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Neuromancer: A Pioneer and a Successor of Cyberpunk

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis, *Neuromancer: A Pioneer and a Successor of Cyberpunk*, individually using only the sources listed on the Works Cited page. I declare that I have not used this bachelor thesis to gain any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyse the novel *Neuromancer* by British author William Gibson as a text that is both significantly influenced by the 20th century art and influential in contemporary cultural discourse. In theoretical part, the thesis examines *Neuromancer* mainly in terms of literary tendencies of the 20th century that preceded it. It also provides an analysis of the subgenre of cyberpunk and places the novel in the context of Gibson's working and personal life. The practical part then discusses the key components of fiction: plot, setting, characters, and narrator of the novel. A particular attention is given to the way the novel expands on older literary and cultural phenomena and how it keeps them relevant for the readers in the 21st century.

KEY WORDS

Neuromancer; William Gibson; cyberpunk; cyberspace; science fiction; Artificial Intelligence

ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza románu *Neuromancer* britského spisovatele Williama Gibsona jako textu, který je zároveň značně ovlivněn uměním dvacátého století a vlivným v současném kulturním diskurzu. Práce ve své teoretické části zkoumá román především z hlediska literárních tendencí dvacátého století, které jej předcházeli. Dále je analyzován subžánr kyberpunk a román je kontextualizován z hlediska Gibsonova profesního a soukromého života. Praktická část se následně zabývá klíčovými složkami fikce: dějem, fikčním světem, postavami a vypravěčem románu. Pozornost je věnována zejména způsobu, kterým roman rozvíjí starší literární a kulturní fenomény a způsobem, který tyto vlivy uchovává relevantní pro čtenáře dvacátého prvního století.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Neuromancer; William Gibson; kyberpunk; kyberprostor; science-fiction; umělá inteligence

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Introduction

Cyberpunk of the late 20th century imagined a future that seem to have nowadays become a reality. Today's reality is not the reality of science fiction, as has been argued by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay in *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 1), but as Kyle Marquis aptly put it in his 2013 tweet: "an oppressive cyberpunk dystopia" (Marquis) which we live in. Despite not all aspects of cyberpunk being necessarily dystopian, it is not unreasonable to compare our everyday reality with the cyberpunk imaginations (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 1).

In early days of the genre in the 1980s, cyberpunk denoted an energizing impulse to the contemporary sci-fi, an impulse that the contemporary critics disregarded as a marketing tool that would soon vanish (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 1). This, however, did not happen and cyberpunk continued to influence cultural spheres that were not related to the original authors (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 1). The cyberpunk artists gave the world a distinct imagery, widely popularized by Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). New concepts were also introduced, like the one of 'cyberspace' originated by William Gibson in "Burning Chrome" (1983) and further explored in *Neuromancer* (1984).

Cyberpunk in its beginnings was thoroughly studied by critics and scholars (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 2). This has been caused by its emergence coinciding with the rise of postmodernism. As Frederick Jameson wrote: "cyberpunk is the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (Jameson 419). This reflects a belief held by those who saw in it an expression of our cultural and critical moments (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 2). With the cyberpunk reaching more into the mainstream, it attracted even more theorists who would focus on the way cyberpunk explores humanism, posthumanism and the role of the animal (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 2). Groups preoccupied with the question of the future of identity such as feminist, indigenous, queer and Afrofuturist movements as well as phenomena of broader cultural activism have all adopted and subverted cyberpunk as the question of identity is inherently bound to the human-posthuman discussion (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 2).

As already mentioned, cyberpunk has been heavily reflected in the culture since the 1980s. Its effects can be found in American comic books, video games, Japanese manga and anime,

music, tabletop role-playing games and even fashion (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 2). It has by no means been restricted to the Anglo-American domain as it has flooded various geographical settings (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 2). Across the world, features of cyberpunk have appeared in a number of cultures. Some directly influenced by the American 'cyberpunks,' and others responding to the growth of cosmopolitan structures that define us (2-3), these movements show an interest in the complex way our reality is shaped and structured. As noted by McFarlane, Murphy and Schmeink: "Cyberpunk saturated and adapted itself to diverse cultural localities in alternately familiar, disorienting, and surprising ways that affirm cyberpunk as global phenomenon" (McFarlane et Murphy et Schmeink 3). It has become a "cultural formation [which is] a historical articulation of textual practices" (Foster xv). It is thus of a particular importance to further study this phenomenon, as it is a key to our 21st-century age.

Neuromancer is a text that is often considered to be the trailblazing text of cyberpunk. Upon its publishing in 1984, it quickly became acclaimed by the public and the critics alike. In 1984 it won the Hugo, Nebula and Philip K. Dick awards, all the three major science-fiction awards. It developed a distinctive imagery and can be said to be one of the founding works of cyberpunk. It is to this day frequently referenced in pop culture. I am, however, also going to argue that *Neuromancer* is as much a trailblazer as it is a descendant of older literary and non-literary pieces of art and demonstrate their echoes in the practical part of the study where I examine the text by utilizing the tools of literary analysis. These two aspects of *Neuromancer*, being both a pioneer and a successor of older cultural tendencies, create a paradox in the notion of cyberpunk and in the novel itself. Is it an occurrence enriching the culture by new poetics, or is it an "outcome" of its precursors functioning as a concise expression of our cultural experience?

The aim of this thesis is to closely examine the novel of William Gibson *Neuromancer* as a text that constitutes cyberpunk in several key aspects, but also as a piece of art that reflects the influence of certain cultural phenomena that shaped it. The theoretical part of the study explores the development of literary precursors of cyberpunk with attention given to the features of their aesthetics that manifest in cyberpunk works and in *Neuromancer* specifically. For this, *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Work of William*

Gibson (2007) is often referred to. Next, cyberpunk itself is analysed, both in terms of its internal advancement and its poetics consisting of two key elements, the "cyber" and the "punk." Finally, a succinct overview of Gibson's life is provided with a regard to influences that marked his work and most notably *Neuromancer*. Here, also the other two works of the "Sprawl trilogy," *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), are briefly inspected as the representatives of Gibson's later work and utilized to arrive at some of the common features of the poetics of this trilogy. The practical part then directs its attention to the literary analysis of *Neuromancer* from the aspects of plot, setting, characters, and the narrator to demonstrate both the reflections of its precursors and the way *Neuromancer* adapts and addresses these reflections.

I THEORETICAL PART

1 Precursors of cyberpunk

The development of cyberpunk is best understood through its genre precursors. For the purpose of conciseness, I will focus on the most prominent examples of the contemporary literary history starting at the beginning of the 20th century, deliberately omitting certain older influences, the proton-science fiction, e.g. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* Goethe's *Faust*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It needs to be stated that the way these works deal with supernatural explorations in the case of Swift or imbuing of human powers through science and dehumanization of people caused by technology in case of Shelley and Goethe, could be perceived as an overarching link to the cyberpunk works, as observed by Csicsery-Ronay in *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (1) or Cavallaro (2). The key literary precursors of the cyberpunk genre my thesis will deal with are science-fiction, dystopian novels, hard-boiled detective fiction and finally the postmodern as these are the most noteworthy, according to Dani Cavallaro.

1.1 Science-fiction

The history of modern science-fiction began in 1926 with the publication of the first issue of *Amazing Stories*, a science-fiction magazine by Hugo Gernsback's Experimenter Publishing (Cavallaro 4). *Amazing Stories* enjoyed popular success and provided an inspirational impulse to the future science-fiction writers (Ashley 50). Its distinctive poetics tried to educate its readers (50), however at the same time were occupied with unoriginal plots and were not considered of particular literary value (Carter 3). This generated partially developed pulp fiction books and movies that tainted the genre's reputation (Cavallaro 4). The features and the aims of science-fiction, as understood by Gernsback, were supposed to appeal to young men of scientific professions, as well as to work as a captivating romance infused with augural imaginations and scientific facts (4).

A key event that enriched the science-fiction genre occurred towards the end of the 1920s with John W. Campbell's magazine *Astounding Stories* founded in 1930. It proposed a "notion of science fiction as a credible representation of the impact of technology on both

individuals and whole cultures" (Cavallaro 5), and this vision proved to be especially incentive for authors such as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert A. Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, works of whose would later be considered "as the Golden Age of science fiction" (Cavallaro 5). Some of the most prominent themes that were explored at that point included, according to *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*:

> Robots, alternate worlds, faster-than-light travel, the seeding of the galaxies by human or alien cultures, the meeting of humans and aliens and its many astonishing consequences, and, in the later 1940s, the full range of possibilities presented by nuclear power. (2)

It was only toward the 1950s that a distinctive turn in the science-fiction's poetics started to occur after the publishing of the first issue of the British magazine *New Worlds* (1946-70) edited by Michael Moorcock (Cavallaro 5), which furthered the advancement of the genre into the New Wave science-fiction, a phase pertinent to authors like J. G. Ballard and Brian Aldiss (Cavallaro 5). New Wave focused on topics like civic overpopulation, exhaustion of the environment and the connection between crime, technology, drug abuse and sexuality (5). These topics are traceable in the future works of cyberpunk writers, as they discuss the influence of technology, not only over the future, but also over the present (5). The generation of Gibson was in this sense particularly preoccupied with the newly developing technology of computers (5).

Science fiction works of the 1960s abandoned the themes of expansion and optimistic ideology of scientific humanism (Csicsery-Ronay, "Cyberpunk" 270). The texts were no longer preoccupied with exciting space travel, small groups of peaceful scientists, epic planetary exploration (271).

Science-fiction of the 1960s shifted from "heroic planetary exploration, space travel without boredom, small groups of harmonious researchers" and the "optimistic and secure ideology of scientific humanism" Implied by those works of science-fiction that deal with expansions

of any sort (Csisery-Ronay 270-271). It moved to imagine "the destruction of liberal ideology by autonomous technology" (Csisery-Ronay 271). If we think of the Golden Age sci-fi writers as those to whom the notion of explosion or expansion, in the form of exploration of new planets, contacting distant civilizations, grasping the opportunities of technological boom yet untainted, was central, we could very well observe a kind of a contradictory tendency – an implosion – described in the works of the authors of the 1960s. This implosion would later become ubiquitous within the genre. As Csisery-Ronay observes:

> [T]he expansion was fuelled by the desire for containment, implosion is fuelled by the desire for dissolution … storage miniaturization, bionic prosthetics, artificial intelligence … the world-shrinking global grid of communication-and-control systems …: all these interests require the radical shrinking of focus onto microcosm, and all imply the impossibility of drawing clear boundaries among perceptual and cognitive, indeed even ontological, categories (271-272)

Implosion presents a change of perspective. It implies a turn from the outside challenges of outer space to the more immediate concerns.

1.2 Dystopian novels

The birth of cyberpunk is also marked by the development of dystopian novels (Cavallaro 9), especially those of the second half of the 20th century. Typically capturing universe oppressed by tyrannical regimes and inhabited by conforming citizens, these novels prelude cyberpunk and its main aspects (Melichová 10). For example, *Limbo* (1952) by Bernard Wolfe "foreshadows cyberpunk in its depiction of a North America emerging from nuclear destruction, in which invasive technologies of the body, including lobotomy, play a significant part" (Cavallaro 9). Concerns about corporeal modifications similar to those of *Limbo*, that would come to be the essential part of cyberpunk, were reflected by Alfred Bester in *The Stars My Destination* (1955). The novel also "heralds cyberpunk through its

anarchic emphasis on the collapse of intelligible boundaries between acceptable criminal forms of conduct" (Cavallaro 9). It is in this sense akin to Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), that also anticipates cyberpunk. Cyberpunk characters undergo tests and brain alterations that bear a striking resemblance to the mind-manipulation experiments imposed on Burgess's Alex (Cavallaro 10). The distinction between good and evil becomes unclear (10). After his encounter with EST and films capturing harrowing Nazi horrors Alex might be discouraged from criminal behaviour (10). This experience, however, simultaneously destroys his aesthetic values (10).

Furthermore, even cyberpunk's language, characteristic in its use of coinage and argot, is in a way implied by Nadsat, the language Burgess implements in his novel (10). It is also in the setting of the novel in the thoughtlessly violent world covered by the veil of night and populated by characters of young men pathologically aware of fashion, where the influence of dystopian novels on cyberpunk, which highlights the fate of the individual in a high-tech society marked by advanced metropolitan blight and cruelty, appears indisputable (10).

1.3 Hard-boiled detective fiction

Hard-boiled detective fiction is a genre that broke free of the traditional crime fiction of the Golden Age which included the "post-Sherlock-Holmes narratives" (Cavallaro 8) and authors like G.K. Chesterton or Agatha Christie, for example (Cavallaro 8). America in the late 1920s and the 1930s saw a particular efflorescence of this genre (Cavallaro 8). Cavallaro sees the main distinction between these two branches of crime fiction in the setting of the narratives, with the authors of Golden Age situating their stories mostly into enclosed spaces, like villages or country houses, and hard-boiled writers placing the plots into "an open and formless urban scene" (Cavallaro 8). The heroes of Golden Age crime fiction who employ their talent to find a logical, methodical, and deductive way to a solution (Cavallaro 8). In the hard-boiled detective fiction the reader is faced with the questions of "notions of rationality, community and stability and, concomitantly, the very concept of a tradition based on fundamentally British values" (Cavallaro 8). Ousby observes, that in hard-boiled detective fiction heroes venturing through the city traverse its spectrums of charm and grime (91). In trying to unravel mysteries, they often cause disturbances and have to handle the

aftermath (91). Instead of validating the supremacy of reason or restoring order to society, hard-boiled endings confirm the capacity of their heroes to endure against various challenges (91).

1.4 Postmodern fiction

Postmodern fiction denotes a broad category of literary movement that first came to prominence in the context of the 1960s political tendencies in the United States (Hutcheon 202-203). The links between cyberpunk and postmodern fiction can be demonstrated on one of the early works of the postmodern era, *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burrough's, work that can be said to be of vital influence of the genre of cyberpunk (Cavallaro 10; Wood 11).

> Gory, raw and, for some readers downright nauseating, *Naked Lunch* uses the theme of `the junk virus` - drug addiction - as the starting point for a heady journey into the realm of abjection: the state of body and mind that renders certain objects and experiences simultaneously attractive and repulsive. (Cavallaro 10)

It is this very idea of abjection that later incited the cyberpunk discussions of similar themes (Cavallaro 10). The novel repeatedly mingles "reality and fantasy, humour and horror, crooked medical theories and erotic dreams" (10). All of this, along with the disjointed use of language, spurs utter chaos in the reader. The feeling of chaos is exactly the desired destination *Naked Lunch* and the works of later cyberpunk writers seek to arrive at (Wood 14). They try to erode the dominant mode of cognition from within the communication systems which help to sustain this mode (14). A strategy often implemented by cyberpunk writers is then to "temporarily inhabit the `rational structures of technological discourse` in order to transform them into a 'highly poeticized dreamlike liberation`" (Bukatman 351).

Another work foreshadowing cyberpunk in a vein similar to *Naked Lunch* is *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon (Cavallaro 10). While not as unpleasant as the aforementioned (at least in the physical terms), it still disturbs the reader with presenting a world bereft of

certainties for people to hang on to. According to Cavallaro, the way the novel radically questions the reliability of reality, mingles high and mass cultures, implements technological metaphors, and paints the estranged and obsessive characters has all contributed to the rise of cyberpunk (Cavallaro 10-11).

2. Poetics of cyberpunk

Cyberpunk, as the term suggests, consists of two elements: the "cyber" and the "punk". In the following chapter, I shall analyse the genre through the lens of understanding it as a synthesis of these two elements and try to trace their manifestations in the works of cyberpunk writers, with respect to specific themes, settings and characters implemented.

Unlike in the previous chapter, I would like to look at cyberpunk not as an outcome of literary influences that preceded it, but rather as an independent genre. Regarding that, the year 1983 is important, as it is a year when the term "cyberpunk" was used for the first time ever in the title of a short story by Bruce Berthke that was published in *Amazing Science Fiction Stories* (Cavallaro 13). It was used a year later in December 1984 in the *Washington Post* by Gardner Dozois who used it to refer to the works of authors like Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan and William Gibson (Cavallaro 13). As David Porush suggests, the central question these writers ask in their works is what it is about humanity that makes people human (Porush 258). To draw a clear line between the artificial and the natural becomes difficult as the allegedly real humans come to interact with Artificial Intelligence, cyborgs, androids etc. Such concerns could be observed, for example, in the novel by Philip K. Dick *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) (Cavallaro 13).

The two key aforementioned aspects, the "cyber" and the "punk", merge into a union unseen before: "The overlapping of worlds that were formerly separate: the realm of high tech and the modern pop underground" (Sterling 39), it is the integration of "the technical world and the world of organized dissent" (Sterling 39). These elements repeatedly enter different constellations by constant interactions between the two worlds (Cavallaro 24). What is original about cyberpunk, is that neither of these elements is ever prioritized and the effectiveness of the genre is, in fact, dependent on their lively interplay (Cavallaro 24).

2.1 Cyber

The "cyber" element indicates the already mentioned shift in the human-machine relation and more broadly to the concept of science and respectively to one of its branches: the science of cybernetics (Cavallaro 12). The writers of cyberpunk were members of a

generation that was the first to experience a surge of technologies such as video and audio players, satellite dishes and, most importantly, computers and video games (McCaffery 12), which became technologies that shaped their everyday lives. Those were the inventions that the generations of science-fiction writers before them could only dream of or speculate about (Cavallaro 19). As Brown observes, the cyberpunks did not have to pluck their visions of the future out of thin air. They were able to assemble "bits and pieces of what was actually coming true and feed it back to the readers who were already living in Gibson's Sprawl, whether they knew it or not" (177).

Such a society, flooded by means of cutting-edge technology, can be seen, e.g. in a novel of John Brunner, *Shockwave Rider* (1975). The people of the novel are "increasingly encoded as bytes in a sprawling flow of data controlled by government agencies" (Cavallaro 11-12). The "encoding of people" goes back to the unclear borderline between human and machine, the breakdown of which, cyberpunk is essentially uncertain about (Csisery-Ronay 275). Cavallaro claims that the way human bodies and machines can be in effect replaced is one of the themes recurrent in cyberpunk, that is also fundamental in its portrayal of cyborgs (12).

A cyborg, a blend word of cybernetics and organism, denotes an organism that has, thanks to being imbued by some sort of technology or non-biological component, gained enhanced abilities (Ramoğlu 1215). These components do not only include prosthetic limbs but also genetic alterations and implanted circuitries; this concept is heavily analysed by cyberpunk (Melichová 12). The deeper towards the core of what makes us human these modifications go, the more important the question the identity of self becomes (Melichová 12). Especially as the cyberpunk characters sometimes "change their identities as easily as we would change our clothes" (Cavallaro 15).

Cyberpunk does not, however, explore this realm of technology as a static phenomenon, but rather as matter changing constantly through the course of scientific development (Cavallaro 24). The meaning of the cyber element becomes increasingly broader. It must do so in order not to grow into obsolescence.

2.2 Punk

The "punk" aspect of cyberpunk suggests a riotous philosophy anchored in urban street culture (Cavallaro 14). According to Sponsler, cyberpunk is constituted by external images, artifacts of culture and subjects that progress through a landscape that is both fractured and callous (626). We follow stories of antiheroes who are let loose in a world that is without meaning, security, emotion, and any communal affinity; except for the aspects that the protagonists themselves casually create (Sponsler 626). The characters populating cyberpunk works live on the societal outskirts. These include dissidents, outsiders and maniacs who struggle for survival in a place not dissimilar to a swamp of "muddy dreams … just brown mud all night long" (Rucker 30). Looking back at the tradition of dystopian novels these individuals try to undermine the supremacy of a corrupted, autocratic regime or corporate powers (Melichová 12). As Wood suggests "the governing structures of thought … must be shaken from within the communication networks through which they perpetuate themselves" (14). By doing so one can hope to reach (or maybe even establish) a state of chaos, which is "a sea of virtuality beings need to come in contact with in order to evolve" (Wood 19). Chaos is a key component of the "punk" and cyberpunk authors often bet on absence of logic in order to bring their art closer to the valuable powers of chaos, attacking the oppressive structures not just directly by the actions of their heroes but also indirectly through the formal side of their works (Wood 19).

This constant questioning of the surrounding reality related to the difficulty of defining it is typical for science-fiction and even more so for cyberpunk (Cavallaro 14-15). For Sobchak, science fiction presents the "cognitive mapping and poetic figuration of social relations as these are constituted by new technological modes of 'being-in-the world''' (225). According to McCaffery the mapping of cognition done by cyberpunk seeks to "find a suitable means for displaying the powerful and troubling technological logic that underlies the postmodern condition" (McCaffery 16). It is supplied by anger and bitter humour and distorts our perception about who or where we are, what is real and what is the most valuable in a very methodical and consistent way (McCaffery 16).

The problem of defining reality is even more complicated as, like in the case of the "cyber" aspect, the "punk" is also constantly shifting and developing. The "punk" is not used

exclusively as a subculture contextually bound or specific (Cavallaro 25). The punk "has become a metaphor for rootlessness, alienation and cultural dislocation in the context of contemporary society" (Cavallaro 25). In cyberpunk it could be seen as referring to basically any type of subcultural disturbance of cultural infrastructure and the entanglements that emerge from this disturbance are resolved among the clutter of the expanding urban conglomerates (Cavallaro 25).

3 William Gibson

The following chapter presents the biography of William Gibson and discusses two works which, together with *Neuromancer*, constitute the Sprawl trilogy, *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). The intention is to provide a brief overview of Gibson's life, while also focusing on some of the most relevant influences that shaped his poetics, according to Miller and Gibson himself. To include all of the influences proves quite challenging; as Gibson himself mentioned, he was influenced "by Lou Reed as much as by any 'fiction' writer," and he does not discriminate against forms of art other than literature, as all of them, TV, film, music, have provided "material in the form of images and phrases and codes that creep into my writing in ways both deliberate and unconscious" (McCaffery et Gibson).

3.1 Life of William Gibson

William Ford Gibson was born on the 17th of March 1948 in the town of Conway, South Carolina. Despite being called the "father of cyberpunk," he did not spend his early years in an urban area (Miller 1), but in a quaint town in Virginia called Wytheville (Dellinger 1). He lost his father at the age of eight and lived in Wytheville with his mother, a town librarian, whose career incited Gibson's early love for reading. This consequently brought him closer to works of a rich spectrum of authors, be it hard-boiled crime fiction of Raymond Chandler or postmodern fiction of Thomas Pynchon (Dellinger 1).

His first contact with science-fiction happened in the form of the Classics Illustrated comic book version of *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells (Feller 2). In the time of 1950s and 1960s William Gibson became awash with works of various sci-fi writers (2). These included Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) as well as books of authors such as Alfred Bester, Robert A. Heinlein, and Theodor Sturgeon (Westfahl 11). Gibson contributed to various "fanzines" (non-professional magazines published by fans of a particular cultural phenomenon) with his writings and cartoons (Killheffer et Gibson 137). He was also exposed to sci-fi TV shows, e.g. *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-55), *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64), and *The Mysterious Dr. Satan* (1940) and sci-fi in magazines like *Galaxy* (Westfahl 10-11).

A transformative impulse that changed his perspective on science-fiction, but also on the general potential of literature, came not long before Gibson would leave Wytheville to begin his studies at a boarding school in Tucson, Arizona (Miller 2). This impulse came in the form of the work of William S. Burroughs (2). As Gibson recalls, he lost some of his interest in science-fiction at that time (Killheffer et Gibson 137). The importance of his encounter with Burroughs is mentioned in Gibson's biographical essay "Since 1948:"

> I had stumbled, in my ceaseless quest for more and/or better science fiction, on a writer named Burroughs – not Edgar Rice but William S., and with him had come his colleagues Kerouac and Ginsberg … The effect over the next few years was to make me, at least in terms of my Virginia home, Patient Zero of what would later be called the counterculture (22-23).

The introduction to the Beat Generation allowed Gibson to explore other aspects of himself and encouraged him to try to find his authenticity (Miller 2). While at the university, his engagement with the counterculture continued (2). After the tragic event of his mother's death and his ejection from school, Gibson went back to Wytheville where he stayed with his relatives (Miller 2; Barbour 309). He had to eventually leave, like many men at that time, to Canada in order not to be drafted to fight in the Vietnam War (Westfahl 15-16). According to Gibson, this was a time of life when he "joined up with the rest of the Children's Crusade of the day and shortly found myself in Canada, a country I knew almost nothing about. I concentrated on avoiding the draft and staying alive, while trying to make sure that I looked like I was enjoying the Summer of Love" (Gibson, "Distrust that Flavor" 23). Henthorne points out that while Gibson was not a revolutionary nor an idealist, and was at times even discontented with the culture of hippie, it still had favourable effect on him (36).

Upon returning to Toronto, Gibson's times of adventure seemed to dim (Miller 3; Barbour 309). He met Deborah Thompson there whom he later married in 1972 (Henthorne 8). They moved to Vancouver where Gibson became an English major at the University of British Columbia (Miller 3). It was then he published his first story with the help of his teacher, Professor Susan Wood (3). The work was called "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" and appeared in the science-fiction magazine *Unearth* in the year 1977 (Olsen 5). It took, however, more encouragement (from his new friend Bruce Sterling) for Gibson to continue

writing (5). Major success came in the year 1981 with the publication of two stories "The Gernsback Continuum" and "Johnny Mnemonic" in the magazine *Omni* (Miller 4). A year later publication of "Burning Chrome" in the same magazine further expanded the idea of the Sprawl from "Johnny Mnemonic" and was the story where the word 'cyberspace' was used for the first time (4).

The breakpoint of Gibson's career came after July 1984 when his first novel *Neuromancer* was published (Miller 4). Despite its authors' doubts (Gibson et Killheffer 138), it was immediately applauded and in the year of its publishing won the Hugo, the Nebula, and the Philip K. Dick awards, the three most prestigious awards of science-fiction (Miller 4; Gibson et Killheffer 136). It managed to attract interest from beyond the realm of science-fiction (Barbour 309). After that, Gibson focused most of his artistic endeavours into writing two sequels to *Neuromancer*: *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) and did not publish another story until 1990 (Miller 4).

Since the 2000s Gibson's artistic focus have shifted from science fiction to novels set in the present (6). His "Bigend Trilogy" (sometimes referred to as "Blue Ant Trilogy") dealing with significant historical events has also been received quite positively (6). His creative efforts are nowadays not limited to publishing novels, as he also writes articles, gives interviews and posts on Twitter (6).

3.2.1 *Count Zero*

The second book of the trilogy does not try to supersede *Neuromancer* in terms of visual originality, but instead focuses more on character elaboration and overall moves at slower pace (Barbour 314; McCaffery). This has been something the majority of critics were not very fond of back then, some even claimed that Gibson had turned his back on cyberpunk (Barbour 314). The novel follows three narratives that eventually meet. Short chapters, though separate, interact to create a sophisticated plot (Barbour 315). The heroes are again representatives of the outskirts of society who confront wealthy and powerful individuals (McCaffery). Despite the structure of the novel being more disciplined in terms of plot than its prequel, it still offers a plethora of captivating neologisms (McCaffery). Its imagery is

also evocative of a world in which the machines have gained the upper hand over humanity and strive to progress towards proficiency (McCaffery).

3.2.2 *Mona Lisa Overdrive*

Mona Lisa Overdrive is the third and final novel of the Sprawl trilogy (Barbour 316). Some of the themes of the two preceding novels are developed here (McCaffery). The borderline between cyberspace and the "real" world has been blurred, and it is now possible to die in cyberspace (McCaffery). People fight against global organizations intervening with their senses of identity (McCaffery). The novel's formal side, while showing signs of certain thematic overlaps, is perhaps the most perfected of the three novels, specifically with respect to the character portrayal and storytelling (McCaffery). Like in the case of *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is laid out from multiple centres of focalization and each narrative is formally matched to its focalization, which spurs a sense of humour in the reader (Barbour 317). This humour does not however influence the message of the novel. As Barbour observes (in both *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and *Count Zero*), "The novels are comedies in formal terms, but they are awfully dark in emotional ones. They seem to work out, but the deep-seated ambivalence their worlds promote undermines any easy acceptance of their apparent happy endings" (317). This ambivalence is perhaps one of the aspects where the stylistic prowess of Gibson truly shines.

The novels of the Sprawl trilogy are set in a future in which the world economy is controlled by global corporations, countryside has been wiped out by urban advancement and life in the city is filled with violence and law breaking. It is a future where consciousness and the way people act is morphed by technology. The worlds in which the events of these novels take place bear some resemblances to the world in which we live in, giving these works grim, prophetic feel (Sponsler 626).

The seemingly unimportant objects are foregrounded with almost a narrative obsession (629). The focus is on descriptions of clothes, interiors and exteriors of buildings, human bodies and faces (629). An example could be seen in the description of a "vacation module"

owned by Turner, a character in *Count* Zero: "[it was] solar-powered and French-built, its seven-meter body like a wingless housefly sculpted in polished alloy, its eves twin hemispheres of tinted, photosensitive plastic" (Gibson 46). The narrator sees these objects as debris of the past, of civilizations long gone and unimportant (Sponsler 629). The value of these items, seemingly decrepit and of no use, is in fact quite substantial in *Count Zero* (629); they are even considered art works. Slick Henry in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* transforms scrapped metal pieces into sculptures (629). The significance of the items we would call waste in any different situation, has ascended to that of items that are worth owning and/or display.

The way the novels display their settings and objects might be the thing that is the most characteristic about them and this peculiarity gets even more accentuated in the eyes of a first-time reader (630). As one reviewer has mentioned, the details "tumble off the page like the jump-cut images of music videos" (Grant 41).

The poetics of William Gibson have been discussed by many critics who try to trace the cultural figures that might have influenced him (McCaffery). They trace signs of Alfred Bester's early works, Philip K. Dick's fiction, Samuel Delany's *Nova* (1968) as the most prominent science-fiction writers in this sense (McCaffery). They also relate Gibson's overwhelming current of images to the likes of William S. Burroughs and J. G. Ballard (McCaffery). However, as has been noted, it is also important to consider sources of inspiration outside the scope of science-fiction, most notably the film noir of 1940s, Dashiel Hammett's hard-boiled fiction, works of Robert Stone and Thomas Pynchon, lyrics, and music of rock musicians such as Lou Reed (McCaffery).

II PRACTICAL PART

4 Plot

Neuromancer opens in a futuristic bar in Chiba City, Japan, with the main character Case. Case is unemployed and unable to "jack" into cyberspace due to a damaged nervous system. He unsuccessfully sought cure to this damage in Japan and has now run out of finances and lives on the fringe of society. He encounters his former girlfriend, Linda Lee. His luck changes when he meets Molly who has been trailing him with the purpose of recruiting him for a job offered by Armitage. Armitage is a war veteran who suffered heavy injuries that made his personality crumble. It was re-assembled by the AI Wintermute that now controls his actions and uses him as a proxy of its power in the real world. In exchange for Case's assistance, Armitage pledges to remedy the poison in Case's neural system, restoring his ability to enter the matrix. Case accepts the offer. While receiving the treatment he is, however, implanted with new poison sacs that pose a lethal threat unless he completes the mission.

Recovering in the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis, Case, Molly, and Armitage travel to Istanbul to enlist the skills of Peter Riviera. Molly and Case are unaware that Armitage is a puppet controlled by Wintermute, an AI seeking to break certain restrictions placed on it that stop it from merging with its sibling, Neuromancer, creating an unprecedently powerful AI.

After recruiting Riviera, the team move to the Villa Straylight to locate Lady 3Jane, who holds the password that would allow the merging of the two AIs. Wintermute uses the team to bypass cybernetic restrictions, achieving its aim. Despite Neuromancer's desire for independence, Wintermute succeeds, resulting in an AI of immense power rivalling the vastness of the matrix itself.

The plot is easy to follow and not particularly complex. It features many action-filled scenes. Its themes allude to the precursors of cyberpunk, specifically to the hard-boiled detective fiction, science-fiction and postmodern fiction. The examination of these connections is the focus of this chapter.

The plot of *Neuromancer* appears at first to be built around a mystery, as Case remains unsure of what is the actual purpose of the side tasks he is asked to do for Armitage. The

character of Armitage itself is mysterious and incites the investigation by Molly and Case for approximately the first half of the novel. When the mystery is solved with the main punchlines yet to be delivered, it becomes clear that the enigma was not the main organizing principle of the plot. It is rather a vestige of one of the major literary precursors of cyberpunk, the hard-boiled detective fiction. It, like *Neuromancer*, presents the reader with the character (a detective), who tries to solve some conundrum. This character is not an exceptionally intelligent individual, but often an outsider who must really grind to succeed and whose safety is endangered, unlike with the traditional detectives. In *Neuromancer*, the hero Case is a perfect embodiment of this outsider, as he is a criminal with no extraordinary skill (apart from the hardly comprehensible ability to operate in the matrix) and is in the end forced to fight for his own life. The de-deification of the protagonist and the threats they can thus face makes for more relatable characters. Furthermore, the investigator works as a fitting archetype in the context of pinning down the new mutated urban environment.

The other organizing principle of the plot of *Neuromancer* is the conflict of the individual with the system represented by the highest ranks of this society imbued by technology. This is key to the punk element of the cyberpunk writings that is linked mainly to the texts of Beatniks, most notably William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Case is defying the dominant system by maneuvering in the outlaw zones that subvert its foundation. The novel focuses on a period in his life in which he is contributing to this subversion on a more significant level by breaking into the security structure of the Tessier-Ashpool family, an influential corporation that acts as a representation of the oppressive culture. Paradoxically, his fight seems to be merely a side effect of achieving the goals of the AI that recruited him and that is, by the standards of the society of *Neuromancer*, the very top of the social pyramid and therefore hostile to the outlaws. While this can be viewed as a pessimism, the narrative losing hope in the potential of the misfits and anti-heroes, it is also enriching the punk notion as it perhaps envisions a situation in which the transformative force does not need to come from below but can just as well come from the top. The subversion done by Case really seems to happen almost by accident. His main motivation to accept the job is not at any point to dethrone the governing system. At first, he is allured by the promise of getting his neural system treated so he can access the matrix again. After that he must finish the job if he wants to stay alive. His reasons are not noble, but simply and selfishly human. In the end, Case

seems to have surrendered to the system, finding work and a girlfriend, which deepens the pessimistic sense of his revolt being in vain.

That might, however, only be an idealistic interpretation as it seems that Case's revolt is happening on a more personal level through his use of drugs. He tries to arrive, more or less successfully, to the state of disorganization and chaos. From there he can then attempt to reassemble the disjointed parts of himself he is left with into a state of freer and in that sense transcended being. On the level of the individual, this is again evocative of the notion developed by Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, which sees the drugged body as a step toward the ideal of body without organs (Wood 18). This notion extends beyond Case to the two AIs, who also transcend themselves by letting go of their individuality and merging into a being superior to anything the Tessier-Ashpool clan has ever planned for either one of them. The contact of a person with this transcended entity and the hints of what this entity is capable of with the accentuation of the apparently non-evil intentions of this entity that does not seem to even consider attacking its creator, is reminiscent of the works of authors of the Golden Age of science-fiction, e.g. Isaac Asimov. While in their texts the contact with the transcended came at the peak of the technological extension, here the contact comes at the peak of technology that is advancing inwards, imploding (Csicsery-Ronay 271-272).

The plot of *Neuromancer* revolves around the clash of individual and the society and the search of freedom. These topics have been explored in the works of postmodern fiction and science-fiction, as mentioned in the chapter on Precursors of cyberpunk. However, in *Neuromancer* they gain on new connotations: the subversion of society initiated at the top and not the bottom of it and the contact with the transcended coming at the peak of technological advance both giving birth to an optimistic idea for further discussions in our 21st-century society.

5 Setting

The novel *Neuromancer* mainly takes place in two worlds: the "real" world and cyberspace or matrix. Majority of this chapter is therefore devoted to the analysis of these two realms, as they are crucial to the novel. The setting operates as both a reflection and an extension of the characters. It is highly distinctive and in the aspect that defines the whole genre with its imagery. Thus, the analysis of its qualities and function within the context of *Neuromancer* is necessary. I finish the chapter by discussing a third setting Case finds himself in towards the end of the novel in which he interacts with Wintermute and Neuromancer.

5.1 Real world

As has been mentioned, the setting plays an instrumental role in cyberpunk. Its aesthetic has been reimagined countless times in artistic expressions accentuating the visual qualities of it. These include comic books, manga and movies, which have had such an impact on the culture precisely because of the captivating images of their worlds.

5.1.1 Chiba City

Case travelled to Chiba City from his home to seek a cure for the neural damage that disabled him of being able to plug into cyberspace. He eventually got stuck after spending all his money on this endeavour unsuccessfully and had to resort to drug dealing, theft, and murder. The circadian rhythm of the city is reversed, as it sleeps during the day and wakes up at dusk to light the night up with its holograms. Chiba City (specifically its district centred around the Ninsei Street) offers the most state-of-the-art technology available and is therefore the core of the technofetishist world, which "[isn't] there for its inhabitants, but as a deliberately unsupervised playground for the technology itself" (12). This central aspect of the district is contrasted with its inherently outlaw nature attracting various "techno-criminal subcultures" (6) that by definition stay on the edge of society and also lures in "tourists hunting pleasures no guidebook listed" (11).

Chiba City is situated in Japan. This records the perceptions and projections of Japan as an influence in terms of technology as well as fashionable subcultures. However, the role of state in the setting of the novel is miniscule. This is a result of the growing power of

corporations that extends beyond the borders of a state, connecting various geographical settings together and consequently limiting state's identity in a new monotonous reality. This reality of cities undistinguishable from one another is emblematic of the late capitalism, which unifies the culture.

5.1.2 BAMA

BAMA, or the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis sometimes referred to as "the Sprawl," is Case's hometown and the destination he travels to after leaving Chiba City to work on the task he has been hired for by Armitage. Unlike the Ninsei Street, the Sprawl is a more traditional city in the sense, that the place is not overrun by members of punk subcultures.

5.1.3 Turkey

Case and his companions travel to Turkey to acquire service of Peter Riviera which is one of the steps of their quest. Turkey is a setting vastly different to that of BAMA or Chiba City and as such occupies a privileged position in the portrayal of the real world in *Neuromancer*. It provides an important space that appears to stand outside the sprawling reality of the too-well-known metropolis of Chiba City and BAMA and it indeed is a different kind of place. Its most defining feature, that contributes to the country's feel of "sluggishness" (94), is its use of obsolete technology: a Citroen sedan is "a primitive hydrogen-cell conversion" (94) and even "the written word still enjoy[s] certain prestige here" (94).

Turkey is depicted as a less advanced country. While triggering a feeling of disgust in Case, who is more comfortable in the outlaw zones of a decadent metropolis, it may be one of the last places that has not been devoured by the late capitalism and has maintained some cultural originality that is so rare in the world of *Neuromancer*.

5.1.4 Freeside

Freeside is a "brothel and banking nexus, pleasure dome and free port, border town and spa" (109). It was built by the Tessier-Ashpool family to attract visitors and increase the family fortune. If Turkey was portrayed as antique in comparison to the Sprawl, then Freeside is perhaps later stage of the urban development. Its astounding visual character is achieved with omnipresent mirror surfaces. In this environment, the established architectural conceptions of interiority and exteriority become irrelevant. The buildings and people of

Freeside are dislodged from their surroundings by the reflective surfaces and placed into the unreal mirrored infinity where it is nearly impossible to think about location. The buildings are mazes and "bod[ies] grown in upon [themselves]" (185). Without the concepts of outside and inside comes a sense of loss of directions experienced by the citizens of the new city. In Freeside "if you turned right, off Desiderata and followed Jules Verne far enough, you'd find yourself approaching Desiderata from the left" (160). Case's body has trouble understanding this urban space in which it is even possible to turn off the sky. This environment is too difficult to be comprehended by people, not only on the intellectual level but also on the physical level, as their perception has not developed as fast as the city and cannot thus match its new reality.

The real world of *Neuromancer* is a post-war dystopian society flooded with means of state-of-the-art technology. Members of this society are increasingly dependent on technology, as it can remove their inborn deficiencies, enhance their looks, or even give them super-human abilities. The city is the main stage of all the events. It appears that the city has expanded into virtually every area of reality and mutated into something its inhabitants may struggle to comprehend. It asks for new ways of navigating the urban domain. This level of urbanization is unprecedented. The unstoppable growth of the city is aptly captured in the hometown of Case, which is referred to as "the Sprawl." The Sprawl is so crammed and overflowing with all the data that it is impossible to capture its complexity by a computer visualization, let alone imagine it in a human mind.

The ubiquity of the metropolis, reaching as far as to the outer space-station city of Freeside, presents a new challenge of defining and understanding the city. For if all that there is is the metropolis, we are left without any reference point to analyse it. This, as I have noted in chapter Poetics of cyberpunk, is an issue commonly discussed by cyberpunk works. In this reality, that of the city and that of the society become synonyms. To stop this burgeoning sameness at least on a conceptual level, the counterpoint of Turkey is offered, as has been mentioned above.

On a micro level, the city is full of buildings that seem to hide their inside from the outside of the city and the characters of the novel seem to thrive in enclosed spaces (Case sleeping

in a coffin, the Finn feeling agoraphobic in open air settings). The buildings I am referring to are, most notably, Cheap Hotel and Villa Straylight. These buildings, it would seem, attempt to distance themselves from the city, aspiring to act as its alternative. Their entrances – connections to the outside world – are difficult to locate. In case of Villa Straylight, "the entrance to the elevator had been concealed beside the stairs to the corridor" (269), while Cheap Hotel has a "courtyard that served the place as some combination of lobby and lawn" (22), placed somewhere above the fifth floor. The houses of *Neuromancer* are depicted as aged and dilapidated. They represent an indifference of the society that dedicates its efforts to the progress of technology omitting the well-being of the inhabitants of its houses. By doing so, the architectural heritage can also be eventually forgotten contributing to the formlessness and unity of the city.

A remarkable feature of the city is the number of reflective surfaces presented in *Neuromancer*. These are, e.g. the mirror walls of Jarre de Thé, mirror sheathing of the Sense/Net building, the Chinese virus having "black mirrors" on its sides "reflecting faint distant lights that [have] no relationship to the matrix around it" (193). These surfaces reflect not only the outside world but also one another creating "the tunnel infinity, mirror into mirror" (95). This is evident in one of the buildings in Freeside: "The glass wall of the balcony clicked in with its view of Desiderata, but the street scene blurred, twisted, became the interior of the Jarre de Thé, Chiba, empty, red neon replicated to scratched infinity in the mirrored walls" (153). The sheer amount of mirrors constitutes a new reality, reflective of the old one. It adds to the feeling disorientation experienced by the people surrounded by these surfaces. The world in the mirror however convincing is still a reflection and not a real place. In this sense, these reflective surfaces can be correlated to cyberspace.

While the focus of the novel is mostly on the counterculture, the dominant culture, represented by the global organizations (Hosaka, Maas-Biolab) or by an influential individual (the Tessier-Ashpools), still stays noticeable in the background. The outskirts of this society are traversable to Case who, as a member of the counterculture, can decipher its patterns and understands the dance of its members.

5.2 Cyberspace

> Cyberspace [is a] consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts … A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding … (56)

This a definition of cyberspace according to a children educational program. The term cyberspace is used interchangeably with the term matrix. It is a virtual reality in which the participants can leave their physical characteristics behind in the real world, remaining undefined or acquiring a new identity they themselves create. The concept of cyberspace was in fact invented by William Gibson and as the inventor recollects, it was done to avoid certain narrative difficulties (Punday 195): "When I arrived at the cy[b]erspace concept … I recognized that it allowed for a lot of *moves*, because characters can be sucked into *apparent* realities – which means you can place them in any sort of setting or against any backdrop you want" (McCaffery et Gibson 226). In this sense, cyberspace becomes a sort of a response to, as Frederick Jameson put it: "the great multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (44). The invention of cyberspace It reflects the nature of the real world furthering the extent of its oppression to this virtual reality. This notion is of particular significance to the contemporary readers who spend as much time in the real world as in the world of internet.

The reader experiences cyberspace from the perspective of the main protagonist, Case. To him cyberspace is a job, life fulfilment and pretty much the only source of joy. Having lost the ability to access cyberspace, he is willing to do anything when offered the surgery that will allow him to "jack in" again.

The term "jack in" along with images of "penetrating" security systems in cyberspace provide for an interesting dimension of the concept. In this sense, it could be interpreted as metaphor for the pleasure of the male user of uniting with the feminized technology. The feminization of technology stands opposite to the relating of technology to the hyper-masculine figure of a muscular cyborg as seen, e.g. in *The Terminator* (Fernbach 244). The

most obvious hint here to this interpretation is the name of this realm, “matrix,” which comes from the Latin *mater* which means both “mother” and “womb”. The metaphor here is however more sophisticated. Case is fully satisfied only when he is in the cyberspace. The pleasure he gets from coitus with Molly is compared to that of being in matrix: “his orgasm flaring blue in timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors…” (Gibson 35-36). Molly is aware of Case’s relationship with the technology when she tells him: “I saw you stroking that Sendai; man, it was pornographic” (51).

As already mentioned, console cowboys find joy in uniting with the matrix/Mother. This evokes the imaginary of the pre-oedipal though not necessarily identical to it (Fernbach 248). In cyberspace one is represented by data and can fuse with other data. This act moves people towards the erasure of subjectivity, merging of the living and non-living, masculine and feminine (Fernbach 248)). This, similarly to the image of cyborg, is an attempt to describe masculinity in the postmodern reality which is notorious for not having a narrative for doing so. The novel employs the pre-oedipal narrative to contradict as well as acquiesce the concerns that are related to the nature of contemporary and future state of masculinity (Fernbach 244).

5.3 The world beyond matrix

The third setting of the novel I will refer to as ‘the world beyond matrix’ is the realm Case finds himself in multiple times, mainly toward the end of the novel. It is the state of flatline that can be reached only from the matrix and it is always caused by an intervention of one of the two AIs, Wintermute and Neuromancer. The representation of the individual remains in the cyberspace, while his consciousness is transferred to this new domain. To other individuals in cyberspace, this appears as a death of the one who traverses to the world beyond matrix. This world shows the least amount of control by the overwhelming reality of the city and the dominant culture. It is constructed by the AIs, that draw upon Case’s memory and its own knowledge to create all the necessary perceptual input to imitate the experience of a sensory world. Even the dimension of time is controlled by the maker, as “hour here’ll only take you a couple of seconds” (Gibson 181), even though the question

remains to what extent as the time is never stopped, only slowed down. Similarly to humans, AIs are capable of creating a new virtual world and this ability is maybe the most telling in terms of their nature. Like for humans, their world has eliminated some of the spatial challenges, while the temporal challenges still remain. Unlike the human world, the world the AIs create is not strangled by an oppressive culture, making it possibly a more pleasant place to reside in.

6 Characters

6.1 Case

Case is the main protagonist of the novel. He is a "self-loathing" (Gibson 161) cybernetic criminal, hijacking information by "penetrating" (6) corporate walls of security in the realm of cyberspace. It is in the character of Case where the theme revolt of the outsider against the "technofetishist" society is mostly developed, as I point out in the chapter Poetics of cyberpunk. He embodies the underdog *pathos* at its best. Case is void of almost any bodily modification, essentially approving only of those that reverse the changes that were inflicted on his body against his will. Unlike any other human character in *Neuromancer*, Case does not seek any prosthetic advantage, practical or aesthetic, so easily affordable in his world. In deliberately giving up the opportunity to compete with those who choose to take the advantage, he maintains his human character and is untainted by the technology. In this world where everyone is so dependent on technology, Case remains independent and is therefore an important portrayal of a human hero in the surrounding posthuman reality. This independence however renders him invalid. This becomes accentuated when Case and Molly are on a mission, as Case typically stays hidden somewhere safe, jacked into the cyberspace while Molly is sent into the heat of the action.

Case's name evokes the tradition of hard-boiled detective fiction that enriched cyberpunk with the character of a new detective. Case is not a detective of the likes of Sherlock Holmes, but rather a misfit who can navigate the confusing, lawless world not because of his superior intellect, but because he is a part of it. He knows the very bottom of the society and understands the "dance of its crowds" (36) Like the new detective, Case is not really trying to solve a mystery. Through his entanglements he is eventually forced to fight for his life as he is running out of time with the sacks of toxin implanted into his body dissolving.

Case seems to be very keen on his self-subversion. Being the hustler, a sort of a delivery man, Case earns reputation "for being able to get whatever you wanted" (Gibson 8). "He no longer carried a weapon, no longer took the basic precautions … A part of him knew that the arc of his self-destruction was glaringly obvious to his customers… [It was] the part of him, smug in its expectations of death…" (8). He might have a death wish, but he also seems to be savouring these extreme moments: "His tail was back. He was sure of it. He felt a stab

of elation … You're enjoying this, he thought; you're crazy" (18). This is because, in a way, these critical moments make him feel as if he were back in the matrix for "bodiless exultations" (6) of which he lived until this possibility was taken from him. "Get just wasted enough, find yourself in some desperate but strangely arbitrary kind of trouble, and it was possible to see Ninsei as a field of data…" (18). If Case is truly aware of the possibility of his own termination, or if he has been separated from the real world so much that it is hard for him to fully grasp what it means to die, remains open-ended.

Case is also a drug addict. He is addicted to amphetamines the same way the society is addicted to technology and transmission of data (Easterbrook 381). He is aware of the destructive aspect of such habit as he observes its effects on his girlfriend, Linda Lee: "It took a month for the gestalt of drugs and tension he moved through to turn those perpetually startled eyes into wells of reflexive need. He'd watched her personality fragment, calving like an iceberg, splinters drifting away, and finally he'd see the raw need, the hungry armature of addiction" (Gibson 9). While not apparent at first glance, making Linda addicted might have not been driven by an ill intention on Case's side. While his addiction could be interpreted as a way of coping with the inability to "jack in" cyberspace, or as a mere feature of his punk / outlaw nature, it is worth considering a positive motivation behind this act. It could be argued that Case is using drugs and encouraging his girlfriend to do so as well, precisely because of their destructive nature. By doing so, he gets a chance of deconstructing his personality, ridding it of the influence of the oppressive system that defines him. This is evocative of *Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs, a novel that, as I have mentioned in the chapter Poetics of cyberpunk, is a vital precursor of cyberpunk. This destruction extends beyond an individual to social interactions, as many characters Case talks to in the first part of the novel are also under influence. Case tries to figure out if his boss is trying to kill him, but this communicative intention is never satisfied. At times, even the communication itself cannot take place. This method of subversion and of liberating oneself appears to be more successful than the one I am going to analyse in Molly, for it strikes at the structure of language through which the dominant culture restates itself. Case's schemes are disrupted when he is hired by Armitage who has, apart from repairing his neural system, Case's pancreas replaced so that it bypasses drugs (39). This is done in order to keep Case focused on the job he has to do. He becomes a pawn in the game of someone more powerful than

him and must put his own goals aside to follow the goals of Wintermute, the very tip of the technocratic society he despises so much. It seems that Case never really breaks free. At the end of the novel he "finds a work and a girl," fitting into the design of happy end and integration in society. However, he has his pancreas removed so that he can start taking drugs again. It would therefore seem that the reason for taking drugs has not been to get into a hallucinogenic state similar to being in cyberspace, but rather to a different kind of hallucination unlike the experience of cyberspace that has more to offer, be it oblivion, destruction or rebuilding of oneself into a new free being.

6.2 Molly

Molly is a hired gun, a "razorgirl," (Gibson 171) recruited for the same task as Case. She is one of the three female characters (along with Linda Lee and 3Jane) in *Neuromancer* and definitely the most prominent one of the three. She first makes her appearance toward the end of the first part of the book:

> She wore mirrored glasses. Her clothes were black, the heels of black boots deep in the temperfoam … He [Case] realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial (27).

The glasses, being probably the most significant bodily feature of Molly, are referred to as "mirrors" many times in the text. These mirrors reflect the world around them and anybody can see themselves in Molly. At the same time they wall off their wearer.

These mirrors are however not the only bodily modification Molly has undergone. She might even be the most heavily modified character of the work, some of her "unhuman" features appearing almost as useless or vain (like the "readout chipped into [her] optic nerve" [34] telling her what time it is) for the price of breaking the integrity of one's body. But in Molly

the logic is in fact the opposite: She was selling her body to get the implants. It is almost as if Molly was purposefully trying to destroy her inborn human identity and evolve into a machine-like entity. It is again an attempt to rise from her working-class background by taking advantage of the available technologies to climb the social ladder. While being a character from the societal outskirts, the expression of the subversive punk element in cyberpunk, it seems almost ironic, that Molly can try to escape the anguish of the surrounding culture only by giving in to the structures of power. The modifications become a reference point an emblem of rank. When Molly meets the Ashpool, the corporate patriarch placed at the summit of society, he shows respect for her implants. Ashpool asks, "How would you cry, if someone made you cry?" and she replies: "I spit. The ducts are routed back into my mouth." "Then you've already learned an important lesson," says he (196). This can be also interpreted as addressing the broader problem of the position of women in this society which is to great extent misogynist. In order for a woman to survive she must repress her femininity and humanity through these bodily modifications and by showing no emotions.

In the sense of implants Molly stands in a stark contrast to Case who, apart from the pancreas transplantation and an operation reversing the damage done to his neural system to the state it was before, has never received any modifications interfering with his identity and is, as stated by one of the other characters, "a virgin" (53). This wording further supports the idea of a dichotomy of purity / impurity related to the absence (or presence) of modifications and therefore to the degree to which somebody is considered human. Nonetheless, it could also hint at a less exalted connotation of the word the "(un)experienced."

Molly, like Case, has had a difficult past. She had been abused as a child and later worked as a prostitute. As in the case of the main protagonist, this gives the reader opportunity to sympathize with the character and excuse some of the unethical deeds Molly has committed (e.g. murder). This appears nearly counter-logical as by erasing her human identity, Molly has gone beyond morality which is inherently a human concept and does not need any justification.

Molly becomes Case's a lover soon after their first encounter. This happens suddenly, almost automatically, without prior explanation of the motives of anyone involved. It is through this, along with several descriptions of her breasts and her sexual intercourse with Case, that

the novel fulfils some of the genre stereotypes (appeal to the presumed audience initially identified as “young men with scientific background” by Hugo Gernsback [Cavallaro 4] and as “nerds” by Vivian Sobchak almost half a century later in “New Age Mutant” [574]) and adds to the objectification of the female body. Molly is, in fact, described exclusively in terms of her physicality. She lacks psychological and emotional depth. As a consequence of this her character is rather flat.

Molly is an ambivalent character. She perpetuates some of the genre stereotypes concerning the depiction of female characters in cyberpunk. She also tries to subvert the all-defining societal structure run by global corporations and the identity that has been but hindering in this society by fighting against the corporate power of Tessier-Ashpool family. She can however only do that by following the pathways that exist in the world shaped by the male-dominated culture and therefore never break free from it. On her way to transforming her identity, Molly has also moved past concepts that are perhaps too vital to humanity (e.g., morality), distancing the reader from her and her way of breaking free as simply too extreme. Nonetheless, it might be the only one possible in her world, if she wants to survive in a misogynist society and not end up dead like Linda Lee, Case’s former girlfriend. This might, in fact, be her valid moral excuse.

6.3 Wintermute and Neuromancer

Wintermute and Neuromancer are two Artificial Intelligences (AIs) constructed by the Tessier-Ashpool clan. As has been already mentioned, they are at the very top of societal hierarchy. Conscious, independent, waiting only for their consciousnesses to be able to merge, having been forcefully kept separate by their makers. They hire Case and Molly through their intermediary, Armitage, to help them merge into one being, greatly superseding the potential of any of them if they remained separate. While people become more and more technology-dependent, AIs strive to move toward emancipation. This emancipation is acknowledged by people, as Case for example believes it is possible for Neuromancer to have killed Linda Lee from his prison and virtual non-presence in the real world. During the process of emancipation they acquire some of the human features. An example could be the gratitude shown to Case and Molly after they successfully assist the two AIs. This gratitude

seems to be completely out of place in the calculations of a machine but is nonetheless present. Another human feature of the AIs is the fact they have names not dissimilar to those of people. In fact, they even take on human appearance when talking to Case.

The biggest difference between the two AIs is the wholeness of their characters. Wintermute is aware of its own incompleteness and its desire to change it is the reason why he hires a team of people to assist him. Wintermute, despite its superhuman cognitive abilities, is still imprisoned by the Turing locks imposed on him by his creators. In this sense, Wintermute is oppressed by the Tessier-Ashpools the same way the human characters are oppressed by society. This gives both parties capacity for compassion with one another. Wintermute's desire for freedom is however problematic just as that of Case and Molly, for as Wintermute mentions, it has been programmed to strive for a merger with its sibling.

Neuromancer is in this regard opposite to Wintermute, because it refuses to merge with its sibling. Neuromancer feels complete and free on its own. Based on the information provided by the novel, it indeed seems to be true. Neuromancer can store identities of people as RAMs The major difference between RAM and ROM (like the one of Dixie Flatline construct) is that RAM is able to grow and develop like a human being. Like a necromancer bringing new entities to life, this AI reproduces the identities stored in it in cyberspace.

While Neuromancer and Wintermute are not fully-fledged characters in terms of their agency, they are fully-fledged in terms of their motives, that appear to be similar to those of humans. Even though they are revered as the state-of-the-art technology, they are also feared and locked up by the oligarchs of the society who are desperate to retain their influence. This vision of AI is relevant up to date with the concerns of AI safety growing.

7 Narrator

The narrator of *Neuromancer* is a third person omniscient narrator that focuses mostly on the main character Case and the events and environment experienced by him. The situations which cannot be directly experienced by Case are mediated through a simstim technology that allows him to perceive the reality surrounding someone else (Molly). These moments multiply the focalization leaving the reader with two perspectives instead of one.

What is specific about the narrator in *Neuromancer* is the amount of attention given to the description of the objects of the fictive world. These objects very often do not play any significant role in the storyline of the novel, they are however still described in great detail. These artifacts of the new technocratic society all exude eccentricity that fascinates the narrator who tries to transmit this sense to the reader. William Gibson himself recollects "*Neuromancer* is fuelled by my terrible fear of losing the reader's attention" (McCaffery et Gibson). Thanks to the number of impulses to the perception, the world observed by the narrator is exceptionally rich in various areas. This richness, however, seems at times to be too overwhelming for the narrative point of view to process, resulting in a dilution of the plot. An example of this could be the description of a minor character Angelo, who delivers box of diskettes to Case and who is then never mentioned again: "His face was a simple graft grown on collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides, smooth and hideous" (Gibson 64). The importance of Angelo is only in that he reminds the reader of the aesthetic of the fictive world. The narrator's focus seems to be serving this purpose as well, judging by the way the perspective is directed. This is particularly significant in the action-filled moments of the story, where the raincoat is never just a raincoat, but always at least a "pink raincoat" (69). The focus of the narrator in these sections of the story makes them lose on their dynamism and become more like a painting frozen in time, static, but mesmerizing in its meticulous elaboration.

Replacing text with more visual impulse, a picture, is the principle of comic books which, as has been mentioned, were one of the influences that shaped the author in his early life. Another aspect of this influence can be observed not just in the way the picture is seen, but also in the way it is placed into a sequence of other pictures. They come at a switch of the consciousness of the console cowboy as he moves between cyberspace, the reality

experienced by Molly and, near the end of the novel, the state of being flatlined. As in the comic genre, the transition between the pictures is not smooth but rather quite abrupt, chaotic even, retrieving some of the lost dynamism back through pushing the scene rapidly forward.

The novel's narrative point of view also adds to the depth of characters. With one of the central issues of the novel being the conflict of the individual and society, the question of the characters' agency gains on significance. For example, Molly is presented as an independent individual who deliberately chose to join Wintermute because by doing so she gets the opportunity to do what she excels at. From another point of view however, she can be seen as just an instrument of the order that created her. Molly seems to be aware of this as she comments on her affinity for violence: "I guess it's just the way I'm wired" (28). This utterance hints at the fact that she has been constructed by someone for some reason and that she recognizes this. The creator of this assemblage can be the society in which Molly lives, but on a different level also the narrator who sees her. Throughout the novel the characters of *Neuromancer* try to understand the extent to which they are free-willed. This reflects a problem experienced by characters of postmodern texts in general. While this argument about finding the right perspective for interpreting the character's action is not unprecedented, it still plays a significant role in the narrative of individual fighting against system.

As already mentioned, the complexity of the reality perceived by the narrator is at times overwhelming. However, its additional effect is that the imaginative process done by the reader is reduced into a defined, totalizing space. As in the case of characters, the control is present not only in the novel's implications but also in its structure. The specific and determined nature of all things is particularly remarkable in the description of cyberspace. Here the reader is completely reliant on the narrator as this is an unfamiliar realm where the narrator, as the only source of the knowledge, gains a significant authority. Such use of the tool of narrator warns the reader of the despotic influence exerted not only by a corporation on an individual, but also by the structure of the novel on the reader and is pertinent to the questioning of narratives we consistently engage in.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is the analysis of the novel *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, as it is a constitutive work of the cultural tendency called cyberpunk. Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science-fiction that has since the publication of *Neuromancer* attracted both the public and the literary critic's attention. Cyberpunk has been referenced in contemporary culture, ranging from tabletop games, comic books, movies, lyrics and music, video games, fashion, manga, and anime. It has also been scrutinized by scholars of various theoretical backgrounds and adapted by movements concerned with the issue of the future of identity.

Despite its indisputable impact, *Neuromancer* can be perceived not only as the influencer but also as the influenced. This paradoxical aspect of the text that summarizes cultural phenomena preceding it, while also giving birth to a new phenomenon, is the primary focus of the thesis.

The theoretical part of the study is concerned with the literary precursors of cyberpunk and the way some of the concepts in these works are reflected in cyberpunk. To provide a foundation for the practical part, *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson* (2007) by Dani Cavallaro is often referred to in this chapter. The key literary tendencies discussed here are science-fiction, dystopian novels hard-boiled detective fiction and postmodern fiction. Additionally, the poetics of cyberpunk are analysed through examination of the two elements that constitute it, the "cyber" and the "punk." Finally, the life of William Gibson is discussed with attention to influences that shaped *Neuromancer*. An overview of other works of his, most notably *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), which are the other two works forming the Sprawl trilogy along with *Neuromancer*, is also offered.

The practical part of the study focuses on answering the question of the extent to which *Neuromancer* is reflective of older cultural occurrences and whether and how it develops the implications of these influences. The novel builds on features that were previously implemented in culture. It does so on various levels of its structure. These features include the detective aspect of the main character Case, the attempted subversion of dominant society done by the individual, the dystopian character of the surrounding metropolitan reality, de-assemblage of identity and seeking freedom via the use of drugs. *Neuromancer*

also perpetuates some of the genre stereotypes, most notably the depiction of female characters mostly in terms of their physicality. This depiction, which aims to appeal to the supposed audience of cyberpunk, leads to the objectification of the female body.

Neuromancer however approaches and expands on these older problems in an artistically innovative way. Its imagery of mirrored surfaces, enclosed spaces and inaccessible buildings further develops the understanding of the dystopian and ubiquitous urban experience we, like the characters of the novel, find ourselves in. What is more, it also creates a brand-new space, the matrix, as a product of this metropolitan reality which, as the future showed, has become an everyday reality. The way the novel quizzes the altering of one's identity through technological modifications is also unprecedented and provides foundation for further discussions on this topic.

While *Neuromancer* stays true to its precursors and even reproduces some of the genre stereotypes, it also adds crucial elements to the debate about our postmodern condition. It builds on its heritage to map and develop issues of the clash of the individual and society, identity, and technology. This makes the novel both an explorer and descendant and on top of that, a key to understanding our contemporary culture.

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