ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Open Access**

HEGEMONIC STRUCTURE OF HYPERREALITY AND MODERN TECHNOLOGY IN WILLIAM GIBSON'S NOVEL NEUROMANCER

*Mohd Abas Parrey

Guest Assistant Professor, Department of English, GDC, Anantnag, Kashmir

ABSTRACT

The objective of my study is to investigate the dominance of hyperreality and modern technology in William Gibson's novel Neuromancer. Gibson's earlier works explored the effects of technologies, cybernetics and computer networks on human beings and helped to create an iconography for information age before the ubiquity of internet in the 1990's. Gibson coined the term "Cyberspace" in his short story *Burning Chrome (1982)* and later popularized the concept in *Neuromancer in 1984*. He with Bruce Co-wrote the alternate history novel, *The Difference Engine (1990)*. Subsequent novels, such as *Pattern Recognition (2003)* and *Spook Country (2007)* have, without deserting subject matter of information, hunting among media-savvy sub-cultures. Obviously, almost in all novels Gibson deals with modern technology and its utility in society. In Neuromancer Gibson mixes reality with fantasy and produces new world where original and real structures are being replaced by new models of technology. This research paper examines the hyperreality and modern technology under three main thematic concerns of the novel Neuromancer. In the beginning, our endeavour is to study hyperreality and modern technology under the heading of *Self-Extinction and Loss of Freedom*. Next we analyze the *World of Crime and Violence*. Finally we will look into another aspect of the novel that is *Love and Betrayal in Modern Society*.

INTRODUCTION

Jean Baudrillard, French Sociologist, coined the term "hyperreality" in his philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation (1981)*. He seeks to examine the relationships among reality, symbols and society. Baudrillard defined hyperreality as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality." Baudrillard in particular suggests that the world we live in has been replaced by a copy world where we seek stimulated stimuli and nothing more. In semiotics and postmodernism , hyperreality is an inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced postmodern societies. Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. It allows the co-mingling of physical reality with virtual reality and human intelligence with artificial intelligence.

Baudrillard borrows from Jorge Luis Borges the example of a society whose cartographers create a map so detailed that it covers the very things it was designed to represent. When the empire declines, the map fades into the landscape. He says that, in such a case, neither the representation nor the real remains, just the hyperreal. Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality was heavily influenced by phenomenology, semiotics and Marshall McLuhan. Baudrillard challenges McLuhan's famous statement that the "Media is the message" by suggesting that information devours it own content. However, Baudrillard's hyperreality theory goes a step further than McLuhan's medium theory: "There is not only an implosion of the message in the medium, there is , in the same movement, the implosion of the medium and of the real in a sort of hyperreal mebula, in which even the definition and distinct action of the medium can no longer be determined." Italian author Umberto Eco explores the notion of hyperreality further by suggesting that the action of hyperreality is to desire reality and in the

attempt to achieve that desire , to fabricate a false reality that is to be consumed as real. Hyperreality can also be thought of as "Reality by Proxy", simply put, an individual takes on someone else's version of reality and claim it as his or her own. The concepts most fundamental to hyperreality are those of simulation and simulacrum. The two terms are separate entities with relational origin connections to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. Simulation is characterized by blending of reality and representation where there is no clear indication where the former stops and later begins. The simulacrum is often defined as a copy with no original. Baudrillard argues that simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right, Aka the hyperreal. He creates four steps of reproduction: (1) basic reflection of reality; (2) perversion of reality: (3) pretence of reality and (4) simularcum which "bears no relation to any reality whatsoever."

Self-Estimation and Loss of Freedom

Neuromancer is seen by many as the pre-eminent work of the "cyberpunk" offense. The cyberpunk genre as argued by Bruce Sterling was born out of the 1980's and was due in part to the rapid decentralization of technology. With the influx of computers, the internet and virtual reality into the everyday household came technological discoveries that affected the individual. Certain concerns that are central to "Cyberpunk" involve implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery and mind invasions such as brain computer interfaces and artificial intelligence. With these issues in mind one must wonder what affect they have on the self or one's identity. Within the Neuromancer, Gibson creates a future where identities can become obscure/ambiguous, due to sophisticated technology available which may alter various facets of person's physical or mental identity. In Neuromancer Molly's sunglasses can be seen as a technological adaptation prohibiting her eyes from being seen, "…..the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones………".(Gibson 24) The eyes are said to be windows to the soul. Many emotions and states of mind are conveyed by the eyes. Molly , however, does not relinquish by power of perception to others. "The lenses were empty quicksilver, regarding him with an insect calm". (Gibson 30) The mirrored sunglasses mask key characteristics of Molly's identity (emotions).

Cosmetic surgery is another means by which characters in Gibson's Neuromancer obscure their identities on several occasions the reader comes in contact with individuals who have had surgery to make themselves to appear more youthful or even to create new face. Armitage and Riviera are two such characters who had faces created for them. "He was very beautiful; Case assumed the features were the work of a Chiba surgeon. A subtle job, nothing like Armitage's blandly handsome blend of pop faces." (Gibson 97) Artificial faces of the people seem to be real. The faces hide the original ones but no one casts any doubt on the people who wore them. The faces become difficult to recognize. The border between them blurred. Everything seems to be equal in all aspects because of modern means of technology when reality and artificiality mix with each other and one is used in place of another without showing any difference. We can say that it is hyperreal. Brain Computer interfaces and artificial intelligence further distort identities and realities in this novel. "………what you think of as wintermute is only a part of another , a shall we say, potential entity. Let us say , am merely one aspect of that entity's brain. It's rather like dealing , from your point of view,

with a man whose lobes have been severed. Let's say your dealing with a small part of the man's left brain. Difficult to say if you're dealing with the man at all in a case like that." (Gibson 20). Gibson explores both sides of technology coin. On the one side, it makes us free, on the other side, it puts in behind the bars of prison. Cyberspace technology allows Case the ability to be free of the "meat" of his body and all the bad stuff of the world like disease and over population. But the threat flatlining also confines him and threatens to trap him in cyberspace forever. Molly's technological modifications free her from her previous life as a squatter, but what she had to do to get those modifications confines her to constant guilt about the past.

What happened in Neuromancer especially with Case and Wintermute, they become consumed by their desires. With Case it is the fact that he wanted to be plugged in order to get freeside. With Wintermute it is the whole entire scheme. He grew obsessed almost with the task of trying to find and converge with Neuromancer. People become bored with something they want to get away. They pull out phones from their pockets and get fully absorbed by this modern technology. They sit and spend hours on it. In modern society as is portrayed in the Neuromancer people think that technology provide more leisure and freedom to live the life luxuriously but such things do not happen it imposes restrictions upon people by getting them engaged properly with the different programs which they carry on their computer screen.

The World of crime and Violence

In the novel's back story, there was a war , and in this war, there was an operation codenamed Screaming First, U.S. Special Forces tried to disrupt some high level Russian computers. Things went bad and every-died except a guy named Colonel Willis Corto. Corto was severely wounded and then betrayed by his higher ups. The betrayal caused Corto to eventually go insane and an experimental treatment was tested on him. The idea was to graft a brand new personality over the broken one, creating essentially an entirely new person. That person's name was Armitage. Like Molly and Case, Armitage is a man burdened by the past. On the other hand, Corto that is still trapped inside Armitage, hidden beneath the layers of Wintermute loyalty is obsessed with his past and way he was betrayed. The obsession is so stormy that it breaks him mentally, causing schizophrenia and insanity, and making him ripe for cybernetic brainwashing. Another character Linda Lee dies in the second chapter of the novel. Case's guilt over her death serves as a type of motivation for him, which means our Poor (thieving girl) has been stuffed in the fridge like so much cheese. When characters like Linda Lee get refrigerated, it provides a clear sense of purpose for our hero but Case is an antihero which means it's hard to define what Linda's death drives him toward. Case blames Wintermute for what happened to her and he gets super upset at Wintermute for trying to manipulate him with his memories of her . In fact, he shoots Wintermute in the matrix for the offense Peter Riviera is a drug find and a wee bit of a sociopath who can't get off sexually unless he knows his betraying the object of desire. He also uses his holographic modifications to try and get under people's skin by tricking them into seeing things that aren't real but hyperreal. The Neuomancer portrays disturbed and inhumane society. Violence in the Neuomancer is insane. Constantly, there is someone dead, injured, or running away

from someone else. Survival is the key element in this type of society. No one has time to think about others, because they are running for their own life. This is the worst society to be involved with. There are guns, knives, blood everywhere and people crying out for help.

The Neuromancer is world of poverty, and there is poverty, crime and violence usually occur. For instance, Case spend the night in a "cheap hotel" he implied was the most expensive place he ever stayed in. Case had to sleep in a coffin, a dead man's bed. It is as if he is dying inside that the society around him has gone to this point of destruction. The "black clinic" where surgery was performed to prolong the lives of humans by means of computers, literally ripped out of the human soul and replaced it with a machine. The human being has died and only a machine was left to live. That is the reason Case sleeps in a coffin. People think by their artificial intelligence. These people do their duty and move on. This artificial intelligence has gone too far people control every aspect of life by artificial intelligence. Real intelligence of humans have now become less visible. All calculations are being done with the help of artificial intelligence. In creating disturbance and violence in the society this artificial intelligence does not lag behind. The following quotes from the text make us better understand.

"Sure. I was crazy. Figured, I'd try to cut it. Hit the first strata and that's all She wrote. My joeboy smelled the skin frying and pulled the trodes off me. Means Shit, that ice."

"And your EEG was flat."

"Well, that's the stuff of legend, ain't it?"

(Chapter9, Paragraph 31-33 Neuromancer)

When ipads attack, as the boundaries between technology and humanity shrink, violence in the virtual world becomes an unfortunate side effected. People found themselves in perfect sate of hyperreality.

"There was an inverted symmetry: Riviera puts the dreamgirl together, the dreamgirl takes him apart. With these hands.

Dreamblood soaking the rotten lace." (Chapter 11, Paragraph 38)

Although this display of violence isn't real, its connection with reality causes Molly pain all the same.

"The bamboo bow was a museum piece, but the black alloy quiver that protruded above [Hideo's] left shoulder had the look of the best chiba weapon shops." (Chapter 22, Paragraph 21)

The bamboo bow displays the old fashioned weapon people use in the battle-fields while on the other hand the black alloy quiver means modern updated weapons used in war fields. Weapons of violence are different in different time but their purpose was same. Some use bamboo bow for destruction of mankind and some guns. This refers to the fact that original ones are being replaced by modern new artificial ones.

Love and Betrayal In Modern Society

The Neuromancer is the story of computer technology and its impact on the world citizens. In addition to it deals with many aspects of human life. But we only discuss love and betrayal. Case is alone at the beginning of his journey. Linda Lee had meant a great deal once upon a time, but her betrayal left him unable or unwilling to trust anyone else. Even with Molly, who opens herself up with rare moments of vulnerability, Case is unable to have anything more than a physical relationship and a sense of wary, but mutual respect. Molly too, remembers a lover who meant something. But she is no longer able to enter intimacy with someone else. So she is isolated like Case. The characters' inability to form close relationships with one another could come from the blurring of the line between humans and machines. With self-aware Als, humans who are physiologically composed of machinery (Molly), humans who are only alive through machines (Dixie), it becomes unclear at which point humanity begins and ends. If we are to believe that the part of us which is responsible for our human emotions such as love and compassion is dependent upon receiving human input, then as the cyborg becomes composed more and more of machine, the human input decreases and our need for intimacy atrophies. The lack of intimacy in Gibson's world is due to the fact that the characters are either no longer human or on their way. They are no longer capable of human emotions. Lack of clearly defined truth is the another place where intimacy does not take place. When Marley meets Zirek in Count Zero, it is really only an apparition that she sees. But because of the advances in technologies. Marley's perceptions fool her into believing that he is real. When one is betrayed by their senses, anything or anyone would be untrustworthy. In Neuromancer, the relationship between Case, Molly, Arimitage, etc. are all filled with the senses of doubt of guarded and shifting loyalties.

In the opening of the novel case is trying to figure out why a drug lord is looking for him and what will the drug leader do with him. Case received a drug shipment from Wage, the drug lord, has not paid Wage for the drugs. He goes to one of his friends. Julius Deane, to figure out what to do and what Wage is trying to do to Case, and later in the novel Deane becomes a leader in the mission to sabotage Tessier-Ashpool. There is an incident between Case and Jules as the story develops where Jules has been taken over by Wintermute, and revels to Case that he in fact killed Linda Lee Case's love. In Neuromancer, little emotion or any at all is shown after an injury or murder on the job. They may be used to witnessing death or are unable to express their sadness. Case admits that he "had always taken it for granted that the real bosses, the Kingpins in a given industry, would be both more and less than people. The people in Case's industry live cold and unaffected lives, riding themselves of typical human qualities. It is undeniable that Case and Molly maintain a sexual relationship while simultaneously taking down the enemy.

However, do they truly care about one another? When Maelcum asks Case. "She you woman, Case?" Case responds, " I dunno. Nobody's woman , maybe." (192) He feels no emotional attachment to Molly regardless of the fact that they spend all their time with each other or in contact and are having sex. In their emotionless world, they are incapable of preserving a modern day passionate relationship. Laughing, crying, loving, hating- all emotions human regularly experience. Case screams when Molly gets hurt, but never create the bond which real human beings have in their true life. Molly rarely cries since her surgery to relocate her tear ducts so she instead spits- an emotionless act.

Conclusion

From the above discussions it is apparent that hyperreality and modern technology has a vital role to play in constructing the basic structure of neuromancer. William Gibson mixes fantasy with real with the help of modern means of computer technology. The boundaries between the artificial and real men have become unclear and dark. Computer created characters perform the same activities which the real human beings do. In Neuromancer it becomes very difficult to identify the real from unreal because both are looking like the same. The original things were replaced by new artificial models. Such things can happen only in the state of hyperreality.

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