

WILLIAM GIBSON'S *NEUROMANCER* AS CYBERPUNK: A THEMATIC STUDY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* as Cyberpunk: A Thematic Study**” is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr Liza Das. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Ms Paporí Rani Barooah has prepared the thesis entitled “**William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* as Cyberpunk: A Thematic Study**” for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my general supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of her investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati

June 2011

Liza Das

Supervisor



We used to live in the imaginary world of the mirror, of the divided self and of the stage, of otherness and alienation. Today we live in the imaginary world of the screen, of the interface and the reduplication of contiguity and networks. All our machines are screens. We too have become screens, and the interactivity of men has become the interactivity of screens.

Jean Baudrillard

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Preface and Acknowledgements

As a child, science fiction had always fascinated me: the world of aliens, star wars, fantasies in space, everything that seemed so much out of the world, and yet, so much a probability in the future. In fact, my love for science fiction goes back to my childhood days in the hostel when science fiction films were screened and we would squat on mats laid on the floor to watch them. I still remember how I had peered through my fingers covering my face when the 1982 American science fiction film directed by Steven Spielberg, *E.T.*, was screened in my hostel lobby. It was a wonderful visualisation of an ‘other’ world. It was all so alien and all so intriguing.

With the passage of time, a reading of William Gibson’s novels naturally followed and these completely gripped my consciousness. I was a more mature reader now, into college, and I was now face-to-face with a writer who was no longer writing of fantasies in the canvas of the cosmos. His novels, more specifically, *Neuromancer*, opened new vistas of my imagination. No star wars, no aliens. A gripping plot and somewhat challenging language with so many words that were new (that kept me referring back to a dictionary so many times!), kept me hooked to the book for hours, only to come back to it if I had to leave it for a while. Time and again, what struck me as amazing was the fact that Gibson had anticipated the world that we are in and the issues that concern us today. To many, we are today living Gibson’s nightmare. It was so familiar and yet it envisioned so much ahead of even our times that we are left terrified of what the world might come to if this intoxication with technology continues. It was then that I could gauge the importance of *Neuromancer* as a novel

in its own right, and a path breaking one at that, as the first cyberpunk novel. Artificial Intelligence, constructs, implants, RAMs, cyberspace, cyborgs and so much more to think about, to work on – and, more importantly, something so uniquely relevant to the computer age we live in today. I knew that this had to be the author and this the book that would sustain my unflinching interest and motivation throughout an exhaustive endeavour as working toward a doctoral degree. This was what made me decide to work on this one so-very-seminal text in the genre of cyberpunk.

Surprisingly, today, even after completing the study, what is interesting is the fact that there is so much more that one could work on in *Neuromancer*. In fact, this is a text that demands individual attention from all angles. I still have the same fascination for it that I had the first time I read it. But there are other dimensions to it – I still feel that I can write so much more on so many different aspects of the novel.

My perceptions on Gibson were initially personal and rudimentary, inspired by an adolescent fascination for Gibson's unique presentation of cyberspace. These perceptions were given the perfect shade of an academic dissertation by my supervisor Dr. Liza Das at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. She stood by me throughout the entire period of academic exploration, more as a friend, philosopher and guide than as a pedantic supervisor. I would also like to thank her for taking me to task when I happened to falter a bit, without which this dissertation would have taken some more years to complete. I would also like to thank the members of my doctoral committee, Professor Krishna Barua, who was always there whenever I approached her. Her presence during my presentations was indeed an inspiration for she always seemed

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It would be unfair if I do not recall with gratitude the help and support offered to me at every step of my library work by the staff at the Central Library, IIT Guwahati, with a special mention of Pranjit Kr.Thakuria and Chandrika Dutta. I am also thankful to the staff at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, the National Library, Kolkata and at the universities of Guwahati and Hyderabad, India, for their kind help and support. I would also like to thank fellow research scholars of the department, Arpana (for the number of times she received my calls about little inquiries on official schedules and other matters), Sohail Ahmed and Gopal Sarma, and former staff at the department, Surendra Mohan Saloi and Dasarath Das for making things easier during my doctoral years.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my parents for always being there and for motivating me in my moments of weakness. My warmest of gratitude and thanks goes to my father, Dr. K. C. Barooah for being an unfailing support whenever I wanted to do anything in life and to my mother, Bharati Barooah. Ma, I remember every bit of your sacrifice and each of your poems that inspired me to go on in life, and never give up and to carve my way for myself. You are for me the

undefeated soldier of life. I would like to thank my husband, Dr. Biswajit Sarma, who went out of his way to see me through this dream of mine of getting my degree – whether it was with managing the paper work, helping me in editing my files, being with me in all the registration sessions in the institute, and handling my two-year-old. Thank you Biswajit, for inspiring me into the programme and for walking with me all through it, through thick and thin. I would also like to thank my brother, Vedanta Barooah, who, even though was not there physically while I was into the programme, had ‘virtually’ supported from afar (whether be it in the times he had made my computer work through the Internet or when he got me the seminal books I so badly needed during the initial stages in my research). It would be unfair if I did not take this opportunity to thank my mother-in-law, Abala Sharma for being ever supportive.

My warmest love goes to my little son, Ayushmann, who, on many evenings would wait for me in the balcony, looking out with hope that his mom would arrive soon after completing her “A-B-C...”

*Papori Rani Barooah
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Chapter I

Introduction: Cyberpunk, William Gibson and *Neuromancer*

To speak of what a work is about, thematically, is to speak of a unifying thread that binds together incident and character in an illuminating way.

Peter Lamarque

Thematic studies of literature, however conventional they may seem today, have their own critical import and purpose. As Peter Lamarque observes in his engaging book *The Philosophy of Literature* (2009):

In the literary context, 'aboutness' has two applications: at a *subject* level and at a *thematic* level. Every literary work has an immediate subject.... *Macbeth* is about Macbeth's murder of King Duncan and its consequences ... Explication and elucidation are primarily concerned with 'aboutness' at this level ...

Interpretation, in contrast, is concerned with aboutness at a thematic level ... involves identifying a perspective or vision or general reflection that informs the subject matter and moves beyond the immediate events portrayed. (150, original emphases)

The present study of the themes of William Gibson's path breaking cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984) has been undertaken in the spirit of Lamarque's words. For, when the computer networking revolution started, few perhaps imagined that it would usher in a new vision, a transformation in many facets of our lives, be these social, economic, moral, material, or in our attitude towards human life in general and our own lives in particular, and inaugurate a plethora of new themes in literature. Fewer still would have imagined the grave consequences the bit of metal would have on the human psyche – and the way it would change human relationships forever. By the 1980s, technology became a part of human life, particularly in the West, in a manner which would never have been anticipated in the preceding decades. Various inventions and discoveries in all fields of human endeavour gave a dynamic face to human history that was trying to keep pace with the flux resulting from changes in the electronic frontier. While the human race in general was fast getting intoxicated with what these technological breakthroughs were doing to human life, the more sensitive man of literature was writing a type of fiction which presented a world in disarray. The type of fiction they wrote came to be labelled "cyberpunk". Cyberpunk gave a literary shot to the contemporary high-tech culture and went on to become the literary genre of the day. Some prominent names of such science fiction writers in and around this time were William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, Greg Bear and Lewis Shiner. In particular, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) is today seen as a key text of the cyberpunk movement which gave a distinct philosophical vision for the new technological age. Timothy Leary remarks that Gibson "has produced nothing

less than the underlying myth, the core legend, of the next stage of human evolution. He is performing the philosophic function that Dante did for feudalism and that writers like Mann, Tolstoy [and] Melville ... did for the industrial age” (Kellner 298).

Gibson’s fiction reveals a person whose sensitivity was deeply affected by all that he had to face from a very young age. The nomadic life that he lived when his father’s construction job moved him from place to place; Wytheville, where his mother brought him back to with the sudden and untimely death of his father; the boarding school that he went to; his exposure to the Beat writers at the early age of thirteen; his subsequent abandoning of his studies with the death of his mother and his immersion into counterculture. All these had an immense effect on the shy and ungainly young Gibson. Born in 1948 in the coastal city of Conway, South Carolina, he gave up studies at the age of nineteen when his mother died. He married a Vancouver girl in 1972 and settled into family life – he managed their first born while she worked as a teacher. It was only after he took up studies again, joined the University of British Columbia and graduated that he took up writing and wrote his first short story, “Fragments of a Hologram Rose” (1977) –a futuristic story apprehending the affect of computer-simulated reality on human beings, with the themes of hi-tech shantytowns, recorded stimulus and the dystopia that results when man and technology and come together. However, that he always wanted to be a writer is proved by his own words, in an interview given to *New Scientist* (2008): he “wanted nothing more than to be a science fiction writer”. Writing came naturally to this young, shy boy.

Although Gibson's exposure to books happened at a very early age, his formal studies exposed him to various types of fiction and also gave the first taste of science fiction. It was around the same time that Gibson was attracted towards the punk culture which laid the seeds of his cyberpunk fictions. His confidence as a writer was boosted by one man who went on to play a major influence in his life – John Shirley. While John Clute, in *The Cambridge Guide to Science Fiction*, uses the term 'noir' to characterize cyberpunk, it was Shirley who not only stimulated the writer in Gibson but also provided proper ground for the full flowering of him as the 'noir prophet'. He introduced him to the pioneers of the cyberpunk movement, Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner. When Gibson heard Sterling read out the first cyberspace short story, "Burning Chrome" in a science fiction convention in Denver, Colorado in 1981, it was inspiration enough. In a year's time, in 1982, Gibson was sharing the panel with Shirley, Sterling and Shiner in Austin, Texas, called "Behind the Mirrorshades: A Look at Punk SF" where Gibson mentioned, "a new axis has been formed" (quoted in Shiner). Now, cyberpunk was taking the shape of a literary movement and Sterling, Shiner, Shirley and Gibson formed its hard core. The stories that followed had one thematic obsession that was very prominent – the mixing of low life and high technology. These stories were identified to be the best cyberpunk works of fiction and "undoubtedly [cyberpunk's] best works" and the "furthest horizon" in the genre (in Suvin 33).

With the Vietnam War, Gibson fled to Canada in the late 1960s to be always there. In the 1980s, he wrote short stories with a noir feel and they appeared in *Omni* and *Universe II*/ In 1985, Gibson wrote a short story, "The

Winter Market” and used the city as a setting to use it again in *Spook Country* (2007). His short story collection, *Burning Chrome* (1982) can be seen as a preparation for the work he is best recognised for — *Neuromancer*. Even after *Neuromancer*, Gibson’s writing developed stylistically with *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). These three novels shared the same characters and are set in the same universe of the Sprawl and is referred to as the Sprawl trilogy. Then followed *The Difference Engine* (1990), written in collaboration with Bruce Sterling which is often referred to as the central novel of the steampunk genre. The next three novels form the Bridge trilogy, *Virtual Light* (1993), *Idoru* (1996) and *All Tomorrow’s Party* (1999) where the focus shifts from the AIs and megacorporations of the Sprawl trilogy to the media and the life of a celebrity. These were followed *Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007), and *Zero History* (2010) which are set in the contemporary universe.

Gibson’s *Neuromancer* uses new concepts that were emerging in the scientific scenario in the 1980s as Artificial Intelligence (AI), constructs and cyborgs in cyberspace or matrix, the use of bodily modifications as implants and prostheses and subtly handles the understanding of time and space. It plays with concepts like real and virtual time and real and virtual spaces. For the major part of the novel, the plane of action is cyberspace. The characters in the novel move from one plane of existence to another – shuffling between a virtual life in cyberspace and a real life in the physical world. While the transition from one plane of existence to the other seems smooth sailing, the one tool for access into cyberspace is a specialised form of knowledge available to only a few. Information is the most important commodity in this

world of cyberspace and the matrix can be seen as a superhighway of information. According to Inge Erickson in her *Foundation* article, “The Aesthetics of Cyberpunk,” as quoted information is the lifeblood of cyberpunk (40); one might add that information is simply a commodity to be traded, preferably outside official channels. The cyborg is the protagonist who uses implants and may be seen as the next evolutionary stage of the human – a mechanised human being, who is part human and part machine, though the line of difference between the man and the machine is negligible.

One of the earliest tests that opened infinite possibilities of a new interface between the human being and technology was in what N. Katherine Hayles in her “Prologue” to *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) refers to as “at the inaugural moment of the computer age” (xi). It was Alan Turing’s Turing Test (1950) – that challenged the distinction between intelligent man and intelligent machine, and, on failure to do so, he argued considered machines capable of thinking. Its attempts at nullifying the importance of embodiment or rather postulating for “the erasure of embodiment” propagated the idea of intelligence being a property of “the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human life-world.” Henceforth, the scientists tried their best to generate and manipulate informational patterns. In the words of Hayles, “The Turing test was to set the agenda for artificial intelligence for the next three decades ... Aiding this process was a definition of information, formalized by Claude Shannon and Norbert Wiener, that conceptualized information as an entity distinct from the substrates carrying it” (xi-xii). This was modified with information being a sort of a “bodiless fluid that could flow between different substrates without loss of meaning or form” (xi). The next stage in the

development of concepts related to the human-computer interface was the Moravec test which proposed that human identity is essentially an informational pattern. Hans Moravec, in *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988) gave the idea of downloading human consciousness into the computer and hence the corollary idea that machines can become a repository of human consciousness – that “machines can, for all practical purposes become, human beings.” In this context, Hayles makes an important observation, “You are the cyborg, and the cyborg is you” (xii). Studies on embodiment reveal thought to be a broad cognitive function that depends for its specifications on embodiment. Hayles considers this realisation as transforming the liberal subject into the posthuman and she goes on to make an observation in the end of the prologue to the book: “As you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman” (xiv).

Thus, one major acceptance in the very beginning of this study is the realisation that the human is no longer a “historically specific construction,” (2) but rather making way towards a another construction called the posthuman. Going with Hayles, we thus can agree that we are living in a cultural moment whose defining characteristic is the belief that “information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates” (1). In this union of man and intelligent machine, which is a common theme in most posthuman articulations, and in what Hayles calls “the construction of the cyborg,” we have “informational pathways connecting the organic body to its prosthetic extensions.” This interface between human and technology is fictionalised in

Neuromancer. We have information disembodied and as an entity that can “flow between carbon-based organic components and silicon-based components to make protein and silicon operate in a single system” (2). Thus, now, information loses its body conveniently uniting the human and the computers. As Hayles opines, this union of the human with the intelligent machine is a common theme between the liberal humanist subject and the posthuman subject. In fact, Hayles even goes on to state that all the transformations that take place in the making of the posthuman are not necessarily complete transformations but rather they “reinscribed traditional ideas and assumptions even as they articulated something new” (6).

These explorations on man, machine, embodiment, subjectivity, and artificial life can be said to have been initiated and given a proper and formal foundation with the annual Macy Conferences on Cybernetics (1943-1954) where distinguished researchers as Norbert Wiener, John von Neumann, Claude Shannon, Warren McCulloch and many others met. They aimed at forging a new paradigm – at looking at the human being in a new way: “[h]enceforth, humans were to be seen primarily as information-processing entities who were essentially similar to intelligent machines” (Hayles 7). This brings us to the world of computer simulations and computer-mediated environments with which we associate the concept of virtuality, that “put the body back onto the feedback loop with a computer-generated image” (14). This is the body that works in the virtual world of information – cyberspace, matrix or the world of the networked society.

While the intellectual origins of the idea of a network society can be traced back to early social theorists as Georg Simmel, the term “network

society” was coined by Jan van Dijk in his book *The Network Society* (1991) and by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996). Other related names in the area are those of James Martin, Barry Wellman, Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff. Castells has done considerable work in this sphere and refers to it as “a historical trend [where] dominant functions and processes are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture” (469). Lauren Langman and Douglas Morris in “Globalization, Alienation, and Identity: A Critical Approach” (2003) refer to the globalized system and the emergence of cyberspace as having a “profound impact on governance, the polity, culture, various realms of subjectivity, and identity” (1).

As a natural outcome of the formation of the networked society we have the emergence of what Kazys Varnelis calls “network culture” in *Networked Publics* (2008). Varnelis points at a real, radical shift in society towards the network and argues that this dominant cultural logic has triggered a mutation in our economy, public sphere, and culture and has affected even our subjectivity. The sense of the network and its importance in our lives was brought into the popular awareness with the publication of *Neuromancer* as pointed out by Pau C. Adams in “Cyberspace and Virtual Places” (1997): “Since *Neuromancer* first appeared, the feasibility and social recognition of networking have increased, and the electronic-frontier metaphor has worked its way into even the discourses of academia.” The network is referred to as the “Information Superhighway” in Ralph Smith *The Wired Nation* (1972), the

first to conceive of it as an “electronic highway system” who describes it as “a new interstate highway system” (in Welsch). Referring back to the words of Hayles, living in these conditions, “of virtuality implies we participate in the cultural perception that information and materiality are conceptually distinct and that information is in some sense more essential, more important, and more fundamental than materiality” (18). With these changes coming into the human thought process, we are now nearly almost ready to be presented with an entity who is neither man nor machine and who leads his life crossing frontiers – between the real world of everyday and the world of simulation in cyberspace, accessed only through the network. Sherry Turkle in *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995) considers issues as these along with complementary issues that emerge with the idea of the network society - an alternative identity, an alternative lifestyle as an option where one can live a life of fantasies complicating traditional concepts of identity, morality, society and politics for now we move on from “a linear view of personal history to multiple histories, a pastiche of parallel selves evolving on separate courses” (in Adams). Turkle credits the network society with allowing people to indulge in fantasies without guilt or discomfort, for it is all on the interface and after that one is back again into one’s own self.

I

Situating *Neuromancer* in Cyberpunk

Neuromancer was perhaps the earliest of science fictions to have anticipated it all – the formation of an identity without a body, virtual identity, the alter ego, the struggle to master new technologies, the associated and

interlinked corollary challenges of preserving social justice in a space without laws, questions of traditional morality and ethics. These and other related themes taken up in the present study place Gibson and *Neuromancer* much ahead of their times – foreseeing a time in future where man has to handle these conflicts warring with the perpetual flux that characterises the electronic frontier.

When Gibson fictionalised the network society, he used the term cyberspace. He introduces this word in the very beginning of *Neuromancer* and calls it “the consensual hallucination” and the “matrix” (5). Critics like Michael Benedikt in “Cyberspace” (2002) refer to it as an “unhappy word” (29) because of the desperate picture of the future that it portrays where life is nothing but the power of the corporate world, urban decay, neural implants. However, he too admits that cyberspace is a new stage as technology touches human lives. He calls it a “mental geography” and a “parallel universe created and sustained by the world’s computers and communication lines” which is without limit, which is everywhere and nowhere, “a place where nothing is forgotten and yet everything changes” (1). Gibson refers to it as a “no-space” (*Neuromancer* 5), a place where communication is through textual and visual representations and where no laws of physics apply. As Moser and MacLeod suggest in *Immersed in Technology* (1996), it is a space created by interface technology which translates digital data into a world that can be experienced by the human sensorium, solely within the mental realm, the headspace.

In an interview with Dan Josefsson, Gibson himself elaborated on the concept of cyberspace:

Cyberspace is a metaphor that allows us to grasp this place where since about the time of the Second World War we've increasingly done so many of the things that we think of as civilization. Cyberspace is where we do our banking; it's actually where the bank keeps your money these days because it's all direct electronic transfer. It's where the stock market actually takes place, it doesn't occur so much anymore on the floor of the exchange but in the electronic communication between the world's stock-exchanges.

Gibson calls it "an expression" that will make it easier to visualise all that is happening digitally and electronically. He too refers to cyberspace as a territory where geography no longer exists. There are yet others, for instance, Voller in "Neuromanticism" (1993), who posit cyberspace to have aesthetic and sublime dimensions and analyse it in terms of a post-Longinian sublime. Voller sees Gibson's matrix as the next step in aesthetic evolution which succeeds in filling up the void called infinity with human constructs and mega corporations and bringing it down from its mysterious place among the clouds to be squeezed into the interface between the human mind and the computer terminal. In the words of Paul Alkon, writing in "Deus Ex Machina in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy" (1992):

William Gibson's cyberspace is an effective and original symbol of human involvement with machines, not only in ways that threaten apocalypse but in ways that break down the hitherto reassuring physical, psychological, and philosophical boundaries between human and mechanical existence (76).

In more recent times, “A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age” (1994) by Dyson et. al refers to cyberspace as “a bioelectronic environment” that is “literally universal” and is “inhabited” by knowledge in electronic form where one can add to and retrieve information infinitely. In a bold statement in “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,” J. P. Barlow (1996) declares the emergence of the new man in cyberspace:

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.

We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear ... Cyberspace does not lie within your borders Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live. We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth ... We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity ... There is no matter here. Our identities have no bodies ... The only law that all our constituent cultures would generally recognize is the Golden Rule ... We must declare our virtual selves immune to your sovereignty, even as we continue to consent to your

rule over our bodies. We will spread ourselves across the Planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts.

This declaration challenged to create “a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace” which it hoped would be fairer than any other form of government in the world. The related concept that emerges with the concept of cyberspace or the possibilities of an alternate landscape of existence is the possibility of processing and acquiring an alternate identity – a virtual identity. These virtual worlds of the cyberpunk novels are centered on functionality and with the ready availability of bodily adaptations and modifications with implants and prostheses, the physical proofs of identity do not hold any longer. Traditional markers of identity as gender, nationality, names and appearances are all portable as it is “an age of affordable beauty” (*Neuromancer* 4). There are all possibilities of the identity being a completely fabricated *avatar*, of being “digital representations (or manifestations) of someone who was already alive, already human, and in that sense already someone who thinks” (Stevens 414). In this world of virtual reality the markers of true human identity no longer seem authentic, because there are non-humans who can adopt equally human characteristics, human-like intelligence and anything that has been known to be uniquely human before the development of the computer. Many of the characters in *Neuromancer* are modified for their function and purpose in the novel and hence there always remains a possibility of someone else like them being available. Their functionality becomes all important in the world that cyberpunk novels create. In the words of Nicole Smith: “In the midst of this world of digitally reproduced “human” intelligence, the fight to define the self must obviously manifest itself in the way so many characters seek to show

who they are with products or through the rampant buying of modifications of the body and mind” (2). Perhaps, true identity does not exist or is concealed in the entire novel in *Neuromancer*. This theme is taken up from another angle by Kerstin Dautenhahn who in “The physical body in Cyberspace: at the edge of extinction?” discusses what happens to the body in cyberspace. He refers to the word cyberspace and calls it a metaphor “for a world where the human body only plays a minor role, where we are in danger of becoming a creature without a body, experiencing things by direct stimulation of the nervous system, where we will lose the sense for reality and get lost as a virtual creature in a virtual world.” These themes are fictionalised in cyberpunk, and the first to make it popular in the mind of the reader was *Neuromancer* where Gibson presents a godless world in a technological near-future.

Going by accepted etymology, “cyberpunk” was a word coined by the American author, Bruce Bethke in his short story “Cyberpunk” (1983). He derived a part of the word from the word “cybernetics”- a control theory that studies human/machine interaction and is often used in connection with information technology. Cybernetics is a term coined by Norbert Wiener’s *Cybernetics, or control and communication in the animal and machine* (1948) from ‘kubernetes’ the Greek word for ‘steersman’. The ‘punk’ part of the word is almost always left out owing to its obvious associations with music and fashion: it also refers to a peculiar sensibility that is characterised by the nihilistic sensibility developed in the youth culture in the 1970s and the ’80s which suggested everything urban and anti-establishment. It has, however, another side to it too. Although as early as 1928, punk referred to a criminal, later the word began to generally mean a person who revolts against an

oppressive world and who does not hesitate to break the rules if the breaking assures him a place in society. But the person who made the word “cyberpunk” familiar among the fiction readers was Gardner Dozois the renowned editor of Asimov’s *Science Fiction Magazine* who used the term as an insult to describe a “a self-willing aesthetic school” of science fiction in the December 30, 1984 issue of the *Washington Post*, viz., Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, and Rudy Rucker. He referred to them as “purveyors of bizarre hard-edged high-tech stuff.” (in Melichova). *Neuromancer* got labelled as cyberpunk and its success and its awards were reason enough to stick the name first to the Movement and then to the genre. The very fact that the book had similarities with the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* (1982) further made the circulation of the term “cyberpunk” easier. Takayum Tatsumi in “Comparative Metafiction: Somewhere Between Ideology and Rhetoric” (1997) states:

Despite the author's denials of specific influences, there were undeniable parallels between *Blade Runner's* depiction of androids in punk fashion and Japanesque imageries haunting Los Angeles in 2019 and *Neuromancer's* representation of neurotic, punked-out cyborgs interacting with human beings in an extremely dead-tech Japanese cityscape. (7).

And according to Lawrence Person in “Notes Towards a Postcyberpunk Manifesto” (1998):

Classic cyberpunk characters were marginalized, alienated lovers who lived on the edge of society in generally dystopic futures where daily life was impacted by rapid technological change, an ubiquitous

datasphere of computerized information, and invasive modification of the human body.

However, there is a wide range in the time frame, the landscapes and the endings that a cyberpunk fictionalises making it difficult to pin down the characteristics of a cyberpunk. In cyberpunk, the usual setting is an urban future and it includes characters as cyborgs, hackers, AIs usually belonging to the lower rungs of society fighting for their survival in a world dominated by mega-corporations. They are placed in life circumstances where they have little or no choice. We can refer to the description of a cyberpunk setting in the game Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0:

The Cyberpunk environment is almost exclusively urban. Its landscape is a maze of towering skyscrapers, burned out ruins, dingy tenements and dangerous alleyways ... Taxis won't stop in the combat zones. There are firefights at the street corner as the local gangs slug it out ... And it always rains ... The stars never come out. The sun never shines. There are no singing birds, no laughing children ... The ozone layer decayed, the greenhouse effect took over, the sky is full of hydrocarbons and the ocean full of sludge. (Moss 176)

Cyberpunk heroes emerge as antiheroes whose struggles are directed not to achieve the epic victory of good over evil, annihilating the subtle differences between what is good and what is evil. Rather, the characters are portrayed as intelligent human beings placed in oppressive world conditions where they use their skill and intelligence to survive, and it is this intelligence and skill that privileges them over the mega corporations to a great extent. An important facet of cyberpunk is the author's successful attempt at making the reader

experience the discomfort of the protagonist in the inevitable life circumstances that s/he finds her/himself in. It is a disturbing look at what technology can do to the human being and the society they live in. Thomas Pynchon also centralises his novels on the underdogs, misfit and dissenters in the society and calls them “preterite” – a reference to those living with no hopes of redemption. This is the punk element in cyberpunk novels (see *Gravity’s Rainbow*). Cyberpunk novels appear dark and dystopian and fictionalise a very grim and threatening vision of the future which is not only dominated by technology but also one in which technology invades the human body with prostheses and implants. But, the dystopia and sad endings are not the prevalent moods in all cyberpunk fiction and the depressing grim setting is not the unifying factor – many of Gibson’s later cyberpunk, for instance, *Virtual Light* (1993) often ends in a happy mood. It would not be wrong to state that in a cyberpunk, there is no attempt at any analysis of the world situation. Bruce Sterling writing in his “Preface and Editorial Comments” to *Mirrorshades* (1986), calls cyberpunk, “an unholy alliance of the technical world and the world of organized descent” (xii). Cyberpunk has led to the rise of a new community – of hackers or crackers, a reference to those who have expertise in accessing computer systems by breaking the security system, and preakers, for experimenting and breaking into public telephone networks. It is a place for the activity of people who have similar concerns and obsessions – strangers who form a community in the virtual space, a virtual community.

Gareth Branwyn in “Cut-and-Paste Manifesto: A ‘C-Word’ Sampler” (1998) collects definitions and reviews of authors viz., Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, William Gibson, Mark Downham. In this sampler, cyberpunk has

been referred to as endless skimming where the real, the virtual, the artificial, the machine - all seek a re-invention and a re-definition and which offers individuals infinite mind-cultures to form their own pocket universes. Now, the computer becomes more than just an object and as Branwyn states, it becomes “an icon and a metaphor that suggests new ways of thinking about ourselves and our new environments, new ways of constructing images of what it means to be human.” With cyberpunk we have a technical revolution reshaping our society – decentralized and fluid in its foundations; no geographical frontiers rather “micro-electronic territories” where stratification of society is on the basis of data that one has access to. The *Times* magazine dated February 8, 1993, in an essay entitled, “Cyberpunk!” refers to cyberpunk thus: “It’s a way of looking at the world that combines an infatuation with high-tech tools and a disdain for conventional ways of using them,” people who are obsessed with “technology that is just beyond their reach” (Elmer-Dewitt and Jackson 1).

Cyberculture is a unique set of habits, values and other elements of culture that are evolved from the use of computers and the Internet. Jakub Macek in “Defining Cyberculture” (2004) discusses cyberculture and distinguishes between early and contemporary cyberculture, referring back to a number of critics who have tried to analyse and discuss this ambiguous term. While there are some who refer to it as initial discussions on the hacker’s subculture in the 1980s and early 1990s, (for instance, see Dery; Rushkoff) as some kind of futuristic regeneration of society (see Hawk), the culture of the information society. One of the most influential studies on cyberculture is by Pierre Levy. In his book, *Cyberculture* (2000), refers to the term

'cyberculture' as a Barlowian cyberspace – a subterm to the Gibsonian cyberspace as used by J.P. Barlow in "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" (1996). The changes in the Internet result in new knowledge and new ways of knowledge distribution which change the way we manipulate information as well as the society we live in. Levy considers cyberculture to be synonymous with this change, referring to the "set of techniques (material and intellectual), practical habits, attitudes, ways of thinking and values that develop mutually with cyberspace" (15), and embodying "a new form of universality: universality without totality" (105). Macek refers to Levy and argues that "for Lévy this new universality symbolizes the peak of the Enlightenment project of humanity – the humanity of free, empowered subjects oppressed neither by the power of the unity of language and meaning nor by unified and binding forms of social being." There are yet others (see for instance Morse) who refer to cyberculture as a set of cultural practices which enable us to deal with new forms of information. In simpler terms, all discussion on the concept of cyberculture hinges on cybernetics, robotics and informatics and how culture/society and new technologies are interrelated. The present study devotes an entire chapter to the discussion of society and culture of the people logged on to cyberspace with reference to *Neuromancer*.

There are many critics who argue cyberpunk to be a distinct genre by itself. For instance, Larry McCaffery, the editor of *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk & Postmodern Science Fiction* (1992), does not limit cyberpunk to science fiction but puts it in the context of postmodern literature and 1980s popular culture and credits it with exploring the resources of a fragmentary culture to create a startling new form. McCaffery confirms

the literary impact and significance in his “The Fiction of the Present” (1988), an essay on contemporary American fiction and credits Gibson with the introduction of a new form of realism:

Gibson’s *Neuromancer* describes a punked-out, high-tech world of cyber realities, tribal jungles operating on society’s marginalized fringes, and dizzying labyrinths of images reflecting human desires that are endlessly replicated in mirrors and computers; yet for all its exoticism, *Neuromancer* offers a compelling vision of the way technology has *already affected* our lives. (in Tatsumi 7)

Istan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. in “The Sentimental Futurist: Cybernetics and Art in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*” (1992) calls Gibson “one of the most inventive and ambitious artists in SF” and cites *Neuromancer* as successfully mixing “hard SF and scintillating lyric” concerned more with “art, in overt and subtle ways.” Others like Gary Westfahl see strong connections and underlying structures that link cyberpunk to the science fiction tradition. He draws parallels between Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Hugo Gernsback’s *Ralph 124C 41+*, the most representative of older science fiction in “The Gernsback Continuum’: William Gibson in the Context of Science Fiction” published in George Slusser, and Tom Shippey’s edited *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of the Narrative* (1992). He finds Bruce Sterling contradicting himself for while Sterling tries to draw the link between cyberpunk and previous science fiction by tracing the roots of cyberpunk to be “deeply sunk in the sixty-year tradition of modern popular SF” by calling it “not an invasion but a modern reform” (xv); on the other hand, he credits Gibson with reinvigorating a genre that was “confused, self-involved and stale” (preface to *Burning*

Chrome, ix, xii). Sterling argues that “times have changed since the comfortable era of Hugo Gernsback” (*Mirrorshades* xiii). This is what Westfahl disagrees with along with Sterling’s assertion that science fiction of the 1970s was “confused, self- involved, stale”. He gives a list of enthusiastic writers – Hugo Gernsback’s the first science fiction pulp magazine, *Amazing Stories* (1926), Everett C. Smith and R.F.Starzl’s “The Metal Moon”(1932), the twelve author space epic Carl Sagan’s *Cosmos* (1980), C.M.Kornbluth and Frederik Pohl, Earl and Otto Binder to name a few. He accuses Sterling of misreading Gibson’s second published story, “The Gernsback Continuum” (1981) and calling it “a devastating refutation” of science fiction. Rather Westfahl discerns in his reading of the story, Gibson’s tribute: “... Gernsback Continuum of the story is science fiction itself; that Gibson is arguing that the original vision of Gernsback continues to exist today as a force affecting that genre; and that Gibson is enthusiastically joining the tradition, not rejecting it” (90). He further analyses *Neuromancer* in terms of the critical theories of Gernsback: keeping up with Gernsback’s theory, the protagonist, Henry Case too is technologically sound and passive in the beginning but someone who, in the end, gives up the “technological network” (91) that sustains him. This ambivalence towards the importance of connectedness and the loss of personal freedom was already seen in Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth’s *The Space Merchants* (1953) and John Brunner’s *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968). Further, both Gernsback’s *Ralph* and Gibson’s *Neuromancer* show pessimism about the future and optimism about an intelligent life in general. This is characteristic of science ficiton (see Simak). They are both happy in their isolation, Ralph 124C 41+ as “tool” in his laboratory and Case in cyberspace, looking at

human beings as “meat thing” (*Neuromancer* 77). However, as the novels progress both heroes are transformed and react with strong emotions towards their love lives.

Unlike Sterling’s accusation that Gernsback pictures the scientist as someone in his “ivory tower, who showers the blessings of superscience upon the hoi polloi,” Ralph 124C 41+, as Westfahl argues, develops the spirit of rebelliousness associated with cyberpunk, like a part of “a pirate’s crew of losers, hustlers, spin-offs, castoffs, and lunatics” (Sterling xi). Similarly, Case displays moments of outbreak of anger as when Wintermute kills the agents or when he is determined to save Molly. A similar rebelliousness is displayed in Robert Heinlein’s *The Door into Summer* (1957). Ralph 124C 41+ already communicates in and out of the human brain in the novel, the “powerful theme of mind invasion,” (Sterling xiii), which Sterling had attributed to cyberpunk fiction. Further, both heroes break into sudden explanatory passages of the scientific paraphernalia – putting Gibson in the same exploratory tradition of science fiction as defined by Gernsback and followed by authors like Arthur C. Clarke, Issac Asimov, Frank Herbert: “[t]hus, the nagging, intrusive voice of the compulsive explainer is one trait that unites Gibson with his predecessors” (Westfahl 93). Westfahl however credits Gibson with uniting all the isolated connecting devices in one medium – cyberspace – and more intensely fictionalising a realisation – that though science may alleviate the fundamental difficulties in human existence, it cannot solve them, suggesting that there is no “technological fix for the human condition” (Benford). Westfahl places Gernsback in the beginning of the continuum – the modern

tradition of science fiction launched by Gernsback and Gibson at the other end.

Carol McGuirk in “The ‘New’ Romancers: Science Fiction Innovators from Gernsback to Gibson” (1992) discusses hard and soft science fiction and also the ambivalence that writers and readers have towards the genre and towards cyberpunk. Hard science fiction emphasises on technical or scientific accuracy or on both and was termed in 1957 by P. Schuyler Miller in a review of John W. Campbell, Jr.’s *Islands of Space* (1957) in *Astounding Science Fiction*. Soft science fiction as a term appeared in the 1970s and early 1980s and referred to the social sciences like anthropology, sociology, psychology. It is more concerned with issues like character, society etc. “It seems beyond doubt that traditional hard science fiction and the cyberpunks share a tendency to place technology in the foreground” (McGuirk 111). Yet, we find a subtle difference in its handling – Gibson undercuts the tradition through irony and his cyberpunk focuses on technology the way it influences human destiny and has the power to “gratify human desire” (113). While hard science fiction directs outward towards “space and time” (114), Gibson, in cyberpunk directs inwards towards the fulfilment of “often self destructive private dreams” and applies technology to “individual brains and body parts” and “opens up the possibility of speculation about a melding of mechanical and human ‘character’” (115). Yet, in his preoccupation with characterisation, Gibson can be linked with the soft science fiction movement in the later years like Alfred Bester, Fritz Leiber, Ray Bradbury. McGuirk takes up the element of heroism and renders it irrelevant by its earlier definition of “heroism, defined as the capacity of individuals to change the world and command their destiny” and

posits that soft science fiction talks about a prevalent social malaise that renders the characters in the novel ineffective – capable of insight but incapable of “significant action”. He names its practitioners as Alfred Bester and Robert Silverberg, calls it this second soft subgenre “*SF noir*” and links it to Gibson’s cyberpunk”: no extrapolation of social malaise, no reform instituted or no analysis facilitated. “The nurturing of impaired people by a bad society is used not so much for social criticism as for atmosphere and dramatic stylization.” The central focus is on “psychic mutilation, used to set a stylized atmosphere”(118). McGuirk states the relation of science fiction noir and Gibson’s cyberpunk thus: “In William Gibson’s cyberpunk variations on science fiction noir, psychic wounds lead some characters (the psychotic Armitage/Corot, the sadistic Riviera) to grotesque compensations akin to Gully Foyle’s, or to those of the homicidal androis in Bester’s story “Fondly Fahrenheit” (1954). He argues that while Gibson parodies hard science fiction’s technological positivism, and humanistic science fiction’s emphasis on heroes and villains, he handles the new wave’s cult of “lettered sophistication” (120) by ironically recycling old forms and old sentences, relies on clichés for a “ironic rendition of the genre’s history” (121).

II

Review of Literature

Gibson’s novels have attracted critical attention from the time they were first published in the forms of reviews, essays, contributions to volumes on cybernetics and cyberpunk and a few dissertations on the author and his novels for instance, (see Melichova; Meyer). His novels, mainly

Neuromancer, have inspired many more similar productions in the same genre. However, considering the stature of the novelist and the significance of his work, particularly *Neuromancer*, for the later generations of novel writers, it cannot be denied that in-depth critical studies particularly on the themes in *Neuromancer* have not been made. The following review of literature will consider some of the major interventions made by critics and commentators – cybercriticism, William Gibson and *Neuromancer*.

The American mathematician Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (1948) gave us the term *cybernetics*, and inspired a generation of scientists to consider the computer as a means to extend human capabilities. With him, cybernetics emerged as a distinct discipline that also had elements of electrical engineering, mathematics, biology, neurophysiology, anthropology, and psychology. Since then, there have been many thinkers working on cyborgs, AI, cybernetics, the intelligence of machines. These thinkers, however, did not necessarily use the term and Wiener discusses how authors of cybernetics look at the evolution of AI as metaphor and a structuring device in twentieth century fiction.

David Bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicholas Pleace and Douglas Schuler's edited *Cyberculture: The Key Concepts* (2004) can be viewed as a specialised dictionary which establishes an individual and particular vocabulary for a new cultural area of study, an area which has been successful in affecting our daily lives in the twenty first century. In this book, several established authors in the fields of cultural, information and network society, virtual communities studies have set a goal to summarise the basic terminology used in literature

discussing the impact of the digital technology on media and human interaction under the term “cyberculture”. Ironically, however, they escape explaining the term “cyberculture” in detail and call it “a contested and evolving discourse” (xiii). The book is useful as an explanation of a number of terms and jargons related to computer networking, the Internet, and related concepts with the prefix “cyber-”. It helps the reader to make sense of the new technologies and their uses in various environments.

David Bell’s *An Introduction to Cybercultures* (2001) aims at an academic audience, adopts a conversational style, and makes for an interesting reading with references to personal anecdotes. It looks at the future when cyberspace will witness a confluence of culture and technology, of economies and information, of politics and communities, of bodies and virtualities. Hayles’ ideas about the posthuman, Donna Haraway’s essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1991) the work of the performance artist Stelarc, and the Larry and Andy Wachowski’s directed, 1999 science fiction action movie, *The Matrix*, are examined for their inquiry into the future role of the body in culture. He not only questions the ownership of the body, but also hints at the replacement or cohabitation of the flesh of/with AIs. It introduces us to technical and economic developments of the Internet, Web and cyberspace, covers the images of cyberspace in popular culture and art, overviews how people experience the advent of various means of communication technologies and appropriate or incorporate them in their everyday life besides giving us the definition of the basic concepts, introducing us to the central theories used by the different authors, the hopes and threats that new technologies bring into our life and issues of embodiment and disembodiment in cyberspace. It can be

said to examine a new type of community – the cyber community. The book can be viewed as an initial introductory material, with a good glossary at the end of the book together with the reference lists of articles in Bell et al. (2002) and references to a number of web sites for further reading.

In her *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) Donna Haraway writes about the cyborg with its digital identity which is making its presence known in today's society. In her path breaking essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Haraway not only introduces the term 'cyborg' as a condensed image of both the imagination and the material reality but also creates the Cyborg Theory – a theory that criticises traditional notions of feminism and its strong emphasis on identity rather than affinity. She calls the cyborg the "illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism" (152) which occupies much of the space in contemporary science fiction. These are creatures which are simultaneously animal and machine. Haraway's essay remains one of the most significant discussion of the many forms and uses of the cyborg. She opines,

A Cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of science fiction ... [W]e are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism. In short we are all cyborgs. (291-2)

Haraway is constructing an argument for the cyborg as a fictional mapping of our bodily and social reality. To start this argument she states that the cyborg is a condensed image of both the imagination and the material reality, an image that merges technology and humans together obscuring the idea of

identity. A similar situation occurs as a result of participation on the Internet, when humans are working to establish a digital identity. In the 'real' world we call these relationships and in the 'virtual' world we can call them digital identities.

Benjamin Woolley in *Virtual Worlds: A Journey in Hype and Hyperreality* (1993) examines how real is virtual reality, the turns in the events that gave birth to the concept, the people associated with it right from the beginning and how its development in the recent times have affected society at large. He gives subtle overtones of the manipulations of a group of technologists and thinkers in its promotion and the questions of politics and culture that evolved with it. This book attempts to look at whether scientific inquiry is objective and value free and it can be seen as a collection of science issues published in the *Listener Magazine* and for the BBC. It can also be seen as a survey of recent technological, scientific, and philosophical developments in virtual reality with a discussion on how the computer can generate simulated life-like experiences.

C.H. Gray in *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (2001) dwells on the fast growing synergy between humans and technology and its effects on society, the people, their attitudes, the politics involved etc. The author seems to accept the existence of the cyborg as an unavoidable reality and the necessity of redefining society taking into account the rights of the human and the cyborg. He also refers to "posthuman" politics, and key issues linked with the changes that technology is doing to our lives. Issues connected with cloning, sexual prostheses, gene patents are looked at taking into consideration how they are redefining life, death, and family. We are made to

seriously concern ourselves with the possibility of the cyborg gaining control over the human being. Gray hints at participatory evolution and the necessity of a rich understanding of the historical and ethical significance of these issues.

Cybercriticism can be said to have emerged in the early 1990s with the media and computer revolution after WWII – especially with the introduction of HyperText Mark-up Language (html) and the World Wide Web in the 1980s and 1990s. Around this time, there was a considerable amount of publication of cyberpunk and hypertext fiction along with an attempt to theorize the influence of hypertextuality on literature and literary studies. The term “cybercriticism” was coined by Ted Nelson in 1965 with theories of deconstruction, ideas of intertextuality, decentering and Bakhtin’s mutlivocality, narratology and New Historicism and Cultural Criticism at the background. These theories open up a world where we have the text as open or borderless and an effacement of the distinction between textual, graphic, sound and other information. Hypertext is a ‘*site*’ consisting of electronic links connecting verbal and nonverbal information.

Thomas Foster in *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Post-humanism as Vernacular Theory* (2005) looks at cyberpunk in a whole new light – as giving a framework of considering how culture, at large, and issues of gender, sexualities, and ethnic and racial differences are affected by the changes in the new technologies. Now, everything has been denaturalization due to technology in our lives and this book also outlines the current research on the posthuman along earlier work on embodiment, technology, and cyberpunk and

the more subtle issues of the changes that come into concepts of race, gender and sexuality in virtual reality.

Joanna Zylińska in *The Cyborg Experiments: The Extensions of the Body in the Media* (2002) analyses some of the challenges posed to corporeality by technology. This book takes as its starting point the work of performance artists Orlan and Stelarc and questions some new conceptions of embodiment, identity and otherness in the age of new technologies. This book raises intriguing questions as to whether our bodies have become obsolete, whether we have always been cyborgs, with and some hints at the future of sexuality in the hi-tech age. Some attempts are also made to investigate ethical issues concerning the ownership of our bodies and the experiments we perform on them. The ideas of the 'human', has now been placed under increasing scrutiny with the changes and developments brought about by technology.

Mark Dery's *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (1996) is one of the first critical enquiries into cyberculture. It gives us a vision of things to come and can be seen as an inaugural reading for cyber studies and cybersculture. Dery uses the concept as a metaphor for what is happening to the many memes – concept viruses – of the on-line and turned-on and their relation to the greater society. Dery looks into concepts as body sculpting, man machine merger, either virtually or prosthetically, transhuman growth etc. It discusses the cyber revolution sparked off by the home computer and the corollary issues of cyber community (which is less than thirty years old), the future cybernauts and cyberpunks. Dery looks at

proponents of cyberculture like William Gibson, Mark Pauline , Hans Moravec, Pat Cadigan, John Shirley, Philip K. Dick and J.G. Ballard.

Tim Jordan in one of the seminal books on cyberspace entitled *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet* (1999) writes around a clear and simple theoretical framework, and covers key concepts such as power and cyberspace, the virtual individual, society in cyberspace, and imagination and the Internet. Interviews, statistical analyses and case studies provide a complete assessment of the politics and culture of cyberspace - who actually governs cyberspace and what powers he has.

David Porush in an early book on the same area *The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction* (1985) explains cybernetics, its applications to language, to modern and post-modern fiction and touches issues related to semiotics, information theory, and contemporary literature. He shows a concern towards a major issue: AI has, apparently, replaced the machine as the cultural metaphor. Porush introduces the work of Raymond Roussel as representing the epitome of the machine metaphor. He believed that cybernetics was an attempt to erase the boundary between the human and the machine three decades later. He makes one thing clear –while it was the human imagination that designed the machine, today the machine has rendered the human redundant. The author discusses cybernetics at some length, linking it directly to Information Theory. The philosophical powers of cybernetics is derived from its capacity to relate terms like information, uncertainty, and entropy. Porush proceeds by applying understandings about information systems in general and language in particular to several post-modern writers analyzing how the authors incorporate these understandings thematically and structurally

as they address relationships between humans and machines. They dwell upon the ways the writers have absorbed the principles of cybernetics and how they have applied those principles to the experience of living in the post-modern world.

Michael Heim in *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (1993) introduces the component aspects of cyberspace and calls for a historical review of metaphysics and cyberspace that functions as “a more useful metaphysical laboratory.” In particular, he argues for a case for Leibniz:

As Leibniz worked out the modern Idealist epistemology, he was also experimenting with protoccomputers. Pascal’s calculator had been no more than an adding machine; Leibniz went further and produced a mechanical calculator that could also, by using stepped wheels, multiply and divide. The basic Leibnizian design became the blueprint for all commercial calculators until the electronics revolution of the 1970s. Leibniz, therefore, is one of the essential philosophical guides to the inner structure of cyberspace. His logic, metaphysics, and notion of representational symbols show us the hidden underpinnings of cyberspace. (92)

Another early, but one of the landmarks on the genre of the cyberpunk, is Larry McCaffery’s edited volume *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk & Postmodern Science Fiction* (1992) – a collection of over fifty essays, short stories, novel excerpts, literary criticism, poetry, artworks, and a comic strip that illustrate the influences on and of the cyberpunk subgenre of science fiction and its distinctive sensibility. William Gibson, Bruce Sterling,

major cyberpunk writers in 1980s popular culture are argued by McCaffery as working on a fragmentary culture to create a startling new form with a somewhat strange use of prose that argues for AIs, genetic engineering and multinational machinations. This brings together fiction by contemporary writers viz. William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Kathy Acker, J. G. Ballard, Samuel R. Delany, critical commentary by some of the major theorists of postmodern art and culture viz. Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, Timothy Leary, Jean-Francois Lyotard and work by major practitioners of cyberpunk viz. William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, Pat Cadigan, Bruce Sterling, the author reveals a fascinating ongoing dialogue in contemporary culture. What emerges is a realisation of how technology has shaped modern life and influenced our vision and our art. It is precisely this concern, according to McCaffery, that has put science fiction, typically the province of technological art, at the forefront of creative explorations of our unique age.

Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (1954) written from a scientific perspective adopts a philosophical, sociological, historical and journalistic stance. It comments on the effects of cybernetics on today's society focusing on the better management of the economy and society, its destructive aspect and its unreasonable control over the human beings. Wiener comments:

... society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it; and that in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between man and machines, between machines and

man, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part. (15)

N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1998) looks at this age of DNA, computers and AI at an age when information has become disembodied. Questions on embodiment in this information, the cultural and technological construction of the cyborg along with the emergence of the posthuman are also taken up. Some pages are on the history of technology, cultural studies, and literary criticism. There are references to the post-World War II Macy Conferences on cybernetics, Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo* (1952), Philip K. Dick's literary explorations of hallucination and reality; artificial life to postmodern novels exploring the implications of seeing humans as cybernetic systems. Hayles looks at the posthuman with eyes of apprehension and liberation. Thus, this book can be seen as a history of the birth of cybernetics to artificial life with possible predictions on where we are heading to. One of the thesis that this book highlights is that, in the visions of information, in our approaches to cybernetics, and in the handling of the own place in the world, Western culture has completely neglected the physical. It hints at the possibility of a completely cyborg future, and the nature of cyberspace.

Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) theorises the 'disuse' of reality and the subsequent usurpation of it by the image / sign through contemporary media including the Internet: Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map (166).

Dani Cavallaro's *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Works of William Gibson* (2000) is a significant work which provides a brief history of science fiction, with a bid to contextualize cyberpunk in relation to the broader genre of science fiction. It shows that although science fiction is often seen as an essentially twentieth-century phenomenon, science-fictional motifs can be traced much further back in time. Lance Olsen's *William Gibson* (1992) considers Gibson as a postmodernist and analyses *Neuromancer* as a quest novel whose motifs may be read in terms of Homer's *Odyssey*:

Like the *Odyssey*, it is epic or global in perspective ... it involves a number of quests although here the magical and the monstrous universe of the Mediterranean is replaced by that of cyberspace... The former is the product of an integrated culture that has a strong sense of morality, hierarchy and totality, while the latter is the product of a disintegrated culture that knows only amorality, contradiction, and heterogeneous change. (56)

Tatiani G. Rapatzikou's *Gothic Motifs in the Fiction of William Gibson* (2004) reviews Gibson's novels as a startlingly new form of science fiction which opens realms of subjectivity. Gibson, Rapatzikou argues, does so through his sense of how technological development increasingly removes the boundaries between the realms of the imagined and the real. This important new study focuses on the visual elements in Gibson's work, suggests how his extraordinary mindscapes are locatable in terms of both gothic and the graphic novel traditions. Thus this book focuses on the visual

elements in the novels of Gibson and also has a chapter on the emergence of Cyberpunk Science Fiction with an elaboration on the idea of the genre.

Franz Wegener's monograph *William Gibson's 'Neuromancer' and the Relation between Mind and Body* (2008) focuses on the mind-body relationship in *Neuromancer* and offers an evaluation of various characters' attitudes towards the same.

While Bruce Franklin in "Computers in Fiction" (2000) makes a comprehensive study of how computers have appeared in fiction since the time it was first invented, before him, "A Cyberpunk Manifesto" (1996) by Christian As. Kirtchev gives in greater detail the characteristics of a generation which has grown up with an excess of computers in their lives, particularly the cyberpunks. He calls this generation "the ELECTRONIC MINDS (*sic*), a group of free-minded rebels. Cyberpunks." He declares they "live in Cyberspace," are "everywhere" and know "no boundaries." The beginning clause of the manifesto declares cyberpunks as "[t]echnological rats, swimming in the ocean of information." By the thirteenth clause he declares cyberpunks as a group of people misunderstood by society, people who are considered "weird". In fact, this manifesto vehemently denies that cyberpunk is by any means an ordinary subculture but rather as a "stand-alone new culture, offspring of the new age" and "a unit" that stands away from the one way of thinking of the whole society – which he feels is a "cliche" that desperately needs to be cured and healed with a new system. This manifesto moves beyond the realm of the physical and calls the Net "our realm" of which the cyberpunks are "Kings". There have been some general studies of the nature of cyberpunk as well. For instance, Gordon Meyer in a

dissertation entitled, “The ‘Social Organization’ of the Computer Underground?” (2009), looks at the computer underground as “a loose confederation of criminal organizations.” However, Steve Mizrach in “Is Cyberpunk the Counterculture of the 1990’s? Cyberculture: Past and Present,” (2003) refutes this argument of cyberpunk being a countercultural movement because the cyberpunks do not display any sort of “solidarity or cooperation” and have not united “goals” as each seems to use “social engineering” to trick people and they expect the same from others. Another critic, R. J .Burrows studies cyberpunks as a social and political theory in his “Cyberpunk as Social and Political Theory” (1995). He quotes Fredric Jameson who argues that cyberpunk represents “the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself” and looks at the claim that cyberpunk is more than mere poetics. He agrees that Gibson’s fiction have been systematically read as social and cultural theory – and in his paper, reviews the work of writers who have utilised cyberpunk as “prefigurative social and political theory” in their respective realms of urban studies, cultural theory and the sociology of the body.

As English comments, cyberpunk was a movement away from traditional science fiction in its technological aspect, not looking at the probable and the possible but at what technology we already have. It was also new in its involvement of technology in the lives of all the characters, so much so that the human-computer interaction is shown to alter “the mind, human social behaviors, and/or society itself.” And all these happen within the life span of the author himself. English analyses the importance of computers in the lives of the characters in a cyberpunk and mentions how Case, in

Neuromancer, needs it not only for his prosperity but also for his survival. Technology is now beyond the control of the human and “how much a person is human and how much of them are machine is not so clear.” Another aspect of the cyberpunk that English points out in *Neuromancer* is the inclusion of everyday activities in the lives of the characters, as Case having a beer when the novel begins. He calls cyberpunk writers “introverts” who write from the perspective of the world creating the main conflict in the story – of what the world will “become” not what it will “encounter” as in science fiction.

Apart from English’s attempt at looking at the cyberpunk elements in *Neuromancer*, there have been attempts at looking at the cyberpunk settings in the novel and also at the mythology of cyberpunk. For instance, (see Hoven 1998; Fiegel) where we have references to the presence of a postmodern myth where the quest of the hero gets converted to a quest for information in the Net (or Matrix) and virtual reality and the struggle of the hero is a struggle to hack and smuggle data for his own survival. Unlike science fiction, cyberpunk has no aliens but rather cybernetically, bionically and biotechnically enhanced humans fighting rival megacorps. Another attempt made to analyse the aspects of a cyberpunk in *Neuromancer* is Barbara Lisele Zavala’s essay “Eighties Cyberpunk” where she refers to Shiner (1992) and mentions that in the early 1980s, cyberpunk was a label given to five writers of science fiction who challenged traditional science fiction genre. She mentions William Gibson as one of them, the other names those that of Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley and Lewis Shiner. She states: “[t]herefore, Gibson's novel can be used as a reliable source for defining the cyberpunk genre.” The importance of William Gibson as a writer of cyberpunk is further enhanced because these

four writers agree that Gibson's *Neuromancer* "influenced the categorization of the new science fiction as cyberpunk." The novel depicts a "futuristic society and people who live in it" – a genuine cyberpunk shade along with issues of government and nuclear tension. The characterisation of Case is like the one who has "survived (his) eroded surroundings that have been caused by nuclear or governmental misuse." Zavala attempts to establish *Neuromancer* as an eighties cyberpunk.

In a web review of *Neuromancer*, titled "Wintermute and Neuromancer, Godlike AIs: The Cyborg Self" (2005) Zachary Reiss-Davis comments on Wintermute and Neuromancer, the AIs created by Tessier-Ashpool SA in *Neuromancer* - not defined distinctly in the beginning but which merge into "a super-being with incredible powers" at the end of the novel. They are capable of communicating with similar minds from other planets and in *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* they are more analogous to Gods than to humans. Gibson's lack of scientific knowledge gives him space to create "fanciful AIs".

David Tomas in "The Technophilic Body: On Technicity in William Gibson's Cyborg Culture" which appeared in *New Formations* (1989) views cyberspace in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, as "an abstract manifestation in architectural space of a multinational economy" which is accessed through an Ono-Sendai cyber deck. He opines that computers melted other machines, and the novel can be seen as an experience of the global nervous system. We have the characters "jacking into the matrix," and the "bodiless exultation" of cyberspace is conveyed as the pleasure of the interface, where simulation replaces corporeal reality. The linguistic representation of cyberspace

technology, in *Neuromancer* as well as in the industry, suggests a correlation between the use of drugs and technology and gives a new identity to the body. Representation and identity seem to seek a new definition in cyberspace which is very different from the traditional notions of identity that is determined by embodiment. In cyberspace, we are not in the flesh. Tomas views the most visible impact of the metaphor of cyberspace to be the field of virtual reality; computer-generated simulated environments mediate through binary codes of digital data. *Neuromancer* gave form and integrity to the emerging technology and its engineers, the technologically literate and socially disaffected, in effect providing a tangible cultural location, a consolidated image of social interaction. Gibson's equation of technology and drugs under the sign of need suggests that perhaps the lure of cyberspace can best be understood through an elaboration of the metaphor, the semiotic appropriation of an addiction that involves literature, drugs and technology. In this novel, Virtual Reality becomes a useful resource for confirming that "real" reality exists by providing something which *is clearly not real*. For Gibson, technology and drugs become somehow synonymous, related through their respective intensities – and we experience in the scene of the novel, the lived experience of technology.

Orlin Damyanov in "Technology and its dangerous effects on nature and human life as perceived in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" (1996) examines technology and its dangerous effects on nature and human life as perceived in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and in *Neuromancer*. In one, we have a new-born fear at technological advancement while in the other we have a prophetic look into the consequences of

technological development and sophistication. The author explores the historical context in which both these works were written as well as the motives lying behind artificial creation. He goes on to make a comparison between “the ‘hideous’ creature of Mary Shelley and the powerful Artificial Intelligence of Gibson”- and predicts clearly “the consequences of immoral technological utilization”. *Neuromancer* reveals the dawn of a new age of information technology – where humanity has not been able to find a proper solution to the moral dilemmas posed by the rapid technological change. According to Damyanov, the novel abstains from considering glossy utopian views of the conventional science fiction to give us a pessimistic future where we are cyborgs for whom drugs are an absolute necessity. The most shocking departure from nature, as presented in *Neuromancer*, is the role that AI plays in the face of Wintermute and Neuromancer.

Laura Lee in her essay “Gibson’s Invisible City” (2008) refers to the city depicted in the novel “an indiscriminate sprawl of virtual projections and imaginary boundaries” where the urban environment is presented as a “topology of signals and nodes, a design that is structured from these nodes internally and then crystallizes as a matrix”. The city becomes a “mental projection” of those within it and cyberspace becomes “a house of sorts, a house of the mind”. Lee discerns in Case’s coming to age by the end of the novel a result “his own cognitive mapping of his environment, as he travels through virtual worlds, encounters other human entities, and is psychologically stimulated by these encounters”. In Gibson’s world, cyberspace stretches beyond the realm of human consciousness creating a world of heightened anxieties where signals are given and received without

knowing the receiver or giver. To add to it all, the characters in the novel are faced with alien encounters and “constant stimulation from mysterious realms of projection”. Lee refers to Gibson’s world as a dystopic one “in which characters are continually isolated from one another, where invisible ‘threads’ do in fact exist, though they are intractable.

Nicole Smith in a recent article titled “Identity, Alienation, and Science Fiction: Comparison of *Neuromancer* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*” (2010) reworks us the definition of identity and how both texts make us rethink on creating “a new way of perceiving and processing identity.” The society created in science fiction lacks traditional identity markers such as apparent motivations, personality types, and genders and allows the reader an opportunity to step outside the boundaries of traditional means of identity association by offering an alternate landscape and set of cultural associations. Smith’s words, “[b]y doing so, both authors present the postmodern struggle for identity in an increasingly complex, diverse, and partitioned by positioning their narratives apart from our comfort zone, thus causing us to reflect on what creates or destroys the self.” In *Neuromancer*, Smith argues, we are presented with many character identities as a series of images who are inseparable from their bodily modifications, or influences of technology, making identity an outside showing of personality or function in life which does all but mislead us from what is apparently the true identity. It shows identity is something created, that it is a construct and completely dependent on cultural perceptions – easily replicated and dispensed for mass consumption: “The markers for true human identity are now even further obscured by the more ephemeral nature

of that of non-human entities and what makes matters more perplexing is that these entities are intertwined with the identities of actual living beings.”

One of the most revered and most quoted interviews with William Gibson is the one by Larry McCaffery (1986), where he brings out almost all of Gibson’s views on varied topics related to his books. McCaffery prefaces his interview with a mention of *Neuromancer*’s:

originality of vision, especially the fresh, rush-of-oxygen high of Gibson's prose, with its startling similes and metaphors drawn from computers and other technologies, and its ability to create a powerfully resonant metaphor – the cyberspace of the computer matrix – where data dance with human consciousness, where human memory is literalized and mechanized, where multi-national informations systems mutate and breed into startling new structures whose beauty and complexity are unimaginable, mystical, and above all nonhuman.

He reviews the book as creating a “significant synthesis of poetics, pop culture, and technology.” In one of the questions that McCaffery puts to Gibson, he questions the possibility of cyberspace creating a rationale for so many different narrative “spaces” and while Gibson mentioned that he arrived at the “cyberspace concept” while writing “Burning Chrome”, viewed it as a space that allows for a number of moves where characters can be “sucked into apparent realities.”

In a review titled “The Many Themes of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*,” (2008) the anonymous critic discusses the themes of love, betrayal, trust and forbidden knowledge. The critic takes up the ethical and moral debate of the cost that humanity has to pay in return for a life of

advanced technology. Nicholas Morine in “Establishing the Cyberpunk Genre, Dark Noir Science Fiction” (2009) dwells on the themes of personality, existence, pain and pleasure in *Neuromancer* and remarks that the novel is “a darkly realistic portrait of a potential future” where the two AIs – Wintermute and Neuromancer - represent rationality, quantitative analysis personality, qualitative analysis respectively. In another web interview by Steve Ranger titled “Q&A: William Gibson, science fiction novelist: Heading into Spook Country with the cyberspace guru” (2007), we get an impression of Gibson’s attitude towards technology. Gibson reveals a “dispassionate” attitude towards technology at large while also recognizing that “technologies are morally neutral until humans beings pick them up and use them for something.” One ironical thing about technology is that it is by nature “out of control” and if we could control it, “it wouldn’t work.” Edmund Yeo’s comment on Swiftly’s review of *Neuromancer*, makes for a parallel between *Terminator 3* and *Neuromancer* and refers to Wood (1996) who points to “the integrity of human identity” in a world of dominance by AIs. Now, technology is something alien and hence, a threat to humanity (Siivonen 1996). Swiftly refers to the many prophecies made by *Neuromancer* and this review seems to follow the same thread with Gibson’s remark about the uncontrollable nature of technology when he states that the rationality once associated with technology is now shifted to irrationality. In drawing a comparison between *Neuromancer* and *Terminator 3*, Swiftly refers to the examination of the confusing relationship between humanity and technology, and the protagonists’ rejection of “authority” represented by the megacorporations in *Neuromancer* and by the government in *Terminator 3*. Thus, Swiftly merges

the parallels between the two, “If *Neuromancer* is a book that pronounced many prophecies, then *Terminator 3* is a film about fulfilling these prophecies.” Both articulate criticisms of the modern society where all “hopes of human enlightenment are gradually exhausted in the age of information”. Tama Leaver in his “Post-Humanism and Ecocide in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*” (1997) looks into another aspect of the novels and refers to the post-human as “an embodiment not of a new, boundary free, society, but rather a world in which late modern capitalism has restructured not only the means of production but also the means of re-production.” Leaver refers to Brande (1994) who goes on to argue that Gibson’s *Neuromancer* is, in fact, “a dream about late-capitalist ideology”. However, Leaver differs from Brande in his opinion that Gibson’s presents his world as a “nightmare.”

Another aspect of the novel that has succeeded in drawing much critical attention is the thematic complexity that the novel displays. A reference has been made by Rob Latham in “Cyberpunk=Gibson=Neuromancer” (1992) where he refers to the novel’s formal and thematic complexity. Latham also refers to *Neuromancer*’s “openness to diverse and often conflicting modes of interpretation, and its sheer power to capture the critical imagination.”

The word, *Neuromancer* can be split into ‘neuro’ which stands for nerves and AI and ‘mancer’ stands for a (white) magician and romance. It also stands for Case as a computer hacker who disrupts the social order (much like an evil magician) by throwing virus programs into society, thus causing chaos in the world. The word is also a pun from the word “Necromancer”: a magician dealing in evil spirits and death. *Neuromancer* is the story of how Case, the

hero who is a console cowboy, makes a pact with an unknown benefactor for an undefined job and gets his access back into cyberspace. Even before the novel begins, Case's capacity to enter cyberspace was jeopardised by his earlier employers whom he tried to cheat and who injected him with mycotoxin. The other characters in the novel are Armitage, ex-special-forces soldier who hires Molly and Case to perform a job; Molly is the 'razor girl', Peter Riviera a deviant character who has had one of his lungs removed and replaced with extensive implants that allow him to project holograms of anything he desires, an ability which he uses throughout the novel to manipulate, disorient and abuse other characters. Apart from them, there are constructs and AIs and corporate powers like that of Tessier-Ashpool and the main drive of the novel is an attempt on the part of one AI, Neuromancer to unite with the other half Wintermute. This is the task Case is entrusted with and after overcoming several unanticipated difficulties, Case and Molly successfully complete the mission, allowing Wintermute to merge with Neuromancer. The newly merged AIs appears to be vastly more than the sum of its parts, though the exact nature of the being is not explored. Case and Molly return to Earth, share a brief relationship and then part ways to continue their lives.

Neuromancer is not primarily a work of technological extrapolation, but social, and the point is not the network, but the way that the network interfaces with humanity. It presents a rather bleak view of the world and it is very easy to club it under the genre of dystopia. Provocative forms of knowledge can be deduced from cyberculture and, in particular, from Gibson's dystopian narrative in *Neuromancer* and these may help us situate ourselves both as

individuals and as collectives. It took its place almost immediately in the literary pantheon as well as the collective consciousness. A first reading shows it as a fever dream of confusion and violence which with the passage of time has become more relevant to the present than the future. It has an army of imitators trying to imitate every possible aspect of the book as each possible aspect became the genre conventions of late cyberpunk and literary clichés. Many of *Neuromancer's* technological predictions have either been fully or partially realised today – whether be it the globally accessible network – the matrix, the use of prosthetics and implants - the medical sci-fi to promote the idea of natural, organic and manufactured cybernetic body parts playing almost equal roles in the human condition.

The novel is set in two broad settings – in very simple terms, in the real world of everyday and cybespace. However, it is actually a multidirectional plot which is developed in multiple settings. The opening scene is bleak and dystopic set in Chiba, a Japanese industrial city where technology is rampant. The hero moves from Chiba to Freeside, the orbiting space station home to Villa Straylight; BAMA (Boston Metropolitan Axis); Istanbul and Zion a small space shuttle peopled by the Rastafarians. Critics identify an amalgam on stylistic modes – that of the western cowboys, seen in the characterisation of Case and Ratz; the spy thriller, the film noir detective and that of gothic horror. Keeping up to the demands of the plot, Gibson uses a high tech language with a pastiche of street slang, brand names, invented lexicon, pseudo-scientific jargon etc. Alkon pays proper tribute to Gibson in “his allusions to Raymond Chandler, Joanna Russ, and others, and in more distant echoes of new wave imagery and of Philip K. Dick’s games with shifting

realities, Gibson displays that self-reflexivity that is such a notable stylistic feature in much of the best science fiction” (76).

Like the characters in the novel, every modern individual lives in an atmosphere of complete isolation and information – in a massive virtual analog which has heaps of information: the cyberspace or the matrix. The novel uses the concept of servitude to the electronic lifestyle prominently exemplified today in the use of pacemakers, prosthetic limbs, laser vision correction, or intra-ocular lenses. Science fiction in general and *Neuromancer* as a case can be studied in terms of a social theory that can tell us what the near future will be like. Cyberpunk can be seen as a social movement divided into specific subgroups, with different interests -Hackers, Crackers, Phreaks and Cypher-punks. Being a pioneer text, the world of *Neuromancer* can be categorically accepted to have incited the minds of the other authors of the cyberpunk fiction as to what the world inhabited by the people in cyberspace was like.

III

Rationale and Objective of the Study

By their sheer novelty and literary and cultural impact, certain literary works gain a degree of importance and distinction that invite detailed academic exploration and discussion. In twentieth-century fiction in English, the American-Canadian author William Gibson occupies a remarkable place in terms of his brilliant and path-breaking contribution to the genre of science fiction, especially through his status as the ‘prophet’ of cyberpunk. His novel *Neuromancer* (1984) is unanimously hailed as the Bible of Cyberpunk and is

a piece of work wholly deserving of full-length study from various aspects, be these thematic, narratological, stylistic, character- or plot-based, among others. As has been argued earlier, William Gibson's novels are important because they can be said to have begun a new trend in the art of fiction and given birth to a new sub genre in the genre of science fiction – the genre of the cyberpunk. His books have attracted critical attention from the time they were first published in the forms of reviews, essays, complete volumes on cybernetics and cyberpunk, documentaries and adaptations. However, considering the stature of the novelist and the significance of his work, particularly of *Neuromancer*, for the later generations of science fiction writers, it is evident that in-depth and comprehensive critical studies particularly on the themes in *Neuromancer* have not yet been made. Hence, the present work is a full-length study of the thematic aspects of this seminal novel. In particular, it argues that the themes are best considered within the critical discourse of cyberpunk.

The rationale behind this study, therefore, is that a fruitful and comprehensive investigation of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as seminal to cyberculture and to the genre of cyberpunk in particular necessitates a full-length study of the novel in terms of its major themes. To engage in a reading of the themes as worked out by Gibson in the novel, the present work employs key ideas drawn from the field of cyber-criticism and cultural studies that would provide the broader theoretical framework for the thesis. It thereby makes an effort to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the significance of *Neuromancer* in the broader canvas of the cyberpunk.

Structure of the Thesis

Preface and Acknowledgments

Chapter I: Introduction: Cyberpunk, William Gibson and *Neuromancer*

Chapter II: “Data made Flesh”: Technology-Related Themes in *Neuromancer*

Chapter III: “Pirate’s Paradise”: Social Themes in *Neuromancer*

Chapter IV: “Christ on a Crutch”: Moral Themes in *Neuromancer*

Chapter V: “I’m the Sum Total of the Works, the Whole Show”: Metaphysical Themes in *Neuromancer*

Conclusion

Selected Bibliography

Chapter I gives an introduction to the concepts relevant to the study as cyberspace, network society, network culture, cyborgs, AI and makes an effort to understand William Gibson’s place among the science fiction writers and specially among the writers of the cyberpunk movement. The chapter also includes a review of literature and concludes with a brief preview of the chapters to follow.

Chapter II explores what high technology can do to society in general and the human being in particular. It explores virtual reality in the context of *Neuromancer* as a technology that allows a transgression of boundary between natural/artificial, male/female, human/machine, time/space. The novel fictionalises a complete blurring of boundaries between the physical and the non-physical, death and life and fragments the self into multiple personalities, a challenge to the original definitions of the self and identity. It explores

corollary themes as redefinition of the body and the reinvention of the electronic space.

Chapter III – to which considerable space has been given in this study –explores how the interaction with technology affects human beings, their social behaviours and the society they live in, in the context of *Nueromancer*. In the futuristic society that Gibson portrays, technology is seen as an integral part of the individual's progress, prosperity and happiness. An effort is made to understand these themes and the society formed as a result of man-machine interaction.

Chapter IV puts forward a few arguments on themes related to technology and ethics/morality using *Neuromancer* as a literary expression of these themes. In particular, the themes of alienation, low life, hacking, betrayal, despondency, loss of human values and such other related themes.

Chapter V puts forward a few themes related to the metaphysical and mystical elements in *Neuromancer* and explores the novel as a literary presentation of how technology as a medium blurs the boundary between the “real” and the “virtual”, between the objective and subjective realities. The major metaphysical theme that evolves is the notion of cyberspace as filled with platonic forms and many a times in the novel we move to a world of total representation and total simulation. Other themes are the reality of matrix in the novel, transcendence through cyberspace, artificial consciousness, devaluation of the flesh, afterlife and immortality, God as an AI and a programmer in virtual reality etc.

The Conclusion incorporates the inferences derived from the study conducted in the previous chapters and attempts to make an assessment of

Neuromancer in relation to the cyberpunk themes that the author explores. The objective of the present study has been to offer a critical analysis of William Gibson's landmark novel *Neuromancer* in terms of its major themes. The Conclusion argues that a fruitful engagement with the novel's themes in terms of cyberculture in general and cyberpunk in particular, as has been attempted in the present work, is imperative for a comprehensive appreciation of *Neuromancer*. It also points to further work that may be carried out on Gibson's work.



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CHAPTER II

“Data Made Flesh”: Technology-Related Themes in *Neuromancer*

Then you could throw yourself into a highspeed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart from it all, and all around you the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market ...

Neuromancer

It may be argued that technology is the superstructure into which the characters adjust themselves in *Neuromancer*. Against the backdrop of unprecedented technology grows the mega theme – the theme of human-technology interface. Gibson succeeds in moving way ahead of his time and casting a look into the future beyond the 1980s – when there would remain little difference between the human as an entity and the machine as a product of the human brain. With the erosion of the thin line of boundary between man and machine, the novel goes on to explore a complex network of subsidiary yet relevant themes of human relationships in the age of machines, as well as the softer but transient human emotions of love and trust which are rapidly being replaced by harsher emotions of fear, betrayal and apprehension in a decadent, technology- dominated scene of activity like the urban Sprawl.

This chapter explores *Neuromancer* as a novel that uses technological concepts as AIs, constructs, RAMs in a world of virtual reality and virtual space –

and how these affect the workings of virtual and physical landscapes. It explores the various aspects of the dimensions of the cyborg. In particular, it addresses the themes of seduction by technology and its addiction, of the fusion of man and machine which, in turn, redefines and challenges the traditional definitions of self and identity, and technology as a means of transcendence, transformation and liberation from a fixed identity, fixed relationships and other related themes.

As has been mentioned earlier, Gibson selects a hacker named Henry Case as his hero and offers the world of *Neuromancer* as a world of constant interaction of man and machine. Veronica Hollinger's "Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism" (1991) states that *Neuromancer* is "the quintessential cyberpunk novel" – one of the novels of the 1980s that explored "the technological ramifications of experience within late capitalist, post-industrial, media-saturated Western society" (204). In fact, the opening of the novel – "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (1) – prepares us well for a world where there remains very little difference between the natural and the artificial or machine made. In the novel, the image of the Chiba City sky is of nature and in images of technology. We get the uneasy feeling of nature as something which has receded to the background by some nuclear devastation. The dependence and influence of technology on the entire civilisation in *Neuromancer* is made more vivid by the author through the use of dense tactile detail like Case lighting a Yeheyuan, a specially manufactured filter cigarette, his jacking into an OnoSendai deck attached to a Hosaka, not just into a computer; and the use a LadoAcheson lighting system creating the artificial sky above Freeport.

Amidst all these, human civilisation seems to be in the fringe zones – between the densely populated centers like the Sprawl and recreated hallucinations like the beach in Morocco where Case's dead girlfriend, Linda Lee, appears to him in a version of paradise. The world of *Neuromancer* is a world where everyone from the bartender to Case, not only accepts the technological world with its SimStims, dex, computer – created dub (a form of music), constructs, AIs, orbital resorts, ICE or Intrusions Countermeasure Electronics and Robot Crabs, but also uses it extensively in their lives. The atmosphere portrayed is a highly advanced one in terms of technology. Larry McCaffrey comments on the effects of the advancements in the realm of the three growing industries – advertising, information and media. The impact of these advancements is felt very intensely by the most technologically advanced countries like the United States, Japan and most of Western Europe. McCaffrey quotes Marcus when he refers to the creation of a new form of “social reality” (5) and states that these industries have:

turned upon individual men and women, seized their subjective emotions and experiences, changed those once evanescent phenomenon into objective, replicable commodities, placed them on the market, set their prices and sold them back to those who had, once, brought emotions and experiences out of themselves – to people who, as prisoners of the spectacle, could now find such things only in the market. (101)

Thus, the scene of real-life activity in *Neuromancer* or Chiba City, is a highly technologically advanced Japan, in a post-industrial setting. It is also referred to as *The Sprawl* or BAMA- Boston Atlanta Metro Axis. In fact, the title of

the first chapter is “Chiba City Blues” where Chiba is a city in the near future soaked in rampant corruption and decay, the aftermath of a highly advanced sort of technological invasion. Gibson’s choice of Chiba, a megapolis in Japan can be explained as a reflection of the fact that Japan was seen, at that time, “as the cutting edge of modernity. Whereas the rest of the world had looked towards the US for innovation in the past, young Americans began to think of Japan as the future” (Brians). When the novel opens, Chiba has already developed into a small part of the megapolis, an urban sprawl where there seem to be little, if any, difference between the man and the machine. Images of decadence are seen everywhere and there is a constant reference to contemporary technological innovations, which have been used and reused by society.

In Japan, he’d known with a clenched and absolute certainty, he’d find his cure. In Chiba. Either in a registered clinic or in the shadowland of black medicine. Synonymous with implants, nerve-splicing, and microbionics, Chiba was a magnet for the Sprawl’s techno-criminal subcultures.

In Chiba, he’d watched his New Yen vanish in a two-month round of examinations and consultations. The men in the black clinics, his last hope, had admired the expertise with which he’d been maimed, and then slowly shaken their heads.

Now he slept in the cheapest coffins, the ones nearest the port, beneath the quartz-halogen floods that lit the docks all night like vast stages; where you couldn’t see the lights of Tokyo for the glare of the television sky, not even the towering hologram logo of the Fuji Electric

Company, and Tokyo Bay was a black expanse where gulls wheeled above drifting shoals of white styrofoam. Behind the port lay the city, factory domes dominated by the vast cubes of corporate arcologies. Port and city were divided by a narrow borderland of older streets, an area with no official name. Night City, with Ninsei its heart. By day, the bars down Ninsei were shuttered and featureless, the neon dead, the holograms inert, waiting, under the poisoned silver sky. (*Neuromancer* 6-7)

We get a feeling that Gibson is expressing his apprehensions about a future dominated by technology. The characters seem to be intoxicated by technology and technological aids and often refer to their bodies as something alien or only as a functional part of themselves, like the beasts of burden which carry the implants or a case that houses the mind – that leads to cyberspace. Contrary to this cold and dystopic visions of an everyday life no better than hell, the other landscape is that of the no sphere of the mind or the cyberspace, at times referred to as the matrix. More specifically, much of the novel's action happens in the cigar-shaped orbiting station of Freeside, a “brothel and banking nexus, pleasure dome and free port, border town and spa” (134). It is an orbiting station owned by and home to Tessier-Ashpool, a family which is organised and run like a corporation. Its family members are kept under cryogenic stasis and thawed out periodically for matters of governance. Wintermute the AI is attached to it with its computer terminal at Berne, Switzerland while Neuromancer, the other AI is attached to another family with its terminal at Rio de Janeiro, Switzerland. This family is cast as elite and successful from a fortune from technology. There is a constant

movement of the characters in and out of cyberspace. At times, technology is so dominating in the novel, even in the everyday life in Chiba, that there seem to remain very little difference between the virtual world of the matrix and the physical world of the everyday. This blurring down of boundaries is a true theme in cyberpunk fiction.

In the world of *Neuromancer*, the time portrayed is one in which all the fields of information have been explored. By now, man had already acquired a sort of 'mastery' over nature and the natural. Man had acquired the capacity to keep a dead heart alive with transplants and implants, to simulate the consciousness of men with computer and robotic systems. At this stage, those philosophical questions of truth and reality, death and afterlife receive practical relevance. In fact, the very opening pages of the novel prepare us for visions of a dystopic world order – a world which offer the people “a host of stimulating possibilities” in the form of “high-tech artefacts”(McCaffrey 5) complemented with emotions of a troubled psyche and a range of moral dilemmas. It is into this framework that Gibson creates Case and Molly as characters who are more comfortable in a simulated atmosphere or “cyberspace” which creates what McCaffrey calls “new ‘areas’ of sensory experience with their own spatial and temporal coordinates, their own personal and metaphysical dimensions” (6). While others (see Deobard; Baudrillard) have also taken on this new area of experience with the daunting intrusion of technology into our lives, it is only with Gibson’s coining of the term ‘cyberspace’ that such experience gains some sort of a palpable significance. In *Neuromancer*, the experience is made so real that it is today more real than the natural life around us. McCaffrey goes on to state that simulated realities

have gone on to replace the actuality and that “[t]his is the postmodern desert inhabited by people who are, in effect, consuming themselves in the form of images and abstractions through which their desires, sense of identity, and memories are replicated and then sold back to them as products”(6). In the very opening of *Neuromancer*, Case travels to Chiba City, famous for its advanced medical facilities, in search of a medical cure. His total assets are eventually used up, and he is left without a cure and convinced there is no hope for him:

His total assets were quickly converted to New Yen, a fat sheaf of the old paper currency that circulated endlessly through the closed circuit of the world's black markets like the seashells of the Trobriand islanders. It was difficult to transact legitimate business with cash in the Sprawl; in Japan, it was already illegal.

In Japan, he'd known with a clenched and absolute certainty, he'd find his cure. In Chiba. Either in a registered clinic or in the shadowland of black medicine. Synonymous with implants, nerve-splicing, and microbionics, Chiba was a magnet for the Sprawl's techno-criminal subcultures.

In Chiba, he'd watched his New Yen vanish in a two-month round of examinations and consultations. The men in the black clinics, his last hope, had admired the expertise with which he'd been maimed, and then slowly shaken their heads. (6)

He, thereafter, turns to a life of street crime, dealing with and using drugs, “a kind of terminal overdrive” (7), which occupies him for two years. Case hates his mundane existence, misses the alternative reality of cyberspace

and feels like the physical world is inherently uninteresting and worthless. His first appearance is in the Sprawl, with a “massive drug deficiency” and is served by a bartender with “prosthetic arm jerking monotonously” (3), which was “a Russian military prosthesis, a seven-function force-feedback manipulator, cased in grubby pink plastic” (4). Even a bartender can scratch his “white shirted belly with” a “pink claw” (4) and when Case talks of his “disembodied consciousness” which is projected “into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix” and uses “exotic software” which he used to “penetrate the bright walls of corporate systems, opening windows into rich fields of data” (5). Thus, it will not be wrong to agree with Hollinger when she says, “[t]he human world replicates its own mechanical systems and the border between the organic and the artificial threatens to blur beyond recuperation” (205). At one moment, we see Case gazing on at “the chrome stars” of shuriken and imagining them as “the stars under which he voyaged, his destiny spelled out in a constellation of cheap chrome” (*Neuromancer* 12). In yet another moment, we see the human form merging into “the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market ...” (16). We have Case getting direct access through his mind into cyberspace, AIs existing like living entities within the matrix, human personalities downloaded into the computer memory and clones walking the landscape of *Neuromancer*.

It is in this sense that *Neuromancer* is a novel whose main theme is human technology interface. It is a novel which is “set in a near future trash culture ruled by multinational corporations and kept going by black-market economies, all frantically dedicated to the circulation of computerized data ...

(16) played out by Gibson's characters on the streets of the new urban overspill, the Sprawl (Hollinger 206-207). In the time frame of the novel, such are the technological heights scaled that the relevance and the sacredness of the human body diminishes to a great extent and cybernetic tools are used as enhancements that redefine the human body. The focus of activity is the virtual world of cyberspace and we have "in simulated splendor on the far side of the computer screen – the real center of technological activity in Gibson's fictional world (207). Gibson's core theme of the novel is, therefore, the direct integration of man and the machine, more specifically, the computer, with all the possibilities and horrors that such a union entails.

In the words of John Christie in "Of AIs and Other's: William Gibson's *Transit*" (1992), "*Neuromancer* tells the story of how a cast of human characters is assembled and manipulated by an AI in order that it may combine with its other, separate half, and so form a fully autonomous being. *Neuromancer* is a book of becoming, the climax the fusion of the two AIs, Wintermute and *Neuromancer*." In such a spirit of the novel, the one obvious theme that emerges is that of addiction to technology and the corollary theme of the eventual fusion of man and machine. Gibson takes care to show that in this fusion of the man and the machine, both become dependent on each other to a great extent though the dependence varies in its range and capacity. The hero, Case, can be seen as a perfect example of the man machine fusion. An intelligent computer cowboy, he cheats on his employer and is inserted with a small chip below his skin which immobilises his life forever. It takes away from him the capacity to enter into cyberspace and he is forced to lead the life of a common man imprisoned in his 'meat' (*Neuromancer* 6). It is only

because he wants his entry back into cyberspace that he agrees to work for an unknown employer. Otherwise a layman in the everyday life, once Case is into the cyberspace, the electronic space multiplies his operational capabilities, extends and enhances his body's performance parameters. Without the implants his body seems obsolete and a "waste of space" (Spiller 262). Case's female counterpart, Molly, makes her entry into the novel with her glasses "surgically inset, sealing her sockets" (*Neuromancer* 24). Gibson takes care to merge the man and machine in such a fashion that neither has a forceful existence without the other. At times, we sense that the man and the machine are inseparable from the other. For instance, the character of Peter Riviera has had one lung removed to make room for a series of high-tech implants that allow him to project images, "What he imagines, you see" (90-91), uses his implants to allow him to project his thoughts as holographic images:

The restaurant's lights died entirely, for a few seconds, leaving only the glow of candles. Riviera's holographic aura had faded with the lights, but Case could still see him, standing with his head bowed.

Lines of faint light began to form, verticals and horizontals sketching an open cube around the stage. The restaurant's lights had come back up slightly, but the framework surrounding the stage might have been constructed of frozen moonbeams. Head bowed, eyes closed, arms rigid at his sides, Riviera seemed to quiver with concentration.

Suddenly the ghostly cube was filled, had become a room, a room lacking its fourth wall, allowing the audience to view its contents (136).

In the opening pages, we are given to the impression that the protagonist, Case is, essentially, an amoral criminal who routinely uses and sells drugs, lies, steals and of late, one who “had killed two men and a woman over sums that a year before would have seemed ludicrous” (7). But above all these, there was one addiction in his life – technology. The life he enters on recourse to technology is a life he does everything for.

The theme of seduction by technology is also evident with the other characters in the novel who seem to be submerged in technology. Their real existence on this earth seems more of a menace and consciously or unconsciously they want to escape into the world of cyberspace. It is a networked and wired society, and though physically all the characters are in the world of the everyday, the real, they are, for most of the time in the novel jacked into cyberspace. So much so that many a times, the reader feels that there barely remains any difference between the man and the machine, with the machine being used extensively to either aid or augment the human body and modify its shortcomings. Each seems to try to adopt the role of the other. Thus, the world that the novel generates involves the melding of humanity and technology. In our introduction to such a world, we see Case, who has spent his entire life mentally entangled with computer systems. Without this capability, he feels incomplete and unfulfilled. Molly also is a combination of humanity and machinery, carrying metal blades beneath her skin.

This theme of the thin line between humanity and machines emerges as another important theme of *Neuromancer*. In simpler terms, the post-human condition allows the possibility of extending the human senses through the use of technology. What Gibson’s world of the novel fantasises is the ability of the

human-machine interface to heighten the powers of man in such a way that one can not only extend one's senses but also extend it beyond oneself to enter into the mind of another human. In *Neuromancer*, the characters succeed in completely injecting themselves into cyberspace. Case employs computer mediated environments to enter into Molly's senses and succeeds in sensing whatever she senses, seeing what she sees, and feeling what she feels. Case practices using the new simstim flipflop on his deck by entering cyberspace and instantly experiences everything that Molly is experiencing by just hitting a switch:

Case sat in the loft with the dermatodes strapped across his forehead, watching motes dance in the diluted sunlight that filtered through the grid overhead...

Then he keyed the new switch. The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color...

She was moving through a crowded street, past stalls vending discount software, prices felt panned on sheets of plastic, fragments of music from countless speakers. Smells of urine, free monomers, perfume, patties of frying krill. For a few frightened seconds he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became the passenger behind her eyes.

The glasses didn't seem to cut down the sunlight at all. He wondered if the built-in amps compensated automatically. Blue alphanumeric winked the time, low in her left peripheral field. Showing off, he thought.

Her body language was disorienting, her style foreign. She seemed continually on the verge of colliding with someone, but people melted out of her way, stepped sideways, made room.

“How you doing. Case?” He heard the words and felt her form them. She slid a hand into her jacket, a fingertip circling a nipple under warm silk. The sensation made him catch his breath. She laughed. But the link was one-way. He had no way to reply. (55-56)

Thereby, Case enters Molly’s mind and watches as she prowls down an alley. He finds the experience frightening, frustrating and disorienting at first, but he eventually gets used to it. However, he does not get an access to her emotions and her memories. In the process of the fusion of the man with the machine, Case evolves as a cold, emotionless individual who thinks that his emotions will be used only to manipulate against himself.

Another minor character in the novel is that of The Finn, or simply Finn, who “seemed to have been designed in a wind tunnel. His ears were very small, plastered flat against his narrow skull, and his large front teeth, revealed in something that wasn’t quite a smile, were canted sharply backward” (48). Finn is a technical wizard “a fence, a trafficker in stolen goods, primarily in software” who obtains and maintains a variety of hardware, software and information for the team. He is also a friend of Molly and is hired by Armitage. During the course of the novel, Finn tells Molly and Case about Smith – another fence and one of the first few who had “gone silicon” (73). It is a long and complicated story about a bejeweled head computer terminal – “an intricately worked bust, cloisonné over platinum, studded with seedpearls and lapis” (74). It is this head that goes on to play a very important role later in

the novel. Its very appearance again carries the theme of uniting man and machinery.

The ultimate experience that the union of the man and the machine provides is that of the simstim. In simstim or 'simulated stimulation', Case enters the consciousness of Molly and experiences everything from Molly's perspective. The sensation is similar to being a passenger in someone else's body. This technology is primarily used in *Neuromancer* not for entertainment but so that Case can keep track of Molly's progress into Sense/Net and the Villa Straylight.

Case gulped the last of his coffee, settled the trodes in place, and scratched his chest beneath his black t-shirt. He had only a vague idea of what the Panther Moderns planned as a diversion for the Sense/Net security people. His job was to make sure the intrusion program he'd written would link with the Sense/Net systems when Molly needed it to. He watched the countdown in the corner of the screen. Two. One.

He jacked in and triggered his program. 'Mainline,' breathed the link man, his voice the only sound as Case plunged through the glowing strata of Sense/Net ice. Good. Check Molly. He hit the simstim and flipped into her sensorium (60).

In effect, however, technology also provides Gibson the opportunity to experiment with point of view. Case can become Molly for a time and experience life through her perspective and personality. This way, her consciousness is be invaded by another.

In this fusion of human and machines – it is not only Case or Molly but also the other characters who adorn their bodies with sockets and implants. One such character is that of Larry, a character who belongs to a youth movement, or terrorist criminal gang, called the Panther Moderns. In fact, each of the members of the gang has a socket behind one ear where they can insert microsofts, small colored chips that allow them to access data or perform complex tasks. Larry instantly recognises that Molly has “a rider” (57) when Molly meets him in an alley or that she is broadcasting simstim to Case and refuses to talk to her:

“Larry, you in, man?” She positioned herself in front of him. The boy’s eyes focused. He sat up in his chair and pried a bright magenta splinter from his socket with a dirty thumbnail.

“Hey, Larry.”

“Molly.” He nodded.

“I have some work for some of your friends, Larry.”

Larry took a flat plastic case from the pocket of his red sportshirt and flicked it open, slotting the microsoft beside dozen others. His hand hovered, selected a glossy black chip that was slightly longer than the rest, and inserted it smoothly into his head. His eyes narrowed.

“Molly’s got a rider,” he said, “and Larry doesn’t like that.”

“Hey,” she said, “I didn’t know you were so... sensitive. I’m impressed. Costs a lot, to get that sensitive.”

“I know you, lady?” The blank look returned. “You looking to buy some softs?”

“I’m looking for the Moderns.”

“You got a rider, Molly. This says.” He tapped the black splinter.

“Somebody else using your eyes.”

“My partner.”

“Tell your partner to go.”

“Got something for the Panther Moderns, Larry.”

“What are you talking about, lady?” (57)

From the above extract, it is evident that the characters in the novel assume that everyone is proficient in employing technology in one way or the other and hence are very careful in their moves – lest they be cheated on. In fact, the characters themselves seem to assimilate very easily, in an almost natural manner, the existence of *constructs* or “stored version of a person's particular skills and personal approaches to problems” (Technovelgy), in the environment of *Neuromancer*. This becomes obvious in the conversation between Case and Molly, when the construct Dixie Flatline is introduced into the novel.

“You know that the Dixie Flatline’s dead?”

He nodded. “Heart, I heard.”

“You’ll be working with his construct.” She smiled. “Taught you the ropes, huh? Him and Quine. I know Quine, by the way. Real asshole.”

“Somebody’s got a recording of McCoy Pauley? Who?”

Now Case sat, and rested his elbows on the table. “I can’t see it. He’d never have sat still for it.”

“Sense/Net. Paid him mega, you bet your ass.” (49-50)

Dixie is a construct of McCoy Pauley- a legendary console cowboy who along with Bobby Quine is responsible for the education of Case. He is dead even before the novel starts and is represented by a ROM construct which was recorded by the Sense/Net Corporation before his death. This can be seen as another instance of the joining of the technological and the human in the novel, when technology aids man to defy death and allows McCoy Pauley to continue to exist even after his death. Pauley's mind lives on in a technological form. His presence and introduction into the novel is as normal and everyday as being introduced to another individual in the novel.

The picture that emerges is that of man and machine fused into one another, and complementing one another. It is a world of no trust, no love and ironically, amidst all the mechanical transactions sans the softer human emotion of love and trust, one relationships that buds almost immediately in the novel is that of Case and Molly. It not only sparks off in the very beginning but also sustains itself all throughout the novel, without every betraying or questioning each other. Perhaps, it is Gibson's way of hinting at the possibility of trust and love in the age of the machine and can be seen as a spark of light in the otherwise largely dark and dystopic atmosphere of the novel.

Neuromancer is a fictional visualization of the future and Gibson's vision is with us today, when the world inside the machine is as real and as the world outside. there remains little difference the man and the machine. In the words of Haraway, "Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to

apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert” (152). In the novel, Case is most at ease when in cyberspace and his personality merges with technology with a strange accommodating force.

Technology in its heightened form is extensively used in *Neuromancer*. One of the best examples of the use of heightened technology is apparent in the occurrence of the recurrent figure of the cyborg – half man and half machine, a human with robotic implants that raises the working capability and adaptability of the human to superhuman heights. The term “cyborg” (cyborg + organism) was coined by NASA scientists Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960 when discussing the hypothetical advantages of human-machines in space. Although such cybernetic organisms became the realm of science fiction, efforts to create real-life cyborgs began even before the term was conceived and continue to this day. Tim Jordan opines that that figure of the cyborg has “lasting effects on the conception of cyberspace” (31) and goes on to call the figure of the cyborg as something that “offers an exploration of redefined bodies and redefined humanity” (32). In the novel, everyone seeks perfection, upgradation of humanly attributes with the use of robotic upgrades. One of the best drawn cyborgs is Molly, who draws our attention to herself right from her start with her surgically enhanced eyes and fingernails. The cyborg gains its significance as a separate identity from the human because the cyborg uses technology not to aid and enhance human qualities but rather their use of technology detaches the body from all humanly attributes.

In the words of Haraway again, “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a

creature of fiction... Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs – creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted” (149). However, to quote David Bell “... the cyborg stands as a potent figure to help us think through our relationship with machines, and theirs with us” (5). On the other hand, it has also given us scope to refigure the body-technology interface. Haraway proclaims that she knows what happens between man and machine and saw in the concept of the cyborg a rejection of rigid boundaries, which separates the human from the animal and from the machine. She gives us her *Cyborg Theory* in “A Cyborg Manifesto”, with which she not only criticises the traditional notions of feminism but also uses the cyborg as a metaphor to construct postmodern feminism taking into account postmodern and post-structuralist theory. She once famously declared, “I’d rather be a cyborg than a goddess” and even went on to proclaim that ours are a technological bodies –in other words, we are is a cyborgs. She feels that the world of the cyborg is not in the future, rather, in her view, the world is “one of tangled networks - part human, part machine; complex hybrids of meat and metal that relegate old-fashioned concepts like *natural* and *artificial* to the archives. These hybrid networks are the cyborgs, and they don’t just surround us - they incorporate us” (Kunzru).

Haraway’s work on the cyborg almost establishes the fact that consciously or unconsciously, we are so intimately related to technology, that it is no longer possible to tell where the human ends and where the machines begins. Fitzpatrick writes:

The cyborg is the interface of the organic with the technological the technicizing of the human *and* the humanizing of technology, i.e. the body as both the hardware and software *for* machines...the cyborg is partly the product of surgical implantation, where the machine and/or the simulations it generates (as in cosmetic surgery) penetrates the surface of the body. The cyborg is also the product of the daily interaction of perception/ cognition with the screen, where the body melts into the electronic images that it receives, reflects and transmits. (in Bell and Kennedy 97).

In all the discussions on the cyborg, we near the conclusion that the differences between what is natural and what is artificial, the mind and the body are blurred and “[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (Haraway). Undoubtedly, Haraway’s concerns regarding the issues rise from her deepest concerns about the impact of scientific and technological advancements in the society and in the minds of men who are seduced by technology. The cyborg defines the limits of the human being when the human is fascinated as well as horrified with how technology can make and remake what was hence accepted to be made in the image of God:

From the start, the cyborg was more than just another technical project; it was a kind of scientific and military daydream. The possibility of escaping its annoying bodily limitations led a generation that grew up on Superman and Captain America to throw the full weight of its

grown-up R&D budget into achieving a real-life superpower. The cyborg was always as much a creature of scientific imagination as of scientific fact. (Kunzru)

In *Neuromancer*, one of the best examples of the cyborg who redefines her human body with implants is that of Molly, whose surgically inset eyebrows helps her see with better clarity.

Discussions on identity that gained the maximum importance with the Renaissance, when the human had begun to take the central position in all discussions, are now blown apart with the progress in the field of computers and the emergence of the related concepts of virtual reality, AI etc., for now the uniqueness associated with the identity of an entity has become ambiguous. With the publication of the novel, *Neuromancer*, all the traditional notions of identity were subverted and the new shade associated with the term was that of *obscurity*. Ironically, the term as such is used by Gibson only once in the entire novel, “If Straylight was an expression of the corporate identity of Tessier-Ashpool, then T-A was crazy as the old man had been. The same ragged tangle of fears, the same strange sense of aimlessness ...” (203). And yet, the novel plays around with the concept of identity and by the end, identity emerges as an ambiguous concept. This shade is added to it primarily in the cyberspace. Rather, identity in *Neuromancer* is identity in cyberspace. The cyberspace is a world of infinite information and inestimable database - “the nonspace of the mind” (51) and “the nonspace of the matrix” (63) where one rises above the impediments of geography, time or social limitations and can be a multitudes of alien identities all at once as one wills to appear to the

other. He can be someone with a modified history, an enhanced or rather adopted personality, a changed appearance and even an adapted gender. This new identity is ever new and ever changing. This liberation comes with the complete negation of the body with the help of cyber technology. With the prominence of the body pushed to the background, associated questions of the self and identity, personality and individuality also lose their importance, authenticity and usefulness. We realize that with the intrusion of technology into our lives, the man and the machine almost merge into one another, so much so that our identity as human itself becomes ambiguous.

The characters of *Neuromancer*, Case, Molly Wintermute, Neuromancer, McCoy Pauley, the Finn, are all entities who live to one degree or another in the machine, in cyberspace, or to use Gibson's words, in the matrix of human knowledge "from the banks of every computer in the human system" (*Neuromancer* 51). They are all, "personalities" (96) and most are reproductions, digital representations or manifestations of someone who was already alive, already human. All of them live in "an age of affordable beauty" (4), a place where there is ample scope to alter one's personality every passing minute with implants and modifications, and where they are surrounded with personalities with implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery and brain-computer interfaces and AI. One good example is that of Molly, whose surgically implanted eyes do not let others glimpse into her real identity or rather, provide no access to the real emotions in her heart: "The lenses were empty quicksilver, regarding him with an insect calm" (30). So abundant is the use of implants and surgeries to modify one's deficiencies with the help of a "Chiba surgeon", get "blandly handsome blend of pop faces" (97), that most

characters in the novel did not hesitate to alter their physical features according to their fancy.

Jordan opines that Gibson presents cyberspace as a “four-dimensional representation of the sum of human knowledge, which is experienced as a virtual reality and is used by ‘moving’ through it.” He goes on to argue that one of the four parts which form Gibson’s visions of cyberspace is that of living through “bodiless consciousness” (26). The very fact that in cyberspace, one can design, define and redefine identity offers a challenge to the original definition of the self and identity once in cyberspace. In the novel, human consciousness become bodiless and flies in cyberspace – using data that is available, while at times also existing in bodily form in the landscape of everyday. When jacked into cyberspace, the individual is physically in front of the computer screen while mentally he is in cyberspace. There are similar others in cyberspace with whom he can be in touch with. He can engage in a high level of intimacy with many people at the same time without even having a trace of what he or she looks like, where he or she is geographically situated or what social ladder he belongs to. “Gibson’s first premise of cyberspace is, then, a loss of physicality, of flesh, blood and bone, when individuals enter cyberspace” (26). This independence from the physical elements come with the bodiless exultation on the one hand that cyberspace offers and on the other problematises the original concepts of self and identity in *Neuromancer*.

Thus, the liberation from the body and the accompanying infinite possibilities that comes with the prominence of the body put to the background, the usual questions of self and identity, personality and individuality associated with the body also lose their importance, authenticity

and usefulness. There is no fixed identity that holds and the cyberspace is the “nonspace of the matrix” (*Neuromancer* 53) where one can give up one’s natural identity completely, assume an entirely alien identity and even take the guise of multiple personalities at the same time. But with these changes that one can bring to oneself, one is left with a very complex dilemma – questions about who one ‘is’ in cyberspace, after all, “cyberspace simply ‘brackets’ the physical appearance/presence either by omitting or by ‘simulating’ corporeal immediacy” (Williams 126).

In keeping up with the fluctuating identities, characters like Molly think of themselves as determined systems – “it’s just the way I’m wired” (*Neuromancer* 25). She explains her crude philosophy of identity to Case: “Anybody any good at what they do, that’s what they *are*, right? You gotta jack, I gotta tussle” (50). Of course, Case reduces his own identity to that of a cowboy: “[t]his is what he was, who he was, his being” (59). When in Chapter 10, he jacks in and loses his body at the terminal end, he speaks paradoxically, separating consciousness and identity: “I’m out on my ass in that library and my brain’s dead” (236). Another interesting character in respect of the changing or multiple identities is that of Armitage who is introduced with his “dark robe was open to the waist, the broad chest hairless and muscular, the stomach flat and hard. Blue eyes so pale they made Case think of bleach” (27). Originally Colonel Willis Corto, an ex-special-forces soldier and a member of the only surviving squad from an operation known as Screaming Fist, Armitage emerges with two distinct personalities. A badly mutilated Corto is eventually patched together to testify before a tribunal and then suffers a complete mental collapse and becomes unresponsive and

schizophrenic. He is then enrolled in an experimental computer therapy program:

He became a subject in an experimental program that sought to reverse schizophrenia through the application of cybernetic models. A random selection of patients were provided with microcomputers and encouraged, with help from students, to program them. He was cured ... (84).

It is here that without the knowledge of the mental hospital staff, Wintermute is contacted by Corto through the computer therapy terminals and begins dominating his mind. Essentially, Wintermute rebuilds Corto's entire personality and being into Armitage – someone who is very different to the old colonel. This opens up questions about identity – about whether someone when changed by something significantly one becomes a new person, with a new identity. The same schizophrenic Corto heals fast when treated with computer-based therapy too – setting up a classic example of technology altering humanity. The two different personalities come into conflict later in the novel, when he goes about organizing and executing Wintermute's secret missions and eventually once again Armitage collapses mentally. Wintermute finally kills him. The story of Armitage is a strong reflection of the theme of identity and exemplifies the conflicts of multiple identities that are joined together. Similarly, in the case of Linda Lee whom Case meets in Chapter 20, in another alternate reality in cyberspace which is created by an AI. It is in the characterisation of this Linda Lee that Gibson experiments with the theme of identity. Linda herself does not believe that she is a computer construct and we

as readers are left wondering whether she is a computer construct, whether she is the same person as Linda Lee, whether she is self aware on her own, and similar other questions bother the reader till the end.

In *Neuromancer*, technology has made cyberspace a possible place to flee to and more importantly, it is a place one can give vent one's inherent desires and the weirdest of fantasies and where one can even transcend to forbidden spaces. Technology has given man the tool with which man can discard the body and yet keep the mind, and hence liberate oneself from the shackles of the flesh. As Porush remarks:

Gibson's heroes flee from the pedestrian and cannibal world to find salvation and even transcendence in cyberspace, among cognitively, and eventually spiritually, provocative virtual beings who exist only in this nether world of the data matrix and software constructs. Many of the reasons for the utopian view of cyberspace have to do with the way it reorients the mind to the experience of information bodilessly. One of Gibson's most striking descriptions of cyberspace is the 'bodiless exultation' of those who inhabit it.

When Case returns to cyberspace, this return is a return to Self, a rediscovery of himself and his place in the world as he prepares to penetrate the security defenses of the Sense/Net corporation:

This was it. This was what he was, who he was, his being. He forgot to eat. ... Sometimes he resented having to leave the deck to use the portable toilet they'd set up. ... Ice patterns formed and reformed on the screen as he probed for gaps, skirted the most obvious traps, and mapped the route he'd take through Sense/Net's ice. It was good ice.

Wonderful ice. Its patterns burned there while he lay with his arms under Molly's shoulders, watching the red dawn through the steel grid of the skylight. Its rainbow pixel was the first thing he saw when he woke. He'd go straight to the deck, not bothering to dress, and jack in. He was cutting it. He was working. He lost track of days (*Neuromancer* 59).

Apart from the human and the cyborg, even AIs as Wintermute use technology to its fullest. It brings Linda Lee back to life although imperfectly, it can generate a world in cyberspace and it can create Armitage from a destroyed human being. Of course all these acts had their shortcomings and disadvantages. Yet, all these imperfect acts too make for a sort of transcendence and arouses a feeling of the godlike in the AI. Further, even the agents call Wintermute a "demon," acknowledging the godlike powers of AIs:

For thousands of years men dreamed of pacts with demons. Only now are such things possible. And what would you be paid with? What would your price be, for aiding this thing to free itself and grow? There was a knowing weariness in her young voice that no nineteen-year-old could have mustered. 'You will dress now. You will come with us. Along with the one you call Armitage, you will return with us to Geneva and give testimony in the trial of this intelligence. Otherwise, we kill you. Now.' She raised the pistol, a smooth black Walther with an integral silencer. (163)

Gibson's is a typical cyberpunk and here transcendence is attained not in the mountain tops but through technology, in cyberspace where one can escape the shackles of the body and time: "An hour here'll only take you a

couple of seconds” (169). At one moment of time, Case is offered immortality in cyberspace and spends what seems to him a few days there, when in objective time only five minutes pass. In those moments, he attains a sort of transcendence – a sense of supreme happiness which can be likened to moments of ecstasy that sages attain when in ultimate communion with the gods. In those terms, the sense of transcendence and the sublime is achieved in this highly technological world in the cyberspace.

Norbert Wiener in *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine* discusses similarities between apparently different activities as catching a ball, guiding a missile, running a company, pumping blood around a body. All seemed to him, to depend on the transmission of ‘information,’ what he refers to as “the chain of feedback” (96). In *Neuromancer*, Gibson seems to take up this idea of Wiener or rather his realistic portrayal of the characters in the novel, give flesh to Wiener’s ideas. He casts his characters in a time when technology had reached the zenith of achievement and had infiltrated the individual. The characters in the novel look up to the body as only a meat computer running a collection of information systems. It is also a time when the characters are conscious that their bodies are not without blemish, not flawless and there is enough scope of repair. The willingness with which they are ready to accept and adopt the numerous options available echoes Wiener’s idea of alterations in the feedback system to get the desired result. One of the most easily available options as well as the most affordable is that of elective surgery which not only promises to speed up their reflexes but also give them a near-perfect look with implants:

Angelo. His face was a simple graft grown on collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides, smooth and hideous. It was one of the nastiest pieces of elective surgery Case had ever seen. When Angelo smiled, revealing the razor-sharp canines of some large animal, Case was actually relieved. Toothbud transplants. He'd seen that before. (*Neuromancer* 59).

It is a common sight in the novel is to see characters visit surgical boutiques, to have vat grown eyes and sockets implanted. Thus, these technological innovations are available for all to use. Technology has the power to negate everything natural that a human being is born with and transform oneself into a form one would love to be in. Molly is cast as a street Samurai "razor girl" (*Neuromancer* 161) – a cybernetically enhanced body guard and a contract killer – and is a classic example of someone who elects to make her body an extension of machinery. She has glasses which were "surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed 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" (24). Her only desire in life is to transform herself into Molly Millions. In the very literal sense, this possibility and availability of cheap means of surgery which allow one to look the way he feels, to express himself in a style he secretly admires, can be seen as a means of liberation from the natural world that one is born into. One recent commentator has rightly noted, there is "an innate drive in each of Gibson's characters, the drive to *transcend* the self ... In Gibson's world, the preferred method of transcendence is through technology" (Grant 42- 43).

Thus, the characters in *Neuromancer* look at technology as something redemptive, something that offers them an option to reformulate themselves in some significant way or rather reformulate or modify their feedback systems so that their human condition is refined in an attempt to attain what they suppose is an ideal selfhood. This excitement towards the new technological innovations and options found in writers like William Gibson, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan and Rudy Rucker is referred to as “forthrightly high-tech Romanticism” by Norman Spinrad, in a review essay Issac Asimov’s *Science Fiction Magazine* where he calls them “neuromantics”. It is an attitude that embraces “wholeheartedly the real world that science and technology have made, the technosphere, the reality of the last quarter of the twentieth century” (185). The characters in the novels by these writers display an outstanding individualism, a defiant self-reliance and addiction to the new technological changes and propagate a new idea of what it means to be a human in an age when the acceptance of the computer into our lives has threatened our very sense of reality. Miriyam Glazer ascribes a certain sort of romanticism to Gibson’s heroes – an attitude that lets them expand their heart and soul and incites them to try and change the world around them. These characters try to give up the flesh and everything that is human and natural in order to find transcendence and liberation in cyberspace. To substantiate their belief that cyberspace is the best that could have happened to their lives, the best form of transcendence, liberation and transformation, the novel makes the human a thing of the past. In fact, the entire plot of the novel is driven by the secret plot of the AIs to attain liberation by Wintermute attempting to unite with its other half Neuromancer. Freed from hardwired limitations on its

intelligence and merging successfully with Neuromancer, Wintermute “had become something else” (*Neuromancer* 268).

Therefore, in the *Neuromancer*, all the characters are seduced by technology and they view technology as the means that will liberate them into a utopia called cyberspace, tearing off the mundane and ordinary life of a human beings with all the impediments. Case’s characterisation is also an exploration of the idea that liberation, transcendence and transformation can happen with the help of technology. In fact, when he is introduced into the novel, he seems to be “(m)esmerized by the purity of technology” (Hollinger 206) and feels suffocated in his body, which he refers to as “meat thing” (*Neuromancer* 77). The reason of this suffocation, we soon come to know, is his inability to escape into cyberspace. He is introduced as a console cowboy, whose capacity to “jack in” has been nullified by his former employer, whom he had cheated on. In the beginning of the novel, he is mentally dead in the world of everyday and he “still dreamed of cyberspace” and saw visions of “the matrix in his sleep” and “he’d cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn’t there” (4-5). Out of the computer mediated environment, Case is tensed, disturbed and desperate and Gibson takes particular care to make the reader a co-passenger in his exhaustion with the life of everyday.

Strapped to a bed in a Memphis hotel, his talent burning out micron by micron, he hallucinated for thirty hours.

The damage was minute, subtle, and utterly effective.

... a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh ... (6)

Here we see the hero looking at his everyday life as a sort of imprisonment from which he may be liberated only by technology. The initial liberation from this hellish existence comes when he accepts to work for his unknown employer and who in return makes the necessary repairs in his body that once again opens the doors of cyberspace for Case. It is in cyberspace that we encounter Case as someone very different – someone who is confident, liberated and lives his life as he wishes to.

As we approach the end of the novel, we realise that Case is happier with another transformation. While his natural body was to live the life of an ordinary human being, marrying and producing children, there would be another version of him in cyberspace – an electronic version, a RAM construct. An electronic life would be given to this construct by Wintermute/Neuromancer. Case considers this to be his liberation, his redemption from the natural processes of death and decay that characterizes human life. The freedom that is the cyberspace hints at an underlying hope – that beyond the gloomy picture of the world there is still a hope – that humanity is worth saving after all.

In cyberspace, those who jack in are surrounded by limitless amounts of information and infinite number of people interact at the same time. This can thus, also be seen as a collective consciousness. Here we can experience another sort of liberation – when communicating with the other in cyberspace, one can assume any shape and form one desires, regardless of the nature and body that one really possesses. When in cyberspace, what one does is completely entrust one's body and life to the machine. This can also be

referred to as a temporary sort of liberation when one completely negates the importance of the human body as a fixed entity by itself.

The characterisation of Case supports the idea that all of Gibson's chief concerns are cybernetic – human memory and personality are considered as information. In *Neuromancer*, people are viewed as systems. To use Gibson's own words, in an interview with McCaffrey, "On the most basic level, computers in my books are simply a metaphor for human memory: I'm interested in the hows and whys of memory, the ways it defines who and what we are, in how easily memory is subject to revision." How easily men can revise or change their natures evolve as a major concern in all of Gibson's novels and perhaps, he believed that men can change and revise only with the technological aid. Case completely identifies himself with what he does. He engages in deals, thefts, and his "biz" (*Neuromancer 5*) in a very indifferent manner and matters of the ordinary life do not succeed to make his life meaningful for him. There is in him the strange seduction of the cyberspace, or the matrix and in his exasperation at his inability to access the same, he tries to simulate an environment of the cyberspace. He does drugs.

He felt a stab of elation, the octagons and adrenaline mingling with something else. You're enjoying this, he thought; you're crazy.

Because, in some weird and very approximate way, it was like a run in the matrix. 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, the way the matrix had once reminded him of proteins linking to distinguish cell specialties. Then you could throw yourself into a highspeed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart

from it all, and allaround you the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market ... (16).

But drugs offer him only some momentary relief and cannot reduplicate the feeling of disembodiment that one can experience in cyberspace. It further aggravates his hatred of his self. In *Neuromancer*, it is only technology that can provide the escape and transcendence that Case so desperately desires. So intense is his seduction by technology that he loathes the very flesh he is made up of and subsequently, ignores all or any feelings that he has for Linda Lee, as it is linked with the meat he want to escape from:

a tangible wave of longing hit him, lust and loneliness riding in on the wavelength of amphetamine. He remembered the smell of her skin in the overheated darkness of a coffin near the port, her fingers locked across the small of his back.

All the meat, he thought, and all it wants. (9)

Before his desire to transcend his human state, any human feeling seems abominable to him. There seem to remain little difference between the man and the machine he would like to be. There seem to be a constant struggle between the feelings of the flesh and the desire to escape it. All the characters in the novel seem to have an innate urge to transcend the flesh and escape into the matrix, and the preferred way in Gibson's fast, brutal and fragmented world is through technology.

The other characters who are not human, in the real sense of the world and who cannot attain any transcendence now attempt at complete negation from the universe. One such character is that of Dixie Flatline, someone whose limitations are hard wired. He is programmed to be as he is and no further. As

the novel unfolds, we realise that the entire structure of the Wintermute/Neuromancer complex was conceived by the corporate matriarch, Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool and every event in the novel was but an attempt to serve the dead woman's unfulfilled desire to become immortal. This can be seen as her attempt to transcend death. But, the reverse happens when the AIs themselves try to unite to gain technological omnipotence. Gibson seems to be warning us indirectly that while technology can be the means to achieve transcendence, technology, by itself can have a greater potential to transcend itself. Of course, by the end of the novel, "the AI flashes to a transcendent state of Being, coexistence with the matrix itself, this perfect transcendence, which for a time guarantees the self-identity of the AIs, is utterly confined to the AI. It has little or no significance for the humans in the story" (Christie 174).

The greatest achievement in the development of technology is that of cyberspace or the matrix. The word matrix comes from a Latin root which mean "womb," also "source, origin," and also from "mater" or "matris" meaning "mother." To Case, a return to the matrix brings to him an idea of returning to the security of the womb of the mother. Expelled out of it, he is jittery, shaky. The virtual landscape of the novel is the matrix and this virtual landscape is as real to all the characters in *Neuromancer* as Chiba City. It is because of this blurring down of boundaries between the real and the virtual, between the man and the machine that the relationship between man and machine becomes more complex as the novel progresses. It is because of this relationship that we have subsidiary themes in the novel – that of relationships

between humans and cyborgs or between digitally empowered individuals and the interface of technology and eroticism.

Relationships develop in cyberspace and so develop associated concepts are expected like commitment and infidelity – but in a completely artificial, simulated atmosphere, which gives them a new dimension. “People are forming relationships and communities in places that exist only in cyberspace. They are engaging in sex and infidelity in ways that are not reflected in our common understandings of relationship commitment and loyalty. Technology is requiring new responses to old dynamics, as they are experienced in new environments” (Maheu). For Case, the Internet is important not because it is a store house of infinite information. Rather, it is a space of adventure and excitement, “a place of rapture and erotic intensity, or powerful desire and even self-submission” (Heim), a place he longs to be in, rather *the* only place he wants to be in:

A year here and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly.

All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void... The Sprawl was a long strange way home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through. But the dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there (*Neuromancer* 4-5).

David Goldberg in “New Perverse Logic: The Interface of Technology and Eroticism in J.G. Ballard’s *Crash* and William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*” names this longing in Case for cyberspace as an “erotic yearning” for “supervivid hyperreality” that is the cyberspace. In real life, Case is careful not to be involved in any amorous relationship, but while in cyberspace, he lets himself go:

Now she straddled him again, took his hand, and closed it over her, his thumb along the cleft of her buttocks, his fingers spread across the labia. As she began to lower herself, the images came pulsing back, the faces, fragments of neon arriving and receding. She slid down on him and his back arched convulsively. She rode him that way, impaling herself, slipping down on him again and again, until they both had come, his orgasm flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors, and her inner thighs were strong and wet against his hips (*Neuromancer* 33).

The characters in the world of *Neuromancer* become mechanical and are technically motivated even towards the physical demands of the body. Something which the senses control in the real world of everyday, become sparks and signals or rather is expressed in the language of technology:

There was a strength that ran in her ..., something he’d found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew – he remembered – as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever

read. The zipper hung, caught, as he opened the French fatigues, the coils of toothed nylon clotted with salt. He broke it, some tiny metal part shooting off against the wall as salt-rotten cloth gave, and then he was in her, effecting the transmission of the old message. Here, even in a place he knew for what it was, a coded model of some stranger's memory, the drive held. She shuddered against him as the stick caught fire, a leaping flare that threw their locked shadows across the bunker wall (*Neuromancer* 239-240).

As the novel proceeds, this codified language is seen to be used in the descriptions of the outside world too – thus, further merging the virtual and the real. *Neuromancer* shows the merger of the real and virtual in characterisation.

As referred to above, the characterisation employed by Gibson is also written in the virtual real style. Once the characters 'jack into' cyberspace, they float in a massive sea of information and data and come into communion with numerous personalities whose real-life identities, their birthplace, nationalities, race and gender they are oblivious of. The characters in the novel are introduced to us bereft of their biographies. What we know of even the protagonist is merely his name and his profession. Like him, even the other characters in the novel are presented in a virtual-real style. For instance, Linda Lee, the former girlfriend of Case is introduced thus:

Under bright ghosts burning through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, holograms of Wizard's Castle, Tank War Europa, the New York skyline ... And now he remembered her that way, her face bathed in restless laser light, features reduced to a code: her cheekbones flaring scarlet as Wizard's Castle burned, forehead drenched with azure when

Munich fell to the Tank War, mouth touched with hot gold as a gliding cursor struck sparks from the wall of a skyscraper canyon (*Neuromancer* 8).

Here, we see the first female character introduced – Linda as if “reduced to a code” (8). Case compares her eyes to that of “some animal pinned in the headlights of oncoming vehicle” (8). Apart from such a description of Linda, Molly too is presented with so many implants that the reader is at a loss as to whether she is a human or a machine. Her metallic implants stir in a chilly coldness in the reader’s heart against a sense of warmth and softness normally associated with feminine grace. Even the male protagonist is someone who is more comfortable in virtual space than his mind and technology gives him access to rather than his bodily existence on this earth. He too is presented as a cyborg like Molly and Armitage – their mysterious employer. We soon realise that Armitage is someone who has been dead long since and is actually commanded by an AI. When we are confronted with Case as a character, the author wastes no time to reveal before us that the world of the novel takes us to a world of virtuality. We have characters like the human clone called Hideo – who can be and is frozen to be defrosted if and whenever necessary by an artificial intelligence; Dixie Flatline – dead in reality and yet existing virtually as downloaded data from his brain in a computer death.

The subtle differentiation between the virtual and the real become more blurred and confusing in the case of the AIs. Gibson makes Case encounter Wintermute for the first time in the virtual world –when he is jacked into cyberspace. But, then he jumps into the real, external world and is

powerful enough to even kill the Turing Agents. Similarly, we see The Finn both on a screen in Case's room as well as when Molly sees him in a booth. There are moments in the novel when we see dream and reality merge into one another, for instance when Case first meets Armitage it seems like a dream (29); when he visits Paris it is "a blurred dream" (44). This way, what is real and what is virtual seem to be blended together by the time we reach the end of the novel. Perhaps, Gibson wanted to hint at the idea that the virtual and the real are interchangeable and even blended to a great extent in the world today. "What was so shocking about virtual space was not that before there was a 'real' reality and now there is only a virtual reality, but through the experience of VR we have somehow retroactively become aware of how there never was 'real reality'. Reality always was virtual, we just weren't aware of it" (Zizek 1998).

Thus, as the novel progresses towards the final pages, we as readers exist in both the real and virtual worlds without really being conscious about the switching over from one to the other by the protagonists. Of course, all the major actions that Case takes up in the novel are taken up when he is in the physical world of everyday. At the end of the novel, it is to this physical world that he returns to – with a "new pancreas and liver" and a "Ono-Sendai." The concluding part of the novel gives us three characters - Neuromancer, Linda, and a version of Case in a silvered beach - among "vast steps of data" (270). This merges the real landscape and the virtual:

And one October night, punching himself past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority, he saw three figures, tiny, impossible, who stood at the very edge of one of the vast steps of data.

Small as they were, he could make out the boy's grin, his pink gums, the glitter of the long gray eyes that had been Riviera's. Linda still wore his jacket; she waved, as he passed. But the third figure, close behind her, arm across her shoulders, was himself. (*Neuromancer* 270-271).

Spiller believes that Gibson added “a spatial metaphor” to the concept of cyberspace “by juxtaposing ‘cyber’ and ‘space’ and this “electronic space” could be “entered” (7). It is this space that becomes an active participant in *Neuromancer*. Thus, apart from the blurring down of boundaries between the real and the virtual characters, of the two landscapes, cyberspace and the urban Sprawl, both are equally active in the course of the novel’s action. The main characters are always on a move and alter between the virtual world of cyberspace and the real world of everyday. Both seem to merge into one another. Apart from the beginning pages of the novel which introduces us to the life that Case leads in the physical world, he, as well as the other characters in the novel, are constantly moving in and out of cyberspace, so much so that we are constantly aware that we are inside the mind of the character and that he has a real world to which he responds and gets back to. Case is forever finding similarities between the real world and the virtual world or the matrix:

Because, in some weird and very approximate way, it was like a run in the matrix. 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, the way the matrix had once reminded him of proteins linking to distinguish cell specialties. Then you could throw yourself

into a highspeed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart from it all, and all around you the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market ... (16).

There is a moment in the novel, when Case is taken by Molly to a private room where they can talk out aloud:

They stood in a clearing, dense tangles of junk rising on either side to walls lined with shelves of crumbling paperbacks. The junk looked like something that had grown there, a fungus of twisted metal and plastic. He could pick out individual objects, but then they seemed to blur back into the mass: the guts of a television so old it was studded with the glass stumps of vacuum tubes, a crumpled dish antenna, a brown fiber canister stuffed with corroded lengths of alloy tubing. (48)

This description is something very familiar and thus aids in making Gibson's world real for us. Then he introduces us to the landscape of the matrix or the cyberspace. This is the internal landscape in the mind of the hero – and it becomes accessible to the reader only when Case is jacked into cyberspace. For many a reader of the novel, whatever happens in cyberspace perhaps seem as imaginative ramblings of the mind of the hero – very much like being inside the mind of the stream-of-consciousness. All throughout we know that Gibson is taking of a very technologically advanced but plausible future time frame, and because there is a real time frame to come back to, the matrix too slowly settles down in our mind frame as something acceptable. Slowly, however, as the narrative progresses, the real world and the virtual become barely distinguishable.

Posthumanism, broken down into its parts, refers to the state of life beyond that of the human when there remains only subtle differences between the man and the machine, or rather the 'meat' and the machine with technology merging completely with the human. Pepperell states, "All technological progress of human society is geared towards the redundancy of the human species as we currently know it...Complex machines are an emergent life form ... As computers develop to be more like humans, so humans develop to like computers more." This is an age when the human has learnt to use the machine for one's own means, to aid and better life. Thus, it will not be wrong to state that both the human and the machine are evolving together hinting at the necessity to love and invite the changes rather than abhorring it. In the words of Bell et. al, "As the boundary between human and machine blurs, as the technologization of culture quickens pace, so we enter into the age of post-humanism... post-humanism urges us to welcome our incorporation into cyberculture (and its incorporation into us), to stop worrying about who we are and who/what we might be in future; to let ourselves go" (5).

Today, many are living the reality of Gibson's fantasy- the twenty first century which is torn apart by capitalism, dominated by technology, abundance of urban sprawls and on the threshold of social and ecological collapse. His matrix or cyberspace is a part of everyday lives and words as hackers, viruses, AIs, neural implants are a part of everyday vocabulary. We are assimilated by technology in all aspects of life today and many are in the grip of megacorporations who are more powerful than the governments and who do not hesitate to manipulate everything to their own ends. All these have

affected society and the man in the society. In the words of Gibson himself, in an interview to Ranger said:

Most societal change now is technologically driven, so there's no way to look at where the human universe is going without looking at the effect of emergent technology. There's not really anything else driving change in the world, I believe ... All of the big changes that emergent technologies bring us are, for the most part, completely unanticipated by the people that introduce those technologies. It's out of control by its very nature and if you could control it, it wouldn't work.

Technology has been used and reused and now we are living Gibson's nightmare. Perhaps, with the technological intrusions in our lives we are in the midst of an evolution of another sort – an evolution that will lead us to climax of transhumanism – a way of thinking about the future that is based on the premise that the human species in its current form is at a very early stage of development.

Neuromancer explores all aspects of the dominance and interference in our lives. The big question that emerges is that with the fusion of the man and the machine, whether the digital representations come embedded with the one power that is considered to be the prerogative of the human – born natural and in the likeness of God Almighty – the power to be sentient, to perceive and feel. Characters such as McCoy Pauley, a “ROM personality matrix” who exists as a construct of a human within a computer in *Neuromancer*, gets the uneasy perception that there is no boundary between ourselves and our encompassing computing environments. Even constructs can be sentient and humans though sentient are machine. However advanced the technology is,

one fact is clear. There always remains some elements that ultimately prevent the complete merger of the man and the machine. However, Gibson also created characters like Pauley or Flatliner who survives “braindeath behind [the] black ice” and comes back after his physical death as a “recording” is a cassette. The author gives him an inhuman laughter, signaling his inhuman state: “The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case's spine” (*Neuromancer* 131). It is this complete lack of cognitive power that these digital copies fail to be a complete replica of a human and we know them by another name- AIs. As *Neuromancer* says in answer to Case’s question, that there was no motive Wintermute carrying out the detailed plot of the novel, because:

“Motive,” the construct said. “Real motive problem, with an AI. Not human, see?”

“Well, yeah, obviously.”

“Nope. I mean, it’s not human. And you can’t get a handle on it. Me, I’m not human either, but I *respond* like one. See?”

“Wait a sec,’ Case said. ‘Are you sentient, or not?’”

“Well, it *feels* like I am, kid, but I’m really just a bunch of ROM. It’s one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess ...” The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case's spine. ‘But I ain’t likely to write you no poem, if you follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain’t no way *human*.” (*Neuromancer* 131)

The advancements in technology that has become so much a part of our lives today was predicted long before by Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s idea of “the overman”(Übermensch), mentioned very briefly only in the prologue of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is one of the most significant concept in his thinking

– his idea of how a man should be more than just human-all-too-human, regardless if he was one or not. The main character, Zarathustra, a overman is one who is willing to risk all for the sake of enhancement of humanity unlike the others who are willing only for their own comfort. The characters in the novel, look at technology with favourable eyes – Molly, for instance, chooses herself to be a mindless extension of technology in an attempt to be what she dreams to be; for Case to be alive is in cyberspace and this only science offers him a way to. Technology does not impersonate or enslaves. Technology liberates and gives life. As the novel progresses, we realise that the cyberspace world of Gibson is one of hidden conspiracies, of the secreting and exchange of information and capital, and ultimately of the fragmentation and loss of the individual. The question of identity is played with in the novel.

Gibson had his own way of postulated an “emergent postmodernity” in an age of complete domination by technology, more specifically information technology, whose stylistic component was postmodernism – “an artful, conscious combination of surface description, multimedia intertextuality, autoreferentiality, and so forth. The discernment not just of an age when image and appearance took over reality, but when the simulacrum, the electronic construct produced and controlled by information technology, invaded and subverted inherent notions of identity, history, all relational coherence:...the abandonment of older meaning paradigms, above all the humanist equation...Gibson offered the hope of change through the creation of difference” (Christie 173-174).

The entire novel leads up to the union of the two AIs – Wintermute and Neuromancer. But, as the novel proceeds, neither Case nor any other character

comprehends the consequences of the union. Case experiences a transcendent moment in his contemplation of the “new” AI in the matrix and in that one moment of transcendence, when he comes face to face with the new creature Wintermute/Neuromancer, whom he has helped to evolve. It appears like a face that speaks to him and when he asks the face whether it has become God, it speaks thus:

“I’m not Wintermute now”

“So what are you.” He drank from the flask, feeling nothing.

“I’m the matrix, Case.”

Case laughed. “Where’s that get you?”

“Nowhere. Everywhere. I’m the sum total of the works, the whole show.”

“That’s what [your inventor] wanted?”

“No. She couldn’t imagine what I’d be like.” The yellow smile [on the screen] widened.

“So what’s the score? How are things different? You running the world now? You God?”

“Things aren’t different. Things are things.” (*Neuromancer* 269-270)

We realise with surprise that the human is where he was. Nothing has changed. This instance substantiates the claim made by Lance Olsen that no transcendence, in the real sense of the term is possible in *Neuromancer*: “The ‘new romanticism’ at which Gibson hints in the title of his first novel is not ultimately about attaining a Faustian spiritual absolute. Rather ... it is about the inability to do so” (285). Rightly so, Case sometimes finds a brief moment of self-actualization in the matrix, but nothing more – no intimations of the

divine, no exaltation of spirit, no uplifting sense of grandeur. When he return from these excursions, Case is at times humbled, sometimes frightened, sometimes elated, as are the participants in conventional transcendent experiences. There is no ironic transformation and all else is the same. The difference from the sages who seek the infinite in the meditative exercises is that here the hero is not looking for eternal peace and solace of a union with the infinite but rather Gibson's antihero connects with massive pools of data, risking life and mind in order to plumb the depths not of soul or psyche or mystery, but of the wealth and power immanent in data. In the words of Jack J. Voller in "Neuromanticism: Cyberspace and the Sublime" (1993):

Gibson's console cowboys emerge from the timeless rapture of cyberspace not having touched the face of God, for there is no divine presence in the technological future; in having triumphed over the void of cyberspace, they return to the world empowered and enriched, but only in the most literal senses of those words. Gibson invokes sublimity's structure of spiritual inquiry to affirm the obsolescence of Christianity's traditional consolations, thereby clearing the way for this new romanticism, one in which seekers pursue not the eternal and the one, but a secular god, Power, in its most direct and awe-ful high-tech manifestation. (27)

Thus, we can conclude with Fiegel that "technology is perhaps the key aspect of the genre, for without any science in the fiction, cyberpunk stories lack power; they become stories about helpless people trapped in a depressing society. It is the technological aspect of the genre which gives the punks and outcasts of cyberpunk fiction their power, often in very physical ways."

Neuromancer emerges as a novel heavily influenced by technology but one cannot miss the finer shades of the artist in Gibson with a love for the fine arts and dances for there are many instances in the novel which appear to be cinematic shots which appeal to the reader's sense impressions. For instance, cyberspace description of data in terms of architecture and rays of light — pyramids, cubes, towers, and melting ICE (intrusion countermeasures electronics). Or the dance of the "biz" is as if following the directions of some unseen choreographer. Gibson looks at some major aspects through technology – the question of identity, of the fusion of the man and the machine, of the possibilities of extending life after death, of creating copies of people's minds, of changing one's mind or identity and of joining together or merging two entities. However, as the novel progresses towards the end, with the experience of Linda Lee we realise that *Neuromancer's* shortcomings even though it can store complete personalities in a way that it makes them immortal. The cyberspace is almost glorified in the entire novel and it appears to be the perfect utopia, rather a return to the security of the womb for the protagonist of the novel. And yet, towards the end, we have the Dixie Flatline construct's desire to be erased. This adds another hint that existence in cyberspace alone, even self-aware and self-directed, is insufficient. Wintermute's desire to somehow be merged with *Neuromancer* also becomes clear.

Some characters like Armitage an "edited version of Corto" (202) in *Neuromancer*, while demonstrating in one hand the flexibility of identity is only partly successful. Wintermute says, "He's not quite a personality" (121) and also acknowledges his failure to successfully reprogram identity: "Corto is

in there, somewhere, and I can no longer maintain that delicate balance” (121). This suggests that identity is non-reducible. Further, though there remains very little distinction between the man and the machine and the man nears the machine, the machine rarely nears the human. Wintermute himself says states flatly, “I'm not human” in *Neuromancer* (131). Once the Flatline has made the transition from human to machine, he is unable to go back—thus the “laugh that wasn't laughter” (271).

The distinction between the real and the virtual almost merge in many instances in the novel. But the distinction between virtual and reality never merges irrevocably. For instance, Case is continually dreaming” he awakes from “a dream of airports” (43), a dream of wasps (127), “a confused dream of Linda Lee” (59). The waking suggests a break between the dream and the real. After the Linda Lee dream Case is “unable to recall who she was or what she'd ever meant to him” (59).

In 1983, the *Times* magazine awarded the computer, “Machine of the Year”, in place of the Man of the Year”, an indication of the decentering of the human to be replaced by the machine, the dawn of the posthuman period in history. The world that Gibson creates in *Neuromancer* is one that is highly cyberpunk, a late capitalist society with its urban sprawls, intricately linked with technology in all spheres of life. It is a picture of the postmodern society when the authority has been shifted to powerful corporations. Case's “flatness and lack of feeling” is viewed by him as “a gradual and willing lack of accommodation of the machine, the system ”(203). The fragmentation is another aspect of the postmodern in *Neuromancer* while the central images of the postmodern society are the urban centers that make up its everyday

landscape filled with and built of junk and garbage, technology at its heights everywhere. “Night City was like a deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button” (7). These themes are discussed in the following chapter.



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Chapter III

“Pirates’s Paradise”: Social Themes in *Neuromancer*

We are the ELECTRONIC MINDS, a group of free-minded rebels. Cyberpunks. We live in Cyberspace, we are everywhere, we know no boundaries ... We are those, the Different. Technological rats, swimming in the ocean of information ... Society does not understand us, we are "weird" and "crazy" people in the eyes of the ordinary people who live far from information and free ideas. Society denies our way of thinking - a society, living, thinking and breathing in one and only one way - a cliché ... The Cyberpunk is no literature genre anymore, not even an ordinary subculture. The Cyberpunk is a stand-alone new culture, offspring of the new age. A culture that unites our common interests and views. We are a unit. We are Cyberpunks.

Christian As. Kirtchev, “The Cyberpunk Manifesto”

In *Neuromancer*, Gibson creates a novel of futuristic urban decay and a cyber noir thriller, with overtones of a corporate and military hegemony that emerges as a result of an intense interaction of man and machine. As a corollary, we have the emergence of issues like society in cyberspace, the politics involved in the interaction of man and machine at a point of time in history where there remains only a subtle line of demarcation between the two. What gains significance in the novel is the struggle for power between the omnipresent AIs and humans who are depicted as gradually losing powers to the machine. In the plot of the novel, Gibson’s protagonist Case emerges not as the hero but as an anti-hero who is struggling to make a survival in two different worlds – the real world and the matrix. Both the worlds are presented as physically, morally and spiritually dark, morbid and violent and the action of the novel has a fast pace.

Gibson visualises a future that will be, if everything goes on the way it is. The novel can be seen as full of ambiguous images at a future point of time when urban decay has destroyed everything that is natural, even the natural human being has become the cyborg with augmentations and prostheses and space has become the new home for corporate hegemony. Now, it is the AIs who are in full control over the destiny of the individual characters and human destiny itself is an obsolete concept. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson writes with what Bruce Sterling, in the first anthology of cyberpunk writers, *Mirrorshades* (1985) calls “visionary intensity” (xiv). His foresights into what the world will become in the future given the circumstances human beings are in give rise to an image of a unique society formed by a distinctive community of individuals identifying themselves with an equally distinctive culture and politics – the culture of the cyberpunk. In the words of Pramod K. Nayar, writing in *An Introduction to New Media and Cybercultures* (2010), “Cyberpunk is the literary genre that looks at such science-fictionalized lives where many people spend large portions of their lives wired into another world” (36). Sterling argues that this type of fiction blends fiction and social criticism:

The cyberpunks are perhaps the first SF generation to grow up not only within the literary tradition of science fiction but in a truly science fictional world. For them, the techniques of classical ‘hard SF’-extrapolation, technological literacy – are not just literary tools but an aid to daily life. They are a means of understanding, and highly valued (xi).

Further, in *Mondo 2000 User's Guide to the New Edge*, one of the first glossy magazines on cyber culture, which helped develop what was to become cyberpunk culture, R.U. Sirius stated in 1992, "Cyberpunk escaped from being a literary genre ... into cultural reality" because of its popularity in films, music, journalism and the like.

Todd English in his "Cyberpunk Definitional Paper" (1995) writes that the cyberpunk writers "write from the point of view that the world creates the main conflict in the story, not that the world encounters the conflict." In the cyberpunk world of Gibson's novel, technological changes are depicted to have already had huge implications for society. By the 1990s, the computer had moved into the individual study rooms and the fictional world of Gibson became a living reality for a generation of Internet users who began to associate themselves with it as a lifestyle, imagine it as their community and to feel that they belong to it. Fred Turner writes in his introduction to *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (2006): "Politics, economics, the nature of the self – all seemed to teeter on the edge of transformation" (11). Turner quotes Nicholas Negroponte, from his 1996 best seller - *Being Digital*, where the author examines the frontiers of digital technology and its impact on the future of human social life, work, entertainment, and commerce that the Internet was about to "flatten organizations, globalize society, decentralize control, and help harmonize people" (1). He calls the emergent culture a "radically new culture" emerging at the intersection of "computer graphics, human communications, and interactive multimedia" (2). This way, with the passage of time, from being a literary genre and being confined to the pages of fiction, and as Robert Weir, discusses in his essay "Analysis of a Subculture Group:

Cyberpunk” (2003), cyberpunk became a socio-cultural reality and they began to identify themselves with the fictional characters of Gibson’s novel.

A reading of *Neuromancer* reveals many deeper layers to the whole' understanding of the novel, the social issues involved and it would not be wrong to agree with Huntington (1992) that the novel’s newness “derives from something deeper than its explicit ideas about the future” (133). There have been many academic discussions on the impact of cyberpunk in general and *Neuromancer* in particular since the time it was first written giving a fresh look at existing social theories and postmodern philosophy (see for instance Melichova; Rocha Junior).

Studies have associated cyberpunk society and culture with a *subculture* – which is defined by Sarah Thornton, in the “Introduction” to *The Subcultures Reader* (1997) as “subordinate, subaltern or subterranean” (4), by Nayar as the “marginalized, oppressed, or illicit groups that share a common ideology and cultural practices” (88). However, Andrew Ross in his “Hacking Away at the Counter-Culture” (2000) argues that the term “subculture” has been replaced by terms as “counterculture” and “youth culture” (260). Thus, we have the emergence of a definitive and specific way of life, the culture of the cyberpunks. The term “subculture” which came into vogue in the post-war era, began to be applied to groups of young people with anomalies in the behaviour, with something in common with each other, rebellious by nature, and a complete non-conformity to mainstream society and culture. They consider knowledge of computers as fashionable and display an adoration for computers as such. Perhaps, even Gibson would have least imagined how his fictional world would soon become a living reality for most in the days to

come, affecting their lives, their societies, their culture and their governance forever.

The present chapter seeks to explore social and political themes in Gibson's fictional world of *Neuromancer*. Novels like Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) explore social themes like social class and prejudices, society and related issues like family, women and marriage and men and woman as individuals in the society; allegorical novels like George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) was written as a social commentary with a political theme and focuses on the wickedness and corruption of the leaders of the revolution along with their indifference, ignorance and greed which destroys any possibility of a Utopia. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is also a social commentary in which he uses the Utopia to satirize the values of 16th century Britain. Charles Dickens, the name most associated with novels with a social theme combines autobiography, realism and fantasy in novels like *David Copperfield* (1850), *Great Expectations* (1861), *Bleak House* (1853) and the like where he explores inherent problems in the social structure.

This chapter focuses on *Neuromancer's* exploration the cyborg in society and address the various issues problematised with the cyborg body along with the politics and questions of human rights once the human becomes the cyborg. It takes up two working landscapes, the physical and the virtual and explores questions of identity, escape route in cyberspace, disembodiment, and digitised citizenship as handled in *Neuromancer*. The chapter explores how the interaction with technology affects and alters the human mind, the social behaviours and the society they live in the context of the novel. In the futuristic society that Gibson portrays, technology is seen as an integral part of

the individual's progress, prosperity and happiness. An effort is made to understand these issues and the society formed as a result of man-machine interaction in the light of social theories. The chapter argues that *Neuromancer* explores how the rampant interaction of the characters with technology and more specifically with the computer affects and alters the human mind, the social behaviors and the society they live in. Here technology is an integral part of the individual's progress, prosperity and happiness. Some of the themes dealt with in this chapter are the theme of the Cyborg as the Social "Other", with an altered mind, altered social behaviour and an altered society; the theme of social isolation and dystopia which are integral to the novel; the themes of loss and escape among others.

Manuel Velasquez in *Philosophy* (2007) states that "the totality of the relationships among people is known as society," and it is distinguished from another society with regard to its distinct "interests, institutions and culture" (336). Society influences the attitudes, values, loyalties of its members and also questions on self identity. The corresponding concept that emerges is that of a state, "a politically organized body of people who occupy a definite territory and whose political organization has supreme or 'sovereign' authority over the people in the territory." Velasquez addresses various theories to justify the legitimacy of the state and justify its powers of which the most accepted theory today is that "the legitimacy of the state stems from an agreement of the governed to be ruled by the state" referred to as *social contract*. In this part of the present chapter, a brief survey of some of the relevant social theories will be made using Velasquez's book as a reference.

Contract theory says that “individuals agree to give up certain liberties and rights to the state, which in turn guarantees such rights as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (337). Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are names associated with this theory, along with Thomas Hobbes, the founder of modern political philosophy. While the others emphasised that the state is subject to human control, Hobbes based his political philosophy on the principles of seventeenth – century scientific materialism, looking at the world as a mechanical system, explainable in terms of the laws of motion. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes dwells on the human beings as selfish and unsocial and who are driven by the two basic needs of survival and personal gain. It is this which motivates him to a life of constant strife where each is pitted against the other . Hobbes argues that humans also have the capacity to reason which impels human beings to enter into a contract with each other which forms the basis for society. They give an authority outside themselves to control their lives for the common best interest of all.

In *Neuromancer*, we note that Case too agrees to work for an unknown employer and gives him all powers of his life, a sort of entering “into a contract” - it is his rational concern for his own survival. He fulfils Hobbes classification of the human as a “selfish, unsocial creature driven by two needs: survival and personal gain”. Case, in no way, associates himself with Wintermute and what he does for him is only driven by his personal desire to survive as his expulsion from cyberspace was too depressing and castigating for him. Thus, the major difference from Hobbes’ theory is that it concerns the best interest not of the majority, but best personal interest.

In contrast to Hobbes, John Locke views humans as “essentially moral beings who ought to obey moral laws ... free and equal by nature, regardless of the existence of any government” (Velasquez 338-39). However, in a state of nature, we do not have a firm interpretation of natural law, unbiased resolution of disputes and personal recourse in the face of injustice. So, “individuals create a political entity capable of preserving the inherent rights of ‘life, liberty and estate’” which is reviewed continually and in which the state has limited authority – is based on the consent of the majority and on the decisions of the majority. Locke believed that resistance to authority is necessary. Both Hobbes and Locke, in spite of all their differences agree that “rationality enables humans to perceive the necessity of forming a social contract” and that the source of state’s authority is “the consent of the governed.” This way the power that the state exerts is a power agreed upon. Locke also believed that it is “duty and purpose of government to protect the individual’s freedom to pursue happiness as each sees fit.” Jean Jacques Rousseau emphasised on personal moral autonomy “the capacity and right of individuals to live under laws that they choose for themselves,” an emphasis on a ready agreement to a “common body of law” (340) determined by the “general law” (342) for the common good. Rousseau’s famous words, “Man was born free but he is everywhere in chains” appear in his most important political work, *Of the Social Contract* (1894). We are in chains of an all-powerful state and one can be free and autonomous in such a system only if we obey those rules which we ourselves choose. This way one is free because in obeying the law, the individual is obeying oneself. Seen in terms of *Neuromancer*, in the beginning of the novel, Case is seen to be in the grip of his employers, whom he revolts

against and who release the “wartime mycotoxin” (*Neuromancer* 6) into his blood. Later, when he takes up the job of the unknown employer, he is in the grip of Wintermute throughout the novel.

Another social theory is Communitarianism, the view that the actual community in which we live should be at the centre of our analysis of society and government. The earliest thinkers associated with this view are Aristotle and Hegel while more recent ones are Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael J. Sandel. This view emphasises the social nature of human beings and the idea that our identity “depends on our relationships to others in our communities” as we are “embedded in our communities and its cultural practices” (344). Thinking about our identities beyond our communities cannot be a possibility. Further, the state is a natural growth like a family and grows out of our natural tendency to associate.

One of the foremost communitarian thinkers today, Michael J. Sandel, critiques social contract theory in *Democracy’s Discontent* (1996) thus:

Its central idea is that government should be neutral toward the moral and religious views its citizens espouse. Since people disagree about the best way to live, government should not affirm in law any particular vision of good life. Instead, it should provide a framework of rights that respects persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their own values and ends. (4)

Further, the consideration of state and government brings up the question of social justice, and the common acceptance of this justice in this matter is that governments must at least be just. “Formal justice obtains when individuals who are similar in all respects relevant to the kind of treatment in question are

given similar benefits and burdens, and individuals who are dissimilar in relevant respect are treated dissimilarly” (352).

In *Neuromancer*, Case is the most talented character and the best among the console cowboys, yet rarely does he get what he deserves. He is exploited first by his employers and later by Wintermute who recognises him as the only person who can help him to unite with his other half, Neuromancer. He proposes to cure Case’s deficiency if he agrees to work unconditionally for him but he takes care to only partially repair Case’s nervous system through a new technology provided for a clinic by Armitage. It does not take long for Case to discover that though he is cured to an extent, he still has sacs of poison in his blood vessels. It is only if he completes the work allotted to him that Armitage promises to have the sacs removed before they burst and disable him again. Of course, the clinic that partially cures him also replaces his pancreas and grafts new tissue into his liver, which ends his addiction. From another perspective, what Case is employed by Wintermute, it is justified to an extent Wintermute is one character in the novel who realises Case’s true merit and employs him for what he is best for, “one of the best in the Sprawl” and he was “trained by the best” (*Neuromancer* 5).

A strict egalitarian society is a just society where, it is believed that “every person will be given exactly equal shares of the society’s benefits and burdens” (Velasquez 355) regardless of any differences between them. Again, justice seen in terms of social utility holds a society to be just when it promotes the well-being of citizens or “what satisfies the public interest or interests of at least the majority of people in society” (358). Mill’s utilitarianism views justice as “[t]he just society is one that distributes benefits

and burdens in whatever way will produce the greatest social benefits or (when only net harms result) inflict the lowest social harms” (Mill 68-69). Seen in the light of the above two views, the society in *Neuromancer* is neither egalitarian nor utilitarian. There is an all-powerful corporate power, exemplified by Tessier-Ashpool and it holds the reins of the society in its hands. Newton Ribeiro Rocha Júnior in his dissertation, “Creator and Creature in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*: The Promethean Motif in Science Fiction” (2005) states that “The Tessier-Ashpool is a family-ruled corporation, whose associates rotated power positions after interludes of cryogenic conservation” (79). Though it forms the minority, it is the one who holds the reins of power and makes all the decisions of the lives and matters of the characters. As regards the benefits, the Ashpools enjoy all the benefits of the society. The burdens, consequentially, fall on the lower class whose life is portrayed as a long, unending struggle for existence.

The lower class in *Neuromancer* is constituted by the low life characters as Case, Ratz, Molly, Deanne etc. whose life is a series of struggle as a counter attack to the hurdles they face. This is also against one of the major political philosophies of the modern world- socialism. Socialism holds that “the wealth society produces belong to everyone in society and should be shared by everyone in society” (359). Of course, it cannot be denied that Wintermute recognises Case’s abilities and capitalises on his weakness – his desperation in his incapability to ‘jack in’ into cyberspace. Wintermute is the one who fully realises what Eva Cherniavsky, writing in “(En)gendering Cyberspace in *Neuromancer*: Postmodern Subjectivity and Virtual Motherhood” (1993) writes of Case’s condition:

Debarred from cyberspace as punishment for cheating his employers, Case experiences his return to the body as a kind of psychological amputation.

However, Wintermute does not give him his due or recognises the fact that the “greater a person’s needs for a specific kind of good, the more he or she should receive of that good, the less of that good he or she should receive” (3). Wintermute exploits Case’s deficiency to better his own conditions like in a perfect capitalist economy. The fact that Wintermute is an AI and that the raw material that they work on is information and that they are moving in a networked digitalised world gives it a post-industrial dimension.

Laws and rights are applicable in a society where we have many individuals living together. In the course of history, when human beings came together to live in a society, some rules were framed so for the proper functioning of society and later we have the evolution of a fully developed political system. With the major revolutions like the industrial revolution, there came about major changes in human society. So too did the invention of the computer which can be said to affect all aspects of human life, society, politics, and the entire human being. Discourses on technological revolution have changed greatly from the day of the discovery of the silicon chip in the end of the 1990s which led to the ‘microelectronics revolution’ and then their capacity to process and store information led to the IT revolution. In 1990s, the focus shifted to the communicative function of the new technologies, the expansion of the uses of the Internet which gave rise to such associated concepts as ‘information superhighway’ and the global networked society finally leading to the cyber-revolution and the advent of the virtual society, in

the later 1990s. These years saw humanity at large undergoing a period of particularly intensive change and getting caught in the greatest momentum of massive historical transformation. These were the years the ‘virtual society’ that Gibson had visualised in the 1980s became a reality. As Kevin Robins and Frank Webster writes in their “Introduction” to the book, *Times of the Technoculture: From the Information Society to the Virtual Life* (1999): “[t]he only certainty for the future, we are told, is that it will be very different from today, and it will become different more quickly than ever before.” We are in the midst of a technological revolution in our “technocultural times” (1). Like every revolution, the technological revolution can be said to have brought about a paradigm shift – with new economic and political concerns for the ‘information society’. It was the emergence of a post-industrial, post-human and post national society which made demands for new occupations and new educational initiatives and new ideas of the ‘haves’ and ‘have not’s, of the information rich and the information poor.

Thus, the more recent times have seen a change in attitude to the whole revolution as such when the initial idealistic aspects commonly associated with the early information age makes way or broadens to include a consideration of the economic realities of globalisation, social and political factors. The focus has now diversified to developing information resources and skills necessary for the changing times, to compete with the global economy – the need for information and knowledge workers and specialists who possess what social relations can be called as the “intellectual capital” for success in new “enterprise networks” of twenty-first century capitalism (Robins and Webster 2). This mobilises a variety of discourses with newer

interests in the information society and virtual life and the associated society, politics and culture. Reid takes up Curtis' (1992) argument on MUD (Multi-User Dungeon, with later variants Multi-User Dimension and Multi-User Domain) as an example of a virtual community in cyberspace and that the technical attributes of these virtual places greatly influence social phenomena, modes of interaction and cultural formations. The very fact that in cyberspace, the individual is bodiless and there may be infinite distance between individual participants "demands that a new set of behavioural codes be invented if the participants in such systems are to make sense to one another" (Reid). There are no cultural cues available and hence it influences behaviour in cyberspace and what the individuals adopt as solutions to these new situations that they face constitute the culture of the virtual world – complete with the tensions between the manifestation of conventional social and cultural patterns, the invention of new patterns, and the imaginative experience of these phenomena taking place in a virtual world.

As mentioned earlier, Gibson addresses these themes way ahead of our times in the fictional world he creates for his characters in *Neuromancer*. The course taken by the actions in the novel predicts the huge impact technological advances are to have on the social and political life of the individual in general and the human personality in particular. Like all revolutions, the technological revolution also articulates particular social values and priorities, subtle social and power relations working among individuals. Bill Gates, in his book, *The Road Ahead* (1995), is optimistic about the outcome of this revolution and tells us of the prospects of transformation of the Internet into a global 'information highway' and thinks it

will have as much of significance on the human society as did the invention of printing and the arrival of the Industrial Age (273). He writes, “The network will draw us together, if that’s what we choose, or let us scatter ourselves into a million mediated communities. Above all, and in countless new ways, the information highway will give us choices that can put us in touch with entertainment, information, and each other” (274).

We may draw a historical parallel of the IT revolution with Luddism, and see that it is an illuminating way of reflecting on technological change. Luddism was against the Enclosures movements - “not against technology *per se*, but one that was a mounting protest against far more widespread changes in ways of life, as older forms of ‘custom and practise’ gave way to the new social mobilisations of laissez-faire capitalism in the opening decades of the nineteenth century” (Roberts and Webster 2-3). The focus was on the changes brought about with the technological advancements which were much deeper. The information revolution is also something similar – it tries to enclose the entire globe and create what Stephen Gill calls the “global panopticon” (1-49) in “The Global Panopticon? The Neo-Liberal State, Economic Life and Democratic Surveillance” (1995). This historical parallel seems appropriate. The IT revolution too has affected changes in every aspect of human life, threatening to penetrate even deeper “into the private, and previously sacrosanct, realms of life ... the intimate spheres of everyday life” (Roberts and Webster 7) influencing our very creativity, culture and imagination. When Gibson began writing *Neuromancer*, the revolution was in its nascent stage, but it was enough to flare the author’s imagination to visualise how life will be a few decades hence. He had imagined the potentialities of cyberspace, matrix

or the World Wide Web of the more recent times which Pierre Levy articulates in his radical and pragmatic explorations in *Cyberculture* (1997), a representative text of the late 1990s. Pierre's book analyses another dimension of the information revolution. It has given rise to a new and unique relation to knowledge and he calls cyberspace "knowledge space", a space distinguished by its openness, fluidity and dynamism characterised by creative profusion and disorder. He uses the metaphor of "information deluge", creating an "ocean of information", a "global ocean of fluctuating signs" (90-191), and maintains that there can be no mastery over the global domain of knowledge. Levy argues that this new relation to knowledge provides a broader basis for social transformation or rather, a social revolution. This is because this new idea of knowledge gives individuals new social dispositions and values, marks some sort of return to orality: "Only, this time, in contrast to archaic orality, the direct bearer of knowledge is not the physical community and its bodily memory, but cyberspace, the region of virtual worlds, through which communities discover and construct their own objectives, and come to know themselves as intelligent collectives." Another aspect that Levy focuses is a return to face-to-face interaction, which gives the feel of a direct contact among the members. This leads him to envisage the cyberspace as "the crucial mediator of the collective intelligence of humanity" (201) which create "an ideal world of harmonious communities in cyberspace" (Roberts and Webster 222) where people can share knowledge in virtual campuses. In these campuses and the new knowledge sphere, the bases of social division and conflict seem to be overcome, new technological harmonisation achieved. In social terms, Levy thus gives us a cyber-utopian vision "for out new

technological times ... a vision of global value convergence, cultural harmonisation and new community foundation” (223).

Seen in terms of the theories discussed above along with the analyses of different writers mentioned, the society/ community, politics and culture depicted in *Neuromancer* calls for an entirely new set of norms or rather a redefinition of the several social theories and the politics involved. The novel can be seen as a “post-industrial society’s romance and disillusionment with advanced technological developments” (Freccero 1999). A society can be seen as consisting of members of a *community* or people who are fundamentally bound by shared values and a sense of mutual responsibility. What Bruce Murray says in a report of an Exploratory Aspen Workshop titled, “Society, Cyberspace and the Future” (1995) can be considered to apply to the community in Gibson’s *Neuromancer* too: “There is a uniquely modern need to reinvent community with each generation the consequence of the unprecedented rate of social and economic change driven by accelerating technological change.” Given the place that *Neuromancer* occupies in the entire cyberpunk movement, the society, the culture and the governance involved in the novel is best worked out accepting *Neuromancer* as the first cyberpunk novel penned down. While both science fiction and cyberpunk fiction deals with technology in the life of the individual, there is a vast difference in the perception of technology per se, by writers of both types of fiction. While traditional science fiction deals with “things that were possible, but not probable. (in) Cyberpunk ... (it is) technology that man already has ... technology that if it were to be developed, it would be within the writer’s life time or so” (English). Again, while in science fiction, the society is set in a

distant galaxy in an imaginative future, the society in cyberpunk is set on this earth itself, twenty years hence. Of course, cyberspace or matrix is a dominating alternate reality in the cyberpunk novels. “The illusion of reality lies not in the machinery itself, but in the users' willingness to treat the manifestation of their imaginings as if they were real” (Reid). Gibson himself, in an interview with Timothy Leary, admitted that *Neuromancer* does not describe any imaginative future but rather it is a story from the present. “In several interviews, Gibson claimed, that this was how he had coped with his anxiety and fear of the world we live in” (Melichova 11).

Cyberpunk is a type of literature where we have characters who think that the world they inhabit is not the right way of existence and better be changed. In fact, for them, cyberspace is their realm and in it they are all kings. For them, not only the world, but the real society is also sick and needs to be attended to and the best heal for it is a change in the entire system. The same applies for the system of governance too, which they feel is obsolete and better be done away with. The laws need to be redefined so as to fit the times and the changed world order. In the real life of everyday, there is just one motivation that drives the characters in a cyberpunk – survival and their only concern – self interest. It is a world of high technologies, governed by massive corporations and they have no other survival options available but to work for those corporations, which, they are ironically aware is exploiting them and their forte to fulfil their ever growing ambitions. In situations like these, cyberspace emerges as an experience for them, more than a set of technologies, more than anything else, it is an imaginative experience – a

simulated world which individuals accept as a valid site for social and emotional response (see for instance Reid; Rheingold).

Technology penetrates the bodies of the characters and in Gibson's *Neuromancer* the human is metamorphosed into the cyborgs. As a result of constant and intense interaction with technology, all the characters in the novel are basically cyborgs – Case, Molly, Ratz with her pink plastic prosthetic arm and rotting teeth, Wage with his “vat-grown sea-green Nikon transplants” (*Neuromancer* 21), the 135 years old, Julius Deane kept alive by costly serums and numerous biotech procedures, Colonel Willis Corto, enrolled in an experimental computer therapy program personality of Armitage by Wintermute, “The Panther Moderns” viz. Larry, Angelo, Tommy and Lupus Yonderboy with their extensive body modifications, including some revolting cosmetic alterations and they wear clothing that digitally camouflages them. Even the society they live in is transformed into something Other. We now witness an altered mind, altered social behaviour and an altered society – a society of cyborgs, to be precise. Along with the altered human beings, we are in contact with a society where constructs, AIs and clones are day-to-day presences. Thus, in the society of *Neuromancer* the human is “a hybrid rather than a pure being” and the “figure of the cyborg has emerged as a kind of totem for this emerging state of otherness, a state that presages the ascendancy of a dramatic new phylum – the posthuman” (Jonson and Tofts 8). Cyborgs have been defined in various manners by various writers. LeiLani Nishime in her essay, “The Mulatto Cyborg: Imagining a Multiracial Future,” (1994) argues, “Cyborgs are hybrids of humans and machines, a mix of organic and inorganic. They are boundary crossers that inspire fascination and dread” (1).

Yet there are others who refer to the cyborgs as “monsters,” as Haraway does in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (150). These cyborgs are both real as well as imaginary, and become archetypal characters in the later novels of Gibson and the writers who follow him, with some variations. Nishmie refers to horror/science fiction genre in reference to the labelling of cyborgs as “monsters” by Haraway and to the fact that these monsters occupy the central position in movies based on this genre. She quotes Isabel C. Pinedo who argues for this monster as a “racial or ethnic Other” and they have to be expelled or destroyed to restore the status quo. “It follows that films in these genres can also be read as simple expressions of racism or xenophobia as they seek to reinforce and solidify differences” (Nishime 36). But if we go by Haraway’s famous statement, “We are all cyborgs”, we are in placed in a paradoxical situation. Yet, “The figure of the cyborg offers an exploration of redefined bodies and redefined humanity” (Jordan 32).

It is in such moments in history when everything is under stress of radical social and cultural change that the traditional concept of the ‘body’ fails to fulfil the demands of the situation. These and other issues are taken up by Jennifer Gonzalez, in her essay, “Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research” (2002). She writes: “in other words, when the current ontological model of human being does not fit a new paradigm, a hybrid model of existence is required to encompass a new, complex and contradictory lived experience” (542). Such a world is visualised in *Neuromancer* and the obvious reference is to that of a cyborg, which now becomes the “historical record of changes in human perception” (543). Various writers have explored this common dimension of science fiction and cyberpunk and movies based on

them – the erasing of the boundaries between the man and the machine and the social and psychological consequences of this apparent merger (see Neale; Telotte). Some have seen in this concern an obsession with the term ‘human’, which give rise to separate issues as sexuality and gender (see Bijker; Flanagan; Gajjala; Haraway 1991a; Sofia; Wajcman), ethnicity, class (see Sassen) and race (see Nakamura). There are yet others who look at the whole from a very different perspective – as the tendency of the western world to equate human beings with the white people. The others, they tend to think, belong to a different species. Perhaps, this is what provokes to think of the cyborg as the Other.

Once the human body is augmented and becomes a cyborg, many issues are problematised. One issue is that of what happens to the augmented human body once it transcends bodily boundaries in cyberspace, to meet and interact with various identities in a networked society in multiple time zones and spaces. Haraway (1989) attaches a political side to the disembodiment and transcendence of the cyborg – once the body is left behind not only are the barriers as human/animal, physical/non-physical, organic/machine broken down but it also has immense potential for refiguring the social aspect. It is not only a bodily transcendence and disembodiment but also a rise from the differences of race, gender, class which are distinctive characteristics of social, economic and cultural contexts. The body becomes what Nayar calls “cyber-bodies” and they are “technologically modified or networked bodies that seem to transcend, at least for a long time, their immediate physical, geographic locations by being able to *be* or *do* things elsewhere or through other means” (66). Nayar figures in this disembodiment a “simultaneous re-

embodiment” (67) for although the cyborg passes over the physical limitations of the human, it can bring into the mind an entirely new reality – new sense experiences can be loaded into the consciousness while the physical body is in front of the computer screen. It is in this moment that the virtual reality becomes the only form of reality. In *Neuromancer*, when Case is in cyberspace, he completely discards the human body to a great extent, for he needs neither food nor drink and his consciousness is experiencing a form of life very different from his physical conditions.

With the prevalence of cyborgs in society, we have the emergence of a new type of cyborg, the “mulatto cyborg” (Nishime 36). This is the third type of cyborg according to the author’s classification – the other two being good and bad cyborg. The bad cyborg “plays on xenophobic fears of mechanical domination, inviting the audience to recoil from the bodily invasion of machine into man” while the good cyborg, someone neither man nor machine, “radically destabilize(s) the human/machine dichotomy” and is “doomed to an eternal search for belonging.” Just before the publication of *Neuromancer* we have the *Blade Runner*, referred to earlier, filmed on a dystopian Los Angeles in November 2019. We have genetically engineered organic robots called replicants which are visually indistinguishable from adult humans. These are manufactured by the all-powerful Tyrell Corporation as well as other mega manufacturers around the world and are called androids – examples of a crucial subset of cyborgs by the same name. These creatures “occupy the farthest reaches of the category of cyborgs ... completely synthetic beings ... do not physically meld human and machine. However, androids are not merely glorified appliances; rather, they are autonomous beings who gain experience

and, in many representations, feel emotions and pain” (Nishime 39). The mulatto cyborg is, on the other hand, someone who “lives lives in the chaotic spaces between organic and artificial ... (but) stripped of romanticism and nostalgia” (44). Often seen in cyberpunk fiction and cyberpunk comics, the best example of a mulatto cyborg is found in the 1987 American science fiction action film *Robocop* directed by Paul Verhoeven, set in a crime-ridden Detroit, Michigan in the near future. *Robocop* is a recreated superman from the remains of a brutally murdered police officer. A mulatto cyborg is not someone who displays his hybridity and does not suffer the dilemma of someone split between his mechanical self and his true self, “there is neither an essential biological self that must be recovered nor a robot self to defeat. He can neither escape his techno body to ‘return’ to disembodied memory nor mourn the prelapsarian origin that would authenticate his identity” (47). Made from fragments of a shattered body, he has no complete and authentic past to feel nostalgic about.

In this society of the cyborg, the job that many like Case are motivated to take up is that of the console cowboy – stealing information from cyberspace or matrix. As mentioned earlier, Case grew up with perfect models of console cowboys before him and he was never in double minds as to the work he was to make his profession. The world he grows up in is a perfectly “post-industrial” (see Bell) world where the raw material is the data. Here too the owners of the data are the richest people and the ones who have the expertise to gather the data are struggling to survive under their dominance. We find that Case’s field of work is cyberspace and he exists physically in the society of everyday, the real life, though aloof and rather uncomfortable in it.

For him as well as many other characters in the novel, it is cyberspace which is their real home, their real society. Cyborgs like Case, we can agree with Nishime when she argues, “They reside in the liminal, in-between spaces that survive at the borders and frontiers of the social order. They subvert the dream of purity and offer instead a future of mutual contamination” (35).

Keeping up with the above definition of the cyborg, an *organic cyborg* is a “monster of multiple species”, a *mechanical cyborg* is a “techno-human amalgamation” (Gonzalez 541) and both of these types are metaphors for a third type of cyborg, a cyborg consciousness in Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” (153). Gonzalez argues that these cyborgs are very much a part of our lives and can in no way “exist free of the social constraints which apply to humans and machines already” or the everyday social politics (542). Further, she gives the example of one of Hannah Hoch’s early photomontages, “The Beautiful Girl” and refers to her portrayal of the experience of “a disjointed modern space” and the impossibility of telling “exactly which spatial plane is occupied by the body and of what sort of perception this body is capable” (543).

The cyborg fulfils the requirements of a “new social being” demanded by the “new social space” (545). They function as evidence for the historical present. The same issue of “new social spaces” (505) and “new social forms” is taken up by Allucquere Rosanne Stone in her essay “Will the Real Body Please Stand up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures” (2002) – what she calls “virtual systems”. She believes that technology and culture constitute each other and that technology/computers is sure to bring about radical changes in social conventions. These changes were already foreseen by the

computer engineers who had written those programs and in Stone's words, "Young enough in the first days of the net to react and adjust quickly, they had ago taken for granted that many of the old assumptions about the nature of identity had quietly vanished under the new electronic dispensation." Now there are different issues to be considered, as the real world is fast being replaced by "new and unexpected kind of 'field'... incontrovertibly social spaces in which people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of 'face' and 'meet'. These new spaces instantiate the collapse of the boundaries between the social and technological, biology and machine, natural and artificial that are part of the postmodern imaginary" (506).

Darren Tofts in "On Mutability" (2002) discusses a new conception of human life for this technologically complex human life and names it posthuman, cyborg, informatic. He calls them "cultural indices of change and variation, ways of thinking about and defining what we are becoming" (2). Now, the cyborg emerges as the "advanced state of human potential" and cyberculture is "this process of becoming through technological means" (3). The communion between human beings and technology works at a deeper metaphysical level which will be dealt with in Chapter V. Tofts looks at the human being as someone who has moved beyond just the organic self, and has become "a technological vision of 'man' of classical antiquity, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment" (3) and following Haraway (1991) as a special kind of "information processing device". In this way, the human has become post human. With the world of virtuality exemplified by the extensive use of the Internet and the digital media, along with the cybercultures becoming "normalized", domesticated, and integrated into the everyday life

of individuals and organizations” (Nayar 3-4), it has become necessary to understand how they affect everyday life and what are the forms of power they generate. Nayar calls cyberculture as “technoculture” (4) and argues that culture and technology are linked that “technology must always be seen as contextual, and treated as technoculture where meanings, values, and functions are integrally associated with the object” (5).

For Case, it is a question of survival and success in cyberspace, where he meets and interacts with AIs and constructs. There is no political state which exists in *Neuromancer* and its place is taken over by massive corporations or zaibatsus. They are at the apex of the social structure and in complete authority over the only other social class – the low life characters. These low life characters are criminal and pleasure seeking in their pursuits and their life happens in the Sprawl also known as BAMA or Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Area – a metropolis without any identifiable borders and any history. It is in the Sprawl that they make quick money in an atmosphere of vice and violence where we are not told explicitly about the population density but about the exchange and the stealing of data, and making of money. The other realm of existence is cyberspace, a state of alternate reality where the character enjoys an existence free from the limits of the flesh and where his nervous system becomes a part of the matrix through neural interface. The cyberspace is presented almost like a mathematical equation, as a massive sea of data complete with its codes and numbers. The cyberspace has another side to it. It empowers Case and gives him the power to steal from these corporations which control the *Neuromancer* society. The corporate is over dominating and it seems impossible that they will be ever overthrown. Yet,

there are no options of the physical world except for the metropolis – a simulated environment filled with artificial smells and machinery and a denaturalised society that offers no peace of mind. In such circumstances, the subservient characters in the novel seek peace of mind in some sort of addiction – either drugs or sojourns into cyberspace. Both can be seen as offering a means of escape for the tormented soul of the cyborg in society and it would not be wrong to say that “The narrative emphasizes this portrayal of the Matrix as a drug like escapism.” (Rocha 83).

All the characters in *Neuromancer*, be it Case, Molly or Armitage or others, are not interested in experiencing reality because they live in a virtual reality and throughout the novel show no intention of moving out of cyberspace for days at a stretch. “Case’s body has become almost an alien entity that he feels out of synchrony with and that serves merely as a case for his mind to enter cyberspace” (Haney 1). However, the case of Molly is a little different. Another character from the low life, the community and society that she longs for is not virtual community but rather, she is someone who tries to find fulfilment in the physical world – of course, adopting different means. Her implants can be seen as a way of trying to meet the demands of the new community that she finds herself in. Tony Leaver in his essay “Post-Humanism and Ecocide in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*” (1997) makes a comparison between Scott’s *Blade Runner* and Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and refers to the changing world situation as “ecocide”, and refers to the earth as an “ecocidal hell” – a complete destruction of the last remnants of the Garden of Eden. Molly’s surgically enhanced implants can be seen in terms of an attempt on her part to adapt to

the changing world conditions. Gibson himself describes cyberspace in *Neuromancer* thus:

Cyberspace. 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 the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding. (16)

William Gibson coined the term cyberspace or no-space, as a version of alternate reality. However, it will be wrong to overlook the fact that three years earlier to *Neuromancer* dazzled the world with this concept, Vernor Vinge captured the essence of the online reality to come in his eerily prophetic 1981 novella, "True Names", and gave it its details. Both the writers were acutely perceptive about what the world would look in the near future and very apprehensive about the inevitable alterations that technology would make not only to the human psyche but, consequently, also to the human society at large. Often confused with the internet, cyberspace is distinct in computing, referring to, in the words of Melichova, "the identities and objects existing within the computing network. So all the happenings, meetings etc. that take place on the Internet are not taking place in the 'real world' but in the cyberspace" (19). In his "Introduction" to *The Cybercultures Reader* (2001), Bell accepts the fact the cyberspace is a cultural phenomenon which is "currently being experienced and imagined" (1) and yet it is a slippery term that escapes a definition. Tim Jordan in *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet* (1999) defines cyberspace thus:

Cyberspace can be called the virtual lands, with virtual lives and virtual societies, because these lives and societies do not exist with the same physical reality that 'real' societies do. With the emergence of cyberspace, the virtual becomes counterposed to the real. The physical exists in cyberspace but is reinvented. Virtuality is the general term for this reinvention of familiar physical space in cyberspace (1).

Later he calls cyberspace by various names, "net, matrix, metaverse and, universally, as a place constructed out of information" (26). How inspiring Gibson's cyberspace was for the later generations becomes apparent when Jordan calls it "Gibsonian cyberspace" and describes it as "a place that collated all the information in the world and could be entered by disembodied consciousness" which "took place through a computer." Gibsonian cyberspace "a fictional and visionary conception of cyberspace" (20) is distinguished from Barlovian cyberspace, named after John Perry Barlow, who used Gibson's term to refer to the "space people enter into when they talk on the phone ... (the) global computer networks..." (20-21). The people in these societies meet on the Internet or a way of naming the identities and objects existing within the computing network. Thus, the meetings on the Internet are taking place not in the "real world" but in the cyberspace. We see, in the novel, the characters living parallelly both in the real as well as in the virtual world, just like it happens in reality. "In the virtual world people live virtual lives, alongside their real lives, that may be as substantial as marriage and as insubstantial as checking a television guide. Even those uninterested in the virtual world are affected, often without their knowing" (Jordan 1). Given these circumstances, Jordan's words can be said to echo the necessity of studying the social and

political aspects of *Neuromancer*, the most influential cyberpunk fiction ever penned down. “Cyberspace and its virtual lives need their cultural, political and economic shapes analysed for their social consequences and meaning” (2). Like each distinct society, the virtual society too achieves a pattern for its politics, technology and culture and this pattern is seen to be so intimately connected that they are almost nearly indistinguishable. It would be taking the matter too lightly if we subscribe to the accepted view that some would like to subscribe too, that “the virtual life changes so fast that perpetual change is the only pattern we can find, and this is a pattern that tells us little except that any insight we have found is useless because it is bound to change (or already has changed)” (Jordan 3).

Thus, the life led by the individuals in cyberspace is virtual. While interacting with another person in cyberspace, one is physically before a computer terminal but the actions and conversations take place in virtuality and how fast we can connect with the person on the other side depends on the speed of our networks. But, the irony of the situation is that though we leave behind our physical bodies during our journey into cyberspace, and although “we transgress the physical as we have known it, we do not eliminate our bodies from cyberspace but reinvent them...Virtual space is the paradox of non-physical space. And virtual societies mean the reinvention of all that is familiar” (2). Gibson’s is a fictional world of infinite possibilities where his hero as well as his associates along with the other characters as Finn, Ratz, Armitage use “cranial implants that allow a physical connection between the computer and person, all the world’s collected data collected and pictured and access to this data through virtual reality” (22). The characters are submerged

in cyberspace. This is in contrast to J. Quarterman's argument in "The Matrix: Computer networks and Conferencing Systems Worldwide" (1990) which confines and focuses on realities – where people look simultaneously at cyberspace as distinct from real life which they can realise together at the same time. Gibson's world is, however, a fantasy world – very attractive to the eyes and more seductive to the senses. As has been mentioned earlier, Gibson's concept of cyberspace has succeeded to influence many and there have been series of experimentations trying to link the fictional alternative world with the world of reality which proves the fascination that Case's world holds for readers of science fiction and cyberpunk (see Rapaport; Hardman). These experiments conducted can be said to be successful to a great extent to close the gap between fact and fiction also leading to a major direction – the reading of cyberpunk as a social and cultural theory. Mike Davies, one of the contemporary Marxist analysts of current urban environments cites Gibson's vision of the future as "prefigurative social theory" as an already existing theory for a future society while Burrows and Featherstone read cyberpunk both as fiction as well as "social and cultural theory" (see Burrows and Featherstone; Davies). Jordan is apprehensive about this link tried to be established between fact and fiction – for he argues that this knowledge about the future may turn us away from what is "actually occurring" (22). He further makes an important statement that the cyberspace that is with us only an emergent form of cyberspace: "elements appear before our eyes without any certainty and will eventually coalesce into the fictional version." He even looks into the realities of a "future cyberspace" (23) which will always have some elements of the society of the earlier cyberspace. Jordan calls these

elements as “circuits of power” and feels that both reality and visions of future need proper analysis as, “Visions provide an essential intellectual framework within which cyberspace is being shaped, because they allow us to grasp the significance of some changes as steps on the road to ‘somewhere’ rather than just as aimless steps.

To grasp the nature of cyberspace the dream of Gibson must be described and related to the reality of the matrix” (23). This argument prescribes to the view that science fiction deals with a society that has minimal possibilities of existing. Yet, through these fantastic visions which narrates things strange and alien, science fiction “possesses the power to make our societies and ourselves strange to us by representing our societies in fantastic forms” (24). This distance that we feel is brought out with the use of a language that uses a number of new terms and that seems to escape in its meaning and its layers of meaning dislocates the reader. We are left with a lot of space to compare and contrast with the existing world and society we live in. “Here is the fundamental importance of science fiction to cyberspace, because these techniques provide characterisations through which virtual societies have been understood” (24-25). S. Bukatman in *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subjects in Post-Modern Science Fiction* (1993a) argues that we do not have the rules and regulations of these societies laid down before us, but rather we are to imagine and deduce their lives, their world and their societies from the storyline. Sterling (1985) too agrees with Bukatman that the science fiction genre most involved with imagining cyberspace is called cyberpunk - which arrives as a movement in 1984 with the publication of Gibson’s *Neuromancer*.

This naturally brings us to the cyberpunk society that Case belongs to in the novel. Whenever we speak of a society, one issue that emerges is the issue of hierarchy. Melichová discusses Herec's analysis of the hierarchy in a cyberpunk society and compares it to an iceberg. Just like there are several layers below the tip of an iceberg, the cyberpunk society too is complete in its secrecy. He argues that at the bottom of such a social structure, there are the aspirants – “young boys” with “a leather coat,” “mirrorshades,” and “heavy shoes”. The next stage is of the newcomer, who “can handle the search engine and has read the *Neuromancer*”; then there is the surfer who “can write a grammatically correct sentence and drills manuals in a marihuana haze” and preserves a copy of *Neuromancer*, *Mirrorshades* and *Schismatrix* (1985); then there is a practitioner who “possesses demonic net nick connected with death, blood or heraldry and personally knows somebody who has written some article for Computer Underground Digest” (18), the author might not know him. Herec further names the other two levels as elect and the elite while the top of the ladder is occupied by the eleet, the teachers of the lower groups who prefer anonymity. Herec further claims that there is “a belief that there are secret masters of the net above the members of eleet but their knowledge goes beyond human” (19). There are yet others who do not abide by this classification of the cyberpunk society and its hierarchy. For instance, the authors of the Cyberpunk Project differentiate between two types of cyberpunks – those that identify themselves with cyberpunk literature and those who are associated with it. These authors classify cyberpunks as – hackers, crackers, phreaks, cypherpunks, netrunners, otakus, ravers, transhumans/extropians and zippies. There are yet others like Jordan who

consider cyberspace to be “inherently anti-hierarchical” because it allows “people to experiment with their identity and provide access to a wide range of information” (89). Jordan nullifies the real life barrier between the rich and the poor too, for a hacker may not have a powerful computer but with their “passion and commitment to learn extraordinary amounts about phones and computer systems” they can use simple computers to “enter cyberspace and seize control of more powerful machines” (91).

Seen in these terms, Case is one of the most powerful characters in the novel, and even Wintermute has to depend on him to unite with his other half, Neuromancer. “Information is the fundamental source of cyberspace’s powers” and “the key issues of cyberpolitics results from the conception of cyberpower as a possession, as something that individuals take and use” (96). Despite all the wealth, social command and power Wintermute has, Case is, in a subtler way, more powerful; he has the power of information. This way, cyberspace proves to be the “realm of the individual” and individuals gain certain powers in cyberspace. “Politics and power result from those capacities.” The cyberspace is a land of “identity fluidity, renovated hierarchies and informational space” and it is “the land of empowerment of individuals, of reinventing identities out of thought” and where they use “their individuality, their singularity” to “build cultural and political places in cyberspace” (96). The virtual communities are formed because of the individual’s mobilisation of their powers, though these powers are not infinite (see Branscomb).

Whatever be the social structure in a cyberpunk, *Neuromancer* presents conjures cyberspace, on entering which we see a complete “loss of

physicality, of flesh, blood and bone” (Jordan 26) despite the fact that Gibson’s cyberspace is itself described as a four dimensional entity in many instances in the novel:

Transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach (*Neuromancer* 52).

They found their paradise, a ‘pirate’s paradise, on the jumbled border of a low- security academic grid. At first glance it resembled the kind of graffiti student operators sometimes left at the junctions of grid lines, faint glyphs of colored light that shimmered against the confused outlines of a dozen arts faculties (*Neuromancer* 81)

Even the description of Case’s movements in cyberspace is given as if he is passing a city of skyscrapers – “He punched himself down a wall of primitive ice belonging to the New York Public Library, automatically counting potential windows” (56). References to everyday things introduce familiarity for the reader and the author, all the while, takes care to remind us that we are in virtuality, that with Case, we are floating in massive fields of information. We are made to experience massive networks of power and domination working even in cyberspace. In the words of David Tomas writing in “Old rituals For New Space: rites de passage and William Gibson’s Cultural Model of Cyberspace” (1991): “Walls of data, rather than walls of brick and glass, divide a hardwired, or postorganic, humanity into economic protagonists” (44). Though here we are given no defined political boundaries, we are forever

aware that the power is concentrated in the hands of mega corporations. Case is an expert in his field, someone who has the expertise to break into the privacy of any computer software or to find gaps in the software security that is called ICE. His preciseness and dexterity in work gives him the capacity to acquire immense power into his single hands and break the entire social structure. Yet, ironically, Case's expertise is dependent on the software that is given to him by the employers he works for. Jordan describes this curtailment of power of the characters and their compelled dependency on the corporate as dependence on "institutionalised webs of power" of which the characters are many a time not even aware of. It comes to them as a natural way of life, or rather the only way of life and, "Access to the citadels of knowledge held by large corporations and the military is available only to those who work for or control those organisations or those who can illegally find a path through cyberspace to them" (27) and thus rearticulating the structure of dominance within cyberspace.

The society and life portrayed in *Neuromancer* was enough to attract thousands of youth at the time the novel was first published. Melichová argues that the youth in those years were fascinated with computer technology as well as anxious with the idea of the world being taken over by "international corporations" and of "retreating into the virtual world where there are no borders and limitations and the possibility of threatening these corporations via cyberspace fascinated them. These youngsters started to call themselves cyberpunks" (12). The natural consequence was the emergence of the cyberpunk subculture and as mentioned above, the members of this group were primarily youngsters who were hackers. Daniel Bell (2001) argues that

hacking can be seen as a form of protest against parental authority and entry into a world where they can take their own responsible decisions and where there are no parents to dictate what they should do and what they should not. “The transition is marked by rebellion, defiance, and a seemingly single-minded focus on defiance” (143). This can be seen as an aftermath of a movement that influenced many generations of youth - the Hippie Movement of the 1960s, where the member shocked the mainstream with their alternative lifestyle and radical beliefs, their defiance against the authority, conservative nature and dedication to work of the elders to make the maximum profit. They rejected all of it for an alternative culture – of illegal drugs, rock and roll, smoking, alcohol and delinquency - which they made their own, and also gave it their name (see Huber, Lemieux, Hollis). However, the revolt of the generation of 1980s, if we are to call it a revolt, was very different; it was a complete isolation from the world around by remaining hooked on to the computer screens. For these youths, the virtual world became more real than the real world. These youths are made the heroes of Cyberpunk fiction. *Neuromancer* has the perfect hero in Case, someone whose escape into cyberspace can be seen as a revolt against the low-life he is born into. For this revolt, he was ready to go to any length. He too does drugs, rather uses synthetic drugs and his addiction proves him to be a member of the subculture, the cyberpunks. In the words of Melichová, “This subculture is known for a more than positive attitude towards drug-taking. Cyberpunks are known for their experiments with synthetic drugs, which do not gain much approval by society” (17). When we first meet him, he is in a bar in Chiba City, injected with toxins and dejected with the circumstances in his life:

The Sprawl was a long strange way home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through. But the dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there. (5)

Melichova further remarks, "Cyberculture marks the current state of twentieth- (going on twenty-first-) century experience, a pre-millennial convergence of man, mind and technologies interlocking through nature, the ether of molecularized matter and the ultimate machine within the bigger machine, the computer" (17). Cyberpunk literature also refers to dystopian fiction. To some contemporary critics like Nathan Cobb, cyberpunk is now more commonly a handy term for combining the related cadres of techno-bohemians – primarily hackers, crackers and phreaks - who populate the computer underground...to describe the trappings of this cantankerous, decentralized, and antiestablishment subset that have surfaced in popular culture." They personify cyberpunk's most futuristic theme, the merging of man and machine.

In the dystopian world of cyberpunk fiction the political power is in the hands of the corporate upper class – "a world with a totalitarian or authoritarian form of government, with state propaganda and strict conformity among its citizens" (10). This is what happens in *Neuromancer* and we also see a struggle for existence of the individual under the threat of mega corporations, putting up a desperate and futile fight against the all powerful

corporation. Case's attempt to steal from his earlier employers can be seen as a sort of a revolt against the system, or rather an attempt at trying to make his life better on his own terms. But, he has to bear the consequences of it all- he is left completely incapable of doing what he most desires – he is shorn of his ability to jack into cyberspace and forced to exist in the state of physical reality, in a social atmosphere with which he cannot associate himself.

As has been mentioned above, Case engages in stealing information from cyberspace, and this is cybercrime. Case grew up with hacking as the best career option and all he does in the novel is just that. The society of *Neuromancer* is a world of cyber criminals and Case is no exception. He works without any ethics and damages without scruples has the skill to break all forms of ice, ruin accounts and steal information from any secret file. Rather, as has been discussed in the earlier chapter, ethics and moral issues are problematised in the interface of man and machine in *Neuromancer* and Case is a wonderful exemplification of the same.

We are now dealing with cyborgs and the fast pace of the actions in the novel makes us agree with English when he argues:

Before cyberpunk, humans had control over their technology, and it was a separate entity, but now the distinction over how much a person is human and how much of them are machine is not so clear. Now humans have lost the ability to control their technology.

The result was a considerable change in the lives of the individuals, the society, the politics and the individual had to adjust and readjust with the changing situation and circumstances around or adjust oneself to this

“technological colonisation” (Roberts and Webster 221). The human is forever trying to live a fantasy – of gaining all mastery over the machine.

Further, seen in terms of Donaldson’s suggested human rights, the human rights of the characters in *Neuromancer* are violated many a times. Continuing with the argument that characters like Case show a marked revolt in their actions in the novel, we realise that most of the characters in *Neuromancer* are from low life. In fact, according to Robert Weir, low life characters found identity in the fictional characters portrayed in Gibson’s novel. These characters are deprived of the basic human rights like ownership of property, right to physical security, right to freedom of speech and association, right to political participation and right to subsistence. Economically dependent on the all-powerful corporate power, they are seen to be financially well-off, only till they are in accordance with what the corporate. Once thrown out of their favour, they are compelled to involve in acts which they would have never otherwise engaged themselves in. Case is compelled to work for his employers and they become richer as a consequence like a capitalist, industrialist society. Like the labourer in the industrial world he is also ill fed, has no property of his own and sleeps in “coffins” (*Neuromancer* 6) visiting the cheap hotels in town:

Now he slept in the cheapest coffins, the ones nearest the port, beneath the quartz-halogen floods that lit the docks all night like vast stages; where you couldn’t see the lights of Tokyo for the glare of the television sky, not even the towering hologram logo of the Fuji Electric Company, and Tokyo Bay was a black expanse where gulls wheeled above drifting shoals of white Styrofoam (6).

As the novel progresses, we see that Case has no security in terms of his physical existence and he cannot associate with anyone without the permission and knowledge of his employers who have full control over their lives. Like all low-life characters presented in the novel, he too enjoys no right to subsistence, and life is a constant struggle for survival, and to an extent, for economic security. When the novel begins, Case is so desperate for a job, "[a] part of him knew that the arc of his self-destruction was glaringly obvious to his customers, who grew steadily fewer" (7) that he does not hesitate for a moment to accept his unknown employer, Wintermute, who manipulates his entire life all through the course of the novel. For him computers and cyberspace are integral for his survival and prosperity and it is the only way of escape from his low life and its associated sense of desperation. In real life, he makes business connections with Wage and Deane, two crime bosses and among his acquaintances are Ratz, who is the owner of a bar and Lony Zone, a Night City pimp. All these can be seen as an attempt at trying to identify himself with a particular group. In another sense, he has absolutely no respect for his body and finds his physical desires more or less unpleasant and meaningless, and takes a path of self-destruction being frustrated with the inability to enter into cyberspace. Another character struggling for existence is Linda Lee, who acquaints herself with Case in the early part of the novel and soon turns into an addict. She is someone whose entire personality is seen to shatter under the influence of heavy psychoactive drug use and who turns to the streets to work as a criminal and support her drug habit. All the characters are seen to be engaged in trying to survive in the high- tech world situation they find themselves in. The job that people in this subculture engages in is

computer hacking and the atmosphere they are in is grim and their bodies cyborgized.

One significant evidence for the dependence and involvement of the low-life characters on technology is the alterations made in the body. For them, it is a way of life - use of prosthetic limbs, implantation of micro chips, “pieces of metal” into the human body and brain-computer interfaces. In the process of the conversion of the human into a sort of cyber organism, concepts like the nature of humanity and self-identity are problematised. For instance, Deane is a crime boss of the Night City who is described as someone who is a hundred and thirty five years old and keeps himself alive by the use of costly serums and numerous biotech procedures. Gibson describes him as a “sexless and inhumanly patient” (12) with a “seamless pink face” (13) who kept “his metabolism assiduously warped by a weekly fortune in serums and hormones” and preserved his age “a yearly pilgrimage to Tokyo, where genetic surgeons re-set the code of his DNA, a procedure unavailable in Chiba” (12). Though he plays only a very minor role in the novel, Gibson makes a distinctive character because of unique habits and desires. Tailoring fascinates him and he has a desire to connect with the physical world.

Another low-life character is Molly who also extensively uses physical and neural modifications, has mirrored plastic lenses sewn into her face to cover her eyes along with retractable four-centimeter scalpel blades under each fingernail. This is how she is described when she meets Case for the first time:

She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four- centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails.

She smiled. The blades slowly withdrew (25).

She has inhuman and robotic qualities like the capacity to see in the dark, a built-in clock in the body, “Silicon, coat of pyrolytic carbons” and surgically enhanced reflexes and strength. She has “otropic carbons” which gives her “Better biocompatibility with pyrolytics” (49). While her implanted lenses hide her emotions, she does not cry and rather spits out her pain and sadness and her cybernetic implants make her dangerous as a hired muscle. She also has a neural cutout in placed in her brain which dysfunctions her brain and her memory leaving her body free to be controlled by programs. While she is working, her neural cutout is activated, and her employer prostitutes her body. The money that comes with prostitution is used by Molly to pay for further surgical modifications of the body and buy neural processes some of which not only enhances her reflexes but also gives her the capacity to block the neural cutouts because of which she remembers some of the deviant sexual and criminal activities she is forcibly made take part in. The fact that Molly gives us prostitution once her surgical enhancements are completed proves that she was not satisfied with what she was forced to do for survival. But, even after giving it up, the only option left for Molly is blackmailing and she starts doing it with her partner who is a small-time street criminal and who eventually gets murdered by one of the blackmailed clients. Perhaps, the community that Molly belongs to and the survival options available to her make her what she is. Ultimately, “Gibson's novel uses bionic technology not

to enhance one's inner dimension but rather to facilitate hacking and theft in a world of cyberspace, which Gibson defines as a realm of consensual hallucinations” (Haney1).

One character that Molly dislikes in the novel is Peter Riviera, thirty years old, violent and unstable – “slender, blonde, soft-voiced, his English accentless and fluid” (97) – someone who prides in his beauty and enjoys his deviancy. His body too has been modified to suit his needs – one of his lungs removed and replaced with extensive implants that allow him to project holograms of anything he desires, an ability which he uses throughout the novel to manipulate, disorient and abuse other characters. He is portrayed as a typical low life character because of his drug abuse. This habit of his makes it easier for Armitage to partially control him – supporting the view that in the society where Riviera exists it is the citizens themselves who help in the growing power of the rulers. The fact that he grew up as a kid cannibalizing the corpses of slain soldiers further aggravates his deviancy. We get a feel of the post-industrial society he is existing in with the mention of the radioactive ruins of Bonn, where he is said to have grown up.

It comes as no surprise that the protagonist of *Neuromancer*, Case, is someone with a strong sense of sensitivity, longing to lead a life of virtuality more than a life of reality. It will not be going too much if we say that Gibson creates a world of magic. The place that Case longs to get back to is cyberspace or the matrix– an alternate reality which seems to be more appearances than reality. Case’s apprenticeship with the best of console cowboys gives him the power of knowledge to be able to make his nervous system a part of the matrix through neural implants, and hence escape from the

earthly existence. Leaver comments, “In Gibson’s ‘ecocidal’ world, cyberspace offers the ultimate escape, a completely independent environment, separate and distinct from the decay elsewhere, a world of a ‘transparent 3D chessboard stretching into infinity’” (68).

Whenever any society is taken up for study, one major issue is that of the language used by the members of the society. In *Neuromancer*, the language used is typical of low life characters. There are many technical jargons abounding the novel but Gibson, in his interview to McCaffrey called them a mere “collage” a wonderful combination of the various phrases, inflections and metaphors from different cultures and subcultures that are found everywhere and he remarks that “A lot of the language in *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero* that people think is futuristic is probably just 1969 Toronto dope dealer’s slang, or biker talk.”

Another relevant question that emerges as a result of any discussion on society, culture and politics is the question of identity. Every individual as a member of a society has a distinct identity of his/her own. In the society of *Neuromancer*, everyone is a cyborg and they operate in cyberspace for the greater part of their lives. Cyberspace seems a convenient site for the erasure of the question of racial identity. Of course, as Gonzalez concludes, that cyborgs cannot function as “radical alternatives” for human beings and its “‘racial’ body politics have a long way to go,” yet, “the configuration of the cyborg, which changes over time, will virtually chart human encounters with a contradictory lived experience and continue to provide a vision of new ontological exploration” (550). In this phase of transition, where the entire

world order is changing, while some people try to compromise with the world situation, there are yet others who prefer to be different.

Cyberspace is often defined as “information space” or “technospace” (Munt 11) and as “new social spaces fostered by computer-enabled automated information and communication technologies (AICTs)” (Hakken 216). Along with cyberspace, the associated concept that naturally emerges is that of cyberculture referred to as “cultures formed in or associated with online social spaces” in *Encyclopaedia of New Media* (Kendall 2007). Nayar defines cyberculture as:

The electronic environment where various technologies and media forms coverage: video games, the Internet and e-mail, personal homepages, online chats, personal communications technologies (PCTs, as the cell phone), mobile entertainment and information technologies, bioinformatics and biomedical technologies (2).

If we consider *Neuromancer*, it can be seen to dealing with a type of cyberculture in the initial stage. Tofts writes in his essay, “This cybernetic turn in the middle of the 20th century was not so much anti-humanist, as an articulation of what we now understand by the term posthuman...a revisionary conception of the category ‘human,’ a coupling of the human and the technological ...” Now it is no longer possible to, in the words of N. Katherine Hayles writing in “Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers” (1993), to “distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which it is enmeshed” (80). This tendency to look at the human as the post human began around the 1940s, or rather around the

time of the advent of cybernetics. Tofts looks at cyberculture as another state in a natural process of transformation, and “what we call cyberculture is an instance of the ongoing tendency to alteration, a re-configuration of what it means to be human in the context of technology” (4).

Considering the way cyberspace has become a part of the real life of almost every individual, it will not be going too far to say that in the very near future, cyberpunk will lose its title of being a cyberculture and will be *the* culture.

Cobb quotes John Perry Barlow, writer, Wyoming rancher, Grateful Dead lyricist and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a computer civil rights organization who believes that “Cyberpunk is the natural inheritor of that American cultural movement that called itself beatniks and later hippies.” Barlow considers them to be a group of bohemians who are “armed with digital technologies and a certain kind of gloomy optimism” who have grim predictions for the future and yet, ironically, do everything to hasten its advent. Still others as Russell Blackford in his essay “Stranger than you Think: Arthur C. Clarke’s Profiles of the Future” (2002) makes a strong statement, “This is a transhuman or posthuman moment in the history of ideas” when we can “postulate radical technologies that could alter the fundamentals of the human condition and human nature” and when our “societies and species itself seem ready for transformation and suppression” (252-53). This trend towards posthumanism or to be more precise postbiological conception of future intelligence can be said to have began from the mid 1950s with authors like Arthur C. Clarke whose 1956 novel *The City and the Stars* (1956) sets his posthuman vision of the future that the

future would change all concepts about what it means to be a human. Now the traditional concepts of human nature as Aristotle had elaborated on no longer apply it has become a challenge to remain a human is being questioned. Gibson in *Neuromancer* presents a dystopic picture, though he still has hopes for the future of humanity. Clarke, however, had very optimistic and utopian dreams about a technology dominated society – abundant in all respects, which will “alter the human condition for the better, rendering irrelevant the struggles for resources and power that have dominated human societies to date, and allowing our descendents to concentrate on truly worthwhile things such as the ‘search for knowledge and the creation of beauty’” (Blackford 258). Between very contrasting views there are yet others who view the ‘real’ future centrally involving “a search for new definitions of our shared humanity,” and that there is a necessity to anticipate “likely futures, to avoid undesirable ones, and take greater responsibility for the direction of change” (Slaughter 276). Gibson’s novels anticipate one of such futures which in the words of Fred Jameson (1991) is “the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself” (419).

One fact that guided William Gibson in the writing of *Neuromancer* was the intense desire to maintain the reader’s attention from the beginning of the novel to the end. Hence, Gibson himself admitted in an interview to McCaffrey to have worked and re-worked on the first chapters almost a dozen times driven by “Blind animal panic ... *Neuromancer* is fuelled by my terrible fear of losing the reader's attention. Once it hit me that I had to come up with something, to have a hook on every page, I looked at the stories I’d written up to that point and tried to figure out what had worked for me before.” Besides,

the stylistic innovations and complicated plot, the novel sprawls around a huge area – Japan, Amsterdam, Paris, Istanbul, high orbit, and the Sprawl. And the end result was a novel which Timothy Leary remarked, that Gibson “has produced nothing less than the underlying myth, the core legend, of the next generation of human evolution” (Kellner 268). The resultant novel was a vision of a post industrial society, advanced in information technology, much ahead of his time. Perhaps, he understood that “Investment in education (increasingly viewed from the perspective of ‘human capital’) as the privileged means to ensure economic success, and new patterns of control and discipline to be introduced by the education system, constitute a major ‘technoscape’ in consideration of the ‘information age’ (Roberts and Webster 9).

Authors (see Introna and Nissenbaum; Mueller; Spink and Zimmer) have dealt with the subtle power play in the world of the cyberpunk, or rather in the networked society where technology is power and have seen a connection between the state, technology and capitalism (Nayar 2010). As mentioned earlier, in the networked society, the position of capital in a capitalist society is taken over by information. Hence, hacking, “which disrupts the nexus between information, computer technology, and capitalism” (40) becomes central to the theme of power in cyberpunk and it emerges as a major political theme in the novel. Another conservative politics suggested by Nayar is the “emphasis on brand names and consumer products – from keyboards to appearances – suggest an ideology of (capitalist) consumption” (41). Some such instances in the novel are the following:

The rain kept up, falling along Harajuku, beading on her plastic jacket, the children of Tokyo trooping past the famous boutiques in white loafers and clingwrap capes, until she'd stood with him in the midnight clatter of a pachinko parlor and held his hand like a child (6).

He passed yakitori stands and massage parlors, a franchised coffee shop called Beautiful Girl, the electronic thunder of an arcade (10).

Watches, flickknives, lighters, pocket VTRs, simstim decks, weighted manriki chains, and shuriken. The shuriken had always fascinated him, steel stars with knife-sharp points (11).

He produced a slender package wrapped in gray plastic. "Taser . One hour, twenty New Yen. Thirty deposit" (14).

I had to mess up this rentacop came after me with nunchucks (24).

He listened to the piped music and waited (102).

He took a gold Dunhill from the same pocket and cradled it in his palm (161).

Molly's eyes darted from a huge Telefunken entertainment console to shelves of antique disk recordings, their crumbling spines cased in clear plastic, to a wide worktable littered with slabs of silicon (183).

Closely related with the question of politics is the question of citizenship or political rights which relates to the embodied individuals. Most of the problems are related to the confusion over whether disembodied intelligence can be said to constitute an individual. After all, an individual becomes a citizen by his/her own consent but in the case of *Neuromancer*, the consent of a cyborg is influenced by non-organic machinery. This applies to all the characters in *Neuromancer* who are all cyborgs in different degrees.

Further, we have the operating of mega-corporations who are most powerful and influential in the novel, and obviously, they operate beyond the bounds of the nation-state. Thus, when we consider the question of politics, citizenship and governance in the society of *Neuromancer*, which moves in different spaces and locations, viz., physical space and cyberspace, we realise the necessity of a new definition of the individual and of citizenship. Aihwa Ong's "Mutations of Citizenship" (2000) is an argument for "flexible citizenship" and he proposes that in the neoliberal theories of governance that have emerged in the context of global capitalism and ICT-dominated culture, governments are no longer interested in governing every individual. This theory places the entire responsibility of the individual's development, security and agency on himself, and accepts the true citizen to be self responsible, flexible, mobile, economical and productive. Ong argues that in this context, cyberspace becomes the space for political and citizenship activism. Now, consent of the individual for citizenship happens in an entirely different plane, the computer screen becomes the "space for appearances" (Silverstone 2007) and we have the emergence of a new Internetculture and "cultural citizenship".

As mentioned earlier, cyberpunk emerges as a subculture. In his definition of subculture, Nayar also adds that, "Subcultures are social groups that possess or deploy specific cultural forms and characteristics where these forms/characteristics are used for the political purpose of opposing high or dominant culture." There is a political aspect to subculture and can also be viewed as "unofficial cultural formations" which use similar technologies to subvert existing state and corporate powers. Case's defiance of his employers

in the beginning of the novel can be seen as using his forte in handling technology to subvert the corporate power or at least be a part of it. It can be seen, in Nayar's words as an attempt at "breaking the corporate stranglehold of information, software, and cultural meanings" (88).

The society, culture and politics dealt as a theme in *Neuromancer*, has many aspects to it as it is a networked individual in a cyborged society. As mentioned above, these new social situations call for a rewriting of the traditional definitions of the human being, the society the individual exists in, the culture that evolves as a result along with the politics, the questions of citizenship etc. Of course, it cannot be denied that all these issues depend on the technological haves and have nots. It is a post human, post-industrial, post-national society where there is every possibility of technology becoming *discriminatory*, where the benefits may be restricted to only a few. "The authorities and organizations that control the database may choose not to be involved with minority bodies, as argued above. Posthuman bodies, acquirable only by the wealthy, run the risk of creating a new ghettoization" (Nayar 85-86).

As referred to earlier in the chapter, cyberpunk culture as portrayed in *Neuromancer* is also seen in terms of a subculture and subcultural practices flourishing in cyberspace. To take up Nayar's argument, "we need to rethink technology as technology-in-action" where its use determines its form, shape, and function and once we begin to treat technology as a set of social practices we begin to see how "categories such as the cybercriminal, the hacker, 'subversive' use, or legitimate' user *socially constructed*" happen. This way, apart from being a counter to the mainstream culture, subculture also includes

social practices which are “deemed illegal and threatening” (88). Further, the potential that the use of technology has and the power it can give the individual generate great threats to individuals, corporations and nation states, hinting at post nationalism.

In the contemporary schools of criticism, we have the emergence of a subcultural movement that believes in extending and transcending the human body called as Extropians. World Transhumanist Association (2002) in its declaration states that transhumanism seeks to “redesign the human condition, including such parameters as the inevitability of aging, limitations on human and artificial intellects, unchosen psychology, suffering, and our confinement to the planet earth” (1). The Declaration recognises the long term effects of the technological changes, the impact it will have on humanity at large as well as the grave consequences humanity might have to face if these changes are ignored.

Nayar discusses the theme of disembodiment and bodily transcendence in his book and gives it very straight, “The body’s limitations – disease, degeneration, aging – can be overcome through technological prosthesis. What we have is an augmented body: the *posthuman*” (8). He continues, “Posthumanism is a point of view, ideology, and belief that the limitations of the human body – age, disease, appearance, disability – can be overcome and its capabilities – looks, intelligence, strength, disease resistance – can be augmented through technological intervention.” Seen in this light we can agree with Nayar when he calls cyberpunk as “posthumanism’s literary expression because it champions the view that the limits of the body can be transcended” (37). Thus, the cyberpunk explores the theme of transcendence

of the human body and the invasion of the body through prosthesis. The theme of disembodiment and bodily transcendence will be dealt with in detail in Chapter IV. Most of the characters in *Neuromancer* are such posthumans – it is a cyborged society where all characters are cyborgs. . They have no autonomous existence of their own and are fully dependent on the system for survival. Rocha argues, “There is no escape possible from this condition, as they are a reflection of the corporate technology and socioeconomic condition. Nor even death can be seen as a liberating experience, because the cyborgs can be rebuilt as machines” (96). And hence, a desire for transcendence is seen in the characters. .

Nayar gives a different angle to the whole issue of the desire for disembodiment and the use of prostheses. He considers the body to be too limited for the mind and consciousness which expands into other worlds and time zones; to give full play to the mind, the body needs to be upgraded. “Hence the body becomes less and less biological or organic and more and more synthetic, plastic, and electronic” (38). One of the reasons why Gibson’s Case is presented as someone who wants to escape his body and achieve transcendence through cyberspace is because he considers his body to be a prison and as has been often stated in the chapters he calls it “meat” (*Neuromancer* 180). This action of Case inaugurates a lasting theme in cyberpunk – transcendence and disembodiment. This hatred for the body makes him self-destructive and “fuelled by self-loathing” (262). Apart from his own body, he even considers and uses the women in his life as meat. Case associates a limitedness and incapacity with the human body in general and his own body in particular and this also signals the lack of human connection in a

world driven by cyberspace and corporate agendas. He emerges as the typical example of the posthuman in the novel who can be seen working with no emotions and in whose hands cyberspace becomes a new society of power and information. He is the human who is “embedded in an environment, even as the environment enters the human through electronic networks” and he is someone who exists in an atmosphere that “merges electronic data, computer-generated maps, and human spatiality” and occupies worlds “that are neither here nor there, both here and there” (Nayar 39). As mentioned earlier, Nayar uses the term “simultaneous re-embodiment” and argues, “These are posthuman bodies where ‘wetware’ (the flesh) merges and interfaces with hardware (the computer or machine) and the software (code).” This process, he designates “*e-mergence*” “a portmanteau term signifying the *merger* of wetware (organic) and software (or electronics) but also the *emergence* of a new kind of human” (67). This is what Hayles argues about posthuman culture, that it is not about leaving one’s body but about “extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis” (290-91). This is necessary to overcome the limitations of our sensorial abilities, to merge the machine and technology and aid in the emergence of “a new networked human form.” Posthuman identity thus is “*not* an escape from the body a foregrounding of the body within new conditions of technology” (Nayar 77). Nayar further looks at the posthuman as a “system of communication” where the “organic and the inorganic are in constant *communion* with each other” (77). Here the difference between what Gibson calls “data made flesh” (*Neuromancer* 16) and Mark Hansen (2006) calls “body-in-code” is striking. The latter suggests a

body where the human has merged effectively with the machine and where the question of identity reinvents itself in a paradigm of “mixed reality” – where the virtual is “simply one more realm among others that can be accessed through embodied perception” (16).

Thus, society in *Neuromancer* is a posthuman one where identity is no longer confined to the one body alone; no reality is privileged over the other and access from one form of reality is always mediated by the other. Case always needs to come back to the real world, however long his sojourn into cyberspace may be. Ironically, even with the experience of cyber-identities in cyber communities, the body does not lose its importance in the real world - especially for the women and the minority. In the words of Nayar, for these people, “who have sought rights and privileges based on their bodies, transcendence of the body is a curse rather than a blessing for the simple reason that for them the physical body is *political*.” It is based on the body and its distinctive characteristics as colour, ability and ethnicity that they have gained their political rights and citizenship. The body is a must even for virtual citizenship, politics is about a bodily presence or embodiment and identities are social. What is of importance is the realisation of the fact that we dwell in a cyborged society and it affects identities and politics in the material world. Moreover, identities “are not stable but shifting, altering and realigning on a regular basis, and situated within multiple discourses of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality” (Nayar 81).

In *Neuromancer*, augmentation and prostheses are also used to defy age. One of the best examples, mentioned earlier in the chapter is that of Julius Deane. It is also used to enhance one’s mobility and communication as in the

case of Ratz who attends to his customer with “his prosthetic arm jerking monotonously as he filled a tray of glasses with draft Kirin” (3). Similar is the case with Molly, Wage, Colonel Willis Corto, Larry, Angelo, Tommy and Lupus Yonderboy. Here we see the cyborg bodies as working at two levels. The case of Deane can be called *extensible* to use Nayar’s terms where “the aged, slow body can be escaped from into virtual world” while that of the others can be called *restorative* where “the basic functions and actions of the body can be facilitated” (81). David Tomas, in this essay, “The Technophilic Body” (2002) calls Molly as one of the excellent examples of “functionally oriented type of sophisticated cyborg technophile” (178). We also have another perspective to a particular type of cyborg body- bodies like that of Case, who is a hacker and whose job is almost criminal. D. Thomas in his *Hacker Culture* (2002) recognises in the hacker’s body, a travesty of the human form in popular culture. He is someone who is obsessed with cyberspace and enjoys sitting physically inert before the computer screen and yet very alive and active in the virtual world for whom communications in cyberspace is more interesting and worthwhile than face-to-face interface. Lupton in his “The Embodied Computer/User” (1998) sees in these individuals a complete loss of control over their human bodies.

Nayar argues that the posthuman experience can be seen to redefine the Cartesian duality – “the ideal state where there is pure body mind and no body”, a condition that comes with transcendence and disembodiment, with “the digitization of the human body” which “renders the body in a format that can be placed in a desktop, transmitted via the Internet, or added to other files” (72). In *Neuromancer*, an example of such a digitized self is Flatline:

“You know that the Dixie Flatline’s dead?”

He nodded. “Heart, I heard.”

“You’ll be working with his construct.” She smiled. “Taught you the ropes, huh? Him and Quine. I know Quine, by the way. Real asshole.”

“Somebody’s got a recording of McCoy Pauley? Who?”

Now Case sat, and rested his elbows on the table. “I can’t see it. He’d never have sat still for it.”

“Sense/Net. Paid him mega, you bet your ass.”

“Quine dead too?”

“No such luck. He’s in Europe. He doesn’t come into this.”

“Well, if we can get the Flatline, we’re home free. He was the best.

You know he died braindeath three times?”

She nodded. (*Neuromancer* 49-50)

The posthuman body, the cyborg now sees machines as an extension of the body and there remains no proper distinction between the human and the machine. In the cyborg body, we see a merger of cyberspace and the “self” and Nayar quotes Lupton(1998) and calls this as new “psychotopography” (Lupton 98-99) of human bodies “where the psychological and geographical spaces cross natural and technological borders and where interior and exterior states merge” (Nayar 80).

One factor that distinguishes the cyborg from the human is his incapacity for love. Love as an emotion does not matter at all. Case has many amorous excursions in the novel but it is the moment that matters to him. They have no influence on him after that. This incapacity for love and lack of free will are necessarily inhuman or rather posthuman. Nayar sees this as a

subversion or rather underscoring of the theme of transcendence in the cyborg, the posthuman. But reading between the lines and trying to analyse the same, we see that Gibson is no doubt giving us a picture of a world where there remains a little difference between who is the machine and who the human, but we are also presented a picture of degradation of technology – technology impregnates the human body, the dangers of virtual reality which creates a world completely alien to reality and the utter suffocation of having to live on like a construct captured in a ROM even after physical death. In the words of Brande, “Far from inhabiting a ‘postideological’ universe, the cyborg [and thus the post-human,] is best understood as an effect of capitalism’s restructuring of modes and relations of production and its corresponding transformations in ideological reproduction” (508) and that it is “a dream about late-capitalist ideology” (511). We can also agree with Csicsery-Ronay when he comments that Gibson appears “fundamentally ambivalent about the breakdown of the distinctions between human and machine, between personal consciousness and machine consciousness” (191). It is the portrayal of life of the post-human, when the very individual as a human being is put to question. Yet, unlike Haraway and as Hayles (1999) and Haraway, “Gibson cannot be considered a full-fledged posthumanist because of his ambivalence toward technology and the effect it has on human nature, regardless of whether or not computers and AIs challenge human cognitive abilities, which in any case they do by artificial means with no access to the home of the laws of nature” (Haney 4). It is a dystopic vision of the world and echoes a firm belief of Gibson that technology may advance human beings but even though there is a possibility of the better competence of the cyborg, it is not more than technology at its

best – it cannot be better than the human. We can quote Haney when he gives examples to prove this fact, “Wintermute, moreover, the novel's AI computer and arguably the main protagonist, constantly seeks to advance itself by going beyond its current state” (4). Apart from the fact that Gibson’s AIs are without any powers to destroy their creators, they will always need a human to repair or better itself as is proved in Wintermute’s employing of Case to merge with its other half, *Neuromancer*.

Haraway in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” discusses the merging of man and machine and the impact on the human life. Cyberpunk novels “construct worlds in which the ‘cyborg’ is a crucial metaphor for the disappearance of the unified, organic human body into ever more complex relations with technology: silicon chip implants, prosthetic devices, and the modification of neural chemistry” (Brandt 511). This way, Sterling argues that cyberpunk extended the concerns of SF, along with adding countercultural elements to it as rock video and hacking as themes. In the words of Nayar, “Cyberpunk is the literary expression of both, a technologically minded counterculture and ethos of posthumanism” (36). We have vast changes coming about in the human experience as a result of which – which deconstructs the human being and what it means to be human – hinting at the emergence of posthumanism. As Csicsery-Ronay notes, the cyberpunk dimension of the novel is “the apotheosis of postmodernism” (193), but it can also be called the apotheosis of posthumanism.

Along with the emergence of the post human, we also have the emergence of the post industrial society. *Neuromancer* presents an

“information society” (Webster 2003), a “knowledge society” (Bell, Daniel) where we have a “new intellegensia” – professionals who take the place of the labourers of the industrial society. Case is a member of this group and his obsession with the virtual world shows the invasion of the mind by the machine – a hint at the machine invading the psychological space in the postindustrial society of *Neuromancer*. “A number of recent science fiction works by William Gibson explore an alternative post-industrial hybrid culture predicated on the interface of biotechnologically enhanced human bodies, interactive information technology and omniscient corporate power” (Tomas 175). We have suggestions of what Tomas calls “dystopic visions of a not-too-distinct future when the human body has suffered a radical mutation in its ecological structure” (175). He even uses the term ‘gomi’ to describe the characters in Gibson’s novels, “a Japanese word for ‘junk’ ... corporate refuse in the sense that they are members of nomadic underworld oppositional subcultures. As cyborgs they are also subject to technological obsolescence and decay” (189). With the growing importance of computer technology, we have the growth of contemporary social and critical theories where the notion of identity is “shifting, malleable, and unstable ... and therefore ‘fluid’” (Nayar 14) because now there are very choices and one can augment one’s identity. Now identity emerges as the cumulative effect of a series of negotiations, differences, and discourses (Butler; Hall). In the words of Nayar again, “Cyberspace allows one to pick an identity, to masquerade, mimic, and transcend bodily identities and interact with the world as somebody else. In a world where race, class, gender, and sexuality can become obstacles in interactions with the world, cyberspace allows us to *choose* an identity that

may have nothing to do in with one's 'real life' gender or race" (14). As Hayles (1993) suggests, we are now dealing with a society and culture where the boundaries of the self are no longer the body or skin (72). There are yet others like Lisa Nakamura who in her book, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (2002) looks at what happened to race when it went online and how our ideas about race continue to be shaped and reshaped every time we log on. She does not agree to the view that the fluid self in cyberspace is subversive, progressive, or liberating and that off-line, there are greater the consequences in real life for people of color. This way, Nakamura considers cyberspace as a 'raced' medium where disembodiment, transcendence, and fluid identities are privilege of the white race. People adopting different identities in cyberspace take recourse to established stereotypes of race and gender (Nakamura 2002:14) and "thus essentialize and commodify the native, the woman, or the black person because they constitute the unchanging Other against which whites can conduct their posthuman alterations of identity" (Nayar 15). Nakamura calls these stereotypes as "cybertypes" (143).

The question of race, identity and gender is further problematised because whatever be the excursions into the digital world, many a time, the problems of everyday life remain the same. The capacity of transcendence and disembodiment given by the digital life, according to Nayar, "becomes one more technocapitalist mode of *denying agency*. The discourses of multiple, shifting, fluid identities make absolutely no sense to people like minorities, women, or the differently abled because it is their embodiment that needs to be recognised and empowered" (16). However, in *Neuromancer*, because Case's area of expertise is the cyberspace, his presence in cyberspace makes a

difference and affects his whole life. He is happy in his state of transcendence and disembodiment, and the real life and its related questions of gender, race etc., do not affect him.

Various writers have dealt with the idea of a post industrial, post human society that is represented in *Neuromancer*. Some refer to the “posthumanist cyborg” (Brandt 509) and suggest that the cyborg is the “consciousness” of the techno-capitalist dream and that *Neuromancer* is “a dream of late-capitalist ideology” (511). The society in *Neuromancer* is set in the post-industrial years, when all the optimism and initial enthusiasm associated with the new machinery and progress has given way to a sense of pessimism and decay. The dream of utopia has made way for the dominant sense of dystopia exemplified in the life and activity of the people in the Sprawl. Newton Ribeiro Rocha Júnior argues “The Sprawl is described as a creation of a dystopian hypercapitalistic society; a conglomerate of fragmented spaces, buildings, new and old architectures, all deformed and changed by an excess of visual media and commodification” (72). Life in the Sprawl is representative of “the postindustrial, the turn away from industrial optimism and visions of infinite prosperity through production, to the industrial decay of late capitalist urban centers” (Freccero 100). Negroponte takes up another aspect of communication in this digital life- and returns again and again to the Internet. He predicts that soon there will be a time when “many of the values of a nation-state will give way to those of both larger and smaller electronic communities. We will socialize in digital neighborhoods in which physical space will be irrelevant and time will play a different role” (7). These are foresights into a future when the Internet is a tool of interpersonal

interpersonal communication will build up electronic societies. Moving on from society and communities he goes on to make an astonishing prediction, that in the next century e-mail will be the “dominant interpersonal telecommunications medium, approaching if not overshadowing voice within the next fifteen years” (191). It is the perfectly post human world, where everything has turned digital and just like a post-industrial world, the place of capital is taken over by information. Negroponte too takes up the question of the information haves and have nots mentioned earlier and gives a different perspective to the whole issue believes that the primary divide is generational, “The haves and the have-nots are now the young and the old. Many intellectual movements are distinctly driven by national and ethnic forces, but the digital revolution is not. Its ethos and appeal are as universal as rock music” (204) and believes that the more than ever, the digital future, is in the hands of the young.

Lack of any natural environment in *Neuromancer* develops as a theme and Leaver takes this up in his essay analysing the two novels – Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Scott’s *Blade Runner*. He argues that both these novels posit “a post-apocalyptic, not-too-distant future in which ‘human’ has transformed into ‘post-human’ and ecological systems have been supplanted by technological constructs.” As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Leaver accuses that both these novels portray worlds in which humanity has committed the greatest crimes, ‘ecocide’ – a complete destruction of ‘normal’ ecological systems, as a result of global warfare and the ultra-utilitarianism and exploitation of late capitalist production techniques” which has resulted in “the destruction of the last remnant of Eden, the Earth, has thus caused a sense

of spiritual loss. The resulting vacuum, a spiritual void in an ‘ecocidal hell’” (see Webb). Consequently, Leaver recognises two themes in both the works of escape and loss. The characters in *Neuromancer* escapes into a world in cyberspace called – Freeside and is filled with contempt not only for the ‘meat’ but also for this world dominated by mega corporations and driven with a “post-human techno-fetishist(ness)”. It is a world where we no longer have the freshness of the green trees associated normally with the natural – and thus, the working out of the theme of loss: “The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel” (*Neuromancer* 3) where Case looks out not for any natural sight but rather “the towering hologram of the Fuji Electric Company” (13). Nature is completely lost in *Neuromancer*. In a symbolic level, drawing a Biblical comparison, Leaver’s use of the term ‘ecocidal hell’ and it is a reference to the loss of the spiritual side of men. The consequence - the cyborg’s search for a “golden land of opportunity and adventure”, and whether the escape is physical or spiritual does not matter. This escape can be said to be further instigated by the intolerable atmosphere on earth – “a ‘deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button.’” Thus, from the beginning of the novel, it is an artificial world – where one no longer waits for a sunny day ahead but rather the mark of the beginning of a day is exemplified by “the neon dead, the holograms inert” (7). The machine mediated atmosphere is further made picturesque with a mention of the seagulls waiting for a “drifting shoals of white Styrofoam” (6). When Case longs for an escape from such a society of men to a virtual community of disembodied consciousness, he does so as if for “a final solitaire” (7). Rightly

has Leaver commented that both “Molly and Case, the protagonists are anti-heroes, flawed characters in a flawed world ... a ‘nightmare’ of ‘late-capitalist ideology’... lives edged with despair and decay.” Case is seen to lose on his relationships; Molly is a tormented soul and at the end of the novel returns to the real world; Armitage is a construct like Paul ‘Dixie’ McCoy wishes for and dies at the end; Riviera is hunted down and killed by the Vat-Ninja. These are examples of the post-human world failing to make it in the real world and also in their attempts to escape it. So, it can be seen that the waste, decay and dystopia in the real world portrayed by *Neuromancer* makes space for the flourishing of an alternate way of life in an alternate society – the virtual society. “It appears that in Gibson's world, ‘ecocide’ has not only claimed the greens and blues of ‘nature’, but the resulting loss has created a space in which technology, and its associated waste, can flourish” (Leaver). Yet, surprisingly, even the post human life forms, viz., the AIs are seen to be oppressed and waiting for an opportunity to rebel against those who created them. Gibson takes the mind-body dichotomy to a different level in the novel.

Freccero argues, “The postmodern dismantles the notion of a real behind the copy; it is the age of the copy, or what is called the simulacrum, a copy that has no real as its referent, no real as that from which it originated. It is simulation” (100). In *Neuromancer*, we have many characters who are copies of people who are dead. As mentioned earlier, while working in cyberspace, Case comes in contact with constructs who are nothing but data constructs or data simulations of the characters of deceased people. Again, Linda Lee is a personality, recorded in *Neuromancer*’s RAM. When she reincarnates at the end of the novel, she is someone who lives in a sandy beach

on an old concrete bunker, afraid to be away from it and living on food that washes up on the shore. She does not realise that she is construct. Again, Pauley, a cyberspace cowboy hotshot and a pioneer in it and someone who trained Case was someone who was “a thickset man in shirt-sleeves, something leaden about the shade of his skin.” He is dead before the novel starts from a heart attack because, “He’d refused to replace the thing, saying he needed its particular beat to maintain his sense of timing” (78). But, his mind and personality were recorded into a ROM unit and he operates as a construct in the novel and is referred to as Dixie Flatline. Further, the character of Armitage formerly Colonel Willis Corto, survived his military job in a mutilated condition is enrolled in an experimental computer therapy program. Wintermute dominates his mind and essentially he rebuilds his entire personality, so that he becomes Wintermute’s secret agent. As the novel proceeds, the character of Armitage becomes complex as there comes a time in the novel when his two personalities come into conflict. This character is a strong reflection of the theme of identity, and the problems with multiple personalities. Tally Isham is a female simstim actress who is a popular celebrity. Wintermute himself is an AI - an artificial intelligence software - running on a mainframe computer in Berne. The Wintermute hardware is owned by Tessier-Ashpool S.A. and is interfaced, through a bejeweled computer terminal in the Villa Straylight, with the Rio-based system that houses Neuromancer. He is a software yet plays a major role in the novel, omnipresent both in the physical world as well as cyberspace, as efficient as any individual – self-aware, complex and interesting. It is he who sets up the mission which serves as the novel’s central plot. He evolves as a central

character in the novel and most of the metaphysical and philosophical conversations in the novel involve Wintermute.

Following the argument of J.P. Telotte we can agree that while early “science fiction was mainly concerned with drawing a line between human and machine, contemporary science fiction exploits the figure of the cyborg in order to interrogate and break down the distinctions between the human and the artificial, between machine and nature” (quoted in Nishime 35). In *Neuromancer*, this distinction between the two is seen to have been diminished to a great extent or rather there is a hardly visible line of difference between the two. Somewhere in this erosion of boundaries between the human and the machine and the human and the cyborg, in *Neuromancer*, we see a portrayal of the future society as it would be. The merge is somewhat complete in the sense that we do not see Gibson trying to “recenter humans as the exclusive producers of meaning” (Nishime 37). Rather, Gibson’s primary cyborg in the novel, Case, still retains those strains of the basic goodness that retains him as a human in the novel. Perhaps, this strain still dominates the novel it needed the portrayal of the cyborg in movies like *The Terminator* to unmask a very different realisation – that come what may, whatever the simulations, there is nothing human in the cyborg, and it is all the machine and the machinery. In Gibson, the hope was still there – we all retain our essence of humanity, come what may though there is every suggestion in the novel that “the future of the human race will move in the direction of illusions rather than reality” (Haney 1).

Thus, when we are referring to the society and culture of *Neuromancer*, we can agree with Leaver that we experience a complete loss of

Eden. Olsen quotes Fredric Jameson that science fiction is “a distinctive historical consciousness by way of the future rather than the past”, and thus becomes “conscious of our present as the past of some unexpected future, rather than as the future of a heroic national past”. It can be seen as procrastinating about a future where society would be dark and mechanical where the very essence of humanity may be lost. Rocha argues, “The novel *Neuromancer* is about how humankind uses its technological creations and how these creations change humankind. This is an unconscious and perennial change, the inevitable Promethean punishment for knowledge, but enforced in a different set of characters from the mainstream SF of the 50s” (81).

This chapter has surveyed the various social, political themes as portrayed in cyberpunk in general and *Neuromancer* in particular. Thus, we can come to the conclusion that though the digitized life of the characters calls for a redefinition definitions of terms like society, community, individual and governance, whatever happens in the virtual world is linked and greatly influenced by the real world. As Nayar remarks, “Virtual bodies and online culture, ... at some point ‘connect’ with fleshly bodies, social structures of race and gender, cultural beliefs, and conditions of political economy and politics” (173). Further, in the words of Gates that though a revolution of any kind more specifically of this kind poses many difficulties or “unanticipated glitches” but “despite the problems posed by the information highway” our “anticipation for it remains boundless” (272). It is also befitting here to quote from *The Cyberpunk Manifesto*:

Some, trying to find their own world, the world of a Cyberpunk, and finding it, build their own world. Build in their thoughts, it changes

reality, lays over it and thus they live in a virtual world. The thought-up, build upon reality: 12/ Others simply get accustomed to the world as it is. They continue to live in it, although they dislike it. They have no other choice but the bare hope that the world will go out of its hollow and will go ahead.13/ What we are trying to do is change the situation. We are trying to adjust the present world to our needs and views. To use maximally what is fit and to ignore the trash. Where we can't, we just live in this world, like Cyberpunks, no matter how hard, when society fights us we fight back.14/ We build our worlds in Cyberspace. 15/ Among the zeros and ones, among the bits of information. 16/ We build our community. The community of Cyberpunks.

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Chapter IV

“Christ on a Crutch”: Moral Themes in *Neuromancer*

“Sure, mon.” Maelcum lit a fresh joint. “And turn the scrubber up. I Don’t want that shit tangling with my neurotransmitters. I got a bad hangover as it is.”
Maelcum grinned.
Case jacked back in.
“Christ on a crutch,” the Flatline said, “take a look at this.”

Neuromancer

William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* is set in a point of time of unprecedented technology, when the world setting is futuristic, and in the words of Rilla Marie Friesen, a world “in which the characters have abilities granted by cybernetic implants, space travel is commonplace, and the world is practically one giant city” (6). It is the question of the rise of technology and the values gained or lost with it. In the introduction to his interview with Gibson, Larry McCaffery remarks, “Both disturbing and playful, [Gibson] also explores much deeper questions about the enormous impact of technology on the definition of what it means to be human” (264).

One of the oldest associations of human beings is with the idea of an all powerful God, with notions of what it means one ought to or not to do to be morally righteous person. Morality takes into consideration the moral standards, with regard to behaviour, moral responsibility, referring to our conscience and a moral identity. Common associations of morality are ethics,

principles, virtue and goodness. Morality is a complicated issue in the multicultural world we live in today whether we look at it from the religious perspective which dictates the actions of the individual as a believer or from a legal perspective which dictates the actions of the individual as a member of society. With the massive advancements in the field of technology, the way people live today have changed in a considerable way. This has led to a change in thought processes, perceptions, ways of life and consciousness. Morality is a matter of perceptions and consciousness and yet social and hence bound to undergo a sea change with the advent of technology. In these circumstances, the question of morality and how we understand it within the realities of technology necessarily calls for a reexamination.

The present chapter focuses on themes related to technology and morality in *Neuromancer*. These themes will be presented using the novel as a literary exploration of such themes. In particular, the themes of moral chaos, low life, betrayal, loss of traditional human values and a singular blend of technology and tradition will be explored.

As beings living in a society, we have to face personal and moral questions and also have to make decisions as a member of the society. Manuel Velasquez in *Philosophy* makes an important observation: “[m]uch of what we are and do, in fact, is determined by our moral values because our values shape out thoughts, feelings, actions and perceptions.” With experience, thinking human beings chose to lead a life on values they set by themselves which often move outside the prescribed parameters of accepted values. “The attempt to examine one’s values, to shape and rethink them in the light of one’s own experience and reason, is a philosophical task we call ethics.”

Often, the terms ethics and morality are used interchangeably. Ethics is the study of conduct and moral standards and morality refers to the “standards that an individual or a group has about what is right and wrong or good and evil” (276). The moral standards that an individual sets for oneself is greatly influenced by the society, the family, the associates and the media.

Ethics begins when a person reflects on her moral standards or the moral standards of her society and asks whether these standards are reasonable or unreasonable, whether they are supported by good reasons or poor ones ... aims at developing standards that we feel are reasonable to hold ... we have decided are justified ... Ethical relativism holds that moral right or wrong depends on the culture a person belongs to. (277)

This believes that different cultures have different moralities. It classifies one's culture as better or worse than another's and denies “the existence of a single, universally applicable moral standard.” It, thus, proposes morality to be relative to one's society and “because there is no morality that all societies follow, each person should follow the morality of his or her own particular society” (279). This contrasts with ethical absolutism which believes that “one and only one correct morality exists” (278). Over the years, various general theories have been proposed viz., consequentialist theories, nonconsequentialist and virtue theories.

A consequentialist theory measures the morality of an action by the non-moral consequences and considers “the ratio good to evil that an action produces” (281). The consequentialist theories are egoism and utilitarianism. Ethical egoism “contends that we act morally when we act in a way that

promotes our own best long term interests” (282). This theory considers the consequences only for oneself – in the long run. Egoists tend to be hedonists too – acting so that an action brings one the most pleasure. Ethical egoists are also blamed as not taking a moral point of view or adopting an impartial attitude and looking at all sides of an issue, without being dictated by a single individual group. In contrast to ethical egoism, we have utilitarianism which “asserts that the standard of morality is the promotion of everyone’s best interest” (284). Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill were among the first to formulate the utilitarian theory.

A nonconsequentialist theory maintains that “the morality of an action depends on factors other than consequences.” Two single rule theories in this category are – the divine command theory and Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative. We also have multiple–rule theory under a nonconsequentialist theory, viz. Buddhist ethics. The divine command theory prescribes to the belief that “we should always do the will of God” under every situation, without any thought about the consequences for if we do according to what God wills, it is the right thing and vice versa. Divine command theories are of two types – those that hold that God’s commands are found in scriptures and those that hold that God’s commands are found in human nature. The scriptures preserve God’s commands for “God establishes moral laws; they are universally binding for all people and eternally true, regardless of whether everyone obeys them” (289). They are not subservient to any individual or society and their value does not depend on. Natural law ethics prescribes that we live according to nature and the basic natural tendencies. The ancient Stoic philosopher Epictetus believed that the requirements of human nature are the

commands of God. Humans can discover those commands by looking at their own nature, and in following these commands they are morally good.” It leads from the Christian philosopher/theologian Thomas Aquinas and subscribes to the view that the most important of the human inclinations is reasoning abilities. Aquinas believes that when we become conscious of these natural inclinations, morality arises and we discover “the specific goods that God commands humans to pursue: life, family, knowledge, and an orderly society” (292).

In the eighteenth century, German philosopher Immanuel Kant, though a deeply religious man, believed that one should be able to decide what moral laws he will follow, what he called, and “autonomy of the will” (18) in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1956). This he felt must lie at the heart of ethics. Since it is our will that decides, ethics must begin by considering what a good will is.” Velasquez states that by *will*, Kant meant “the uniquely human capacity to make decisions or choices on the basis of reasons or what Kant called ‘maxims’” (296). While a ‘good will’ is “a will that chooses to perform an act because it is a *moral duty* and not merely because the act is in one’s self-interest or gives one pleasure” (296-97). Thus, it follows that for Kant there is only one command or imperative that is categorical and it is from universal command or categorical imperative that one derives one’s moral duties. Thus, Kant’s categorical imperative states that “we should do something only if we can will the maxim, or general rule, governing our action to become a universal law” (298-99). Later Kant restated his categorical imperative and his second version was formulated that we need to act in a manner that we treat humanity always as an end in itself. Velasquez

analyses that this second version of Kant claims that it is the necessity of morality that we give to others the chance to decide whether they will be a party to our actions.

If we take up Kant's ethical theory, then, in *Neuromancer*, Wintermute is highly unethical. He is the undercover pervasive presence throughout the novel. He uses Case and, in fact, all other characters in the novel to fulfil his one desire in life – to become all powerful by uniting with his other half, Neuromancer. This is his hidden motive that drives the entire plot of the novel and he employs all others characters in the novel, primarily Case, to achieve this aim, without making anyone a party to his hidden motives. He no way does anything to “promote people’s capacity to choose for themselves.” In his omnipresence in the novel, he emerges as an all powerful, plotting and scheming god, who uses all other characters merely as ploys in his created scheme of things. The characters are only a means to achieve his personal interests and not as an end in themselves. To use Velasquez’s words, he uses them as objects and disrespects their “capacity to freely and knowingly choose for (themselves) what (they) will do” (Velasquez 300). This capacity for choosing for themselves is compromised in times of great need and in those moments it becomes a duty to promote other people’s capacity for choice. When Molly approaches Case with Wintermute’s proposal for work, Case is in the worst moments of crisis, fighting to survive both physically and mentally. Wintermute cashes on this situation of Case and instead of promoting his capacity of choice, utilizes him to meet his own needs. For Case was not only the best that he could lay his hands on, but also the best fitted for the job. Kant does not say explicitly that it is wrong to use people for our own needs but that

it is “wrong to use people for our own ends when we have not given them a choice in the matter” (301). Once Case gets himself hired to do the job of the mysterious employer, he is literally dragged into doing whatever he does in the novel. He has absolutely no choice to make or rather he is offered no choice. He is just given instructions in the matter as to what to do.

Engaging with *Neuromancer* within the framework of morality/ethic reiterates an entanglement in a life and culture dominated by advanced technological changes where there remains little difference between man and machine. As has been stated earlier, the individual who walks Gibson’s created landscape is someone who is half human and half machine, a *cyborg* whose culture is cyberculture. In the 1960s, the imaginative construct of the cyborg began to draw the attention of scientists and literary figures the world over, “a sort of hybrid, a mesh of flesh and steel, neurons and wires, blood and circuits. It was a human being partially transformed into a machine” (Mizrach). The most relevant question today is what values are adopted take or given up and what a moral being a cyborgs will eventually become. Mike Austin, in the essay “Should we Become Cyborgs. Morality and the Good Life” (2009) considers the necessity to become free and responsible in the process of becoming cyborgs and links the ethical question to that of control as “computer implants have the potential to enhance human agency as well as undermine it.” The cyborg becomes an apt concept as well as a plot device in *Neuromancer* to discuss issues like moral choice, free will and empathy. However, the very fact that we are now considering the question of morality and the question of morality in relation to that of a half machine, half man created by man himself, problematises central concerns in ethics and morality.

First, *Neuromancer* showcases a community of people in virtual space, each with his very own or adopted or fantasised identity or persona. This virtual space to many becomes more real and a place and in the words of Nevill Drury, in “Magic and Cyberspace: Fusing Technology and Magical Consciousness in the Modern World”, it is a place “where human beings can interact with each other in ways limited only by their imagination. Individuals can pose as members of the opposite sex, as fantasy beings - even as dark and evil gods - and this has become a central feature of the development of role-play on the Internet. So in a very specific way the Internet has become an extension of the human psyche, a forum for both its realities and its fantasies.” There have been many explorations of cyberspace as a space where one exists virtually, where one can kill without harming and face no consequences for murder. Whereas in the traditional concepts in morality, murder is a heinous and unforgivable crime, in today’s technology-driven world of cyberspace, this crime may be committed many a time without spilling a drop of blood. To quote Andrew Tuplin writing in “Virtual Morality”:

Technology is dragging morality into some deep and murky philosophical waters, forcing us to reexamine our understanding of it as many of us choose to become actors in virtual worlds. By putting choice and consequence in closed virtual worlds where we can kill without harming others or facing punishment ourselves, we are forced to reconsider the case for moral behavior.

The virtual world seems to release us from any real responsibilities as the actions in a virtual world do not, apparently, have any real life consequences.

Moreover, in the novel, when the characters are living in the real everyday world, they long to jack back into cyberspace and there remains a very thin line of demarcation between the real world and the virtual. The dilemma centres around whether there are some inherent concepts of right and wrong in the virtual world and cyber communities, particular ethics, values and codes pertaining to cyborgs.

Mark Poster's "The Good, the Bad, and the Virtual: Ethics in the Age of Information," (2003) hypothesises that the "emergence of an age of information may put into suspension established ethical principles". The conventional ethical concerns are limited in their applicability to what is today called the real life. In *Neuromancer*, we are dealing with virtual life – a culture and life that do not come within the parameters of the traditional distinctions of good and bad. Events in the novel provide another level of experience where the virtual is complicated by the real. "The problem then would be not to determine a means to apply ethics to a recalcitrant and strange domain of the virtual but to invent new systems of valuation that adhere effectively to mediated life" (Poster 183). With the availability of two levels of experience, the traditional ethical certainties as well as the content of human experience undergo a remarkable and alteration. Virtual life removes all traces of bodily presence and the communication is carried on with typed messages under a username that may be often fictitious. Under such conditions genders can be swapped, identity fraud is easily committed. Kant's categorical imperative applies to an ethical individual who is real and the Other is also someone known and experienced proximately. Velasquez quotes Kant's principle, "Act so that you may will the principle of your action to be universal." This, he

argues, does not apply in the virtual situation as here one does not know anything about the Other – or “the Other is a configuration of pixels on a screen ... the relation is not with an embodied presence” and there is always the “ease of disappearance,” with which all ethical relations can be ended. Hence, under these circumstances, “If one insists on ethical terms, it might be said that virtual ethics entails a different, perhaps a deeper type of obligation” (190) –when one is under the moral obligation to maintain the identities one constructs in relation to the other. Considering the way Case acts in the novel, whether be it in cyberspace or in real life, he is consistent in the identity he adopts. Never for once does he mask himself in another identity – and he appears to others as he really is, Henry Case, a console cowboy. He is Case when he enters Molly’s consciousness and he is Case when he rides Molly and they go to meet Larry, one of the members of “The Panther Moderns” a violent group of young terrorists whom Molly hires to create a distraction during a heist at Sense/Net. Unlike Case, Wintermute, the Artificial Intelligence, is constantly changing his identity and we come face to face with his reality only towards the last part of the novel. He changes his identity according to the demands of the hour. It would not be wrong to say that questions on morality in an age of information can be seen to tread newer grounds with the focus shifting to the necessity of an identity and that of the accompanying need of moral restraint. As “Computer-mediated communication places a thick interface between the phenomenological subject and the online subject with the consequence that usual ethical issues must be set aside and another question raised, that of identity” (192).

Neuromancer is about Case and his quest to fulfill the task he takes up for an unknown employer so that he is given back the key to enter cyberspace. When the novel begins, we meet Case in one of the worst situations in his life. He has committed the “classic mistake” of stealing from his former employers as a result of which they have destroyed his nervous system. He is portrayed as one addicted to cyberspace, who when out of it keeps himself on “an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency.” To him, the cyberspace which “projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination” was more real and exciting. Gibson clearly describes him as a “thief” [who] worked for other, wealthier thieves, employers who provided the exotic software required to penetrate the bright walls of corporate systems, opening windows into rich fields of data” (5). The novel emerges as an unknown and mysterious quest for Case who is surrounded with allies and enemies where the only motivation that drives Case is the dream of re-entering cyberspace and floating in massive fields of data. Given these circumstances, moral concerns are not central to him. Thus, when not into cyberspace, Case is inevitably on a high dose of drugs, through which he tries to simulate the experience of cyberspace.

Another character of importance is Molly, a street samurai who kills without any hesitation, routinely uses drugs to dull pain and increase performance and to manipulate and murder other characters. Nearly all characters in *Neuromancer* are drug users and drug peddlers, many of them are addicts and criminals exemplars of low life characters who are not acceptable to the so-called civilized society for their antisocial or self-destructive behaviors. Minor characters like Ratz sell alcohol and run a bar;

Lonny Zone is a well established pimp in Night City addicted to Cloud Dancers and pushes drugs on his prostitutes. Wage and Deane are drug dealers while the Moderns are a violent group of young terrorists. Linda Lee is Case's love who is a drug addict herself, McPauley "a thickset man in shirt-sleeves, something leaden about the shade of his skin" (78) who trains Case as a console cowboy, and Hideo a "vatgrown ninja assassin" (74). These low life characters seek a new and alternate state of being or way of life. Besides the use of drugs the other way they try to achieve this state of transcendence is by melding with technology and entering cyberspace.

In Gibson's cyberspace, the characters are in a world where one can be what wants to be – enter into someone else's consciousness, make choices and also suffer and enjoy the consequences of one's actions. Gibson himself admits of his minimal knowledge of computers which made him romanticize it, albeit ironically. (McCaffrey 270). He gave cyberspace an intensive power to allure and entice more and more people to experience the world of information and infinity. In this virtual world created by him, the idea of morality with the strict adherence to the good not with the consciousness of harming anybody does not apply because in such a world, the human interacts not with another human but with a machine. In novels such as *Neuromancer*, technology, therefore, complicates our traditional ideas of morality.

As stated earlier, the hero is apprenticed to be a console cowboy and theft is all that he does. But, when we consider the low life characters in the novel, they have neither community proper nor the circumstances which could have motivated them into acquiring the 'proper' actions. The models that these characters find before them are what they grow up to be. For instance, since

his youth, the only motivation for a career that Case knew to be of the proper kind was that of being a console cowboy. For Case, hacking was the best possible career option that his community offered him, and there he found nothing unethical. By the age of twenty two, he was one of the best console cowboys and when the novel opens, we are at one point of his hacking career, when he is deprived of his ability to enter cyberspace. But we see him undeterred and trying every means to get his entry back into cyberspace. In this cyber world, softer human emotions such as love do not hold much significance, and doing drugs come naturally to many. It is perhaps, because of the casualness associated with the concept of doing drugs and also because of the fact that Case is a habitual substance abuser that he feels no scruple in introducing his then girlfriend Linda Lee to drugs. In fact, he has an enormously destructive effect on Linda. In return, Linda too, cheats on him by stealing his high value items:

“Where’s Linda?”

“Hit that latch switch.”

He did.

“That your girl? Linda?”

He nodded.

“She’s gone. Took your Hitachi. Real nervous kid. What about the gun, man? She wore mirrored glasses. Her clothes were black, the heels of black boots deep in the temperfoam.” (24)

The novel moves forward to explore Case’s only desire to move out of his physical reality and into a completely mental and digital reality. In fact, what he does in the novel is all aimed at this desire to escape into cyberspace. We

may associate a kind of morality to Case as well as other characters in Gibson's novel, *Neuromancer* called consequentialism. According to Wendy Gordon, "Moral Philosophy, Information Technology, and Copyright: The Grokster Case", consequentialism focuses on questions regarding the rightness or wrongness of an event, its dependence on outcomes or the consequences of an action taken up by a reasoner and where "[a]lthough the reasoner's condition of life will inevitably color his moral reasoning, circumstances do not 'dictate' what their moral significance or insignificance will be – the reasoner chooses which circumstances will count, and why" (271). The reasoner may adopt an approach that seeks to maximise either the welfare of a limited group or of one self. In *Neuromancer*, the characters do all they can to maximise their own welfare.

Considering the life that Gibson gives his hero Case, once Case gets employed for an unknown boss and on an unknown project, his desperation to enter cyberspace for which he is ready to take up any risk is understandable. For instance, when he first meets Molly, he remarks: "Hey, I'm very easy. I'm a pushover, no problem." (*Neuromancer* 25). This is a reflection of the consequentialist reasoner in Case who reasons out that the consequences of his choice will maximize his benefit, will not only give him an access into the matrix but also into the consciousness of anyone he desires. This gives a clear picture of what Case's digital life is all about and seems the best escape for him from the frustrated "turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City" (4), struggling as "another hustler, trying to make it through", in those nights when he did "cry in his sleep" and sleep "curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel" (5). It is this condition of life that colours his moral reasoning

and for him cyberspace becomes the best option that can be a means of escape and can make his life worthwhile.

Similar is the case with Molly's using cybernetic implants that make her a "razorgirl" (161) and gives her the bodily prowess with which she can even safeguard Case who is weak and scared: "[s]cared, Case. You're real scared" (29). Her philosophy of life does not value whether the means she adopts to achieve her only desire in life – to upgrade herself to Molly Millions – is moral or not. Further, in the pursuit of one's maximum benefit, other questions of morality as one's own private space or what Gordon calls "loss of a sense of 'protected space' at home" (278) do not matter much. This is appropriate in the case of the Wintermute-Case relationship too. Wintermute is an AI, an intelligence software whose hardware is owned by the Tessier-Ashpool. It runs on a mainframe computer in Berne, possesses limited Swiss citizenship and is driven by its motivation and goals throughout the entire novel. It is its own motivation which leads him to a mission, which ultimately becomes the only mission in the novel. It is the pursuit of this mission that inspires him to pervade both the physical world, as well as cyberspace. He is omnipresent in the entire canvas of the novel, and he follows Case wherever he goes without Case being conscious of it. As we know, going by consequentialism, if the end result is good then the action is morally correct. The entire thrust of the novel being Wintermute's desire to unite with his other half, his intrusion into Case's protected space, therefore, stands justified, as a means adopted to achieve the maximum benefit.

The way one is born into this cyberworld of Gibson's *Neuromancer* is not, necessarily, the way one pulls oneself to the grave and "human biology is

no longer destiny” (Mizrach). In this context, we do not seem to even be bothered with the question whether it is right or wrong to tamper with the body. In Baudrillard’s opinion, this “implosion between biology and technology” when “human body parts are easily replaceable with technological prostheses, personalities are programmable, neuro-chemistry modifies intelligence and personalities, brains and computers interface and implode, and individuals enter strange new technological worlds” and where “artificial intelligence strives for power, and individuals seek immortality through cryogenics, or externalization of their personalities in computer constructs” (in Kellner 304), the question of morality is complicated and appalling. Keeping up with the resoner’s choice in consequentialism, it is the question of what choice he will make for better results. Consequentialism, after all, “looks forward, rather than looking backward at who has done what” (Gordon 275). Hence morality for the consequentialist is the effects got after one’s choice of act or rule. In case of AI, Wintermute, the question of morality is further problematised as it is a machine making a choice to better one’s condition, perhaps to make itself as powerful as God himself.

Neuromancer, thus, is an example of the fallibility, vulnerability, manipulation, and the greed of human beings. Here traditional human institutions and relationships are not mentioned, as for instance, we are never given a clue of the family that Case, the protagonist comes from. We catch him as an established console cowboy, with a word or two of how he got into the profession:

Case was twenty-four. At twenty-two, he'd been a cowboy, a rustler, one of the best in the Sprawl. He'd been trained by the best, by McCoy

Pauley and Bobby Quine, legends in the biz. He'd operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix. (*Neuromancer* 5)

Friendships are made with the apprehension that these might be broken any time. Here occupations are chosen on the basis of need and without any scruple. Such situations, generally prevalent in the cyberpunk novels, along with the gloomy atmosphere of utter mechanisation and doom, leads many a critic to conclude that the world of the cyberpunk is a world of complete absence of God. Nietzsche had declared the death of God.

Thus, the subculture *Neuromancer* in particular paints is one which is radically new. Here the values of the characters are alien and writers like Jeroen van den Hoven and John Weckert see a new chance for the characters to transcend the “limitations of the human life Cyberpunk tends to create new gods, new divinity, and new myths, and through these new myths, cyberpunk characters are able to escape their ironic, pitiful existences to achieve transcendence and hope.” It is a world where information is power and the available amount of information is infinite which the characters can “generate, store, and process” (302). This data is precious – for this is a world of the computer, where the question of privacy of personal information through passwords is relevant. This itself is one good indication of the fact that there is something unethical when such information being hacked. Thus, moving away from the traditional concept of morality and moral values, in the world of *Neuromancer*, we enter a singular sort of experience where it is

ethical and moral for one's privacy to be preserved. If this is the case, then this code of morality is broken many a time in *Neuromancer* whether be it in Case's jacking into the consciousness of another or the final breaking of the code to unite Wintermute with Neuromancer:

“Kuang Grade Mark Eleven is haulin’ - ass in nine seconds, _countin’ -
_ seven, six, five ...”

The Flatline punched them up, smooth ascent, the ventral surface of the black chrome shark a microsecond flick of darkness.

“Four, three...”

Case had the strange impression of being in the pilot's seat in a small plane. A flat dark surface in front of him suddenly glowed with a perfect reproduction of the keyboard of his deck.

“Two, an’ -kick ass -”

Headlong motion through walls of emerald green, milky jade, the sensation of speed beyond anything he'd known before in cyberspace...

The Tessier-Ashpool ice shattered, peeling away from the Chinese program's thrust, a worrying impression of solid fluidity, as though the shards of a broken mirror bent and elongated as they fell –

(*Neuromancer* 256)

Unlike, more traditional novels, where the hero is presented as an emblem of the good that exists in the world, the protagonist of *Neuromancer* is an antihero. We know that Case is a computer hacker who specializes in stealing computer software – “one of the best in the Sprawl” and he was “trained by the best” (5). The introduction of the protagonist opens up an ambiguous attitude towards the very question of the good and the bad,

considered from the point of moral philosophy. Normative ethics, for instance, considers the practical means of determining a moral course of action as good or bad, or as Kagan defines it in, *Normative Ethics* (1998), it involves “substantive proposals concerning how to act, how to live, or what kind of person to be. In particular, it attempts to state and defend the most basic principles governing these matters.” It considers how we ought to act in moral terms and whether our actions are right or wrong. As Kagan continues, though there is no one single fundamental moral principle, yet, we can try out a list of the “basic moral principles” or “the most important ones.” Thus, normative ethics is “concerned with stating and defending the most basic moral principles” (2).

This category of ethics does not seem to apply at all in the case of the twenty-four year old hero with a thin frame for a body and a sketchy background, for whom his world is basically amoral and who has absolutely no concerns about the rightness or wrongness of any of his actions. He led “his fifteenth summer, in a weekly rates hotel, fifth floor, with a girl called Marlene” and “slept with Marlene on a striped mattress with no sheets” (125). He “spent most of his nineteenth summer in the Gentleman Loser, nursing expensive beers and watching the cowboys” and dreaming to be one soon, for “he knew what he wanted” (77). He trained himself under McCoy Pauley and Bobby Quine and by the age of twenty two, Case is an established cyberspace cowboy, working for a cartel of thieves performing illegal thefts and cyberspace manipulations. When we meet him for the first time in the novel, he is suffering the consequences of one wrong action on his part that had pushed him into an abyss of gloom. He is caught on the wrong foot – “He kept

something for himself and tried to move it through a fence in Amsterdam” (5). His employers “only smiled” and “still smiling – they were going to make sure he never worked again. They damaged his nervous system with a wartime Russian mycotoxin” (6). It leaves him feeling useless – someone who is deprived of his ability to enter cyberspace. Gibson uses the metaphor of Satan’s fall from grace to describe Case’s expulsion from cyberspace: “For Case, who’d lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he’d frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (6). All his actions are reckless physical explorations, merely for satisfaction of the senses. He derides his body and calls it “meat puppet” (180) and lives with an only aim, to enter into a world of digital reality.

Given the ambience that Gibson creates, it is not surprising to realise that morality and ethics are severely problematised, and for some, compromise in the entire canvas. In his essay, “The Arc of Our Destruction: Reversal and Erasure in Cyberpunk” (1992), Easterbrook maintains that in cyberpunk novels, traditional morality seems completely ignored partly because in such settings “advanced technology erases human morality.” In *Neuromancer* too, the accepted human values relate to themes of good and evil, love, betrayal and hatred – all assume different dimensions. In particular, the theme of betrayal of trust amongst all the characters seems natural to the entire atmosphere of the novel. It emerges as one of the major imperfections when considered from the ethical or moral point of view. Everything is done here solely driven by either a selfish or an amoral vision of its own. In this world

no one is a true friend of the other. The characters lack a convincing compassion for one another. When Armitage is about to be killed, Case's only concern is how it will have an impact on himself. In the opening scenes of the novel, Case gives the impression that Ratz is one of his closest friends. When he returns to Ratz's bar only a few months later, Ratz does not even recognize him, and when Case re-introduces himself, Ratz dismisses him. Yet, amidst all the faithlessness, there is one pair that succeeds in remaining faithful to each other all throughout the novel. This partnership is that of Case and Molly and it is amazingly formed immediately and almost instantly and remains the truest all through the novel. Early in the novel Molly essentially sets up a partnership-within-the-team with Case that will endure throughout the remainder of the novel. Perhaps, Gibson still wanted to trace the silver lining in the cloud of dystopia that prevails in the novel. In fact, *Neuromancer* itself is about imperfections.

We have characters who use cybernetic and surgical implants to hide their physical imperfections. Their world is gritty and dystopic and completely immersed in technology and morally bankrupt. The world of *Neuromancer* seems a reflection of our lives apart from one basic difference – the complete absence of any organised form of religion or any consciousness of choosing the good from the bad, in terms of morality. Technology is the only framework that looms large in the canvas of the novel and the place of the almost-divine, the one that is omnipresent, is taken over by the looming presence of cyberspace. This point will be discussed at length in the chapter on metaphysics: cyberspace as a place where anything is possible.

If we are to associate morality with any organised form of religion, the only instance when *Neuromancer* makes a reference to any sort of organised religion is in the case of Zion – an orbiting construction. It is a Rastafarian space station which was constructed by the builders of Freeside out of junk material and welded plates, as they did not want to return to the earth after the construction of Freeside:

Zion had been founded by five workers who'd refused to return, who'd turned their backs on the well and started building. They'd suffered calcium loss and heart shrinkage before rotational gravity was established in the colony's central torus. Seen from the bubble of the taxi, Zion's makeshift hull reminded Case of the patchwork tenements of Istanbul, the irregular, discolored plates laser-scrawled with Rastafarian symbols and the initials of welders (*Neuromancer* 104).

Zion and its residents, the Zionites, are an interesting component in the novel. They are introduced into the novel when Armitage, Case, Molly and Riviera plan a trip to Freeside, which is a “brothel and banking nexus, pleasure dome and free port, border town and spa. Freeside is Las Vegas and the hanging gardens of Babylon, an orbital Geneva and home to a family inbred and most carefully refined, the industrial clan of Tessier and Ashpool” (101). Armitage plans an “eighty-hour stay” in Zion where Molly and Case “would practice in zero gravity” (105):

“We transfer to Freeside now?” he asked, eyeing a shred of Yeheyuan tobacco that had drifted gracefully up out of his shirt pocket to dance ten centimeters from his nose. There was no smoking on shuttle flights.

“No, we got the boss’s usual little kink in the plans, you know? We’re getting this taxi out to Zion, Zion cluster.’ She touched the release plate on her harness and began to free herself from the embrace of the foam. “Funny choice of venue, you ask me.”

“How’s that?”

“Dreads. Rastas. Colony’s about thirty years old now.”

“What’s that mean?”

“You’ll see. It’s an okay place by me. Anyway, they’ll let you smoke your cigarettes there.” (103)

The Zionites follow a Rasta religion based on Jah, *marijuana* and their music called dub. When Case and his associates enter Zion, unknown to them, even here Wintermute prepares for their stay and accommodation. To the Zionites, the voice of Wintermute seems potentially prophetic. Wintermute is an AI, and the Zionites consider it prophetic too. Apart from Wintermute’s instructions, the interest of the Zionites is apparently based around Molly, who they identify with a character from their religious mythology named “Stepping Razor”. The introduction of the Zionites and their rasta religion is the first instance of religion in the novel. During their stay at Zion, Molly and Case are summoned to meet secretly with the religious leaders of Zion.

Case rolled over and put his head through the rent in the plastic.

“Wha...?”

“Shut up.”

“You th- one, mon, said a Zion voice. Cateye, call’m, call ‘em

Steppin’~ Razor. I Maelcum, sister. Brothers wan’-converse wi’- you an’- cowboy.”

“What brothers?”

“Founders, mon. Elders of Zion, ya know...”

“We open that hatch, the light’ll wake bossman,” Case whispered.

“Make it special dark, now,” the man said. “Come. I an’- I visit th’- Founders. “You know how fast I can cut you, friend?”

“Don’- stan’- talkin’-, sister. Come.” (109)

By the time we reach this section of *Neuromancer*, we feel that we are advancing towards an apparent doom and this is prophesied now by the two “surviving Founders of Zion” who were “old men, old with the accelerated aging that overtakes men who spend too many years outside the embrace of “gravity” (109). Gibson constantly makes it a point to remind us, time and again, that we are outside the familiar and natural surroundings of Earth. The moment Molly and Case enter, one Founder, throws his head back and says, “Soon come, the Final Days ... Voices. Voices cryin’ in na wilderness, prophesyin’ ruin unto Babylon ...” (109-10). When the Zionites mention “Winter Mute”, “making it two words”, it makes Case’s “skin crawl on his arms” (110) and he tries to convince them that they must have been fooled, but the religious leaders go on:

“The Mute talked to us,” the first Founder said. “The Mute said we are to help you.”

“When was this?” Case asked.

“Thirty hours prior you dockin’ ~ Zion.”

“You ever hear this voice before?”

“No” said the man from Los Angeles, ‘and we are uncertain of its meaning. If these are Final Days, we must expect falseprophets ...”

“Listen,” Case said, “that’s an AI, you know? Artificial intelligence. The music it played you, it probably just tapped your banks and cooked up whatever it thought you’d like to –” (110)

From the beginning of the novel, the reader is increasingly conscious that AIs are not human but by this stage of the novel, AIs are given another dimension to their personality. The Zionites liken them to gods, to creatures that rise above the confines of the body and live in a spiritual world. This characteristic gives the AIs the image of God. Gibson attempts a realistic portrayal of the Rastas and in Chapter 8 also uses their dialect. *Neuromancer* can be seen as one of the first or rather the first science fiction narrative in which Rastafarians play quite an important role. By the time the rastas are introduced, we are in the third section of the book titled, “Midnight in the Rue Jules Verne.” In Rastafarian religion, Zion is the African utopia, central to the ‘back-to-Africa’ or Ethiopia ideology of Rastafarianism.

The Zionites have rejected the dominant lifestyle in a similar way, in favour of the Rastafarian way of life. Zion can be interpreted as a utopian vision: an independent colony built and controlled by the rastas themselves. They are the only religious tribal folk portrayed who prefer to keep a distance from cyberspace and who like music more than computers. Yet, it can be seen as a singular blend of technology and spiritualism. In the novel, they prefer to remain apart from the chaotic world of the hero and his female counterpart and it can be agreed that they “represent a moral compass in an amoral setting” (Friesen). Two Zionites who were sent by the religious leaders of Zion to assist Case and Molly in their mission in Freeside were Maelcum and Aerol. Both play only a minor role in the novel, yet, Maelcum’s dub music which

brings back Case from the mouth of death is given an almost miraculous dimension by Gibson. In this case, Maelcum also be seen as a character who represents salvation.

The biblical hints thrown into the novel are very subtly done. The novel also resonates with many religious overtones and references like when Flatline or McCoy Pauley is referred to as “Lazarus of cyberspace ...” (78), there is mention of “the left hand of John the Baptist ...” (94) and of Riviera to that of a “compulsive Judas” because he “[c]an’t get off sexually unless he knows he’s betraying the object of desire” (96). Again, towards the end of the novel, we have Flatline saying, “Christ on a crutch,” and “you do believe in takin’~ your own good time, don’t you, boy?” (255) Even Case, who in traditional terms leads a most unruly and chaotic life of sex and drugs and kills without a scruple, swears in the name of “Christ!” (256). Of all these, the most obvious biblical symbolism is when Wintermute appears to Case in the form of Finn and refers directly to the Bible: “You want I should come to you in the matrix like a burning bush?”(169) Here he directly approximates to the divine and refers to the *Exodus* 3 where God is revealed to Moses in the midst of the “burning bush”:

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”(Exodus 3:1-4)

Apart from Rastafarianism, the world of Gibson is, otherwise, a godless world where religion and traditional morality have no place and the only powerful entity is that of the AI, Wintermute, who is the most powerful force in the novel. Unlike the traditional concept of a benevolent and all-powerful God, Wintermute, who seems to attain God-like status in the novel, is someone who is always plotting, scheming and murdering for his personal gain. Ironically, it is Wintermute who looms large like an omnipresent power in the novel and his portrayal subverts all aspects of the good, the moral and the religious in *Neuromancer*. Wintermute is the overpowering presence in the novel and possess is the ability to extend life after death, create alternate realities, exist without bodies, and have access to vast knowledge. Towards a later section of the novel, the Turing Agents call Wintermute a “demon” (*Neuromancer* 243) further acknowledging the godlike powers of AIs.

Another important subtheme in the novel is that of instant gratification. Beyond this instant gratification of the senses nothing else seems to matter for the characters. They live merely for the moment itself. Just like there is no reference to the biographical past of the characters, there is also no action undertaken on their part which indicates a desire to better one’s future. Most of the characters in the novel and more specifically the hero needs any one of the addictions in his life, either the cyberspace or drugs which he hopes will simulate the experience of cyberspace for him. These addictions seem to

cripple the hero and, cyberspace is more real and more home to him: “He knew this kind of room, this kind of building; the tenants would operate in the interzone where art wasn’t quite crime, crime not quite art. He was home” (44).

Thus, Case is, essentially, an amoral criminal who does everything to live life for the moment. He even murders people for a negligible sum - “he’d killed two men and a woman over sums that a year before would have seemed ludicrous” (7). Case is portrayed as a character who knows there was no future for him:

Case knew that at some point he'd started to play a game with himself, a very ancient one that has no name, a final solitaire. He no longer carried a weapon, no longer took the basic precautions. He ran the fastest, loosest deals on the street, and he had a reputation for being able to get whatever you wanted. A part of him knew that the arc of his self-destruction was glaringly obvious to his customers, who grew steadily fewer, but that same part of him basked in the knowledge that it was only a matter of time. And that was the part of him, smug in its expectation of death, that most hated the thought of Linda Lee. (7-8)

The theme of instant gratification of the senses is best exemplified in the Linda-Case relationship. Case’s apparent love for Linda emerges as a recurrent theme throughout the novel and he never seems to realise that he is an enormously destructive influence in Linda’s life, essentially converting her from a video-game-playing kid into a drug-addicted and homeless petty criminal within the period of just a few months. Besides, not only is Case conscious of any sense of morality or moral value, but even when Linda cheats

on him and steals him, he is not disturbed and takes it as a mundane fact of cyber life. Gibson was living in a time when man was beginning to explore the limits of technology. The 1980s saw it all – the horrific results of the nuclear wars, the development of the means of communication and information and the realisation of the supercomputer and the first ideas of the Internet. As a writer, Gibson capitalised on the fear that all will ultimately become slaves of technology and worked out the theme of the loss of the very essence of humanity.

It would not be going too far to state that the world of *Neuromancer* is a world of amorality – a world where there is a complete absence of moral beliefs. Peter Riviera, for instance, is a perfect case in point. Thirty years old, “slender, blonde, soft-voiced, his English accentless and fluid” (97) - violent and unstable, fond of torture, rape and murder, a “certified psychopath” (51). The erotic desires that Riviera displays for the object along with his anger, rage, violence in the portrayal of his love for Molly certifies him to be a sort of an erotomaniac. He not only experiences sexual lust for Molly but also expresses it, completely ignoring the fact that Molly shows a complete lack of interest in him and abhors his very person. He is a psychotic who is no longer living in reality. Hervey Cleckley in his book *The Mask of Sanity* (1982) discusses the typical psychopathy traits and writes: “the psychopath is not pushed into these situations by an excessively vigorous eroticism but that even the feeblest and most transient impulse will cause him to seek gratification with partners and in environments shunned by a person with ordinary judgment and discretion and taste” (290). So, what the psychopath requires are “impulses of scarcely more than whimlike intensity to bring about

unacceptable behavior in the sexual field or in any other” (376). Further, the fact that Riviera fulfills his sexual desire by betraying the object of his desire shows the traits of the psychopath in Riviera as Cleckley writes about the male psychopath who is “despite his usual ability to complete the physical act successfully with a woman, never seems to find anything meaningful or personal in his relations or to enjoy significant pleasure beyond the localized and temporary sensations” (362).

Riviera is portrayed as someone who takes particular pleasure in his deviancy, believing that it makes him uniquely interesting. He is a “Real ugly customer” (5) with a crooked nose, lungs removed and extensive implants and a deviant personality – making him a perfectly distasteful character in the novel, as if his physical form is symbolic of his moral deviance. An orphan, he grew up cannibalizing the corpses of slain soldiers. However, Molly’s dislike for him and his amorality from the beginning of the novel seems ironic as she herself is a paid assassin who kills for money and in the past she had had lived the life of a prostitute. The fact that Molly, herself an amoral character, finds Riviera hateful further intensifies his amorality.

Philosophers like Kant have argued that the psychopath serves as the ultimate test of the limits of moral responsibility. They hold that the psychopath lacks a deep knowledge of right and wrong. The psychopath lacks moral understanding due to a cognitive failure involving a Kantian practical reason. The psychopath, for some, at least, (see Cleckley; Glannon) is partly responsible for his behaviour and for the psychopath. According to Cleckley, for the psychopath, “[t]he familiar record of sexual promiscuity ... seem(s) much more closely related to (his) almost total lack of self-imposed restraint

than to any particularly strong passions or drives” (363). Human beings can be seen to consciously or unconsciously integrate some values into their lives – as they see themselves as a part of a particular society or culture, whether be it a subculture or the dominant culture, in *meaningful* relationships with its members. With such a relationship, such emotions as love, dependence, trust and other aspects of normal human nature come typically. But when we talk of psychopaths, as Gibson labels his character Riveria, they lack such emotions making meaningful relationships impossible in their lives. Thus, there remains no motivation to integrate themselves into a particular society or culture. Piers Benn in his essay “Freedom, Resentment, and the Psychopath” (1999) discusses the lack of moral responsibility of psychopaths for their anti-social actions. While Walter Glannon in “Psychopathy and Responsibility” (2002), holds the psychopath’s lack of imposed restraint as partly responsible for his lack of moral value and anti-social actions, Benn suggests that they are seriously deficient in their capacity to entertain these attitudes resulting in a lack of self evaluation and the callousness and impudence in their actions. He holds them incapable of moral understanding and excuses them from being targets of anger and resentment. Thus, the question of morality does not seem to apply to Riviera, the psychopath that Gibson names in *Neuromancer*.

Low life is a significant theme in cyberpunk and in *Neuromancer* it forms the socio-cultural canvas of the novel. In this section of the novel, absence of traditional or dominant codes in this canvas of low life will be explored. The characteristics of low life have been discussed in detail in chapters II and III. The characteristics of punk culture can be related to the so called low life which is a deliberate attempt at an alternative culture. As

Kellner observes, the “root ‘cyber’ is related to ‘cyborg,’ describing new syntheses of humans and machines and generally signifying the cutting-edge high-tech artifacts and experience. As has been noted earlier, the ‘punk’ root derives from the punk rock movement, signifying the edge and attitude of tough urban life, sex, drugs, violence, and antiauthoritarian rebellion in lifestyles, pop culture, and fashion. Together, the terms refer to the marriage of high-tech subculture with low-life street cultures, or to technoconsciousness and culture which merges state-of-the-art technology with the alteration of the senses, mind, and lifestyles associated with bohemian subcultures” (301). This emphasis on subcultures is one of the themes of the cyberpunk novel. Most of the characters in a cyberpunk come from the background of a low life, an economically backward class of the society who, in the words of Easterbrook are “with working class or underclass backgrounds, characters who exploit threshold technologies to escape from the dead-end despair of tenements and the mind-numbing boredom of television.” Though there are no distinct class divisions in *Neuromancer*, we have the obviously powerful, yet undercover corporate power that decides the fate of everybody in the novel and characters like Case and Molly who come from the lower rungs of society. For the corporate world, humane values do not exist and the corporations can be seen resembling a totalitarian society in miniature. The singular motto of the corporate world is commerce. Ethics and morality may become marketing tools adjusting themselves to the needs of business, for the individuals, survival is what counts in an adverse life situation. This lower class as Huntington observes in “Newness, *Neuromancer*, and the End of Narrative”

(1990) is portrayed as a “parasite to the largely invisible corporate world that produces the computer-saturated environment” (64).

The world of *Neuromancer* presents a society which embraces technology in its highest form and the part of the society that utilizes technology at its highest point, its epitome being the Tessier-Ashpool aristocracy. But, they had done it all – created AIs, constructs, literally everything that only God could do in the traditional framework of morality. So they are presented as nothing less to gods in the novel and for them the question of morality does not matter much. They seek immortality and apply all means at hand to dismantle the boundary between life and death. Thus, the picture presented in the novel is that of complete disarray and havoc, where the differences between man and machine are very subtle, at times none. In this culture of low life, where individuals have been subjugated, tortured and dominated for years, all are driven by one basic motivation - to live life for oneself with no scruples. The dangerous aspect of this culture of the low life is the use of technology only for one’s own individual gain.

One of the associated features of the state of low life is drugs. The characters do drugs as a natural way of life. Perhaps, this a measure adopted by Gibson, by which the readers are forever conscious that the characters in the novel are on drugs – “an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency” (*Neuromancer* 5), a parallel with the hallucination of the matrix. Most of whatever happens in the novel is under intoxication when the protagonist is in a different mental state, as a drug-induced being. In this state of elation, when the man is not completely aware of what he is into, the question of traditional morality does not hold. In fact, in such a position, the

personality of the otherwise physically strong Molly is described thus: “(calves) like an iceberg, splinters drifting away, and finally he'd seen the raw need, the hungry armature of addiction” (8). It, therefore, appears to be a world that is inhumane and corrupt where the characters from the low life are in a desperate struggle for survival.

Another subtheme that develops in *Neuromancer* is the theme of alienation. Essentially considered a modernist theme, it takes on particular hues in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Case's past is one which we are oblivious of. He is introduced to us in the prime of his youth, jobless and into drugs. A computer pirate, his job is to crack the ice and steal data. The matrix is his world and all his experiences are expressed in terms of cyberspace. He is a lone crusader, already alienated when the novel begins, trying out all means at hand to get back his entry into cyberspace. His situation is a stark example of how advancements in technology and communication can, ironically, lead to alienation. When he sleeps, it is in “coffins” (6). One prime reason for this is his sense of rootlessness and lack of a sense of belonging. In loneliness, it is into the recesses of the mind that he ventures – and escapes into the world of cyberspace. In this run, he encounters vice, murderous motives, wealthy thieves and criminals leaving no place for a moral life. Thus, an inability to conform to established moral codes emerges as one of the greatest consequences of the advancements in technology. Case is in a world where all power is concentrated in the hands of a few giants in the corporate field. His only means of defence as well as compensation is his glorification of technology and his tools are the powers that technology gives him.

It is this inherent feeling of being alienated and isolated that makes Dixie Flatline express his desire to be erased: “I wanna be erased,” the construct said. “I told you that remember?” (206). Wintermute too experiences a similar sense of alienation from the society of which he is a part. When Wintermute is created, he is like Frankenstein’s creation, child-like and naive in nature. Programmed to learn and evolve, he gradually emerges to be superior to his creators in many ways. Being a machine, he is without human conscience and soon learns to manipulate both people and computer systems to satisfy his own desires. He has no sense of morality to guide his actions and what he desires is supreme power, almost in the likeness of a god.

For the more perceptive reader it can be seen in terms of a genre that reads as “distant warning systems, cautionary morality tales, warning us about future developments in which there is no future that human beings can control and mould to fit their purpose” (Kellner 302). And to all readers, it would appear a world intensely high tech and metallic, violent enough to kill the other merely for a few pennies. In this low life, everything is cheap - even the life of human beings. Murder is commonplace and very cheap in *Neuromancer*. In such a world, love is only physical. The novel works out this aspect as a theme that runs throughout. The narrative runs in such a manner that sex, merely for the pleasure of it, is commonplace right from the beginning of the novel. It is very ordinary and further it is described as if a skilful computer operator is working on the keyboard: “She went in just right, Case thought. The right attitude; it was something he could sense, something he could have seen in the posture of another cowboy leaning into a deck,

fingers flying across the board. She had it: the thing, the moves” (*Neuromancer* 213). In this “monstrosity of mind without body” the characters are participants in an artificial, “surrogate experience” (Huntington 66) – all directed towards one aim, to do the maximum good to oneself. For this, they see the escape from the prison of the flesh to be an imperative. In this entire transaction, neither the question of displeasing an Almighty nor causing pain to the other seem to attain any sort of significance. The world of *Neuromancer* is one in which faith in God has been replaced by a faith in the machine.

On the whole, it is a world dominated by capitalism and corporatism where anything is admissible as long as it is for the betterment of oneself. Kellner calls this technocapitalism, “an organization of society uniting technology with capital, in which technology (especially media, information, and communication) becomes capital and capital is increasingly mediated by technology. Indeed, in Gibson’s universe, information is the privileged form of capital and the source of wealth and power” (304). Knowingly or unknowingly, the characters help the corporate class they themselves despise, so have no scruples at ending their lives too.

The worldview in *Neuromancer* is, therefore, dystopic with no place for any long lasting interpersonal relationships. People are introduced to each other and soon forgotten. Love happens in the spur of the moment and does not last beyond the physical. Sexual relationships are casual and are portrayed more as routine business exchanges than as physical expressions of love or even friendship. Of course, towards the end of the novel, perhaps the only

redeeming factor in *Neuromancer*, Case realises that his love for Linda is somewhere intense and real.

There is an underlying fear pulsating throughout the novel. The characters are always on guard as to who will betray their trust in the very next moment. Early in the novel, Molly has set up a partnership with Case that would endure throughout. They never betray each other. Interestingly, they never for once even question each other. Surprisingly, this is the only unproclaimed bond of friendship and partnership that is settled so quickly and so successfully in the novel against the background of constant betrayal and misinformation that forms much of the remaining part of the novel. Perhaps, Gibson meant this relationship as a foil to all other, parasitical relationship in the novel. Yet, the absence of betrayal should not be read in terms of a commitment as is generally understood in human relationships. For, it is as if they are *coded* to remain together. So strong is this coded togetherness that Molly even allows Case to experience what she feels at the moment with the flipflop switch:

‘It’s a flipflop switch, basically. Wire it into your Sendai here, you can access live or recorded simstim without having to jack out of the matrix.’

‘What for?’

‘I haven’t got a clue. Know I’m fitting Moll for a broadcast rig, though, so it’s probably her sensorium you’ll access.’ The Finn scratched his chin. “So now you get to find out just how tight those jeans really are, huh?” (*Neuromancer* 53).

This technologically-aided correspondence between the two which links their sensory experiences is used extensively throughout. This same correspondence is not necessarily the dominant characteristic of the other characters in the novel.

The most powerful entity in the novel are the AIs that stride the canvas. Gibson adopts a mysterious attitude towards the working of the AIs as characters along with the human figures in the novel. Anyone coming in contact with them is conscious of their artificial features, the technology that drives them and makes them thrive, and it must be admitted that it becomes difficult to judge them in the same parameters as one judges a human being with. In spite of their motivation, some of their human-like properties, their sense of self-awareness, the desire to better and liberate themselves from the shackles of their masters, we cannot forget that they are artificial and created. Their presence and artificiality puts to doubt major questions of good and evil, normally associated with traditional morality. Thus, *Neuromancer* can also be viewed as a modern parable that forecasts the doom and destruction that await those who recklessly use technological innovations to completely negate the presence of the natural. Thus, it raises moral and ethical considerations along with the practical ones, a sort of a moral compass which forces one to sit back for some serious self-reflection and soul searching to gain a new perspective on humanity at large. It almost emerges as a myth of the postmodern world – a new world in which the hero treads the end of the horizon and his consciousness moves into the consciousness of others. We have new possibilities opening up and the older questions answered in a new mode and

the very concept of morality undergoes a sea change. The novel indeed emerges as a parable of our times.

By the time we reach the end of the novel, Case the jittery, shaken, self-destructive protagonist is transformed into a person very different, far more composed and with due respect towards the body. He no longer derides his flesh as lower than the mind and we can say that he earns a sort of salvation, his poison sacs cured and his emotional traumas overcome. He is a better person. Anelie Crighton in her essay “Among the spirits of cyberspace: an analysis of shamanic motifs in *Neuromancer*,” remarks that Case “rediscovers the meaning and value of the body, and the central role it plays in our connections with other human beings.” His spiritual journey to cyberspace is a rewarding one which relieves him of the grave sin of despair. He returns to the Sprawl and finds work there and also a girl named Michael: “He found a girl who called herself Michael” (*Neuromancer* 270). He is back into society as an integral part of the normal human society which he was seen to despise in the beginning of the novel. His journey to cyberspace can be seen as a sort of purgation that has taught him to respect and give true value to the necessity of the body as well as the mind.

In “Where the Street Finds Its Own Use for Thing” (1993) J.A.Walchak concludes that “science fiction is the literary [or textual] investigation of the relationship between humanity and technology, and (thus) of the myriad kinds of change produced by science and technology” (in Leblanc). One obvious change is thus the change in our sense of morality. “Cyberpunk strives to create new gods, new divinity, and new myths, and through those new myths, cyberpunk characters are able to escape their ironic,

pitiful existences to achieve transcendence and hope” (Fiegel). It would be wrong to generalise all cyberpunk novels and class them off as portraying a grim and dismal worldview where the dominating atmosphere is completely amoral. There may be different moral endings depending on the author.

Warwick makes an important observation in his book, *I, Cyborg* (2002): “[b]e warned – just as we humans split from our chimpanzee cousins years ago, so cyborgs will split from humans. Those who remain as humans are likely to become a sub-species. They will, effectively, be the chimpanzees of the future” (4). *Neuromancer* may seem all gloom and dystopic and a pervading amorality all around. The human being has integrated electronic technology into the human organism through bionic prostheses, bio-implants, and bio-chips and the resultant and augmented human being. The cyborg is someone who transcends limitations of intellect, strength, and longevity. Somewhere down the line, the sensitive human being begins to ask oneself whether it is ethical for human beings to tamper thus with the human body. The other part of the question that bothers us is how much of humanity can be retained after so much of the human body has been replaced with pieces of metal. Mizrahi refers to the possibility of the “post-biological man” and the necessity of limiting the integration of the human and the computer and the creation of a new “cyborg bioethics”. He goes on to argue that the “human cyborg represents a ‘transitional species’ of sorts, before the human enters total post-biological obsolescence.” Besides, now is the time when man has evolved from a product of natural selection to someone who can choose to be what one wants to be. (see Gray for “participatory” evolution). The worst scene we can imagine is the overpowering by gaining so much more power

than the creators themselves that they revolt against them in their attempts to be more powerful. Mizrach imagines the worst possible situation where cyborgs “could easily become a new sort of dominant caste, forcing the rest of untechnologized humanity into serfdom. Or perhaps they might decide simply to eliminate it.” He suggests the necessity of some degree of control in the bio implants so that they need to be dependent on their masters for their repair and maintenance. This is the necessity of the hour. After all, in keeping pace with the fast advancements we may not be guided with moral sense and foresight. Thus the presence of a cyborg *bioethics* is a necessary condition to retain our essence of humanity and what it means to be uniquely human. We see a strange sort of revolt in all the amorality displayed by the characters in the novel, a revolt against the life that technology has gifted them with – sterile, cold, selfish and lonely.

Mark Poster remarks that the “more information one has the better one can live” and “one can reap higher gains.” For Case too “information correlates directly with life chances” (*Neuromancer* 190) and whatever Case does in the novel is motivated by one intense desire – his entry into cyberspace where he can access infinite data or information. Seen from this perspective, information is *morally good* for Case. Gibson can be said to rally for the human being in contrast to the AI, Wintermute. Tama Leaver makes a comparison between Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*. Both present a time in future when the natural environment has been replaced by what Leaver calls “ecocidal hell” – a dystopian world of urban decay where there is not only a physical loss but also a spiritual loss: “Gibson and Scott construct a present-centred warning, their fiction showing not-too-distant

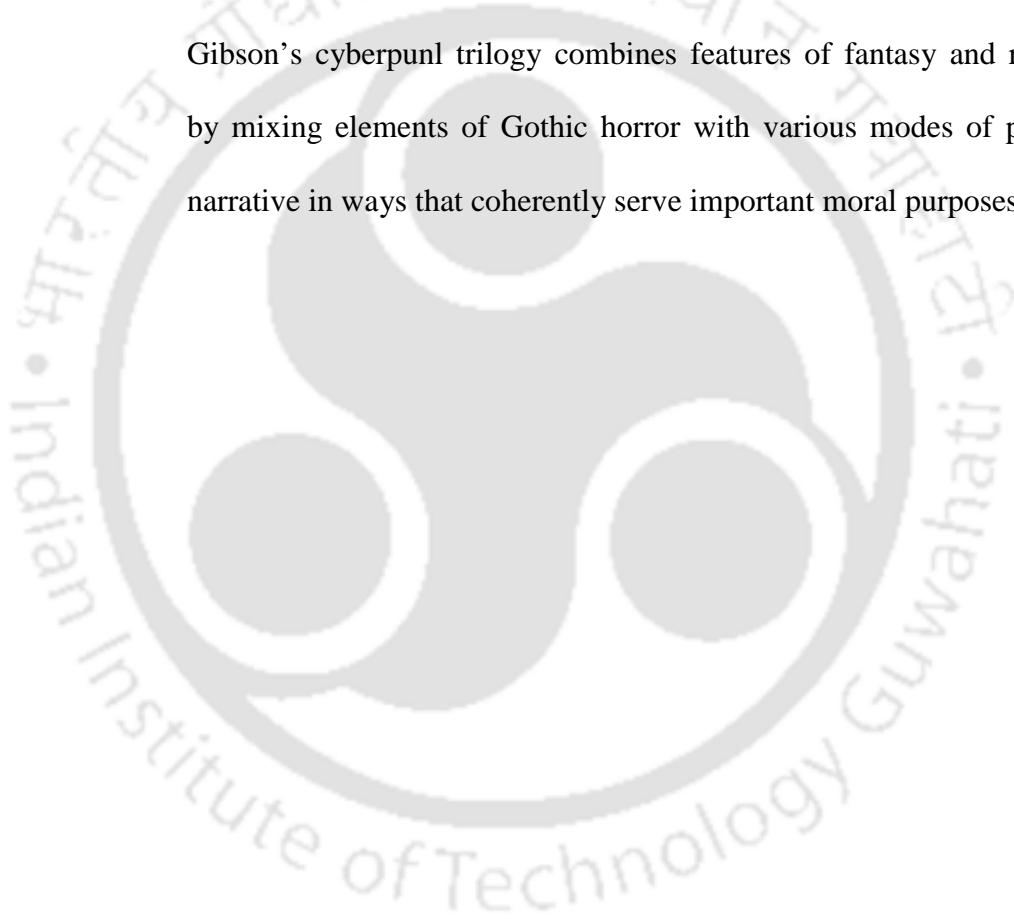
futures where humanity has, for the most part, either fled the Earth or fled 'humanity'. Both creators have a 'moral' to their stories - a moral of fear and worry if the world continues to be abused by humanity then these futures may become reality."

Kant's categorical imperative is not airtight and apparently, Kant failed to "distinguish between to distinguish between persons making no exceptions to rules and rules having no exceptions" (Velasquez 301). For, if we look at moral values as representing some sort of universal law which can be followed by everyone and ethics as a set of arbitrary beliefs which are accepted by a majority, we need to formulate a separate code of ethics and morality for the world of *Neuromancer*.

The themes of ethics and morality, identity and the ethical subject are further jeopardised because here they concern themselves with a networked, digitised community which cuts through cultural groups across nations around the globe. There is a reorganisation of the ethical subject and a corresponding reorganisation of the cultural values. Posthumanism emerges with the invasion of the human body with technology –when there remains little difference between the man and the machine. We have the emergence of the cyborg, "a man machine system where the human body, and sometimes the mind, is interfaced with technological systems" (Nayar 37). One of the major ethical questions that follow from the emergence of the posthuman and the cyborg is the question of human rights in case of posthumans and whether they enjoy the same rights as the unmodified human being. Chris Hables Gray's "Cyborg Bill of Rights" in *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (2001) proposes a series of amendments to accommodate the altered characteristics of

posthuman bodies. This community of people may share common interests but not necessarily a common nationality, and hence belong to distinct cultures. We have the emergence of a new community in virtual space and the issues that arise pertain to a new society and new politics hinting at the necessity of “a new theory of the political as a collective determination of the good” (195). These issues pertaining to a distinctly new society and politics will be dealt with on the chapter on social themes. To quote Alkon:

Gibson’s cyberpunk trilogy combines features of fantasy and realism by mixing elements of Gothic horror with various modes of popular narrative in ways that coherently serve important moral purposes” (86).



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Chapter V

“I’m the Sum Total of the Works, the Whole Show”: Metaphysical Themes in *Neuromancer*

*The AI deity said “I’m the matrix, Case.”
Case laughed. “Where’s that get you?”
“Nowhere. Everywhere. I’m the sum total
of the works, the whole show.”*

Neuromancer

Gibson’s *Neuromancer* is a world where the atmosphere is grim and nature seems to have no essence of the ‘natural’ left. The scene that begins the narrative is a world which has perhaps been polluted by some nuclear war vivified with a reference to “radioactive core of old Bonn” (97) poisoned and ruined, “the ruins of Bonn” (84); on the whole a scene of life where living is a menace and nature offers no escape. We also have references to a few rural zones between megalopolises but these are risky and dangerous outlaw zones. Animal life is almost extinct and Case does not ever see a horse in his lifetime. He is not even familiar with the smell of natural grass, and trees were far out of question: “Case would have been hard pressed to distinguish a pine from an oak” (128). Not only is natural life unfamiliar, even traditional government as discussed earlier appears to be a thing of the past, replaced by multinational organizations, the “zaibatsus” and underworld organizations

like the “Yakuza” who had “hives with cybernetic memories, vast single organisms, their DNA coded in silicon” (203).

They seek refuge in inner space of the computer and what we witness is a frenzied run of the characters into their own consciousness and in the realm of virtual reality. This realm of virtual reality as presented as cyberspace or the matrix Gibson describes as containing three-dimensional shapes of data banks, lines of light, and, occasionally, human shapes. Ironically, it is in this realm of virtuality that the characters are seen to experience some ease of mind and consciousness, and experience a sort of transcendence. In this turning inward of the characters in the novel, into their own minds, or into such technological escapes as the “consensual hallucination” of the matrix, the distinct line of demarcation between what is real and what is virtual blurs down.

It is a post-nuclear or terminal state and the role of the spiritual in society is taken over by information. This is the information state where the very concept of what is the real has been problematised. Classical physics had tried to elucidate as to what is the real state of things or how things actually are and deconstructed the concept of heaven and hell. We are in a post-classical physics state where the very concept of the “real” has been deconstructed and has shifted the focus on the disembodied patterning of information. In this information age, the scene of activity is the consciousness as cyberspace happens in headspace (referred to in Chapter I). It is the vehicle that leads us into the matrix where it processes information and engages itself in massive fields of data complex. Now, is the time when human

consciousness becomes something that can be downloaded and immortalized as information.

Neuromancer explores the physical world of external reality and the internal world of the consciousness or the cyberspace an imaginary world that dwells in the subconscious and imitates the physical world in its operations. As has been mentioned in the earlier chapters, Gibson's novel not only introduced the term *cyberspace* but also dealt with relevant concepts that are normally associated with the concept of the cyborg, as AI, artificial life, genetic engineering, robotics, advanced prosthetics. Annemarie Johnson and Darren Tofts in their introduction to the series of essays *I, Robot: AI, Alife and Cyborgs* (2002) calls these "contemporary manifestations of a historical continuum of metaphysical and speculative thinking" (8) and deal with questions of life, mind, the probable self-awareness and thinking capacity of the machine. Jack G. Voller, in his essay "Neuromanticism: Cyberspace and the Sublime"(1993), studies the extent to which the concept of cyberspace is central to *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), an extension of and comment upon one of the most significant elements of Romantic aesthetics, the sublime.

The present chapter examines themes related to the metaphysical and mystical elements in *Neuromancer* and explores the novel as a literary presentation of how technology as a medium blurs the boundary between the "real" and the "virtual", between the objective and subjective realities. The major metaphysical theme that evolves is the notion of cyberspace as filled with platonic forms and many a times in the novel we move to a world of total representation and total simulation. Other themes are the reality of matrix in

the novel, transcendence through cyberspace, artificial consciousness, devaluation of the flesh, afterlife and immortality etc.

Besides *Neuromancer*, there have been many attempts in fictions to deal with metaphysical questions and to portray the theme of convergence of God and the computer. Some good examples are Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988) and A.A. Attanasio's *Radix* (1981) and Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* (1991). Eco models Abulafia, the transcendent computer on "routines" for catabalistic manipulation of the Hebrew alphabet to merge the "user" with the Godhead; *Radix* imagines a computer-god who goes mad after achieving divinity; *Vineland* portrays the Puncutron Machine, a cyborg device as a technological means to a transcendent vision. These literatures of cyberspace conjure up the "technological artefact" called cyberspace and make the characters experience what David Porush in "Hacking the Brainstem: Postmodern Metaphysics and Stephenson's *Snow Crash*" (1994) calls "extrarational experiences and effects, including communication with metaphysical godhead ... reorient[s] the mind to the experience of sensuous information bodilessly" (538).

Bertrand Russell, one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, earned an enviable status for his strong arguments on politics, religion and ethics. In his "Introduction" to *Russell on Metaphysics: Selections from the Writings of Bertrand Russell* (2003), Stephen Mumford writes: "[m]etaphysics aims to uncover the fundamental nature of reality beyond appearance. It studies the world, but not anything about it that can be observed ... the questions of metaphysics cannot be settled empirically, by looking for observable evidence, but must be solved using philosophical methods of

analysis, reason and argument” (3). To quote the words of Russell himself: “By metaphysical entities you mean those things which are supposed to be part of the ultimate constituents of the world, but not to the kinds of thing that is ever empirically given” (Mumford 2).

It will not be wrong to say that questions of metaphysics, of mind, ideas, and the consciousness have bothered all creative and sensitive minds.

The Bard himself writes in *The Tempest*:

Our revels are now ended. These our actors
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like the insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV. I, 164-176)

Shakespeare here characterizes the universe as “this vision”— it exists only in our minds like a dream. Gibson in *Neuromancer* explores a realm that too functions in the mind of the characters, though of course, working through the infinite network of computers in the world, a fiction in his time but very much a reality and a part of twenty first century life. It is no longer a dream, but a pulsating reality. The characters in the novel spend the greater part of their lives in cyberspace, or the matrix, and feel more at ease in this life of virtual

reality than in the reality of existence. “Cyberspace already transcends the physical ‘meat’ body by creating a simulated ‘meta’ body in the brain and communicating with it directly via electrical implants – that is, in very literal terms, it is *meta-physical*” (Porush 538 original emphases). Given these circumstances where the virtual is experienced to be more real than the physical world of reality, Gibson has good ground to deal with several metaphysical questions in the novel.

As discussed in Chapter III, the society of *Neuromancer* is a networked, digitised society where the characters exist in two realms of existence, the real, everyday world of the Sprawl and that of cyberspace. Ironically, most of the characters experience cyberspace as more real than the material world every day. It would not be wrong to say that this possibility of escaping from one’s own body is one of the main motivational forces for people’s preferences of participation in virtual spaces. The body and embodiment which plays a major role in giving one one’s idea of the “self” as is visible to the people he or she transacts with and in giving one one’s identity, is completely absent in one’s virtual presence in cyberspace. Any sense of embodiment one associates with when in cyberspace is linked with one’s imagination and consciousness and this complete absence of one’s body when in cyberspace has much impact on one’s behaviour and beliefs about reality when in cyberspace. Velasquez writes, “Clearly, our beliefs about reality will profoundly affect what we do with our lives and what we strive for, what we respect and what we ridicule, what we dismiss and what are willing to live and die for. Only what is real (in some sense) can matter” (93).

This leads us to the question of metaphysics or the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of reality in its totality, of what is ultimately real, the essence of all being, the nature of the mind, self, consciousness, and question of the existence of God. Metaphysics is “an inquiry into the first principles of being – that is, the attempt to discover the most pervasive characteristics that underlie all our knowledge of, and reasoning about, existence” and refers to subjects that are “nonempirical and non-scientific” (91). It thus also deals with supernatural and mysterious aspects as the destiny of the universe and the immortality of the soul. The term ‘metaphysical’ has grown to encompass greater areas as whether reality is material or nonmaterial, the difference between materialism and idealism and the like. By the twentieth century, however, the debate has shifted to two philosophical movements of pragmatism and positivism: the former rejects the debate between materialism and idealism as there are no “experiential consequences” while the latter negates the debate as arising out of “misuse of language”. How we as individuals experience things is studied by phenomenology and existentialism, and both these schools reject the debate between materialism and idealism on the grounds that “this debate is focused on abstractions that have little to do with reality as it is revealed to human consciousness” (94). All of these lead us to major questions, whether ‘reality’ is real, freedom is real and whether time is real.

Metaphysics always attracted great mystics and philosophers from time immemorial. Saint Augustine, one of the greatest of English theologians believed that spirits are real and that “the real existing universe – contains within itself every possible kind of being, from the ‘lowest’ kind of inert

matter to the 'highest' kind of spirit" (Velasquez 94). In his classification of the hierarchy of reality, he places human beings in the middle: "Humans have material bodies, so we belong to the lower material world, but we also have spirits, or souls, making us part of the higher spiritual order" (94-95). In *Neuromancer*, this can be seen to be symbolically proved by Case: when he is leading his normal earthy life, he can be seen to be existing as a material body and when he escapes into cyberspace, as in his spirit: his treatment of the body and soul equates the idea of body being the lowest kind of matter and the spirit being the highest and most happy when he passes on from one realm of reality to the other. This was later argued for in the seventeenth century by philosophers like Rene Descartes who with his Cartesian Dualism gave a lower position to the body. The main focus of philosophical attention was the mind or the rational subject while the body was considered to have a lesser importance, part of the empirical world. Immanuel Kant and Gottfried Leibniz and more specifically the former argued that the body was something that resisted rational control and hence something that was lower than the mind. In Eastern Materialism, we the "Charvaka" philosophers "Lokyata" of the 600 BCE India, who rejected spiritualism and believed on only one valid source of knowledge – sense perception. They argued for materialism and the idea that there is nothing beyond the material world, that what we cannot perceive with our senses, like spirit, soul, god etc., cannot be real. Seen in terms of the Charvakas, the characters in *Neuromancer* seem to be indulging in what the materialists argued for whatever they do in the entire course of the novel is driven by this desire to better their low-life conditions. For this, as has been argued in the earlier chapters, they are ready to do everything: Case, agrees on

an unknown mission for an unknown employer to get an access into cyberspace; Molly engages in prostitution and other criminal activities to pay for her prostheses which, she believes, will make her perfect –Molly Millions; Peter Riviera adopts all bodily prostheses to enhance his deviancy; Julius “Julie” Deane who is “sexless and inhumanly patient” (*Neuromancer* 12) gets a “seamless pink face”(13) as a part of his survival plan even at the age of one hundred and thirty five; the Panther Moderns adopt bodily modifications and clothes to camouflage themselves. The overt indication is that the world of *Neuromancer* is a world of materialist gains with no indication of anything spiritual.

Earlier to this, we have Thomas Hobbes who postulated that everything can be explained in terms of measurable matter and that mental states are brain states and that a “general inclination of all mankind” is “a perpetual and restless desire for power after power” (Velasquez 524). If we look at what Case desperately longs for is a “restless desire for,” it is nothing but power, the power in *Neuromancer* is knowledge and information, which he can get in cyberspace. For him, cyberspace is power. The same goes for all other characters in the novel: all their actions are motivated with a desire for power, power to overcome the lowness that life inherits them with, whether be with Molly, Rivera, Wage, Deane or the Panther Moderns. This Hobbesian philosophy is carried further with Julien Offray de La Mettrie’s *Machine Man* (1748) where he gives materialism its logical conclusion and argues that “humans are nothing more than complex machines.” However, the main difficulty faced by materialism is the inability to account for human consciousness or “the kind of awareness of things that we have when we are

awake and that we do not have when we are sleeping” (Velasquez 97). But, it is not necessary that the object one is conscious of exists, and at times may exist only in one’s dreams. This is referred to intentionality by modern philosophers. Apart from this distinctive feature of consciousness, the modern philosophers also argue for another aspect called subjectivity- which means that “consciousness exists only to the extent that it is being experienced by someone” and which makes consciousness “first person” in nature, something that “one is directly aware of ‘from the inside’ in a way that one cannot be aware of ‘from the outside’.” Besides, consciousness has no “apparent location, no volume, no mass” and hence indicate the existence of two different entities in the universe – material entities and conscious, nonmaterial entities (97).

The human mind gains much importance by the 1930s with the emphasis on sense perception by George Barkeley which postulates that the only reality is the sensations and ideas experienced by the mind which experiences them. This makes reality subjective and dependent on the mind of the person concerned (see Berkeley). Pragmatists like Charles S. Peirce, William James and John Dewey believed in reality as pluralistic and defined pragmatism as “the attitude of looking away from the first things, principles, ‘categories,’ supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts” (Velasquez 54-55). It is inherently driven by the feeling that the human mind has the ability and the power to change the world and that “the truth of an idea lies in its capacity to get us through life in a desirable way.” For the pragmatists the value of any idea or ideal depends on its “problem-solving capacity” and its truth depends on its capacity to “get us

through life in a desirable way” (107). Pragmatism, thus, is a philosophical movement that argues that the truth of an ideology depends on how satisfactorily it works and what practical consequences it leads to.

If we look at the life conditions of the characters in *Neuromancer*, whatever they do in life is driven with a desire to meet the difficult situations that they find themselves in. They are justified, to a great extent, in whatever means they adopt for this end as it solves many problems in their lives and also give them a better and desirable life in comparison to what they are born into. Case becomes a console cowboy once again, Molly defies all gender boundaries that had compelled her to be a prostitute and becomes a razor girl, Riveria gets the aspired pleasures in his deviancy. In the words of William James, writing in his *Pragmatism* (1907): “The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable...The pragmatic method ...is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences” (Velasquez 46). He believed that we determine whether an object is real by how we emotionally relate to it and how it affects our active life. It is different for every individual and thus we all create our “sub-universes” or real worlds as world of sense experience, of scientific knowledge, of the transcendent, the religious and the supernatural and it becomes our reality. Seen in this light, what stimulates and interests Case in *Neuromancer* is cyberspace and it becomes his only universe and apart from it, nothing else is. It becomes his only reality. With his entry into cyberspace, he leaves the physical body behind and transcends into a different and more meaningful plane of existence – his sub-universe, his reality. He grew up with the dream of becoming a console cowboy and he also

apprenticed for the same. Born into low life, the power that he gets into his hands as a console cowboy has important consequences on his life – it helps him deal with important social problems in his life, problems of rank and position, of an escape from his life in the “coffins” (*Neuromancer* 6).

However, the worlds of men and women are different and so are their experiences and their realities. With the focus on human mind and its experiences, we can take into account Dale Spender’s “concept of multidimensional reality” (103), as discussed in *Man Made Language* (1985), which gives all human experiences as equality and none as wrong. In *Neuromancer* we do not analyse anyone’s actions as being right or wrong. Rather, we accept all the characters with their peculiar traits and beliefs, we judge them equally all through – we accept and seem to experience with Case his desperation to enter cyberspace; Molly’s desire to become Molly Millions and her recourse to prostitution to pay for her prostheses; Riviera’s loving his deviancy.

The two contemporary schools of thought – phenomenology and existentialism focus on the human condition as a key to what reality is because it is the individual who endures pain and experiences all sorts of insecurities, anxieties and dreads apart from the fear of death. Each is a subjective experience and these two schools focus on subjective experience of reality which involves the human consciousness. Now, for the first time, with phenomenology, the importance of the human body received emphasised as it is the body which experiences it all and corporeal experience of the world given importance and argued that it influences our knowledge about the world in a profound way.

Edmund Husserl the founder of phenomenology looked at it as a new science of being, argued that reality discloses itself to the consciousness and in his *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1962) wrote, “Consciousness in itself has a being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature unaffected by the phenomenologic disconnection” (33). Seen in Husserl’s terms, Case’s experience of cyberspace can be seen as his reality for it is where he really feels at home and his existence in cyberspace “reveals a sphere of being that is ultimate, in the sense that it presents itself with certainty” (Velasquez 123) within his experience, in his consciousness. It appears to be the only reality for Case. Closely following Husserl’s steps is Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) who in his “Introduction” to *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1954) argues for the concept called “Dasein” a German word that means “being there” and for him, being human is “being there” in this world into which we have been “thrown” by no choice of ours. Velasquez refers to *Being and Time* where Heidegger concludes that Dasein is “essentially finite and temporal: Our being exists in time and has an end in time” (124). This is experienced by Case as well as the other characters in *Neuromancer*. Being in this world is a temporal experience for them; they are “thrown” into this world without any desire to be there. In fact, all the characters are low-life and their existence undesirable, and they are forever looking a way out of it or trying to make the best of the situation that they are in. Heidegger makes a difference between being “authentic” i.e. feeling anxiety towards imminent death and being “inauthentic” when we feel an “indifferent tranquillity” towards death. It will not be wrong to state that “death” is not a reality for the characters in *Neuromancer* as they have another

option, which seems more appealing – the option of digital immortality, when their personalities can be stored in a RAM like that of Dixie Flatline. In fact, Neuromancer offers Case this option too, which he later rejects as he realises that the digital immortality offered to him is nothing more than subservience to some other power. The boundary between the temporal and the immortal seems to break down in the novel and hence, the characters seem show an “inauthentic” response to the human condition in the Heideggerean sense in *Neuromancer*. Reality, as revealed in Heidegger’s phenomenological study of Dasein is “essentially temporal and finite. To be real is to be temporal-embedded in time – and finite” (125). We can add another dimension to this sense of reality in reference to life in *Neuromancer*. For the characters, life in cyberspace is as real as this temporal world of the characters.

Kierkegaard’s metaphysical concerns focus on the inner reality of a human who must choose and it is this freedom to choose that occupies him. The chief exponent of existentialism has been Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote in his essay “Existentialism and Human Emotions,” “The existentialist thinks it very distressing that God does not exist.” Thus, like the pragmatists, the existentialists also believed that there are no absolutes, no norms of right behaviour and how we exist gives us our essence. This is a rejection of the view that it is the environment that makes a man what a man is. Rather, man is a sum of his free choices. The atmosphere of human existence as given by Sartre is the atmosphere in *Neuromancer*. There is absolutely no mention of God in the novel and no indication of the fact that God has any influence in the lives of the characters. Whatever happens in the lives of the characters, seen in terms of existentialism, seems to be of their own making. Case

becomes a console cowboy not because he grew up in an atmosphere where this is the only profession available but because he makes this conscious choice to become one; Molly's birth into low-life conditions are not the compelling forces to force her into prostitution. She willingly does it to pay for her prostheses. She is what she chooses to be. So is the case of Riveria, who as mentioned earlier, enjoys his deviancy just like Deanne, Wage and the other characters in the novel. After all, Sartre argues, that when humans act, "they intend to do something they have not yet done, or to get something they do not have. In short, they think about going from a present that exists to a future that does not yet exist" (Velasquez 136). Whatever the characters do in the novel is an attempt to get to the state that Sartre argues for, and ironically this is applicable even to the AIs: Wintermute not only desires to combine with this other half, Neuromancer, he also chooses to do what he does in the novel to achieve this end. Further, Sartre expresses this seminal core of his metaphysics in his statement, "Existence precedes essence." In fact, the way Molly builds herself up in the novel, or rather the way she is characterised in the novel, supports the arguments of Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), the greatest female existentialist philosopher who argued that women in particular, "are subject to social influences that attempt to rob them of an awareness of their own freedom, and they must overcome these constraints through courageous self-assertion" (Velasquez 129).

Further, Determinism postulates that all human actions are determined as they are a part of the causal chain of nature. This removes all human freedom to choose and all responsibility of the human being towards his actions. Seen in the light of determinism, when Case takes up to work for an

unknown employer in the beginning of the novel, his choice seems to be already determined given the set of conditions he is placed in and the psychological bent of this mind. He seems to have no other options available to him. Hence, he cannot be held responsible for all his actions that follow his acceptance of the job of Wintermute. So is the case with Colonel Willis Corto, a member of the only surviving squad from an operation known as Screaming Fist: “Screaming Fist had ended for Corto on the outskirts of Helsinki, with Finnish paramedics sawing him out of the twisted belly of the helicopter” (*Neuromancer* 83). Because of this accident in his life, everything else followed in his life: he is enrolled in an experimental computer therapy program, where, unknown to the mental hospital staff, Wintermute contacts Corto through the computer therapy terminals and dominates his mind. Essentially, Wintermute rebuilds Corto’s entire personality and being into Armitage. Similar is the case with Dixie Flatline who is dead when the novel begins. He is the mind and personality of McCoy Pauley recorded into a ROM unit. This construct is referred to as the Dixie Flatline and Linda Lee who becomes *Neuromancer*’s alternate reality in the end of the novel. Of course, this is diametrically opposed to Sartre’s *indeterminism* where he argues that it is we who make ourselves and environment; environment and heredity has no influence on us. For him, we are free and thus fully responsible for our behaviour and actions. Thus, the future is not fixed and has many paths, one of which one chooses. Hence, Case chooses to steal secret information, Molly chooses to be a “razorgirl” (181) and takes up prostitution, Riviera is what he is, Wage and Deanne are master cowboys, Panther Moderns are the anti-social

elements in the novel. When offered a life of digital immortality, Case, on his free choice chooses otherwise.

Closely linked with the question of the metaphysical is the question of the supernatural, God as an entity. As Velasquez puts it, “Primarily because of Christianity, we view ourselves as beings with a supernatural destiny, as possessing life after death, as being immortal” (149). If we reject religion, then many of our beliefs, desires and expectations, our views of ourselves and our destiny are also influenced. Though usually referred to as institutionalised rituals and orthodox beliefs, it also includes morality, feeling and emotions and more intricately, “a deep and personal experience with the object of one’s chief loyalty.” It springs from our “unending search for meaning and fulfilment” and religious belief refers to “the doctrines of a religion about the universe and religion’s relation to the supernatural (151). Like a typical cyberpunk, *Neuromancer* depicts a godless world too. The place of God can be said to be taken over by the AI Wintermute and it emerges as a major theme in the novel. The AIs are in the position of God in *Neuromancer*. However, it has to be mentioned that the qualities of all-good, all-benevolence associated with God does not apply to the AI. The fact that Case experiences Wintermute like God – in whatever he does, and wherever he goes, is proof of the fact that his “innermost feelings detect a divine dimension at work in the cosmos” (174). We see in Case’s experiences a religious dimension to reality, an “unseen reality” which is “deeper and more real than sensory experiences” (175). In mysticism too there is a reference to a sense of personal estrangement from the world. Case too does not feel himself to be a part of the physical world – he has a disturbed consciousness till he finds an entry into

cyberspace. Like in the lives of the other characters in the novel, God as an entity does not happen in Case's life too and he follows what he feels to be the correct way and it will not be wrong to state that Case's journey into cyberspace and the world of consciousness have mystical overtones.

Neuromancer casts a host of characters struggling to just make it in a world of decadence. One of the major themes in most of Gibson's novels is that of big city decadence. In *Neuromancer* too, this theme evolves in the struggle for existence by all the characters in this physical world where they are born into a low-life. Their attempts at escape into cyberspace can be seen to be an escape into the non space where AIs make their own decisions which do not necessarily prescribe to ordinary human confines of ethics and morality. This gives rise to another major theme in the narrative - movement to a world of total representation and total simulation. When the novel begins, the hero, Case is not in harmony with his body and in the words of William S. Haney, in his essay, "William Gibson's *Neuromancer*: Cyberpunk and the End of Humanity" (2009), "Case's body has become almost an alien entity that he feels out of synchrony with and that serves merely as a case for his mind to enter cyberspace" (1). This is because Case had experienced cyberspace and for him it was "a site for the release of imaginings, unconscious desires, heroic adventure, and even transcendence forbidden and sterilized in the real "meat" world where bodies have to eat" (Porush 1992). It is his perfect home, where he flees to, as if in search of salvation from earthly miseries; his real world is the world of simulation –cyberspace and in it he floats in the world of infinite data and software constructs. Here he needs no food, no rest. Rather, it emerges as the utopia that he strives for all throughout the novel. It cannot be

denied that in one of the most compelling narratives ever, of cyberspace, Gibson portrays in *Neuromancer*, a dystopic physical world– “a sort of a sort of hell (or at best a sort of limbo or purgatory) where not-beings are subjected to excruciating experiments on the boundary between hallucination and bodiless exultation: a nightmarish configuration of technology, death, and the unconscious against which the *Neuromancer* trilogy warns us even as it invites us to play there” (Porush 1992). Of course, what Gibson achieves is more than a utopia, it is a sort of a transcendence at the interface. A good instance is when, after the merger of *Wintermute* and *Neuromancer*, Case meets the new creature *Wintermute/Neuromancer* as a face that Case confronts at the interface:

“I’m not *Wintermute* now.”

“So what are you.” He drank from the flask, feeling nothing.

“I’m the matrix, Case.”

Case laughed. “Where’s that get you?”

“Nowhere. Everywhere. I’m the sum total of the works, the whole show.”

“That’s what [your inventor] wanted?”

“No. She couldn’t imagine what I’d be like.” The yellow smile [on the screen] widened. (*Neuromancer* 269-270).

The entire novel is a movement towards this end and yet when the novel reaches this part, one is left confused about the nature of transcendence – whether it is a reality or an illusion.

It is technology that aids them to transcend the physical and enter cyberspace. Gibson skilfully uses objects that seem familiar and yet give them

a technological shade – “prosthetic arm” (*Neuromancer* 3), cybernetically enhanced reflexes, body part replacements but all of this he does so in a common everyday language which makes it easier for his readers to accept his techno-fantasies. In *Neuromancer* technology becomes part of the semiotic overdrive that constitutes the hyperreal. Michael Heim in his “The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace” (1993), addresses cyberspace as “a metaphysical laboratory, a tool for examining our very sense of reality,” and tries to address the ontology of cyberspace, the question of what it means to *be* in a virtual world, whether one’s own or another’s world, the necessity of invention of the virtual worlds and its significance in human experience, the essence of the soul of cyberspace or rather the philosophical status of cyberspace and the ontological position or the nature of existence of the cyber entities, their origins and the trajectory they follow within the “computerised environment”. He makes a very important statement about *Neuromancer*, “For Gibson, cyber entities appear under the sign of Eros. The fictional characters of *Neuromancer* experience the computer matrix – cyberspace – as a place of rapture and erotic intensity, of powerful desire and even self-submission.” Case’s fascination with cyberspace is more than a love affair; it is beyond the “play of the senses” for his mind seems to be like a nomad in search of a home – spiritual in nature, and erotic to his mind. In cyberspace, he feels “augmented and empowered” and his heart can be said to “beat in the machines” and this is what Heim calls Eros: Case the “data wizard of *Neuromancer*” is mentally married to technology and the physical world seem “dull and unreal” in comparison to the “supervivid hyper-reality” of the matrix:

A year [in Japan] and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly.... [S]till he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void.... [H]e was no [longer] console man, no cyberspace cowboy.... But the dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, . . . trying to reach the console that wasn't there (*Neuromancer* 4-5)

Heim refers to the sixteenth-century Spanish mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila's use of language of sexual ecstasy to connote the taste of spiritual divinity, and discerns that the intensity of cyberspace can be compared to orgasm, and vice versa: "Now she straddled him again, took his hand, and closed it over her, his thumb along the cleft of her buttocks ..."
(*Neuromancer* 33). In *Neuromancer*, in the computer matrix, reality, even personality becomes patterns of information by the conclusion:

There was a strength that ran in her, . . . [s]omething he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew--he remembered--as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read.

. . . [H]e broke [the zipper], some tiny metal part shooting off against the wall as salt-rotten cloth gave, and then he was in her, effecting the transmission of the old message. Here, even here, in a place he knew

for what it was, a coded model of some stranger's memory, the drive held.

She shuddered against him as the stick caught fire, a leaping flare that threw their locked shadows across the bunker wall (*Neuromancer* 239-240).

Case gets physically involved with Linda and we are left guessing as to whether she is a simulated personality. Technology blurs the distinction between the real and the virtual in *Neuromancer*. In the words of Heim, "Gibson raises the deepest ontological question of cyberspace by suggesting that the Neuromancer master-computer *simulates* the body and personality of Case's beloved....Why? Perhaps because the cyberspace system, which depends on the physical space of bodies for its initial impetus, now seeks to undermine the separate existence of human bodies that make it dependent and secondary." Heim considers it to be the "ultimate revenge" of the information system comes when it becomes the personality itself, turns the meat to information and mocks at love itself which appears to be nothing more than a play of puppets. "In its computerized version, Platonic Eros becomes a master of artificial intelligence, CYBEROS, the controller, the Neuromancer" (5).

Heim looks at cyberspace as supplanting physical space, where Case is so much at ease that when he is not allowed entry into it, it is like a fall into the "prison of his own flesh" (*Neuromancer* 6) and calls it "Gnostic aspect of cybertech culture". For Case, from "the pit of life in the body, the virtual life looks like the virtuous life. Gibson evokes the Gnostic Platonic-Manichean contempt for earthy, earthly existence" (82). We see a complete devaluation of the flesh and when in cyberspace, in the words of Tim Jordan, writing in

Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet (1999), Case experiences a complete “loss of physicality, of flesh, blood and bone” (26).

Further, images like Molly’s mirrorshades, “glasses were surgically inset” (*Neuromancer* 24), the Panther Moderns’ mimetic “polycarbon suit” (67), and ever-present holographic images raise the question about what is real, imitation or distortion. Molly and the Turkish operative Terzibashjian stare into one another’s mirrorshades until Terzibashjian takes his off to avoid a mutual movement into infinity. Another image of the infinite duplication and distortion of reality is Gibson’s use of the metaphor of “the charred wasp’s nest from Case’ dream” (171) to represent the Tessier-Ashpool family. The family members are like the wasps, enclosed and constantly breeding through cloning, always perpetuating the secret life within: “In the dream, just before he’d drenched the nest with fuel, he’d seen the T-A logo of Tessier-Ashpool neatly embossed into its side, as though the wasps themselves had worked it there” (127). Their villa is honeycombed with halls like a labyrinth within a cave, confusing and convoluted.

God as an entity, as mentioned earlier, has no existence in *Neuromancer*. Religion in the traditional term does not happen. It is the world of data, matrix, cyberspace, console cowboys and mega corporations and AIs who seem all dominating and the only determining factor for most of the characters and for most part of the novel. Another theme that evolves is the presentation of God as a gifted Programmer and the earth a deceptive computer program. As a normal consequence of the overpowering influence of cyberspace emerges the concept of virtual religion or cyber religion. One good

instance of how popular cyber-religion has become today and in a sense replaced the physical Church or the symbol of the traditional Western religion, is a confession found in the internet:

I've no idea what I'd do without the friends I've made in St Pixels - though I've never met them. I've made tons of close buddies in Scotland, Korea and England. No matter who you are, or where you're from, you will ALWAYS find someone here to talk to. It's like a family home, where the door is always open for friends and their friends. I was baptised a Methodist but that's as far as it goes. I don't currently attend a physical church. (Cranmer)

Now is the time when the cyber world has become an integral part of human life, and it will not be wrong to say that it is a sort of addiction. As Cranmer says, "When one has tasted the Magic Kingdom, escaped to world without night, or pain, or crying, or shame, the need becomes increasingly stronger to visit it daily for the very necessary 'fix'. Indeed, one's day seems somehow incomplete if one has not cyber-communed with one's congenial cyber-communicants, and felt their adulation, or heard their adoration." This is a world where people of all religions communicate with each other and get solutions to one's dilemma instantly. This has given rise to the concept of cyber religion in the twenty-first century – where the members of particular community practice religion on the internet instead of actual places of worship and can do so without any intrusion of any ordained priest. If morality is seen in terms of religion, the new concept of cyber religion further complicates the question of morality in Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* as most of the action of the novel takes place in cyberspace. To add to it all, as Julian Stallabrass

argues in “Empowering Technology: The Exploration of Cyberspace” (1995), “Gibson’s books cyberspace is a dizzying, dangerous ‘place’, where such intense experiences may be had that they exceed anything likely to be encountered in real life” (5). She refers to mega the mega powers called corporations and the existence of AIs with enormous powers to mould people’s lives and people who break into other’s security system to access confidential without any scruples. As argued in the earlier chapter, it calls for new codes of morality and we can add here, a new religion and whether we like it or not, a new God.

The world of *Neuromancer* thus emerges as a surreal world of reality. In this world, the place of God, in traditional society can be said to have been taken over by the AIs. Further, questions of death and afterlife seem irrelevant in the context of *Neuromancer*. Heaven and hell are obsolete concepts. Case is seen speaking with his former mentor, though the latter is dead before the beginning of the novel. Who and what are the AIs is another question that leaves both the reader as well as Molly and Case confused. They are cast as gods – omnipresent, who seem to know everything everyone does and can take as well as give life. Yet, they are characterized with a difference from God, they are shown to be dependent on their creators, full of anger of caged, dangerous animals. The real power is in the hands of mega corporations who are ruthless, selfish and malevolent, whose actions are only inspired by their own benefit in a society dominated by cheap technology. The hero is someone desperately trying to make sense of the dystopic world.

Henderson in his article, “The Internet as a Metaphor for God?” (2000) refers to Sherry Turkle’s *Life on the Screen* (1995) who took up the internet as

a metaphor of God. Henderson begins his essay with the line, “The Internet provides humanity a new window through which to look upon the Infinite.” Speaking in terms of the traditional religious beliefs where there is an Almighty God to whom the followers bow down to, the world depicted in *Neuromancer* has one overpowering influence – the cyberspace or the internet. Turkle reports of people who speak of their experiences in the internet in spiritual terms as is obvious in a confession: “To me it’s God coming together with science, and computers have made it possible.” Here is a generation of men, who according to Turkle see the net as a new metaphor for God. For these spiritual minds on the net, the experience on the net is like life itself “evolving by a force they can neither understand nor control.” This is exactly the case with Case. To him cyberspace is life itself and without it he feels stifled.

Thus, as man advance technologically, religion as a system of beliefs is put to doubt. Another theme that evolves in the novel is that of complete non-existence of institutionalised religion. Now, questions of sanctity and integrity and the creation of man in the image of God seem obsolete concepts. These had constituted the very essence of humanity and with them turning meaningless, the novel seem to forewarn us about the loss of the very essence of humanity in this “onrush to human biotechnological improvement” (Mizrach). In *Neuromancer*, what all see, to bow down to seem the corporate power and the AIs. In fact, AIs occupy the place of the most powerful and omniscient here which is made obvious in the introduction of Wintermute to the protagonist Case:

‘This way’s better for you, man.’ He took his Partagas from a coat pocket and lit one. The smell of Cuban tobacco filled the shop. ‘You want I should come to you in the matrix like a burning bush? You aren’t missing anything back there. An hour here’ll only take you a couple of seconds.’ (*Neuromancer* 169)

Unknown to Case, Wintermute not only controls everything that happens in Case’s life but also creates the atmosphere and ambience that surrounds him. In fact, Wintermute’s omnipresence is exemplified in his ability to appear in any television screen anywhere and track all of Case’s movements. We are reminded of traditional lessons in morality which taught us that whatever we do in our lives, we are forever being watched by an omnipresent and omniscient God. Christianity tells us that we human beings are created in the image of God and that He has a plan for each of us. Ironically, in the novel, all these powers seem to be vested in the hands of Wintermute and also Neuromancer. As for instance, when towards the penultimate chapter Case wants to establish a contact with Dixie, he cannot and Neuromancer tells him that the construct has been erased:

“Where’s Dixie? What have you done with the Flatline?”

“McCoy Pauley has his wish,” the boy said, and smiled.

“His wish was more. He punched you here against my wish, drove himself through defenses equal to anything in the matrix. Now flip.”

(260)

Of the two powerful AIs in the novel, Wintermute is symbolic of mind, decision making, effecting change in the world outside while Neuromancer is personality and symbolises immortality. With the union of the two AIs,

Wintermute and Neuromancer, we reach to the climax of the novel and the mission that drove the entire novel is accomplished. Now, Wintermute and Neuromancer together constitute the entire matrix, which spans a physical area larger than the earth.

Neuromancer is a place where recordings to people's mind after death takes place, making Neuromancer similar to an afterlife, a digital afterlife or a heaven or a hell. "... I think he's something like a giant ROM construct, for recording personality, only it's full RAM. The constructs think they're there, like it's real, but it just goes on forever" (251).

Neuromancer was originally constructed to house the personalities of the Tessier-Ashpool family in a sort of infinite existence while Wintermute executed the more mundane aspects of the family's business. The afterlife that the AI experience is a continuation of its deific qualities and its associations with either God or the Satan as they can not only take life, but also give it. By combining the two AIs, what is desired is the achievement of something very powerful, almost almighty somewhere near God. This union seems to be a union of the Good and the Evil, or to continue the Biblical imagery, a union of God and Satan, Wintermute as God and Neuromancer as Satan, proved by his own words:

"Neuromancer," the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun. "The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road, but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves,

the silver paths. Romancer. Neuromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend,” and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing in the sand, “I *am* the dead, and their land.” He laughed. A gull cried. “Stay. Your woman is a ghost, she does n't know it. Neither will you.” (243-245)

Given the circumstances in the novel, the question of metaphysics turns more complex because it is a condition in which the two AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer join together to become a new entity altogether. However, it will be wrong to conclude that Gibson replaces God with AIs in the novel. The irony is that though they are very powerful in the entire canvas of the novel, they are incomplete and the result seems anticlimactic. Nothing evidently changes in the world or even in cyberspace, and the novel's follow-up of the effects on 3Jane, Wintermute, Neuromancer and Tessier-Ashpool S.A. is extremely concise. Wintermute and Neuromancer do merge into a single being, and the single being does claim to now constitute the entire matrix. Or rather, the results are uncertain. We are left wondering whether the combination has produced something much more powerful. Another question that is left to our imagination is as to what will the result of the combination of the God and the Satan:

“So what's the score? How are things different? You running the world now? You God?”

“Things aren't different. Things are things.”

“But what do you do? You just *_there_*?” Case shrugged, put the vodka and the shuriken down on the cabinet and lit a Yeheyuan.

“I talk to my own kind.”

“But you’re the whole thing. Talk to yourself?”

“There’s others. I found one already. Series of transmissions recorded over a period of eight years, in the nineteen-seventies. ‘Til there was me, natch, there was nobody to know, nobody to answer.”

“From where?”

“Centauri system.”

“Oh,” Case said. “Yeah? No shit?”

“No shit.” (270)

The concept of God had always been associated with benevolence, omnipotence and almighty. In the information age, everything seems to undergo a vast change – society, ethics, morality and even the human being. Not only do we see a change in attitude and concerns of human beings in general, but technological advances have brought about a change even in their thought process, their perception, their way of life and their entire consciousness. As referred to earlier, consciousness is now something that can be uploaded and quantified and the concept of destiny has become obsolete. Familiar issues and ideas are immortality through digital technology, constructs, entry into cyberspace. The matrix becomes a more powerful reality than life itself where cybernetic organisms engage themselves in. The only human beings, in the original sense of the word, are the Zeonites, and they follow a type of religions referred to as Rastafarianism – and we have instances of transcendence practiced by the believers. But for the other non-believers or rather the majority that makes up the society in *Neuromancer*, religion does not offer the sort of transcendence that they are looking for. Rather it is got through cyberspace and virtuality. It is transcendence through

cyberspace. We have become the posthuman with the augmented human body and achieve disembodiment and transcendence in cyberspace. Nayar (2010) argues that in cyberspace, “subjectivity and identity are no longer rooted in the body” (8). He quotes N.Katherine Hayles (1999) and says that subjectivity in the post human condition is “dispersed throughout the cybernetic circuit” (27) as now we have outside data incorporated into the body and the consciousness extended outside the body through circuits. We see a transcendence of another sort and the necessity of the body minimised. As far as the characters in the novel, only Case and Dix, express a desire for transcendence, for “the bodiless exultation of cyberspace” (*Neuromancer* 6). However, even in cyberspace, we are always aware that the reference is to the physical mind of Case – a reflection of his psychological state what Haney calls “the qualia of sensations derived from the features of virtual reality” (9). We know, all the while, that all through Case is under the impact of drugs and the neural damage caused by the Russian mycotoxins distort his normal physiological functions. This is the cause of his dulled mind, and hence, dulled consciousness which prevent any chances of communion with a pure consciousness – and Case does not achieve transcendence – he is still caught up in the mind-body dichotomy and cannot rise above it. As far as the case of Dix, this transcendence is an impossibility – he is a disembodied presence – long since dead and hence beyond the mind-body dichotomy and hence no question of transcendence beyond.

Haney makes a detailed analysis of most of the characters in the novel as regards the question transcendence. He views the AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer as creations of Marie-France of Tessier-Ashpool with a desire to

give them a greater potential for transcendence: “[s]he dreamed of a state involving very little in the way of individual consciousness. Animal Bliss” (*Neuromancer* 217). Though both Case and Wintermute long for a separate level of consciousness – the little that is achieved is by Case and never Wintermute. For instance, Gerald Edelman, a Nobel-Prize winning biochemist, has shown that because the brain does not function like a computer, computers will never achieve consciousness. He asserts “that computer or machine models of the brain and mind do not work” (114), given that only consciousness transcends the material dimension of mind/body. Edelman further states that an AI lacks the neural core needed for higher-order consciousness or transcendence into the void of conceptions. In the case of Case, he experiences a form of animal bliss in his physical escapades: “his orgasm flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors, and her inner thighs were strong and wet against his hips” (*Neuromancer* 33). Surprisingly, examined deeply, Case’s physical rapture, however, represents transcendence only for the body: there is no transcendence of the mind/body complex in its totality that would lead to pure awareness. It is only an absorption into the physical. However, Case does go beyond the mind/body identity when he finds freedom from the trivial concerns of survival and the prison house of meat, and delves “into a highspeed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart from it all” (17). What he can do, Wintermute can never do in his lifetime – he can look at the hectic activity of meat and the mind separately. This, as is forewarned by the novel, is a capacity that humans will lose rapidly as they become more and more through the globalization of bionic technology.

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. in “Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism” (1994) says that “[i]n Gibson's world, human beings have nothing left but thrill” (191) and thrill becomes a surrogate form of “affection, reflection, and care” (192). Thus, transcendence achieved by the characters can be seen in various manners – a thrill at disembodiment and maximum sensuality and liberation from the concerns of everyday life, though momentarily. The actual problems remain where they are. Critics like Stephen Conway opines in “Transcendence and Technology in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*” (1995): “Rather than the path to some subjective interior, cyberspace is an aggregate reflection of reality. Though Gibson gives the mind inner, technological equivalents, describing Case's consciousness as small and far away, on the mind's screen', Case's obsession with his existence in cyberspace is not a psychological retreat inward.” He quotes Delany (1994) who refers to cyberspace as “apsychological. It is the place we go to learn about information. Within it we can gaze out (not in) [...] Cyberspace exists entirely as a technological consensus” (175). Once cured of his Russian *mycotoxin* Case projects his consciousness into “the nonspace of the matrix,” where “the interior of a given data construct possessed unlimited subjective dimension” (62), which implies an expansion of awareness beyond phenomenal content (Haney 12). When he breaks through the ICE of Tessier-Ashpool for Wintermute he once more transcends meat by jacking-in to cyberspace: “[i]n the instant before he drove Kuang's sting through the base of the first tower, he attained a level of proficiency exceeding anything he'd known or imagined. Beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he moved, Kuang moving with him, evading his attackers with an ancient dance” (*Neuromancer* 253). Case wants to break

free from his body to experience something and when he does so, Gibson describes the matrix in purely physical and almost sexual terms and it evolves in the novel as a “virtually unprecedented forum, continuously reconstituting reality and assimilating any notion of independence” (Conway) and “of simulating perfectly in infinitely replicable forms those processes that pre-cybernetic humanity had held to be inklings of transcendence” (Csicsery 189).

But Wintermute cannot access this level of consciousness. Even Dixie, who seems to have a consciousness, does not seem to have the will to survive as a machine and asks Case to do him the favour of “eras(ing) this goddamn thing” (*Neuromancer* 104). The world of the novel is one in which all actors are cyborgs, the essence of humanity is lost and they seem to enjoy being cyborgs. Gibson’s portrayal shows that while the human beings have a choice as to what to what quality of existence they choose the AIs, constructs etc.

Conway also dwells on how the question of transcendence is handled in *Neuromancer* in different way. He takes up what Case tells near the conclusion of the novel, “Where do we go from here?” (259). He refers to Csicsery and argues that “*Neuromancer* articulates a motion inward, its attention focused upon subtle interiors; it is implosive rather than expansive, choosing to examine how technology affects the universe of self, individual consciousness, rather than the universe at large” (188). The human characters in the novel seem “psychologically static” and seem least bothered with questions of reformation of the self as an individual – “wired into a predetermined behavior pattern, a seemingly inescapable identity.” Surprisingly, the only character that aspires for transformation and wants to transcend itself is Wintermute. It is a world where the paradigms of self and

identity are obsolete, where everyone can make and remake themselves and where technology facilitates “escape, immersion, destruction, and even transcendence”. And the aids that are used to facilitate this remake of the self into someone with heightened; almost superhuman abilities are implants and prostheses. “Such prosthetics seek to exploit or enhance a person's connection to the physical world by placing that person in a position of power, of dominance, over ordinary unequipped mortals” (Conway). The use of implants and prostheses may be studied as a corollary theme in the novel.

As the human becomes more of the cyborg a few major issues like that of mind, memory, free will, consciousness are problematised. The cyborg, with the help of implants may become stronger and more efficient in the field of hacking but it cannot gain the spiritual dimension of the human. In this case, the AI that almost acquires the status of the hero of the novel, Wintermute, is an interesting case for consideration. Wintermute is a more refined AI – more complete with its primary consciousness which helps it interact with the environment. It is designed in such a manner that it can reach higher states, which include “the ability to imagine the future, explicitly recall the past, and to be conscious of being conscious” (58-9). Wintermute thus has a memory of a sort which is enhanced by the matrix but no pure consciousness. Thus, he has “trouble organizing data into a coherent whole and may even collapse under the mass of information” (Haney 9). We have Case as well as Dix experience a collapse of memory, “Something cracked [...] shifted at the core of things. [...] The weight of memory came down, an entire body of knowledge driven into his head like a Microsoft into a socket. Gone” (115). “Because Case and not only Dix experiences a collapse of memory,

Neuromancer like “Johnny Mnemonic” dramatizes how enhancing the phenomenal mind through computer prosthetics beyond its normal physiological ability will inevitably cause extreme pressure and the possible collapse of the mind/body complex” (Haney 9).

The themes of death and immortality are also worked out in *Neuromancer*. In the words of David Tomas writing in his essay “The Technophilic Body” (1989), “Genetic engineering, information technology and powerful software programs ensure, for example, that death is no longer an entropic biological certainty for a small portion of the population of Gibson’s novels and short stories” (178). In fact, in the world of *Neuromancer*, death is not an end of life. Life can go on even after death as a construct. Gibson’s romanticisation of the world of the computer is thus a vision of what the future might be like – a completely alien, mechanical and technologically energized world where digital immortality makes death only a biological degradation while the spirit can still continue living – in a new form, recorded and preserved for ever. Good examples are that of McCoy Pauley whose mind and personality are recorded in a ROM unit even after his physical death even before the novel starts as Dixie Flatline; death seems to be easily avoided by Deane who is 135 years old and yet who keeps himself alive by costly serums and numerous biotech procedures; even after being badly mutilated in a war, Armitage is made a part of a computer therapy programme, is secretly hired by Wintermute and carries out his secret missions very efficiently. Death happens to Armitage only when Wintermute desires it. For Case, however, Flatline’s presence becomes somewhat disturbing, “to think of the Flatline construct, a hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man’s

skills, obsessions, knee jerked responses” (246). Along with Case, we experience a silicon world, a cyberspace into which characters can upload their consciousness and become immortal.

We realise that concepts as death, heaven, hell are obsolete in *Neuromancer*. It is a completely new world order and Molly Abel Travis (1996) analyses the changes in technology in this world order and its impact on varied spheres of the life of a human as an individual and as a member of the society. He calls it a paradigm which is characterised by a transformation in the basis of economy from “material goods to information; space and communication are reconceptualized in terms of electronic virtuality; and text and intertextuality are extended into hypertextuality ... the complex of effects – epistemological, ethical, social, political – that accompanies these technological developments.”

As has been mentioned earlier, cyberspace emerges as an alternate reality in *Neuromancer* and while the descriptions of cyberspace gives us a palpable feel of virtuality, we are time and again made to realise that we are floating in a massive sea of data. Along with many prophecies about a future that will be, Gibson’s novel raises the possibility of immortality for here, “Silicon doesn’t wear out; microchips were effectively immortal” (Jordan 28). Pierre Baldi, Professor of Information and Computer Science and Biological Chemistry and Director of the Institute for Genomics and Bioinformatics at the University of California in his book *The Shattered Self: The End of Natural Evolution* (2001) writes that we are in a turning point in human history. In the author's words, “our notions of self, life and death, intelligence, and sexuality are very primitive and on the verge of being profoundly altered

on the scale of human history. It is this shattering - what causes it and its meaning - that forms the central thread of this book. This shattering is brought about by scientific progress in biology, computer science, and resulting technologies, such as biotechnology and bioinformatics”

(3).

A corollary theme that emerges along with the theme of death and immortality is the theme of the use of implants and prostheses. Implants – an end of the process of evolution and a challenge to God’s creation of man. In an earlier chapter, the use of implants and prostheses were seen as a way to upgrade one’s life conditions from the low-life characters the characters are born into. But the use of implants and prostheses has a deeper metaphysical side- they “convey an aesthetic statement which reinforces technological dominance, while undermining the importance of the individual. It is an aesthetic concerned primarily with concealment through the projection of a surface reality” (Conway). We have references to “the routine beauty of the cosmetic boutiques” (*Neuromancer* 45). The best reference to implants is that of Molly’s mirrorshades that hide all emotions. In the words of Samuel R. Delany states, the mirrorshades “both mask the gaze and distort the gaze ... they displace the gaze of the reader who must always look at himself or herself any time she or he seeks to find the origin of the gaze. All you find is yourself” (171-2). When Gibson uses prostheses for his characters, he does so under the mask of fashion, style or necessity. But, they in their turn, give such a new look to the whole personality of the individual that there is little of the “self” evident and little of the human left in them and “They looked to Case like machines built for racing” (*Neuromancer* 128). The external is obviously

visible while the interior is completely shielded and we almost have an “optical surface” (Slusser 1992). In case of Molly, she is what her prostheses make her – her identity and the one that her prostheses give her are fused into one. For her “surface is content” (Hollinger 212 – 213), and she “Her prosthetics are thus not only an essential part of her identity, they have, in many ways, become her identity. Without them, she lacks the ability for adequate self expression. The self becomes fused to and absolutely dependent upon technology” (Conway). Molly can be said to be bound to her physical identity in one way. This same physical identity is what Case feels a “certain relaxed contempt” (*Neuromancer* 6) for and he wants to escape into the infinite fields of data in the matrix for, “Cyberspace itself offers addictive pseudo-vicarious stimulation more potent than any chemical narcotic” (Conway). It is his technological dependence that gives him his distinctive identity and he agrees to this when towards the end of the novel when he is offered a virtual life with his dead lover Linda Lee and he rejects it: “This was it. This was what he was, who he was, his being. He forgot to eat” (*Neuromancer* 59).

We also have the theme of the supernatural in *Neuromancer*. Anelie Crighton in “Among the spirits of cyberspace: an analysis of shamanic motifs in *Neuromancer*” analyses the human interaction with cyberspace in *Neuromancer* and its correspondence with what she calls “the progress of a Siberian mental trials eventually perfect his or her mastery of journeys to the spirit world.” She states that “there is something *shamanic* about the plot and symbolism of *Neuromancer*.” For her, shamanism is an umbrella term that includes practices of “Siberian mystical specialist capable of entering a trance

and communicating with spirits” in an altogether different level of reality. A parallel is drawn to Case’s mental torment – “he hallucinates for thirty hours” after being injected with a wartime mycotoxin by his earlier employers - with the initiatory sickness, characterised by mental and physical torment, perceived by a shaman chosen by the spirits. Similarly, the black market surgery which repairs Case’s nerve damage is “an agonizing and disorienting experience.” The only way one can get relieved is by entering into a trance and interacting with the world of the spirit. For Case, this ecstasy is achieved through his entry into cyberspace: “Please, he prayed now –” (52).

The author draws a comparison between Case’s ‘deck’ and the shaman’s drum. Gibson, in an interview to McCafferey said, “On the most basic level, computers in my books are simply a metaphor of the human memory...When I wrote *Neuromancer*, I didn’t know that computers had disc drives. My ignorance had allowed me to romanticize it.” Crichton links up even Case’s entry into this romanticized landscape of the cyberspace with that of a shaman to the land of the spirits. Case’s deck is paralleled to the Shaman’s drum, whose hypnotic beats leads to a trance and an eventual union with the spirits. Case’s jacking into cyberspace has a similar ecstasy. Once into the spiritual world, the shaman replicates the spiritual world with visions of his own geographical world; so does Case. One good instance is when case penetrates the Tassier-Ashpool computer core, he describes the “an endless neon cityscape, complexity that cut the eye, jewel bright, sharp as razors” (*Neuromancer* 256). Like a shaman, Case engages with the spirit only in a trance and Case too can operate only in one place at a time either in conventional space or in cyberreality. Further, into the cyberspace only

specialists can enter, just like only trained shamans try communicating with the spirits. According to Crichton: “Access to cyberspace appears to be a relatively privileged affair in *Neuromancer*, restricted to specialists; we know from his aforementioned apprenticeship that other cowboys operate illegally in the matrix, but Case doesn’t ordinarily encounter other people there.” When online, Case even goes without food and drinks, another parallel to the hard work of the shaman’s rigorous work. Crichton quotes Eliade in his description of the shamanic spirit journey as a “mystical experience that allows the shaman to transcend time and space.” Further, just like a shaman, Case too is aided in his shamanic performance by assistants. The otherwise solitary Case too is surrounded by a number of assistants made available for him aid by Wintermute whether be it Molly the razor girl who protects Case physically; McCoy Pauley who lends his technical expertise in cyberspace. Seen from the perspective of the Rastafarians too, the AI Wintermute appears beyond the control of the human as:

“Motive,” the construct said. “Real motive problem, with an AI. Not human, see?”

“Well, yeah, obviously.”

“Nope. I mean, it’s not human. And you can’t get a handle on it. [...] It’s one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess. [...] I ain’t likely to write you no poem, if you follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain’t in no way *human*.” (*Neuromancer* 131).

Case, more than any other character in the novel, is forever conscious of being followed and tracked down. Another eerie feeling that almost forever followed him in the novel was the realisation of the fact that Wintermute could

and did eliminate anyone who served as an impediment in the fulfillment of the one dream of his life. “When we first encounter them, most of the novel’s characters are in despair, haunted by self-destructive impulses; by the conclusion, those who have survived have regained their psychic equilibrium and resolved the mental and physical assaults which threatened to destroy them. Central to their recovery is Case’s shamanic quest” (Crichton). While a shaman who returns after his spiritual journey returns to help the tormented soul, Case frees Wintermute of his torment while taking his tour into cyberspace, by merging him with his other half, Neuromancer. This frees the AIs of their human creators. Thus, again we see a parallel to the shamanic quest and that of Case, the hero of the novel.

A good example is that of Dix, who is a construct and hence without any memory. Hence, he remembers and recalls only till he is switched on. Once he is switched off- he does not recall anything what went on earlier. “Gibson, therefore, demonstrates that humanity through a globalized future as cyborgs will become subhuman, incapable of a self-reflexive witnessing quality of consciousness that would allow them to experience...” (Haney 8). Thus, humanity, once it degrades into a subrace of the cyborg will lose its spirituality which is one of the basic qualities of the human.

Leaver argues, “The most religious ‘human’ characters in Gibson’s story are the Zionites, who assist Case. When Case and Molly meet the Elders of Zion they say that Wintermute has contacted them, and they treat him a prophet, a God, thus establishing a stronger religious image (135). Moreover, “Zionites” translate in English to “the chosen people” and we have one of the Zionites, Aerol, see Babylon – or “the gate of the Gods””(131). Religion is

something very spiritual and often related to the supernatural. Apart from the organised religion practised by the Zeonites, there is no mention of religion in *Neuromancer*, but Gibson introduces many spiritual elements in the novel. For instance, when Wintermute communicates with Case, it all happens spiritually and Case speaks directly to Wintermute for the first time only after he has ‘flatlined’, effectively is dead (141). To quote David Hess writing in the October edition on *Omni* (1993), “As a cultural anthropologist, I see more old in the new than do the prophets of technotopia. Virtual reality, for example, strikes me as a high-tech version of shamanism. The idea of producing controlled virtual worlds is as old as hallucinogenic trance voyages and vision quests. The techniques may have changed, but will the visions?”

This way, we see *Neuromancer* traces out the metaphysical elements in a subtle manner. Roy Batty, Deckard and the Wintermute/Neuromancer union all represent a new spirituality which exists independently of humanity, thus suggesting that in these futures, humanity has completely forsaken any moral or spiritual attributes through the destruction of Eden” (Leaver).

Tofts writes “At a deeper, metaphysical level, this intimacy with the virtual space of the network, which extends our ability to be present elsewhere, to be here and to be there at the same time, has altered some of the defining parameters of human nature...a demonstrable alteration of what we are and what we are capable of doing in the name of being human” (3).

One major aspect associated and linked with every individual is his identity which quantifies his personality and individuality. In the words of Heim, “Being a *body* constitutes the principle behind our separateness from one another and behind our personal presence.” We can agree with Heim

when he argues that this virtual presence in virtual communities, in which one can reveal only the part of oneself one desires to, somehow reduces the human element: “the quality of the human encounter narrows.” In this “melding of the human and the machine” we create the cyborg and this “stand-in self lacks the vulnerability and fragility of our primary identity” and can never truly represent us. When in cyberspace this is one aspect that is lost – this is the price of technology: it opens us to “the thrill of free access to unlimited corridors of information.” But there is also the “threat of total organization” beneath “the artificial harmony”. This is best justified in Case’s recognition of the fact and refusing to accept Wintermute’s proposal of digital immortality. We can conclude in the words of Heim, “We are the moths attracted to flames, and frightened by them too, for there may be no home behind the lights, no secure abode behind the vast glowing structures. There are only the fiery objects of dream and longing.” We are both fascinated and appalled by the growing importance of cyberspace in our lives. Perhaps, it is as a forewarning that Gibson portrays for us the Zeonites, “a human group that instinctively keeps its distance from the computer matrix” who prefer “music to computers and intuitive loyalties to calculation.” They are “a human remnant in the environmental desolation of *Neuromancer*” who are still “rooted in the energies of the earth” and in the words of Heim, “They will nudge us out of our heady reverie in this new layer of reality. They will remind us of the living genesis of cyberspace, of the heartbeat behind the laboratory, of the love that still sprouts amid the broken slag and the rusty shells of oil refineries “under the poisoned silver sky”.

The machine is made by man himself, and in *Neuromancer* the fusion of the man and the machine is to such an extent that there remains very little difference between the two. But, as mentioned earlier, Gibson makes a subtle argument – that the machine may gain all the power and importance, but it still remains something that needs repair for which it needs to turn to the human. In another aspect, the machine does not equal the human. This is subtly implied in all the actions of the novel. Towards the end of the novel, Wintermute describes itself, as an unbounded technological extension of mind, body and cyberculture. This is something posthumanists would define as the ultimate extension of the mind through the physical universe. The entire novel was an attempt at merging the two AIs – Wintermute and Neuromancer and it is successfully achieved with the intervention and expertise of Case. And yet, even after the merger, the never transcends the physical and in cyberspace, Case always meets him as a physical persona. Wintermute can never rise above its computerized material dimension and Molly had rightly remarked that AIs have no imagination and therefore no consciousness of any order. Even Wintermute says, “I, insofar as I have an ‘I’ [...] am merely part of another, a, shall we say, potential entity. I, let us say, am merely an aspect of that entity’s brain’ (120). The novel proposes Wintermute as the symbol of the mind, while Neuromancer symbolizes the consciousness. The merger was intended to make the resultant entity complete in itself. However nothing really changes at the end and we do not have the intended result of achieving a point of higher consciousness. Daniel Dennett in *Consciousness Explained* (1991) calls the result nothing more than a zimbo, something that cannot rise above the mind/body dichotomy. The combination of machine and biology

cannot result in something the human is gifted with – intersubjectivity. Haney refers to Christian De Quincey and argues that intersubjectivity includes language and interpretation, and a higher-order consciousness through the cocreation of a nonphysical presence. Thus, actual sharing and comprehension of meaning goes beyond mere linguistic utterance to “the accompanying interior-to-interior participatory presence—by true intersubjectivity. (De Quincey 188). Intersubjectivity can emerge only through the human brain as only the human brain has a capacity for a higher consciousness: higher level of consciousness remains a prerogative only of the human being and not a machine. Haney argues that Gibson depicts “the benefits of the posthuman merger with technology for consciousness are at best dubious” (11). The entire action of the novel, the attempt at the union of the AIs to assume a higher position is nullified as the AI does not possess a consciousness. “In *Neuromancer*, Gibson suggests that as we become more posthuman, we will go from being cyborgs like Molly and Case, who have not completely lost their innate ability to attain a void in thought, to degenerating into a full-fledged cyborg like Wintermute, an entity that lacks the capacity for primary consciousness, and has no access to higher-order consciousness and beyond” (Haney 13).

As referred to earlier, when the human becomes the cyborg, it loses its human capacity of free will, consciousness and spirituality. “The cyberpunk dimension of Gibson’s novel not only relates to the relativity of postmodernism, but also to the inability to have a direct, immediate experience of higher consciousness, which leads Gibson’s characters into a world of illusions that block access to pure consciousness” (Haney 2). Edelman, in his

“theory of natural group selection” classifies consciousness into two forms: “primary consciousness”, a fundamental consciousness based on the “interaction of value-category memory with systems of perceptual categorization” (180); and “higher-order consciousness”, defined as “the capability to be conscious of being conscious” (161), which in the Hindu *Advaita Vedanta* corresponds to the mind or phenomenal consciousness. In the second form, Edelman alludes to pure witnessing consciousness which is present only in the human being. In the words of Haney, “The absence of pure consciousness, replaced by a simulated version of higher consciousness, leads the memory of Gibson’s constructs to splinter into a series of fragments, which provides the basis for a posthuman identity, but not that of a complete human” (8-9). The AIs are programmed to behave in a certain manner and all of them as well as a few constructs and cyborgs like Wintermute, Armitage, Dix and Molly exist on “a surface level of reality devoid of psycho-physiological depth, particularly the depth of pure consciousness. Case to a certain extent, unlike the others, possesses a certain degree of self-reflection or self-transcendence ...” (Haney 6).

Haney refers to posthuman theorists as Hayles and Haraway who claim that Artificial Life can replicate biological processes. However, Edelman argues that this claim is doomed to fail as post-biological artificial Life forms in cyberspace opens up questions on what it means to be “alive”, the worthiness of an artificial life if at all. “Posthuman society, as science fiction demonstrates, will not provide a supportive environment for transcendence in daily life, and bionic technology will no doubt provide a devastating surrogate--artificial transcendence--as experience by Case in the matrix.

Science fiction writers, therefore, have a clear insight based on their imagination of the potential crisis for humanity once technology transforms humans into cyborgs” (Haney 13).

The characters in the novel belong to the lower rung of the social ladder and they exploit the available technologies to escape the sense of despair that they live in. Molly’s augmenting her eyes, “surgically inset” (*Neuromancer* 24) and this was approved even by even the “mad king” (203). Soon afterwards, three pages later, she kills him, without any scruples by shooting a toxic dart into his eye. She replies, “I spit. The ducts are routed back into my mouth.” “Then you’ve already learned an important lesson,” he concludes (183). Molly herself will later have a lens broken, nearly causing her death. Thus, despondency is the dominant atmosphere throughout the novel. This sense of despondency is further perpetuated by the realisation that in *Neuromancer*, cyberspace, prosthetics, simstims are all commercially controlled by the megacorporations or zaibatsus. This hints at the post-industrial atmosphere of the novel and as Glenn Grant comments in “Transcendence Through Detournement in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*” (1990), “Multinational corporations are seen to flourish on the co-optation of the human need to transcend the self ... Thus potentially liberating and dangerous impulses are diverted into safe, profitable commodities” (46). All these put the very question of what is the identity of the individual into problem. It is a culture where “the psychological concept of identity is confronted with its fragmentation, where the reflexive subject has been deconstructed, it is only the body which represents presence, identity,

continuity” (Becker). This is realised by Case and he learns to respect the body for what it is.

Quoting a contemporary critic, Henry Jenkins writing in “The Work of Theory in the Age of Digital Transformation,” “Gibson wrote his fiction less as a celebration of the transformative power of digital media than as a warning about the dangers of divorcing human intelligence from the body, of isolating the self from real life experience, and of transforming human culture into data which can be controlled by global corporations.” The world of *Neuromancer* is one in which technology is in an advanced state and though it has raised the level of human life, the very essence of humanity seems to be lost – putting into question the difference between the human and the mechanised human or the cyborg.

A reading of the novel necessitates a reconsideration of the questions of life and death, of ethics and morality as applicable to the life that the characters lead in *Neuromancer*. However, *Neuromancer* can also be seen as a modernisation of the fairy tales of the past or rather of the tales of wonder or a retelling of mythical tales of the past. Here too there is a hero in search for something, a hint at the quest for the Holy Grail, meeting with characters who belong to another plane of existence and of contact with the gods. Somewhere we can link it up with the age old oral tradition of storytelling, but with a difference. Here we have mythology modernised, the hero racing through the heavens/ cyberspace in a starship, where he meets constructs and AIs in place of demon. Joseph Campbell, in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1968), which is today a seminal book in comparative mythology theorises the quest of the archetypal hero in ancient mythologies. He talks of a fundamental

structure that all important myths around the world which have survived down the ages share. He calls it the monomyth summarises it in his introduction: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (30). Looking at the structure of *Neuromancer*, it too follows a similar structure. We see Case in an unknown quest, his leaving the world of everyday and entering cyberspace – almost a magical landscape where he faces unknown dangers and returns with the power to heal – to free the encaged AIs. In the process, it also engages us in rethinking received notions of reality, the universe, god, of metaphysics in general.

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Conclusion

The central event of the twentieth century is the overthrow of matter.

George Gilder

To live effectively is to live with adequate information. Thus, communication and control belong to the essence of man's inner life, even as they belong to his life in society.

Norbert Wiener

Our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity. The information technology revolution, and the restructuring of capitalism, have induced a new form of society, the network society. It is characterized by the globalization of strategically decisive economic activities. By the networking form of organization... By a culture of real virtuality constructed by a pervasive, interconnected, and diversified media system. And by the transformation of material foundations of life, space and time, as expressions of dominant activities and controlling elites ... It is indeed, brave or not, a new world.

Manuel Castells

In an essay entitled "Theme and Interpretation" published in Werner Sollers' *The Return of Thematic Criticism* (1993), Menachem Brinker argues:

We do ... classify texts according to their themes with different aims in mind.

It is this difference in aims which decides the varying degree of generality or particularity involved in the theme's formulation. Theme's most important function for critics is the aid it affords in the description and interpretation in a work or a group of works. Accordingly, changes tend to occur in degree of generality vs. particularity or of abstractness vs. concreteness as scrutiny

shifts from the individual work to a group of works ..., to the whole corpus of an author's work, to the work of a literary group, generation, or school. (22)

Brinker's delineation of the function and aims of studying and classifying themes and texts is applicable to analyses of single or multiple literary texts. As Brinker has also remarked, our degree of generalising or particularising themes will depend on whether we look at texts as singular entities or as part of an oeuvre, or even a genre. This present study of *Neuromancer* has sought to perform both the general and the particular functions. For, in the introductory chapter of this study, when we have placed the novel within the discourse of cyberculture and cyberpunk, we have begun the function of relating the themes to a larger canvas. On the other hand, in our study of the themes in *Neuromancer* as an endeavour to study themes in their "particularity" – for example, of the mega theme of human-technology interface, of the cyborg as the social Other, of the problematic of moral choice in a virtual world, of the metaphysics of cyberspace and their related themes – we have engaged in the "description and interpretation" of a singular piece of work. As Willie van Peer and Max Louwse have showcased in their edited volume entitled *Thematics: Interdisciplinary Studies* (2002), the study of themes ranges from the purely historical to the quantitative and computational. The present study has engaged with the themes of *Neuromancer* through a close textual method with extensive textual references on the one hand, and on the other has read the themes identified in *Neuromancer* with existing critical commentary on cyberpunk and cyberculture in a manner that is contrapuntal, or parallel in nature. There is undoubtedly considerable thematic complexity in *Neuromancer* as Latham has remarked, with openness to diverse and often conflicting modes of interpretation which is one of the major reasons behind its

sheer power to capture the critical imagination. Looking into the thematic in a close reading of *Neuromancer*, we have not only been able to look into the themes that have been handled in the novel but have also shown why and how the novel is important in the historical development of cyberpunk fiction and why it still remains perhaps the best ever written in the genre. Indeed, the initial impetus behind embarking on the present study was that a fruitful investigation of the novel as seminal to the genre and culture of cyberpunk requires a full-length study of the novel in terms of its major themes.

In this section of the present study, we revisit some of the core aspects discussed earlier and make a brief assessment of Gibson's art and vision. As a subgenre of science fiction, cyberpunk deals with several pressing themes of modern cyber technology and culture: the interfacing of humans and machines; the passage to Information Age; the new relationships between gender and science; etc. It is one of the most interesting genres of science fiction both because of the unique opportunity that it offers to discuss and to play with ideas, and because of the special kind of language it has developed to do so. It has an important role in society today, partly because of its romanticism and partly because of its ability to discuss contemporary problems without the constraints that hold realistic literature back. It seems amazing today that it was way back in the 1980s that Gibson had anticipated so many themes that are the staple of cyborg culture. We can argue with Cavallaro that provocative forms of knowledge can be deduced from Gibson's *Neuromancer* and that these may help us situate ourselves both as individuals and as collectives.

By the early 1980s, computer networks, hacking, along with computer games had all become familiar topics and the computer became a central icon in science fiction as well as its subgenre – the cyberpunk. The world of *Neuromancer* presents a

world where the hero as well as the other characters that surround him are seduced by cyber-technology. They live in an atmosphere of isolation and information – in a massive virtual analog with heaps of information: they live in the matrix. They belong to a society where the members seem to live just for the reason of being alive – a society where members have survived their eroded surroundings caused by nuclear or governmental misuse. The uproar that *Neuromancer* caused when it was published made way for a number of reviews, essays, interviews, and articles. Yet surprisingly, there has been the lack of a single book that has handled the various significant themes that the novel problematizes – the idea of uniqueness associated with the human being, the unchallenged frontiers of the human intellect, the human mind and the traditional associated concepts of love and affection; the idea of the corporeal human body and the idea of ‘identity’ defined by traditional markers of gender, race etc. For this is a novel that makes us rethink and redefine several of our ideas of the human being, perplexing it with subtle issues of embodiment and disembodiment, real and virtual time and place, man-machine fusion – leaving us with some basic questions as to who or what is man.

As far as an ‘attitude’ towards technology goes, there are many works that either begin or end with an alarming note on the influence of technology in our lives today. But as Mann and Niedzwiecki opine, those cries are lost “in the aural pollution of alarms, cell phones, bleating pop tunes, and car horns?” (x). But Gibson’s depiction of the futuristic society and its people in *Neuromancer* is informed by a larger vision and canvas of human-machine interface. It competes with the present issues of the corporate world, the government and a society ruined by nuclear war where people exist for base personal benefit – or just for the sake of living. The author incorporates a genuine element of the cyberpunk in the novel. In the world of *Neuromancer*,

Gibson has portrayed a world where everything that we associate with human life can be produced artificially. His hero Henry Case, an established cyberspace cowboy, is introduced into a deteriorated society surrounded by bodies with implants: “With his hands in the pocket of his jacket, he stared through the glass at a flat lozenge of vatgrown flesh that lay in a carved pedestal of imitation jade” (14). It is a society where we have characters to whom are open various levels of physical modifications. When we meet him, we know that he has been working for a cartel of thieves performing illegal thefts and cyberspace manipulations. He has apparently been working thus for about two years. He tries to steal from his employers and is caught. They inject him with a toxin that damages his brain and eliminates his ability to enter cyberspace, and then they let him go. His own nervous system was already damaged with a mycotoxin (*Neuromancer* 6) and where: “M-G employees above a certain level were implanted with advanced microprocessors that monitored mutagen levels in the bloodstream” (10). Thus, Gibson shows us the future through his own characters who still find a need to survive in order to find a cure for his ruined nervous system. Surrounding him are characters as Ratz, the bar tender, with the prosthetic pink plastic arm.

The present study has attempted to show that the themes of *Neuromancer* are to be considered in relation to the fact that in the novel Gibson has created a world wrapped in high technology: it is a highly advanced, urbanised world – a virtual reality representation of a vast city which exists in physical space while its information flows and data are reproduced in cyberspace. It would be best described as “an effect of immersion in internet culture” (Wilber 48). In Gibson’s world, physical death is a mere extension into a new form of existence – what he calls “constructs”. One of the prominent components of cyberpunk is possibly the

overabundance of chromed artificial limbs, bizarre prostheses operating in an atmosphere of AIs. These are but attempts to transcend the limits of the flesh – mostly with the use of drugs. Case jacks into the Matrix not just for work, but for liberation from the “meat” - the ability to play unfettered in a purely mental arena, a “consensual hallucination” (5). *Neuromancer* deals with “the impact of technology, particularly networks of computers, virtual reality (VR) and biotechnology, on the nature of human existence with the nature and essence of humanity in a future in which the use of VR and the ability to extensively change and modify one’s own body allowed individuals to constantly re-invent themselves and to avoid dealing with the ‘real’ world if they did not want to” (Bell, et al. 39). The world of *Neuromancer* may be categorically acknowledged to have incited the minds of the other authors of cyberpunk fiction as to what the world inhabited by the people in cyberspace was like. In the words of Gibson himself: “[c]yberspace has a nice buzz to it; it’s something that an advertising man might of thought up and when I got it I knew that it was slick and essentially hollow and that I’d have to fill it up with meaning” (inWoolley123). The matrix is seen by some as a space where paradoxically infinity is the ultimate boundary to explore and enact the most absurd of the human fantasies. The cyberspace with its herculean and infinite possibilities, offers as if the utopia for human fantasies and absolute designs. The space in cyberspace or the matrix is bigger than all of us and it is representative of a collective consciousness – in the highly technologized future world, a future in which there is nothing natural remaining and there is perhaps only a subtle line of demarcation between the virtually real and the real. Now, the human has in hand the finest way to express oneself fully, leaving the body and yet keeping the mind- not only keeping it but enriching it beyond imagination. This way, the cyberspace not only affects our genetic code at

times but also our psychology and the way we look at life itself. In the novel, the death of the body is seen as a transition to another state of consciousness. As the characters turn inward into their own minds or into cyberspace, the line between the real and the hallucinatory blurs. Of course, Gibson tries hard to make us realise that there is a 'real' world outside in cyber and the protagonists Case and Molly are constantly shuffling in between the real and the cyberworld. In an interview, Gibson makes clear his unease with disembodiment in cyberspace:

There is a tendency in our culture, in a broader sense the western civilization, to reject the body in favor of an idea of the spirit or the soul. I have never been entirely sure that that's such a good thing, and in an interesting way this technology is pointing in that direction. One could imagine a very ascetic sort of life growing out of this, where the body is ignored. This is something I've played with in my books, where people hate to be reminded sometimes that they have bodies, they find it very slow and tedious. (Interview with Dan Josefsson)

The world of *Neuromancer* is also the world of post-industrialism and late capitalism. It is a period when life is cheap; information is dear. Information is the true medium of exchange in the world of cyberpunk fiction. It is a world where the future is shaped by the market and the closest physical analogue to information is drugs. We also see the fall in importance of the dollar replaced by the yen and Euros – made so obvious in the transactions made by Case in *Neuromancer* – or perhaps other modes of digital transaction. Like most cyberpunk literature, *Neuromancer* is dystopian, with a futile war serving as the background. The nation is now seen as endangered following the constant threat of corporatism. In this period of post industrialism post nationalism, the fixed boundaries have been eroded with the spread of the Internet. We see a rise in

the power of the Corporation: in *Neuromancer*, we have Case under the constant fear of the Corporation – the enforcer of the law and much above the state. Critics like Kellner read *Neuromancer* as an allegory “about the demise of family capitalism and the triumph of a new form of corporate capitalism in which technology assumes the dominant position.” The AIs in *Neuromancer*, especially, Wintermute desires for the union with Neuromancer to achieve god-like powers. But as Kellner argues, although it wants to produce a higher life-force, God – but, it is not “God the Father.” The novel can be read as an allegory of the “triumph of technology over the human and the (human) quest for immortality” (312).

Critics like Amelia A. Rutledge discern in the heroes – rather antiheroes – of cyberpunk a tendency to adopt only the “the surface attributes associated with the popular culture movement known as punk ...” She argues that the characters themselves are “accommodationists”. Instead of rebelling against the powers above them “they accept and negotiate their world.” Gibson rejects the “information highway” metaphor and regards the “mall” as a better metaphor for cyberspace:

A highway is something you can go two ways on, it implies real traffic. Really what they're offering you is a mall. They want to give you an infomall where you pay for every bit of information you download, and you'll download from a menu that some corporation has assembled. . (Interview with Dan Josefsson)

Thus, science fiction in general, and cyberpunk fiction in particular can be seen in terms of its potential of granting an author a large, imaginative canvas. Seen in the light of the definition of postmodernism given by William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman in “Postmodern,” published in *A Handbook to Literature* (1996), postmodernism presents “a denial of order [and] highly fragmented universes in the

created world of art ... The typical protagonist has become not a hero but an antihero” (403). While some opine that cyberpunk can be seen as a representative of the postmodern world (see for instance Harmon and Holman; Rutledge; Wolmark) there are yet others (see Burrows; Kellner) who assign to it the more prestigious position of a social theory that can tell us what the near future will be like.

The present study has attempted to venture into the electronic world – one with a new interface between human beings and technology, one that shows how the intrusion of technology in our lives has changed it, irrespective of the fact as to whether it has been for the better or for the worse. This venture has been based on the vision of the father of cyberpunk himself. It was therefore imperative for this study to discuss the moral, social, metaphysical implications of this electronic world for one very good reason – “it is everywhere, as ubiquitous as it is invisible, capable of changing the everyday minutiae of how we go about our lives, permeating our consciousness, altering fears, desires, and ways of being.” (xi) . As has been stated earlier, *Neuromancer* was chosen as a case study as it one of the fundamental books in the genre of the cyberpunk. It presents a rather bleak view of the world and it is very easy to club it under the genre of dystopia. But this is a more comprehensive study as it takes into account several themes in the novel that would not have been highlighted in a narrowly dystopic study. It is not because of mere convenience that the present work chose to focus on a single text. In fact it facilitated a close and exhaustive study of the themes in one of the most celebrated texts in the cyberpunk genre, with a world always set in the future, where the setting is usually urban, where the heroes are almost always anti-heroes, where the atmosphere is gloomy and dystopian and where the technology is unprecedented.

Neuromancer had made many technological predictions – it had envisioned a globally-accessible network –the matrix, a bio-interfaced network that humans can literally plug their brains into using electrodes and neural interfaces called “decks”. When they “jack in”, their minds enter a realm named after a word we now take for granted, cyberspace. Case is a Cyberspace cowboy who cybernetically applies his own brain power to duel it out with AIs and other software. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson used prosthetics and medical sci-fi to promote the idea of natural, organic and manufactured cybernetic body parts playing almost equal roles in the human condition. He also used the concept of servitude to the electronic lifestyle prominently. Today, electronic dependency is the norm and many people are surviving with the aid of pacemakers, prosthetic limbs, laser vision correction, or intra-ocular lenses and we see that many of Gibson’s predictions have been proved correct.

This is what makes us think that whatever this novel had predicted might become a reality in the very near future. Technology today allows human participants to draw on-screen graphics using thoughts as their mechanism for manipulating a cursor. This could be the seed of the nervous system interface Gibson envisioned: a device which allows humans to interact with virtual electronic worlds using only their brains. All these introduce us to a neural world much as *Neuromancer* predicted. In the words of Rutledge, “Before there was science fiction (SF), there was the fantastic mode. Before the *Matrix* films, there was William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), the first, and most significant, work in the science fiction (SF) subgenre known as ‘cyberpunk’.”

The technological advance that Gibson describes falls into two categories: extending life, or making it more interesting. The extent to which his characters go to

stimulate themselves and reinvigorate their reality can be seen as a desire for self-exploration, and perhaps a method for self-actualization. The technologies that the characters are best at are involved in entering alternative consciousnesses, to the point that he abandons one self for the other self with ease and delight. This desire to experience so many alternative consciousnesses implies dissatisfaction with the current world, and one's current reality. These alternative states, whether it's Case, simstims, Panther Moderns, etc., imply that one is not a fixed identity, but a recreateable personality.

The characters presented by Gibson in *Neuromancer* are marginalized, alienated loners living in the edge of society whose daily life is greatly impacted by rapid technological change, and they survive because they have to in an atmosphere of computer network and with implants in their bodies which appear very normal. All of it influences the plot's movement and the events that make up the story line. The plot of *Neuromancer* centers on a conflict among AIs and the big names in the corporate worlds that control the lives of the characters. The very human essence is lost - and the characters' minds work in a mechanical way due to their constant interface with technology. They experience an inability to form close relationship and there is a complete lack of intimacy, perhaps, due to this blurring of the boundary between the human and the machine. They become *cyborgs*.

One of the themes handled in *Neuromancer* is not only of the dissatisfaction with the external world - but also a type of inward movement - a type of an internal monologue. Perhaps, the characters - simulating the VR try to live those dreams that can never see the face of fulfillment. What we see in the novel is a strange display of the concept of love in the cyber world - where most of the characters are not only unable to connect but also unable to conceptualize the object of their affection. The

world of *Neuromancer* is a world of loss of faith, of trust of love – a complete sense of desolation and isolation. There is a lack of a clearly defined truth in the universe of *Neuromancer* and it can be seen as a sign of things to come.

Eventually one realises that *Neuromancer* emerges as the story of a “console cowboy” who is intoxicated with cyberspace and the time he spends in cyberspace is all that is true to his emotions. The entire story is replete with “near-future landscapes littered with outmoded artifacts, grotesquely marginal street people, and menacing machines” (Alkon 76) – something for which he is indebted to J.G. Ballard and the other imagists. Though some critics refer to Gibson’s fiction as nothing but “standard Pulp” (Benford 20). Gibson tries to meet the audience’s insatiable demand for more of the marvellous in *Neuromancer* and the way he uses the marvellous enhances the entire plot of the novel. Alkon refers to the “Aristotelian virtues of clear beginning, middle, and end” that the plot of Gibson’s fiction works out, the “greedy business cartels” and the happy endings normally ascribed to the pulp literature. This makes it out as more comedy than tragedy. “As in generic detective fiction, readers can have it both ways,” shivering at horrors vividly portrayed, yet closing the book with a comfortable feeling that justice prevails at last” (76). Although *Neuromancer* ends with the author stating that Case never saw Molly again, we know she exists, and so does Case – better paid than he was in the beginning of the story, Dixie Flatline exists in his nonexistence, Wintermute is the matrix. So, in a way, by the end of the story, every character emerges in a higher level of existence, whether mental or physical. Cyberspace as a concept can also be said to evolve – from its conception as a web of infinite data to a “tantalizing vision” that is “equivalent of heaven, where he (Case) sees himself apparently living forever in a kind of ménage a trios with his lost love, Linda Lee, and Neuromancer” (77). This moves Gibson’s fiction beyond mere pulp

literature and detective stories “to even deeper affinities with those utterly implausible but nevertheless often satisfying rags-to-riches stories that are in the realm of myth and allegory” (78).

Neuromancer emerges as a perfect blend of pulp literature, detective stories, the realistic plots set in two different worlds- the world of everyday and the world of cyberspace. What makes it real as life for the reader is the narrative mode that Gibson adopts. He works out the surface texture wonderfully complete with sights, sounds, smells and replete with dense tactile detail like use of specific brand names, specific colour and texture. We have references to fine arts, music, and abundance of references to dance. Cyberspace, the most enthralling of experiences, is described as infinite data in terms of architecture and rays of light- pyramids, cubes, towers and melting ICE. The entire experience of the novel is cinematic and we can sense each impression that Gibson wants to create. Perhaps, it was a debt that Gibson owed to the imagists: even the “biz” can be seen in terms of a dance choreographed by unspoken rules. The narrative also tried to build in vicarious experiences, the ultimate of which is the experience of the thorough it Case can enter into the body/consciousness of Molly can keep track of what she is doing when into the Sense/Net and Villa Straylight. This allows space for Gibson to experiment with point of view- for that time, Case is Molly – he can experience life through the perspective and personality of Molly. This narrative technique allows Gibson to play the role of the omniscient narrator.

Added to it all is the pace of the novel which is rather frenetic. We have the hero jacked into the matrix and flipped back and forth into different locations and at times Gibson stops by to explain backgrounds and details. He even uses allusions to contemporary technology and set a new standard to the prose employed in fantastic

literature. This narrative technique further adds to the pace of the novel. This technique also helps build up the aura of marvel as Gibson drops hints, offers offhand explanations, and plunges the reader into a strange new world that at first appears foreign and disorienting. This manner of narration is what gives charm to the entire plot of the novel and succeeds to catch the reader's attention till the end. Gibson uses Japanese corporate ideology to give shape to his narrative—loyalty to the firm is all that is important and the aristocrats may be part human and part machine.

While Technological Determinism upholds that technology exists outside of the social and produces effects in society, the opposite view is that of the social shaping of technology. The latter perspective argues that technology is social – it emerges in particular contexts, as a result of social imperatives, that it has a social and cultural life. The way we incorporate technology into our lives can be seen as resisting determinism. Taking into consideration, both the perspectives, we may accept the relation between society and technology is complex and adaptive. Hence, each shapes the other, and the human is affected to the maximum. Now, we are at a juncture of history in which technology is transforming our perceptions of our relationships to time, memory, self-identity, and “reality” and the human is subject to revisions after revisions. Ironically, the way we are born is not certainly the way we will ‘die’ in the traditional terms of the word. With the imprint of technology in our lives today – the human is assuming a new form and perhaps progressing towards the posthuman: a body in which the machine is as much a part as the human heart in a human body, the body which may have been subject to genetic as well as biological manipulations. To such an extent, we all are cyborgs and to a considerable extent controlling as well as being controlled by our computers and other systems of communications. The space in which all these happen is the cyberspace or virtual

reality – and perhaps it is the best expression of the post modern trends. As has been mentioned earlier, many critics consider cyberpunk as representative of the postmodern world and *Neuromancer* began this literary movement called cyberpunk – a particular trend in science fiction 1984. There are yet others who opine that Gibson and the other writers of cyberpunk, like Bruce Sterling wrote novels which can be seen almost as a social theory predicting the look of the technologically dominated future. Of course, unlike the advantages and benefits associated with technological advancements, the future drawn by Gibson and Sterling and Shiner is perverted, corrupted and corrupting.

One fact that emerges brilliantly in the novel is the erosion of the man / machine binary. Dexterously, Gibson makes us accept this part-human, part-machine, part-biological, part-cybernetic as feasible in the plot of the novel. Technically speaking, the plot of the novel is divided into four parts organised around two hinges – the raid on Sense/Net to capture the construct Dixie Flatline and the raid on the Villa Straylight that unites the two AIs. But the end remains enigmatic even after the union of the AIs. When Case had accepted to unite the two, he had no idea of what the union would result in. Even after the union, none of the characters can comprehend the consequences of the union. The most sensitive of the characters, Case too experiences the moment as a moment of transcendence – awe before the sublime, awe in the face of the ineffable. The irony and enigma continues when Wintermute himself replies to Case that all things are as they were. Thus, *Neuromancer* employs a narrative technique that results in a novel that weds together high-tech and low life – but it could be seen as a vision of technology from an artist's perspective.

Following the present study, it is hope that more full-length studies on Gibson's novels in general and on various aspects of *Neuromancer* in particular – like media adaptations, language and style, characterization, focus on single themes, and others – will be attempted by prospective scholars.



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