

## William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Its Relevance to Culture and Technology

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### Abstract

We live in a time where technology is in a rapid growth. These advancements have made various changes in the cultural sphere. Computers have drastically started to influence the lifestyle of people through various systems of information technology. Thus, within a fragment of time anyone can access to any sort of resources on the planet. This advancement is in way shrinking the division of mind and machine as most people depend vastly on the outside sources of intelligence through technological devices. The concept of mind uploading, trans-humans, cyber space, virtual reality, and etc. have interested the cyberpunk writers and influenced them to project these ideas in their literary texts. Thus the present paper explores the relationship between William Gibson’s cyberpunk science fiction *Neuromancer* and its relevance to culture and technology. It first focuses on the novel *Neuromancer*, and then goes onto its cultural and technological relevance with present time, and discusses the close connection between reality and cyberpunk literature.

### Key words

Cyberpunk, cyber space, mind uploading, mindclones, mindfile, William Gibson

### Introduction

The link between computer technology and literature play an important role in society, as literary texts reflects the contemporary situation. In this context, cyberpunk science fictions play an important role in exploring the high-tech advancement in science and technology. This can be traced back to the cyberpunk movements in 1980s. During the latter part of 1980s, the cyberpunk writers identified the breakdown of the boundaries between humans and machines, and their writings welcomed the new kind of science fiction which represented the present state of techno- reality.

William Gibson being the pioneer writer of this genre coined ‘cyber space’ which is the virtual local used in these fictions where technologized bodies projects the image of

the near future. His novel *Neuromancer* is published in 1984 and soon after it won the “Triple Crown” for science fiction. His creation of cyberspace leads the interaction of humans with technology. The main character

in the novel named Henry Dorsett Case is a hacker who eventually gets into the digitalised system and logs into the Matrix where the copy of his consciousness exists forever. The similar idea of this mind uploading is now an emerging concept in the twenty-first century. Thus the most general background of Cyber literature projects the increasing role of technology in our society.

### Research Objectives

This study highlights how William Gibson’s cyberpunk science fiction *Neuromancer* reflects the impact of technology on culture and demonstrates the increasingly complex relationship between culture and technology which may lead to future subversion.

### Research Question

The study addresses the main research question “what are the ways in which cyberpunk science fictions reflect the relationship between culture and technology?” This question is examined through William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* and its relevance to the contemporary times.

### **Methodology**

The secondary data is used for the research. The Secondary data is collected from William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer*, books, journals, and research articles related to the research topic. The analysis is comparative; it compares the work of William Gibson with the other related literary texts and theories. It also uses the descriptive analysis to show how cyberpunk science fiction highlights the complex relation of technology and future.

### **Neuromancer**

William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* won the 'Triple Crown' award after its publication in 1984 and became a milestone in the cyberpunk writing. At the earlier times, technological concepts in cyberpunk literature are considered to be superficial. Along with the progress of technological development, the fictional ideas of the past came into a realistic picture. In 1984 William Gibson portrayed the merging of humans with technology, which is practiced to a certain extent in the 21st century high-tech world. Play stations, gadgets, virtual games, video conferences, usage of microchips, robots, android, humanoids and etc. are example of technologically developed applications and methods where a person merges into the artificial intelligence through the mode of virtual reality using a computer or other electronic devices. The gradual transformation of virtual world into reality can be seen through this process where the virtual realities stimulate the reality and blur the reality itself. Thus reality is starting to resemble the data-saturated worlds explored in cyberpunk literature. This concept of stimulations is mentioned in Jean Baudrillard's philosophical treatise '*Simulacra and Simulation*' (1981) where he brings in the concept of originality having no value and loses its identity soon after the copy is created by the simulation which is called as simulacra.

Gibson's novel centers on the character called Case. Gibson creates a transpersonal realm where the main character Case gets into a

metaphysical world called as 'cyberspace'. Case in *Neuromancer* represents the present day computer users. His life is dependent on the streams of information in the computer. He spends most of his time immersed into the data networks and plug-in his head into the network and literally merges with the information. Case is a computer hacker who makes his living by breaking into security systems. He gets caught by his employer and his nervous system is damaged as punishment so that he cannot jack into the cyberspace called matrix. After this incident he joins with Armitage who pays his debts and cures his nerve system by exchanging Case's ability of hacking. Finally he gets into the artificial world of matrix. It is in the latter part of the novel Case realizes that he was actually controlled by the artificial intelligence, even though he escapes and comes to the real world, whenever he logs into matrix, he finds the glimpse of himself, his dead girlfriend and *Neuromancer* inside the computer program. He finds out that the copy of his consciousness still exists in the digitalized world. Gibson portrays Case as a trans-human at the beginning of the novel and ends it by portraying Case as a part of technology merging into the world of matrix.

### **Mind uploading / uploading consciousness**

The concepts of merging into computer data are possible to certain extent at the present time scenario. Scientific researches based on the concept of trans-humans, are now creating robots and humanoids having artificial intelligences in a rapid speed. The advancement in the field of information technology presently explores the concepts of uploading and downloading consciousness which were considered to be fictional at the time Gibson wrote his cyberpunk novel. Director of engineering at Google, Ray Kurzweil, claims that people will be able to "upload" their entire brains to computers and

ecome "digitally immortal" by 2045.<sup>6</sup> In the field of science, progress has been made in Brain-computer interfaces (BCI) where the brain's nerve is electronically stimulated to restore sound to help people with hearing problem. Martine Rothblatt, a lawyer, author and entrepreneur, and chief executive officer of a biotech company United Therapeutics Corp has introduced the concept of 'mind-clones'<sup>7</sup> which is a process of 'mind uploading' which digitalises human consciousness into data. Although these concepts are new to the present day scenario it is already proposed by Gibson in his cyberpunk fiction *Neuromancer* where Case has the copy of his consciousness running in the virtual world of matrix which can be connected to him whenever he logs into the system.

The progress of these types of technologies is the stepping stone for the future transformation of our society into the high-tech world. Present society depends vastly on network and digital data. Social networks play a major role in uploading the consciousness even without the knowledge of the user. The unavoidable interface with digital world in the form of social networks such as facebook, twitter and etc. lead a person to update his or her consciousness in the form of status in timeline. This is once again similar to the scenario of Gibson's cyberpunk writing. Similarly computer hackers are also common in the present times. Like Gibson's character Case, there are computer hackers who break into computer networks. The futuristic writing

of William Gibson is not only taking the form of reality, it has gone to the extent of the creation of humanoids. The recent mindboggling creation called BINA 48 is the most advanced humanoid robot in the world. The artificial intelligence is provided to it through the consciousness downloaded from the mindfile of its owner. This is similar to the novel *Neuromancer* where Case has the copy of his conscious mind which is digitalised and uploaded in the computer system which could be accessed whenever logging into the computer. These types of humanoids blur the boundary between humans and machines and merges into cyber culture. This increasingly complex relationship between culture and technology has the tendency to subvert the culture and lifestyle of people in the near future.

### Conclusion

The increasing advancement of technology has a tremendous influence in culture and lifestyle of people. Unlike the past, at the present time, people are vastly depended on computers, mobiles and other electronic devices for various purposes, these gradual processes of merging with the machines are increasing in the present day with the latest inventions of the interface communications with computers and artificial intelligence, social networks and applications which recognize human senses. This type of culture is predicted by a group of cyberpunk writers in 1980s. Among them, William Gibson is the pioneer in explaining the concept of cyber space, where people merge into the electronic data and live in the virtual reality in the digitalized form. In his novel *Neuromancer* he illustrates this idea of cyber space and transferring the consciousness into data files which is used in a virtual village which is controlled by the artificial intelligence. These stimulated cyber space and cyber culture are only considered fictional in 1980s. But it has taken the form of reality with the progress of science and computer technology. Gibson's idea of merging with the computers is the

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<sup>6</sup> "We'll be uploading our entire MINDS to computers by 2045 and our bodies will be replaced by machines within 90 years, Google expert claims". Daily Mail (London). PUBLISHED: 14:22 GMT, 19 June 2013 | UPDATED: 14:22 GMT, 19 June 2013

<sup>7</sup> 'Mind Uploading' & Digital Immortality May Be Reality By 2045, Futurists Say. Live Science | By Tanya Lewis  
Posted: 06/18/2013 9:43 am EDT | Updated: 06/18/2013 9:43 am EDT

emerging concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Converting a person's consciousness into mind-files and uploading it into computers brings in the concept of digitally eternalising a human being in a computerised immortality. The progress of this concept is evident with the creation of the humanoid BINA48.

William Gibson in a way has predicted these types of technological changes in his novel *Neuromancer*. Thus the most general background of Cyber literature projects the increasing and changing roles of technology in our society at the present time.

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