of a real world is transformed from the familiarity of everyday reality into a grid of numbers that can be stored as a representation of reality. This will inevitably lead one's thought to ponder upon the postmodernist theorist Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation.

The French theorist Jean Baudrillard has proclaimed a new reign of the simulacra (the copy without an original) and the world of hyperreality in his path breaking book *Simulacra et Simulation* published in 1981. The poststructuralists have viewed the world in terms of signs that signify and make familiar an abstract object in our mind. But the signs represent the

essence of the reality. But, the postmodern era has witnessed ‘the loss of the real’ according to Baudrillard. He has commented about this particular characteristic thus:

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.

. . .

It is with this same imperialism that present-day simulators attempt to make the real, all of the real, coincide with their models of simulation. But it is no longer a question of either maps or territories. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other, that constituted the charm of abstraction. Because it is difference that constitutes the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real. This imaginary of representation, which simultaneously culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographers’ mad project of the ideal coextensivity of map and territory, disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive. It is all of metaphysics that is lost. No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control- and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of

combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere.
(*Simulacra and Simulation* 1-2)

He has further explicated the difference between dissimulation and simulation. Dissimulation leaves the principles of reality intact whereas simulation wipes out the reality. It threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false', the real and the imaginary. He has also differentiated between representation and simulation:

Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 6)

Thus we have the following ideas: (i) It is the reflection of a profound reality; (ii) It masks and denatures a profound reality; (iii) It masks the absence of a profound reality; (iv) It has no relation to any reality whatsoever; and (v) It is its own pure simulacrum. Peter Barry has summarized this quite effectively:

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 a culture of 'hyperreality', in which distinctions between these are eroded ... then the whole system becomes what he calls *simulacrum*. He then substitutes for *representation* the notion of *simulation*. (*Beginning Theory* 84)

Now let the focus be shifted on to digital world. First the world is not a real world; it is a virtual world. The touch of reality is not at all there. The digitized world represents the facsimile images of the object of the real world. For instance in case of online shopping numerous images of real world objects are seen in the virtual hyperreal space where from a purchaser buys what he wants. So the entire thing becomes 'virtual', unreal. The very concept of market has changed in the postmodern era where the market too has become virtual! The market is not now geographical rather it is virtual. The term is now 'e-market'- electronic market where you could find various objects- rather images from which you may choose one to buy and your purchase will be done virtually. One makes friends in the social online media like Facebook, Orkut etc. People share their feelings in the virtual pages. The present generation of teenagers plays games virtually in computer instead of going to the nearby field. So the very stamp of reality is gone.

In this virtual world a war is operating every day- a war to capture the economy of a country. The war may be a virtual war, but it leaves an impregnable and indelible mark up on the real world. This is almost a kind of paradox. Through the virtual market the foreign companies reach at every people's door and they actually invade into the economy of a country.

The war is inevitable to conquer the virtual market of a country. Unquestionably the victory will lead to the establishment of neocolonialism in the virtual market of a country. And indubitably that will be a great matter of concern. Kwame Nkrumah has expressed his utter concern in the introduction of his book, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*:

The neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage . . . No new colonies will be created. In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism. (ix)

Pramod K. Nayar has defined neo-colonialism as follows:

Economically, however, the native population is still controlled by the European power. That is nominally 'free' nation-states continue to suffer from economic exploitation by European powers that, therefore, remain 'imperial'. This is why we do not ever see the term 'post-imperial'. This form of control has been called 'neocolonialism', used especially to describe the American control over the rest of the world. Neocolonialism is the continuing economic exploitation of Asian and African nation-states by European and American powers. (*Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* 54)

It exploits the economy of a country in a silent way. To invade into the territory of a country's economy it takes the camouflage of a mere capitalist investor. But the result is that the foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed countries. Investment under neocolonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries in the world.

Neocolonialism is nothing but the continuation of colonialism sans military conquest and political control. The colonialism and neocolonialism, both zero in on the exploitation of the economy of a country. Neocolonialism operates in a subtle and silent way. But the most significant point is that geographical places used to play an indispensable role; though colonialism is all about economy, the geographical 'real' places are profoundly important. Colonialism could not be established unless the territory was under absolute control of the coloniser. Neocolonialism so far has not negated the importance of the 'real' places. But the neocolonialism of the virtual world wipes this out. The virtual neocolonialism is impervious of the 'the real geographical territories'. This could be said that a new form of neocolonialism - the virtual neocolonialism aided by the digital world is approaching very fast in this postmodern era.

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MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Konar, Subhadip. "Virtual Neocolonialism: The Postmodern War of Economies." *Literary Quest* 1.11 (2015): 24-32. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.