

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED "CYBERPUNK"  
WORKS BY WILLIAM GIBSON, PLACED IN A  
CULTURAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL  
CONTEXT.

MATHEW BLATCHFORD

Thesis presented for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of English

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

January 2005

**Abstract.**

This thesis studies William Gibson's "cyberspace trilogy" (*Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*). This was an extremely interesting and significant development in 1980s science fiction. It was used to codify and promote the "cyberpunk" movement in science fiction at that time, which this thesis also briefly studies.

Such a study (at such a relatively late date, given the rapid pace of change in popular culture) seems valuable because a great deal of self-serving and mystifying comment and analysis has served to confuse critical understanding about this movement. It seems clear that cyberpunk was indeed a new development in science fiction (like other developments earlier in the twentieth century) but that the roots of this development were broader than the genre itself. However, much of the real novelty of Gibson's work is only evident through close analysis of the texts and how their apparent ideological message shifts focus with time. This message is inextricably entwined with Gibson's and cyberpunk's technological fantasies.

Admittedly, these three texts appear to have been, broadly speaking, representations of a liberal U.S. world-view reflecting Gibson's own apparent beliefs. However, they were also expressions of a kind of technophilia which, while similar to that of much earlier science fiction, possessed its own special dynamic. In many ways this technophilia contradicted or undermined the classical liberalism nominally practiced in the United States.

However, the combination of this framework and this dynamic, which appears both apocalyptic *and* conservative, appears in some ways to have been a reasonably accurate prediction of the future trajectory of the U.S. body politic -- towards exaggerated dependency on machines to resolve the consequences of an ever-increasingly paranoid fantasy of the entire world as a threat. (It seems likely that this was also true, if sometimes to a lesser degree, of the cyberpunk movement as a whole.) While Gibson's work was enormously popular (both commercially and

critically) in the 1980s and early 1990s, very little of this aspect of his work was taken seriously (except, to a limited degree, by a few Marxist and crypto-Marxist commentators like Darko Suvin). This seems ironic, given the avowedly futurological context of science fiction at this time.

Mathew Blatchford

January 2005

University of Cape Town

**Acknowledgements.**

I should like to thank all those who encouraged me to complete this thesis even when I wanted to abandon it after years of neglecting it: my beloved wife Felicity Wood and her parents Bob and Van, my long-suffering supervisor Professor Lesley Marx, the administrative staff at the University of Fort Hare who gave me a semester off to work on it again, my therapist Margaret Anema, and everybody who ever asked how the thesis was going, no matter how I scowled at them.

University of Cape Town

## Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction.</b> Problematizing Cyberpunk, Introducing William Gibson.	6
<b>Chapter 1.</b> <i>Neuromancer</i> : The Maturing of Gibson's Cyberpunk.	52
<b>Chapter 2.</b> <i>Count Zero</i> : The Trilogy Takes Shape.	107
<b>Chapter 3.</b> <i>Mona Lisa Overdrive</i> : Conclusion or Deferral?	159
<b>Conclusion.</b> After It Changed: Post-Cyberpunk and Late Gibson.	203
<b>Bibliography</b>	251

University of Cape Town

## **Introduction.      Problematising Cyberpunk, Introducing William Gibson.**

### **Science Fiction and the Origins of Cyberpunk.**

The appearance of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), harbinger of the science fiction genre which rapidly came to be called cyberpunk, seemed to promise a fundamental change in science fiction much like that initially promised by the 1960s "New Wave". *Neuromancer* was widely praised for its stylishness; it also dealt with technologies neglected by most science fiction writers of the period. It appeared to make a political intervention by challenging many conservative trends in Western society around the time of its appearance. It was entertaining, carefully crafted, and even incorporated social and literary issues which most popular fiction, and particularly science fiction, then ignored. Furthermore it appeared when science fiction seemed intellectually stagnant. While all these points appear to contain truths, cyberpunk's actual nature deserves close scrutiny, partly because so many claims have been made on its behalf

The New Wave had been linked to (and had seen itself as emerging from) socio-political ferment in Britain and the United States in the 1960s. Various British writers, like Michael Moorcock, Langdon Jones and M. John Harrison, incoherently supported Situationism and the student radical movement. However, when these groups dissipated in the early 1970s, the British New Wave was left with apparently obsolete ideals and no constituency. Much of the U.S. New Wave endorsed similar movements in the U.S., (although generally less obviously radical ones, such as the Civil Rights or anti-Vietnam War movements). These similarly ceased to be novel or even fashionable among most middle-class white intellectuals in the early 1970s. (Likewise, when feminist science fiction arose, using the space opened by the New Wave but aggressively condemning the New Wave's often rampant sexism, it came to face comparable problems in the 1980s.) Thus New Wave science fiction seemed limited by time, space and dogma.

Cyberpunk, by contrast, seemed on a firmer footing, partly because it was technologically-oriented as well as socially-based. Its name was quickly coined -- allegedly by Bruce Bethke, author of the cyberpunk satire *Headcrash* (1995) -- suggesting its internal consistency. Its genesis-mythology is outlined by the theorist Larry McCaffery:

The cyberpunk SF "movement" first came into prominence in 1984, when William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was published . . . . the seeds of its development were actually planted several years earlier, when Gibson and other writers later associated with cyberpunk began publishing stories and novels that had a different edge from other SF works dealing with similar issues . . . . In their works and in numerous, highly contentious public debates that took place at SF conferences and conventions, the cyberpunks presented themselves as "techno-urban-guerrilla" artists . . .

(McCaffery, 1994: 11-12)

These emphatic declarations imply a value-system to organise around and even an opponent to be challenged. The reference to "a different edge" makes the genre appear novel -- often a vital quality for science fiction. Many of the stories in Bruce Sterling's seminal anthology *Mirrorshades* (1986) share a similar world-view: Tom Maddox's "Snake-eyes", Pat Cadigan's "Rock on", Marc Laidlaw's "400 Boys", John Shirley's "Freezone", Paul Di Filippo's "Stone Lives", are all chiefly about corporate or totalitarian rule resisted by the young or weak, links between technology and the body, and all but Laidlaw's are set in a plausible near-future. This unity of purpose implies that cyberpunk embodied a fairly coherent world-view -- although a distinctly monotonous one.

Sterling argues that "it's possible to make broad statements about cyberpunk and to establish its identifying traits" (Sterling, 1988: ix). suggesting that "[t]he work of the

cyberpunks is paralleled throughout Eighties pop culture: in rock video; in the hacker underground; in the jarring street tech of hip-hop . . . . cyberpunk is its literary incarnation" (Sterling, 1988: xi-xii). This claims cyberpunk as part of a broader culture, but fails to explain the links -- suggesting a desire rather than a reality. He adds, somewhat confusedly, that "[t]he advances of the sciences are so deeply radical . . . that they can no longer be contained" (Sterling, 1988: xii), implying that science itself somehow threatens the socio-political establishment, rather than being its product. This supposed threat, or promise, must be acknowledged by cyberpunk writing, where "central themes spring up repeatedly . . . . of body invasion . . . . mind invasion . . . radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (Sterling, 1988: xiii).

This implies that technological change was making the world fascinating, dangerous, and perhaps unpredictable. Sterling's reference to a "hacker underground" where "a new alliance is becoming evident: an integration of technology and the Eighties counter-culture" (Sterling, 1988: xii), an idea later used by technological publicists like Douglass Rushkoff, suggests a political dimension to cyberpunk -- assuming that such a counter-culture existed in the form which Sterling implies. Yet Sterling locates this in the future; once again it is a desire rather than an observation.

The title of his collection significantly recalls his claim that "[m]irrored sunglasses have been a Movement totem since the early days of '82" (Sterling, 1988: xi). Darko Suvin notes sardonically that "mirrorshades are a two-way transaction between the wearer and his social environment: they conjoin a minor degree of effective withdrawal with a large degree of psychological illusion of withdrawal in the wearer" (Suvin, 1994: 350). Fredric Jameson similarly suggests, apropos the Los Angeles Westin Bonaventure Hotel, that "the glass skin repels the city outside . . . like . . . those reflector sunglasses which make it impossible for your interlocutor to see your own eyes and thereby achieve a certain . . . power over the Other" (Jameson, 1996: 42). Mirrorshades might depict a will to power for Sterling's writers, yet this appears to be an insecure power, one which dared not permit close inspection.

This is surely also "reflected" in the complex name of the genre. The "cyber-" prefix generally connotes something technologically advanced, but actually refers to control (Norbert Wiener, who coined the term *cybernetics*, drew it from the Greek for "steersman"). The concept of "punk", however, connotes radical dissatisfaction with social control and resentful, anarchic desire for freedom. The two concepts -- controlling power from above, and absolute freedom from below -- do not easily combine.

Cyberpunk writers saw cybernetics and genetic engineering as tools which could transform people, and through them society. Sterling's concept of "redefining the nature of humanity", does not so much mean a call for anti-essentialism challenging the Enlightenment project (the interpretation made by some critics in McCaffery and Bukatman), but actual biological and psychological restructuring, as in Sterling's novel *Schismatrix* (1985). However, Sterling does not say why this restructuring is necessary or desirable; as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay complains: "Sterling hints at some new political attitude with technical know-how and anti-establishment feelings . . . . it's hard to see the 'integrated' political-aesthetic motives of alienated subcultures that adopt the high-tech tools of the establishment they are supposedly alienated from" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1991: 183). How far was this a consciously political project, and how far merely taking advantage of the popular imagery of cybernetics?

Undeniably, many cyberpunk texts recognised severe social problems existing at the time of writing. For instance, Kelly and Kessel's *Freedom Beach* (1984) features a group called the "dreamers" who use high technology (including computers) to solve the world's problems. Marc Laidlaw's *Dad's Nuke* (1984) mocks privatisation and the growth of technology, predicting disaster. Lewis Shiner's *Frontera* (1984) is about a world after that disaster, ruled by companies instead of governments. Tom Maddox's *Halo* (1991) -- an extension of his "Snake-Eyes" -- similarly concerns a world ruled by companies, suggesting that this tyranny might be challenged by artificial intelligence. The common features of these texts are clear.

With this in mind, cyberpunk might have come to dominate the genre (and influence wider culture). Yet by 1990, cyberpunk was almost passé. Science fiction in general seemed to be turning into a merchandising tool for TV shows and movies. Dominating the field was the commodified growth of sword-and-sorcery and horror fantasy, including the *Goosebumps* series aimed at teenagers (admittedly by 1997, Gardner Dozois noted that in this field "sales seem to have suddenly and dramatically fallen off" [Dozois, 1997: x], perhaps because of repetitiveness and market saturation) and warfare fantasias like Mack Maloney's *Wingman* (1990) series. One might ask why this should have happened.

Part of this may have been due to wider changes. Publishing grew increasingly monopolised in the 1980s as companies merged or were purchased by larger organisations; as Herman and McChesney put it, "[b]ook publishing . . . has been brought squarely into the cross-promotional plans of the media giants" (Herman, 1997: 62) such as News International, Viacom and Bertelsmann. Arguably the motive for literary experimentation declined. Nevertheless, publishers happily promoted pro-technology, cyberpunk-sympathetic works like Rushkoff's *Cyberia* (1994) and Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* (1995). It seems unlikely that the producers of cyberpunk faced ideological censorship; Gibson remained popular into the 1990s, especially among popularists of the Internet and "cyberspace" as revolutionary developments -- including figures like Timothy Leary, the erstwhile Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, and the then Vice-President of the United States, Albert Gore.

However, these points suggest that cyberpunk, like science fiction in general, is not necessarily subversive; indeed, its social role is often quite conservative. Whereas science fiction tends to represent science as an answer to human problems, science is actually a method of questioning nature, so science fiction's approach undermines the nature of the system it eulogises. Such self-defeating opportunism is common in contemporary society; many postmodern theorists' apparent critiques of scientism, as Alan Sokal points out, use scientific metaphors in their arguments and thus valorize

science; they may even "pass off as profound a rather banal philosophical or sociological observation, by dressing it up in fancy scientific jargon" (Sokal and Bricmont, 1998: 9) to exploit the public's support of science.

Science fiction exploits this support; it is also a wish-fulfilling fantasy of social power. The nature of such fantasy is suggested by Jameson's remarks concerning Balzac, that "the production of the wish-fulfilling text . . . . allow us to account for . . . the production of that quite different thing called ideology" (Jameson, 1994: 161). The writer, to fulfil political fantasies through a text, must recognisably express an ideology through it. As a result, "daydreaming and wish-fulfilling fantasy . . . . involve mechanisms whose inspection may have something further to tell us about the . . . link between wish-fulfillment and realism, between desire and history" (Jameson: 162), for the need to construct a fantasy suggests that one finds reality restrictive or unsatisfactory.

In science fiction, reality is overcome by powers which the writer envisages as provided by science. An example was once a flight to the Moon, which science made plausible (Joannes Kepler's 17th-century *Somnium*, ironically, made this flight possible through magic, though his representation of the Moon was plausible in terms of contemporary astronomy). Normally such fantasies are legitimated by scientific jargon, or through the notion of new scientific developments -- "novums" in Suvin's terms -- to grant whatever the author desires.

In these fantasies the world is counterfactually set to (what the author considers to be) rights. Hence this is not necessarily purely based in technological extrapolation. Jules Verne's and Hugo Gernsback's fantastical machines fulfilling bourgeois dreams seem ultimately not to have been sufficiently human-centric; insufficiently "realistic", even though impeccably scientifically justified. Jameson, again, suggests how such difficulties must be resolved on another level of wish-fulfillment:

one can imagine a more consequent act of desire in which the wish-fulfilling mind sets out systematically to satisfy the objections

of the nascent "reality principle" of capitalist society . . . . these new, second-level narratives . . . entertain a far more difficult and implacable conception of the fully realized fantasy: one which . . . seeks to endow itself with the utmost representable density and to posit the most elaborate and systematic difficulties and obstacles, in order the more surely to overcome them

(Jameson: 183)

A science fiction text creates an illusion of verisimilitude, by representing and legitimating prevailing orthodox ideologies through "science" (considered as an ideology rather than a practice). The obstacles produced in the text to be overcome are interpreted by the reader as a "realistic" version of life-experience (although it seldom undermines fantasized success; science fiction narrative is generally comic).

1920s and 1930s science fiction power-fantasies were cast in technological terms which readers found unexciting. This clash between scientific power-fantasy and the audience's needs (and literary expectations, since most readers expected popular fiction to provide love interests and demonized political enemies) was resolved when more complex texts were produced offering fantasised versions of human society. In these texts an aspect of human society (usually scientific or technical in nature) became representative of the good, or the evil, in that society. The evil (often, though not always, a physical problem) was symbolically destroyed or removed -- preferably by an individual, who then became the champion of society. The novelty in the text (good or bad) might be telepathic mutants, or autocrats, or a scientific or technical conspiracy, or some symbolic invention, like the space ship or the robot, the political context of such mechanical symbols being made clear.

For instance, Isaac Asimov's short story "Trends" (1939), he claimed, was the first story to suggest that space flight might not be universally popular; dealing with heroic struggle against opposition to space flight, it is a wish-fulfillment fantasy, but more "realistic" than a simple story about space flight because it mentions human politics

rather than merely describing mechanical or natural processes. In Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1952), the first man to Venus, a universally admired hero, turns out (for scientific reasons) to be a midget, comically undermining the power-fantasy of this text -- yet he eventually dies heroically, removing his presence (and saving the power-fantasy), and hero and heroine blast off for Venus. The target of this part of the satirical text was evidently the superficiality of earlier science fiction -- the technical-ideological foundations of that science fiction were not criticised, however.

These intellectual structures resemble conspiracy theory, where seemingly insoluble problems are changed through fantasy into forms which may be resolved. Conspiracy theory assumes that the truth is "out there", which is potentially empowering, but also assumes that it can be found easily -- free from obscuring ideologies, a fantasy which discourages critical thought. Probably because of this anti-critical depoliticization, Jameson terms conspiracy theory "a degraded attempt -- through the figuration of advanced technology -- to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (Jameson, 1993: 38); presumably it is "degraded" because it fails to pursue painful truth, the history which hurts, as Jameson put it in *The Political Unconscious* (1984).

This may be a psychological coping mechanism when dealing with an "impossible totality" beyond individual control; Noam Chomsky notes that in "a discussion of sports . . . . [p]eople know a tremendous amount . . . . when I hear people talk about . . . . domestic problems, it's at a level of superficiality which is beyond belief . . . . I think that this concentration on such topics as sports makes a certain degree of sense . . . . [t]he way the system is set up, there is virtually nothing people can do . . . . [t]hey might as well live in a fantasy world" (Chomsky, 1988a: 33). However, such helplessness breeds a radical scepticism which often feeds conspiracy theory; Chomsky hypothesises that

skepticism against a background of understanding and rationality is a very healthy attitude. Skepticism against a vacuum is extremely dangerous. The educational system and the doctrinal system have created vacuums. People's minds are empty and confused because everything's been driven out of them. In that case skepticism can quickly turn into paranoia.

(Chomsky, 1996: 94)

The impossibility of knowing the truth coexists with an urgent need to discover the truth. This is hardly new; many of those pursuing historical conspiracy theories were deemed deranged by Charles MacKay in his *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (undated), implying that conspiracy theory exists only among the foolish and ill-informed. The problem with this reassuring notion is that conspiracies actually exist, and sometimes are even uncovered.

Jameson's notion of conspiracy theory as generated by the "impossible totality of the contemporary world system" may be oversimplification, but the "high-tech paranoia" which he identifies may derive from socio-political conditions. Mobility and communication, the facilitators of modernity, give more power to conspirators and to secret services. This may have given conspiracy theory new significance in the early 1980s (when cyberpunk arose), which may explain why Jameson deems cyberpunk a crystallization of conspiracy theory's narrative. (Technology does not give rise to conspiracies or conspiracy theory -- but it provides a convenient metaphor for the origins of such things.) Jameson's ideas suggest a special significance for writers like Gibson, whose science fiction may outline a socio-political order arguably too complex, or too inaccessible, to analyse fully.

The production structure of science fiction magazines and pulp paperbacks (like that of most popular fiction) encourages a simplified, conspiracy-centric world-view. Science fiction writers sell texts to editors, who usually endorse a school of science fiction readers (who expect a particular type of text). The text is sold to readers via a

magazine or paperback filling that niche, so the editor, who knows the audience's tastes, is likely to reject ideologically unpalatable texts. (Most science fiction magazines have historically had identifiable styles, and favoured writers, as Brian Aldiss parenthetically observed in *Billion Year Spree* [1973].) Thus a writer is expected to produce a proper type of text.

Science fiction texts exist within intellectual structures sustaining readers' political opinions -- like most popular fiction. Such a text's ideas should appeal to a wide audience interested in science. The text would present its ideology through symbolic scientific images, in themselves attractive to the audience. If the writers properly valorizes science and technology, the reader is likely to forgive dissonances with her/his political viewpoint in other spheres. Besides, in power-fantasies, the possession of power, and who controls its distribution, is more important than the putative goal of wielding the power.

Even dystopias, like Zamyatin's *We* (1924) or Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), fit this pattern; the reader is evidently expected to repudiate Zamyatin's Benefactor or Orwell's Big Brother. Jameson claims that "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* [1985] has . . . been assessed as the first feminist *dystopia* and thereby the end of the very rich feminist work in the Utopian genre" (Jameson, 1996: 160). Atwood's text preconceives the destruction of the dystopian universe; she ends with an ironic multicultural historical seminar in the post-"Gilead" world -- itself a utopia. Indeed, Jameson later recanted: "I . . . want to caution against the facile . . . opposition between Utopia and dystopia" (Jameson, 1994b: 55). Dystopian science fiction should be seen as implicitly utopian.

In this context, the apparently novel intellectual structure of cyberpunk was arguably a timely development. The science fiction subculture seemed to need transfusions from elsewhere; in the late 1970s and early 1980s it seemed exhausted. The "New Wave" had died. Feminist science fiction was ghettoized, read by relatively few. The science fiction establishment, dominated by magazines like *Analog* and

editors like Ben Bova, had changed little in ten years, stylistically and politically conservative.

Fiction from a randomly-chosen issue of *Analog* for August 17th, 1981 affirms this. "Which Way to the End of Time?", a parallel time-tracks story by Michael McCollum, concerns a brave human battle against the evil alien "Dalgiri". "Mercy", by 1950s writer Ron Goulart, is a traditionally-structured android story. "Gift of Fire", by Steven Gold, about solar energy, resembles the 1950s Arthur C Clarke squib "A Slight Case of Sunstroke". "Diminution", by Martin Greenberg, is a traditional satire of an epistolary story about people psychically copying other people's work. "Thinking of Romance", by Rick Wilber concerns an alien visiting the Earth meeting a boy who wants to join him, a familiar idea of innocence rewarded. "The Cyphertone", by S C Sykes, imitates Henry Kuttner's 1950s "Mimsy were the Borogroves", though more comforting in its ending. "The Big Black Bag", by Michael Banks, is a familiar matter-transporter story. Clearly much of this is conscious recycling of familiar tropes.

Such conservatism also appears in non-fiction articles. The editorial, "A Case for Conformity", criticises efforts to encourage diversity in language education. *Analog's* resident technophile G Harry Stine predicts, in "Industry Looks at Space", that industrial exploitation of space is imminent, as he had done, inaccurately, for decades. The libertarian conservative Jerry Pournelle's feature "The Alternate View" denounces scientific space research for hampering capitalist exploitation. The book review section, "The Reference Library", by Spider Robinson, complains (intriguingly) that new SF books are dull. The letters mainly reflect technical issues, barring one complaining about a lack of stories interesting to women (the editor admits getting few submissions from women). Several of the contributors had written for the magazine for over twenty years. Evidently the text strove to reaffirm the expectations of readers without challenging them -- yet *Analog* boasted that it was the most important magazine in its field!

One might have expected more freedom from novels, which did not have such well-defined clienteles or such dominant editors. Yet even there, conservatism was

manifest. Clarke, Asimov and Heinlein, who dominated the field in the 1940s, made major comebacks, as did Pohl and Bester, familiar since the 1950s. Illustrating this, here are the "Hugo" award winners for the late 1970s and early 1980s, with a crude description of the character of text:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Character</b>
1974	Arthur C Clarke.	<i>Rendezvous with Rama</i>	Hard SF
1975	Ursula K LeGuin.	<i>The Dispossessed.</i>	New Wave
1976	Joe Haldeman.	<i>The Forever War.</i>	Hard SF
1977	Kate Wilhelm.	<i>Where Late The Sweet Birds Sang</i>	Ecological
1978	Frederik Pohl.	<i>Gateway.</i>	Hard SF
1979	Vonda McIntyre.	<i>Dreamsnake.</i>	Feminist
1980	Arthur C Clarke.	<i>The Fountains of Paradise.</i>	Hard SF
1981	Joan Vinge.	<i>The Snow Queen.</i>	Feminist
1982	C J Cherryh.	<i>Downbelow Station.</i>	Hard SF
1983	Isaac Asimov.	<i>Foundation's Edge.</i>	Hard SF
1984	David Brin.	<i>Startide Rising.</i>	Hard SF
1985	William Gibson.	<i>Neuromancer.</i>	Cyberpunk
1986	Orson Scott Card.	<i>Ender's Game.</i>	Hard SF
1987	Orson Scott Card.	<i>Speaker for the Dead.</i>	Hard SF

Here are the "Nebula" winners for the same period:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Character</b>
1973	Arthur C Clarke.	<i>Rendezvous with Rama.</i>	Hard SF
1974	Ursula K LeGuin.	<i>The Dispossessed.</i>	New Wave
1975	Joe Haldeman.	<i>The Forever War.</i>	Hard SF
1976	Frederik Pohl.	<i>Man Plus.</i>	Hard SF.

1977	Frederik Pohl.	<i>Gateway.</i>	Hard SF
1978	Vonda McIntyre.	<i>Dreamsnake.</i>	Feminist
1979	Arthur C Clarke.	<i>The Fountains of Paradise.</i>	Hard SF
1980	Gregory Benford.	<i>Timescape.</i>	Hard SF
1981	Gene Wolfe.	<i>The Claw of the Conciliator.</i>	New Wave
1982	Michael Bishop.	<i>No Enemy But Time.</i>	(not read)
1983	David Brin.	<i>Startide Rising.</i>	Hard SF
1984	William Gibson.	<i>Neuromancer.</i>	Cyberpunk
1985	Orson Scott Card.	<i>Ender's Game.</i>	Hard SF
1986	Orson Scott Card.	<i>Speaker for the Dead.</i>	Hard SF
1987	Pat Murphy.	<i>The Falling Woman.</i>	(not read)

These lists are surprisingly similar considering their origins: the Hugo was created in the mid-1950s to measure popularity among science fiction fans, while in the 1960s, in reaction against the Hugo's alleged failure to accommodate aesthetic criteria, the Nebula was created, judged by writers. In each list, four of fourteen texts are by writers prominent in the 1940s and 1950s. Without denying their competence, it is likely that nostalgia and familiarity played a part. "Hard SF" stories seek to recover the naïve technophilia of the 1930s and 1940s; Card's, Brin's, Haldeman's and Cherryh's books all concern galactic war with aliens. Wolfe's novel (the first in a tetralogy) may be deemed New Wave, since he made his name in that genre, but it is essentially fantasy. Gibson's novel is conspicuous in its novelty.

Significantly, there were fewer science fiction magazines in the early 1980s than there had been thirty years earlier. Publishing houses were uniting into larger conglomerates, giving editors less power than they had had in the days of Gollancz SF, which had novelized many serials from American magazines (publishing *Neuromancer* as one of its last acts). Edward Herman and Robert McChesney identify a pattern of homogenization, saying that "when one combines the effects of media

conglomeration, corporate concentration, and hyper-commercialism . . . . [b]ook publishing . . . which for decades tended to have a relatively wide ideological and cultural range of output, has been brought . . . . into the cross-promotional plans of the media giants" (Herman, 1997: 63). This was true even with science fiction; admittedly the relatively new *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (edited by Gardner Dozois, once part of the American New Wave) published cyberpunk; however, Dozois' annual *The Year's Best Science Fiction* frequently mourns the death or decline of a magazine. Structurally, early-1980s science fiction publishing seemed stony ground for a potentially subversive form like cyberpunk.

Admittedly, there was more enthusiasm for science fiction films in the late 1970s and early 1980s than there had been since the 1950s. George Lucas' 1976-80 *Star Wars* trilogy, Stephen Spielberg's 1978 *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and 1981 *E.T.*, as well as a 1979 remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1978-1984 postapocalyptic *Mad Max* movies, and Ridley Scott's 1981 *Alien* were all blockbusters. However, *Star Wars* was a fairy-tale couched in 1940s science fiction iconography. Spielberg's movies drew on the flying-saucer subculture, an aspect of U.S. conspiracy theory scorned by most science fiction writers. *Mad Max* and its offshoots are essentially slasher films. Even *Alien*, with its wry anti-technocratic approach, knowingly subverting the visions of films like *2001*, was a "Thing" movie, a genre characteristic of 1950s B-pictures. These films thus represented science fiction, broadly, as thrill-seeking, machine-oriented and anti-intellectual. Scott's 1983 *Blade Runner* seems to have affected cyberpunk -- it was based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K Dick, one of cyberpunk's mentors -- and revealed an audience for "intellectual" science fiction films, but it did not spawn imitations. Arguably, many of these films were vehicles for special effects rather than ideas.

While this context suggests a need for change, it is not clear that cyberpunk saw itself as a New Wave-style challenge to established science fiction:

Their precursors are legion. Individual cyberpunk writers differ in their literary debts; but some older writers, ancestral cyberpunks perhaps, show a clear and striking influence.

From the New Wave: the streetwise edginess of Harlan Ellison. The visionary shimmer of Samuel Delaney. The free-wheeling zaniness of Norman Spinrad and the rock esthetic of Michael Moorcock; the intellectual daring of Brian Aldiss; and, always, J.G. Ballard.

From the harder tradition: the cosmic outlook of Olaf Stapledon; the science/politics of H.G. Wells; the steely extrapolation of Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, and Robert Heinlein.

(Sterling, 1986: x)

Sterling added, however, that:

Cyberpunk has risen from within the SF genre; it is not an invasion but a modern reform. Because of this, its effect within the genre has been rapid and powerful.

....

Science fiction today is in a rare state of ferment. The rest of the decade may well see a general plague of movements, led by an increasingly volatile and numerous Eighties generation.

(Sterling: xv)

Amid this possibly undeserved image of revolution and rebelliousness, Sterling's all-inclusive roll-call ignores the differences between the writers he cites -- significantly, all respected by the science fiction writing establishment. His insistence that cyberpunk was a solid part of the science fiction tradition assumes that this tradition is unshakable. Hence his hopes for the impact of cyberpunk seem

paradoxical; the "modern reform" suggests that cyberpunk would only have to make minor changes to transform science fiction, despite his images of "ferment" and "plague".

Cyberpunk did not need to subvert science fiction's fundamental structures. It depicted plausible things in narratively conventional ways, and its technology was a familiar part of the scientific mainstream (unlike the 1960s "New Wave"). It was as if the era of 1940s science fiction, which used space travel (then viewed as absurd by most serious commentators) to symbolise liberation, had occurred when space travel was already supported by the establishment -- like the conservative *Analog* in the 1960s.

Even so, many in science fiction opposed cyberpunk; *Analog* did not publish it and rarely reviewed it; in 1986 Tom Easton, *Analog's* reviewer, justified mentioning Walter Jon Williams' *Hardwired* (1985) by saying that Williams offered "something more than adventures in computerland" (Easton, 1986: 181). In 1990 Jerry Pournelle and S. M. Stirling wrote, obviously referring to Gibson's artificial intelligence, that "[c]onsciousness-level computers were a dead-end technology, doomed to catatonic madness" (Pournelle, 1991: 45). Orson Scott Card wrote of his own cyberpunk effort "Dogwalker" (1989) that "I had long had an ambivalent feeling toward cyberpunk . . . . [a]n artist who is alienated from his society *has* no reason to live . . . .the worst thing about cyberpunk was the shallowness of those who imitated it" (Card, 1992: 540-1). While the latter point may be valid, the former point repudiates a huge field of art. Evidently in Card's terms art must be affirmative (somewhat like socialist realism) -- which in science fiction terms would mean supporting science.

However, cyberpunk was not solely a creation of science fiction. Like the "New Wave" it drew on other cultural iconography, and this, with its relevance to contemporary technology and politics, might have given it a broader base. It thus seems, despite all queries, valuable to examine the genre in this light -- focussing especially on its best-known and most successful exponent.

### **Cyber Technology and Punk Culture.**

How could the two be combined? Indeed, what was to be gained by moving the icon of the computer, a familiar prop in science fiction since the 1950s, to the centre stage previously occupied by more spectacular-seeming machines?

One obvious point is that the U.S. space programme, glorified through five decades of science fiction, lost momentum with the end of the Apollo programme in the mid-1970s and seemed to have betrayed the expectations vested in it. Despite the Space Shuttle project beginning (belatedly) in 1981, public interest in space weakened. The idealists of *Analog* hoped that America might grow great through expansion into space, but as Jameson pointed out, theirs was a contradictory power-fantasy. The dynamism of space opera attempted to generate a "sense of adventure which readers derive from the contemplation of one of the most physically restrictive situations in which human beings can be thrust" (a point also made by Lewis Mumford, that space flight, far from liberating, was confining at least for the astronaut). Jameson suggested that this might be because "[t]he intergalactic spaceship is . . . an avatar of Conrad's merchant vessels, projected into a world that has long since been reorganized into a capitalist world system within empty places" (Jameson, 1994a: 218). The space programme, however, proved to have little to do with trade or capitalism (except in funding aerospace companies). It was natural that science fiction writers might look elsewhere for inspiration.

Cyberpunk arose at the same time as the rise of the personal computer (Gibson's "cyberspace decks", absent from his earliest SF story, "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" [1977], are surely based on PCs). Minicomputers appeared in the early 1970s; initially these were only accessible to those who could assemble them, but by the early 1980s cheap microcomputers were usable by anyone who understood a programming language; as the processing power and storage capacity of computers grew, "user-friendly" software made computers usable by almost all. It seemed that robots and

even intelligent machines might be possible in the near future; cybernetics promised a new golden age.

Meanwhile another kind of information technology was evolving: research in DNA polymerization, and new methods of introducing foreign DNA into cells, suggested that biotechnology could create life-forms never seen in nature. This gained much publicity from opponents of genetic engineering like Jeremy Rifkin, whose book *Algeny* (1982) argued for the abolition of genetic research because its ecological effects were unpredictable. (Stephen Jay Gould, not normally deemed a conservative scientist, denounced Rifkin for "arguing that scientific paradigms are simple expressions of socioeconomic bias" [Gould, 1990: 238]). Biotechnology was, like cybernetics, about control over information and the impact this had on reality; both were potential sources of political power.

However, while the "hard" sciences were important to cyberpunk, technological knowledge was not essential. (When he wrote *Neuromancer*, William Gibson had never owned a computer.) Nevertheless, the new technological power seemed to be concrete rather than symbolic. (Space travel might symbolise imperial expansion, but is not identical to it, whereas artificial intelligences might give genuine power to whoever controlled them). Gibson, Walter Jon Williams and Marc Laidlaw seem to have expected the upper class to use information technologies against the lower class, though they acknowledge that high technology can be turned against the power-structure -- Williams, in his short story "Flatline" (1988), envisages unfocused rebellion against artificial intelligence, and much the same is true of Laidlaw's *Dad's Nuke* (1985) -- the title being an ironic ultimate consumer item -- the household nuclear power station. Kelly and Kessel, in *Freedom Beach*, expect cybernetic technology to rescue an impersonalised world. Rudy Rucker, in *Software* (1984) and *Wetware* (1988), appears optimistic about the decentralising potential of information technology; robots in *Software*, and artificial intelligences in *Wetware*, can be freed because the evolution of society and technology is chaotic and uncontrollable.

Rucker's artificial intelligences resemble an unfairly suppressed group of superior humans deserving freedom. This suggests one possible political content to cyberpunk.

Before 1987 Sterling followed a similar pattern. His texts were set far in the future, or in fantasy worlds, avoiding substantial socio-economic comparison with the present, though as Veronica Hollinger notes, Sterling's future is "different from many SF futures in that what it extrapolates from the present is the . . . idea that human beings will be different in the future" (Hollinger, 1994: 208). Sterling did not represent artificial intelligences, preferring instead mechanically or biologically altered humans. The "Shapers" and "Mechs" of the *Schismatrix* texts (1982-5) operate within authoritarian, capitalistic hierarchies, though Sterling, like Rucker, feels that hierarchies generate confining world-views, and may be self-defeating; the end of *Schismatrix* depicts an escape from these.) Sterling particularly condemns those remaining on Earth, who failed to exploit their potential, doubtless symbolising people who ignore the technologies which he praises in the introduction to *Mirrorshades*.

In *The Artificial Kid* (1980) and *Schismatrix* (1985), he suggests that humanity will develop according to the idea of the physicist Ilya Prigogine, that systems which receive constant energy input (like the Earth) become increasingly complex. Such ideas were prominent in the field of chaos theory, a notion much admired by intellectuals in the 1980s. This makes humanity's future scientifically preordained, rather than culturally determined, making science superior to art or politics. Sterling's *Schismatrix* aliens, the Investors, are interstellar capitalists. Such capitalist scientism recalls the ideology of Robert A Heinlein, who strongly influenced Sterling. Csicsery-Ronay complains, apropos Bruce Sterling's inflated language, that "the ambivalent solutions of cyberpunk . . . ignore the question of whether some political controls over technology are desirable, if not exactly possible" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1994: 193).

These technical underpinnings of cyberpunk did not threaten conventional science fiction. In many ways it appealed to the authoritarian streak prevalent in science

fiction's power-fantasies. Meanwhile, however, the term "punk" reflects a very different popular culture which developed in the 1970s.

Punk as a musical subculture formally appeared in about 1976-7, crossing the Atlantic in the latter year, contemporary with Gibson's first published writing. Csicsery-Ronay describes punk as "[a] self-stupefying and self-mutilating refusal to dignify or trust anything that has brought about the present world, even the human body, all for the promise of an authenticity so undefinable it can't ever be known" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1994: 186). This seems too abstract to explain why and when it happened.

Punk seems to have begun in Britain, arguably a response to political conditions in the latter 1970s. The ruling Labour Party, as Tony Benn's 1977-80 Cabinet diaries, *Conflicts of Interest* (1990) suggest, constantly avoided radical changes despite continual crises aggravated by such timidity. Britain had fallen under IMF economic control; unemployment was high (almost a million), betraying the promises of the mid-1970s. Meanwhile, revolution in the Portuguese colonies, Zimbabwe and Central America, and the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, had given the Left distant victories in contrast to its domestic failure. An influx of blacks into Britain transformed popular culture; meanwhile, the rise of a small but well-publicised fascist movement, the National Front, added to the Left's easily-assimilated good/bad dichotomy (Rastas versus National Front, Third World versus America). These new factors seemed to offer alternatives to the sterility of conventional politics. It is easy to see how these issues should have promoted an incoherent working-class rebellion. It is also easy to see why the British middle-class left and liberals might have endorsed this (especially when it largely disregarded class politics) and the raucous, confrontational songs it generated:

God save the Queen,  
And the fascist regime,  
They made you a moron,

A potential H-bomb . . .

(The Sex Pistols, "God Save The Queen", 1977)

Black folk got a lot of problems,  
 But they don't mind throwing a brick,  
 White people go to school,  
 Where they teach you to be thick . . .

(The Clash, "White Riot", 1977)

When all the gay geezers got put inside,  
 And coloured kids were getting crucified,  
 A few of us fought and a few of us died,  
 In the winter of '79 . . .

(Tom Robinson Band, "Winter of '79", 1978)

These images of rebellion are strikingly disparate. The Sex Pistols were (if anything) nihilists, the Clash were leftists, and Tom Robinson was a gay-rights activist. British punk took its iconography from the right-wing "Skinhead" movement; some of the post-punk "Oi!" bands were reputedly racist, and at least one, Skrewdriver, supported the neo-fascist "Blood and Honour" movement. Resistance to authority seemed the common factor; the Conservative Party's 1979 triumph was widely claimed to be (ironically) an anti-establishment victory. This fusion of disparate movements was doomed to disintegrate, and the Left was not able to make gains through it. Another defeat for the Labour Party in 1983 (astonishing Salman Rushdie) disillusioned the Left, while when a cause for resistance appeared, the 1984 Miners' Strike, the British Left responded weakly and the miners lost. The culture of rebellion which created punk seemed to have dissipated -- if it was ever real and not, as the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren claimed, a commercial invention.

In the United States, conditions evolved slightly differently. In the early 1970s the resignation of President Nixon and the defeat for American power in South Vietnam were accommodated by the established Democratic Party rather than generating radicalism. The U.S. public (or at least the media addressing it) was more shocked than the UK's by Third World crises, especially when in 1978 their strongest Third World ally, the Shah of Iran, was overthrown. U.S. conservative propaganda claimed that the United States had become (or was becoming) weak, a claim reinforced when the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979. (This was deemed a gain for Soviet imperialism, though it was intended to keep Islamic fundamentalism out of Soviet Central Asia.) Thus by 1980, claims Fred Halliday, the U.S. Republican Party Manifesto could call for U.S. superiority to be "restored" (implying that it had been lost). This sense of impotence was identified with nationalist politics, in contrast to the situation in Britain (although the British Tories made comparable appeals, these were never as ideologically dominant as the U.S. Republican appeals).

American punk similarly lacked the political rebelliousness of English (apart from the Dead Kennedys). The Ramones borrowed more from the Beach Boys than from the Sex Pistols. Patti Smith cultivated the image of a poet -- inconceivable in British punk, and perhaps only possible because of the New York links between rock and art created via Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground. The U.S. punk movement depended heavily on the *image* of the British movement -- which may also be true of cyberpunk. (Gibson is plainly influenced by the Velvet Underground's leader, Lou Reed, who also influenced the punk movement).

Radicalism and rebelliousness were repudiated when in 1981 Carter was replaced as President by Reagan, who as governor of California had been one of the villains of the American Left in the 1960s and 1970s. (He features in a satirical song at Woodstock, and as a disastrous President of the United States in John Sladek's New Wave science fiction novel, *The Muller-Fokker Effect* [1970].) However, his Democratic opponents (Carter in 1980, and Mondale in 1984) adopted similar political positions to Reagan's.

For liberals within the U.S. official political structure (essentially the Democratic Party), Reagan's popularity was inexplicable, leaving them feeling isolated from society, and lacking any political focus. Two apparent responses to this are Brett Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* (1984) where the early-1980s appear as a time of powerless anomie, and Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* (1990) which focuses on the oppression of surviving dissident intellectuals -- appropriating elements of punk. The "punk" element of the cyberpunk may have been style rather than substance -- yet the writers accepted the name, associating it with a resistance to oppression which almost certainly rejected the anti-intellectual, socially conservative Reaganism. Politically impotent, liberals might have hoped to be proved right by catastrophe.

Thus it seems likely that the cyberpunk movement reflected an inclination towards political nihilism in American *liberalism*. This differs from the actual punk movement; it is a self-conscious and pessimistic position. This kind of pessimistic, critical opposition is not common in popular fiction, although it exists to an extent in aspects of detective fiction -- such as the political context of the tough, illusion-free Ned Beaumont, the anti-hero of Dashiell Hammett's *The Glass Key* (1932), where there is no happy ending:

"You despise me," she said in a low hard voice. "You think I'm a whore."

"I don't despise you," he said irritably, not turning to face her. "Whatever you've done you've paid for and been paid for and that goes for all of us."

(Hammett, 1980: 216)

Beaumont, the most positive character in the book, is an alcoholic gambler and a fixer for a political boss; in this and other Hammett novels, the corruption of the world appears inescapable. Hammett's near-contemporary and admirer, Raymond Chandler, arguably prefers to romanticise the private detective; a decent (if

vulnerable) hero, ostensibly cynical, but striving to solve the problems of the world by displaying its wrongs: "down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid . . . a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man" (Chandler, 1984: 191). Nevertheless Chandler acknowledges the sinfulness of the real world.

To Jameson, "Chandler's picture of America . . . is the converse . . . of an abstract intellectual illusion . . . [t]he federal system and the archaic federal Constitution developed in Americans . . . a double system of political thoughts which never intersect . . . [o]n the one hand, a glamorous national politics . . . [o]n the other hand, local politics, with its odium, its ever-present corruption" (Jameson, 1983: 129-30). Hence, he argues, "the American is able to observe local injustice . . . with a practiced eye, while he continues to entertain boundless optimism as to the greatness of the country" (Jameson, 1983: 130). Americans condemn their environment but retain illusions about political values, nostalgic for an assumed golden age when gangsterism did not exist -- appropriate for liberal sentiments in the 1980s.

There appear to be elements of detective fiction in cyberpunk, as noted by those who claim cyberpunk as postmodern. Brian McHale argues that "postmodernism is characterized by the collapse of hierarchical distinctions between high and low art" (McHale, 1994: 309). However, such a collapse may be more specifically significant; cyberpunk may appropriate the emotional content of popular-cultural elements, such as popular music, without necessarily accepting their totality. Certainly it uses images of the drug culture, an oppositional force (representing withdrawal from common reality, and flight into subculture) which can be used to critique current society (as does William Burroughs, of whom Kadrey and McCaffery declare, perhaps exaggeratedly, that "without *Naked Lunch* there would probably be no cyberpunk" (Kadrey and McCaffery, 1994: 18).

Images of drug use are widespread in 1980s cyberpunk. The title of Rudy Rucker's second science fiction novel *White Light* (1980) is a scientific metaphor about the unification of colours, but "white light" is also amphetamine, as referred to the

eponymous Velvet Underground song. This links the rock scene and the drug scene, pleasing the knowing reader, identifying passwords which some might not recognise. (Gibson mentions "White. Light." in *Count Zero* [1986], probably referring to music, drugs *and* Rucker.) Rucker, a mathematics professor, endorses hard drugs in his texts -- alcohol or marijuana are considered unfashionable in *Wetware*. (He mentions his own fondness for alcohol in *The Fourth Dimension* [1985].)

In Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the drug *wiz* fulfills much the same function as the heroin which the Velvet Underground hymned. In *Count Zero* Gibson quotes their "Waiting for my man", the character Lucas saying "'First thing that you learn,' he said, with the air of a man reciting a proverb, 'is that you always gotta wait'" (Gibson, 1990a: 165) -- a phrase which the band took from William Burroughs. The punk movement preferred drugs like heroin, which numb perception, to hallucinogenic drugs which intensify perception, since for punks, life was deemed painful.

All this represents the cultural iconography of oppression, just as computers represented the cultural iconography of power. These are, however, superficial images which could be used for various purposes. The political -- and even philosophical -- context was what determined the real nature of cyberpunk.

### **Postmodernism, Late Capitalist Politics and Cyberpunk.**

While science fiction is about power (and hence politics) cyberpunk writers had differing approaches to this. Some said that information technology gave powerful people more power, others that such power is inevitably subverted by chaotic forces, or that such power must eventually be made irrelevant by nature. Evidently the *distribution* of power in contemporary society was important for the cyberpunks (showing why their central characters were often powerless).

Gibson, for instance, appears fascinated by the powers of technology -- especially artificial intelligence -- to resolve social change. This would make technology the central human issue in social development. In much cyberpunk, machines are

indistinguishable from people, and this arguably risks dehumanizing the latter rather than humanizing the former. (Postmodernist critics saw this as a positive aspect of cyberpunk, since it diminished the role of human identity.)

Gibson, Shiner and Rucker depict large corporations, which have largely replaced governments, dominating the societies they describe. These do not seem to symbolise wish-fulfillment fantasies, because none of them show the corporations from within, or use them to offer readers power-fantasies. In earlier science fiction, corporate rule was projected onto a symbolic space frontier (various pre-1960 stories endorsed the idea that corporations might dominate outer space; pre-1960 dystopian images tended to condemn governments rather than capitalists.) Gibson seems to express nostalgia for the welfare state, perhaps blaming corporations for destroying this in their own interests.

Gibson sees corporations as promoting organisation and planning, which he opposes to the random individualism of his heroes and heroines. Such corporations must concentrate central power because they cannot tolerate uncertainty. Gibson thus represents planning as opposed to individualism and thus evil, where Sterling, in *Schismatrix* and the later *Islands in the Net* (1988) seems to see planning as desirable. The contradiction between the balance of forces -- corporations versus individuals -- in Gibson's texts is sharpened by the fact that the strong are planners and the weak are unplanned. Rucker sees no problem in any of this -- he, and his successful people and corporations, all oppose planning: "ISDN has no policies; ISDN surfs chaos" (Rucker, 1989: 181).

All these texts suggest a vaguely liberal approach to power, a pursuit of balance between centralisation and decentralisation, between freedom and anarchy. This surely reflects the politics of the U.S. in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Eric Hobsbawm terms the period preceding this (roughly 1945-1975, when Gibson's politics would have been formed) the "Golden Age" which "rested on an effective policy consensus between Right and Left . . . a deal acceptable to all sides. Employers . . . welcomed the predictability which made forward planning easier. Labour got regularly rising

wages and fringe benefits . . . . Government got political stability" (Hobsbawm, 1995: 282). This had cultural implications; "personal liberation and social liberation thus went hand in hand . . . . The newly extended field of publicly acceptable behaviour . . . . rejected the long-established . . . ordering of human relations in society . . . . this rejection was . . . in the name of the unlimited autonomy of individual desire" (Hobsbawm, 1995: 333-4). This established what in the United States came to be called "liberalism", a system which strove to maintain social consensus while promoting individual freedom. However, this was incompatible with a capitalist system which required different treatments for different classes (destroying the consensus in time of economic slump) and a disciplined workforce and the surveillance which went with it (limiting personal freedom); so, Hobsbawm suggests, it could not last.

However, liberal ideology did not change as rapidly as economic conditions changed. As a result there was considerable intellectual conflict between liberals and conservatives, particularly with regard to the 1960s, a time of great cultural flexibility. Many conservatives later argued that during Hobsbawm's Golden Age "the inchoate attack against authority . . . had weakened our culture's immune system . . . origins of metaphorical epidemics of crime and drugs could be traced to the Sixties, as could literal ones such as AIDS" (Collier and Horowitz, 1990: 16). (Apparently these commentators believe that drugs and crime did not exist before 1960, whereas the HI virus appeared ten or fifteen years before it actually existed!) In 1975, a report for the Trilateral Commission, *The Crisis of Democracy*, argued that democracy had weakened governability in the U.S. by distributing power excessively. Nobel Prize-winning author Saul Bellow, in 1987, complained that "[t]he heat of the dispute between Left and Right has grown so fierce in the last decade that the habits of civilized discourse have suffered a scorching" (Bellow, 1988: 18). This last point is especially peculiar because the Left barely existed in the U.S. by 1987; given that Bellow also denounces "the untreated sewage odors of . . . revolutionary rhetoric" (Bellow, 1988: 17); evidently he was actually resurrecting the 1960s Left which he

had condemned as having "made shit a sacrament" (Bellow, 1978: 39) in *Mr Sammler's Planet* (1970).

Cyberpunk arose out of this left/liberal intellectual milieu, which was increasingly marginalised in U.S. society. The 1960s are clearly symbolically significant for this grouping; radical liberal Hunter S Thompson declared in 1972 that in the 1960s: "[t]here was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning . . . . over the forces of old and evil . . . . we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave . . . . now, less than five years later . . . with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark -- that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back" (Thompson, 1980: 113). Whatever the truth of this, for the liberal public this image of the country's recent history has seemed valid. Fredric Jameson suggested in 1984 that "[t]he 60s were . . . an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers. With the end of the 60s, with the world economic crisis, all the old infrastructural bills then slowly came due once more; and the 80s will be characterized by an effort, on a world scale, to proletarianize all those unbound social forces that gave the 60s their energy" (Jameson, 1989: 208). It would be logical for those believing this to see the 1970s and 1980s as a time when these optimistic accomplishments were reversed and dismantled -- as many American conservatives, evidently, wished to do. Thus for liberals this period was one of crisis, which a crisis-oriented genre like cyberpunk served.

Liberals perceived a crisis; Chomsky claims that "dominant elites . . . need[ed] to return the general population to passivity and obedience, reversing the threat of democratization posed during the 1960s" (Peck, 1988: 45); Thompson looks back on "the 'Reagan Revolution,' which ushered in eight years of berserk looting of the federal treasury and the economic crippling of the middle class" (Thompson, 1995: 37), representing the 1980s as an irrational betrayal of the 1960s. Chomsky and Jameson pragmatically suggest that the ruling-class in the late 1980s was pursuing its own interest, but for many liberals, such as Thompson, such changes were

incomprehensible, since they could not be accommodated within a liberal paradigm which saw U.S. politics as essentially altruistic.

Many cyberpunk writers seem to accept this U.S. liberal 1980s nightmare -- a world corporate-dominated, undemocratic, and harsh for the weak and poor. However, they postulate powers which can protect the good (if they make an effort) and punish the bad (unless they mend their ways): cybernetics, chaos, or energy-driven evolution. The sins of contemporary power-politics would be redeemed by technology, sidestepping political change. In the real world, high technology normally gave oppressors more power, and even disrupted nature (*vide* the "nuclear winter" notion of the early 1980s, publicised by the science writer Carl Sagan, and the global warming debate). Through the cyberpunk fantasy the disruptive power of science and invention overcame corrupt politics (which reduces science to an image of individually-driven technology, forgetting that politicians tend to control scientific research). Conceivably these technological "solutions" may have symbolised (even if unwittingly) radical political changes which middle-class Western intellectuals rejected in actuality.

Technological change had already happened. During the twentieth century equipment for industrial manufacture became more complex and productive. Machine workers needed skills (so unskilled workers could not be hired to replace them) which made trade unions strong. Rapid economic growth until the early 1970s kept unemployment low. However, from the 1970s factors such as the inflation caused by the Vietnam War and the crisis caused by the 1973 and 1980 oil embargoes slowed economic growth. This began the era which Hobsbawm terms the "Crisis Decades".

The growing use of computer-controlled equipment, and the movement of manufacturing industries toward Third World countries, troubled Western workforces. Many production processes ceased to need skilled workers, requiring only simple assembly techniques (using imported components). This weakened Western trade unions, making it easier to fire workers. Profitability grew; the rich became richer, especially when conservative governments cut their taxes. From the mid-1970s poorer countries, indebted to rich ones, subsidised rich countries through interest on debt.

This need for foreign exchange made these countries flood the market with raw materials, cutting producer prices and further impoverishing themselves.

While the increasing exploitation of the poor worldwide alarmed liberals, there seemed no political answers (except revolution, which liberals deemed unthinkable). It seemed safer to seek solutions outside politics. Alvin Toffler, in *The Third Wave* -- described by Sterling as "a bible to many cyberpunks" (Sterling, 1988: xii) -- felt that technology was making the world more decentralised. Governments and nation-states were growing less important; as he put it, "[a]s the mass society of the industrial era disintegrates under the impact of the Third Wave . . . [c]orporations typically meet this problem by introducing more variety into their product lines . . . [n]ational governments . . . find it difficult to customise their policies" (Toffler, 1981: 327). There would be fewer curbs on rich corporations, since governments would no longer have power to control them; "the rise of the great transnationals has reduced . . . the role of the nation-state at precisely the time when centrifugal pressures from below threaten to part it at the seams" (Toffler, 1981: 332). Toffler, writing from the perspective of the first-world middle class (whence the cyberpunk writers sprang) considered this good. While the power-elite might endorse this, in U.S. terms liberals are a loyal opposition, criticising U.S. policy without opposing its basic intellectual framework; what Said calls "internaliz[ing] imperial rule" (Said, 1995: 305). One might thus expect their criticism of any changes in U.S. society and culture to be muted; their sense of distance from society qualified by a commitment to it.

Social change may have been driven by shifts in the economy. In *Late Capitalism* (1978), the Trotskyite theorist Ernest Mandel argues that the short-term business cycle of capitalism is overridden by multi-decade "long waves" when the rate of profit is high or low, and capitalism booms or slumps. This cycle is driven by factors like the growth of the world market after the 1848 revolutions which freed bourgeois political power, or the expanded capital exports to colonies in the 1890s. The most recent is explained by the political stabilization of the world after 1945 by the USA (which aided investment), a "permanent war economy" (with state support to industry) and

the "Third Technological Revolution" (more labour productivity). This, which Mandel calls "late capitalism", coincides with postmodern art and theory's appearance (hence Fredric Jameson's interest in it), and its climax coincides with the rise of cyberpunk.

Mandel believed that automation would make workers unemployed and thus slow down the economy. Wholly automated production would have to distribute products for free, making capitalism meaningless. Therefore, Mandel argues, "late capitalism" would have to grow increasingly wasteful to avoid this, and based increasingly on falsehood. It would be totalitarian, but also paranoid (profit would be less stable, and expensive fixed plant would constantly need replacement). Moreover, "[t]he logic of late capitalism is . . . to convert idle capital into service capital and simultaneously to replace . . . services with commodities" (Mandel, 1978: 406); that is, into relatively unproductive activities, encouraging anomie. Though much of Mandel's work may be wrong in detail, his overall view is plausible -- helping to explain the failure (as noted by Hobsbawm) of the post-Cold War world to become a capitalist utopia. This suggests the environment in which cyberpunk developed.

Under late capitalism, Mandel insists, the growing power of multinational corporations also empowers the state. Indeed, "[f]ar from representing a 'post-industrial society', late capitalism . . . constitutes *generalized universal industrialization* for the first time in history. Mechanization, standardization, over-specialization . . . which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate into all sectors" (Mandel, 1978: 387). To Mandel, late capitalism reduces all human activities to those of the market, and thus increasingly psychologically oppresses people, especially the working class.

McCaffery appropriates Mandel's ideas, mentioning "what Ernest Mandel . . . has termed the 'Third Stage' in capitalist expansion -- that of 'postindustrial capitalism'" (McCaffery, 1994: 3). (Mandel rejected this idea, yet it is placed in quotes as if Mandel used it.) McCaffery's extract from Jameson's "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capital", in *Storming The Reality Studio* ends before Mandel is mentioned. McCaffery calls Jameson's essay an "eloquent and timely call for new art

forms" (McCaffery, 1994: 16), an example of Jameson's reference to "what Benjamin still called the 'aestheticization' of reality (he thought it meant fascism, but we know it's only fun)" (Jameson, 1996: x). Jameson's Marxist position was that "Mandel's intervention . . . involves the proposition that late . . . capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great nineteenth-century analysis [as Daniel Bell would argue] constitutes, on the contrary, the purest form of capital yet to have emerged" (Jameson, 1996: 36). Clearly McCaffery misrepresents Mandel; intriguingly, though he evidently has no interest in Marxism, McCaffery nevertheless finds Mandel attractive, probably because of the transformations to which Mandel points -- change being attractive to most postmodernists, and also to cyberpunks (who saw high technology as its cause and effect).

Mandel's notion of a new economic structure might well lead to new cultural goals and forms. This helps explain Jameson's view of postmodernism as a sign of a shift in the mode of production rather than in values or morals, the terms in which most postmodern theorists operated (rejecting Jameson's Marxist doctrines). The connection with culture appears because in this mode of production more people do less productive work, growing more alienated, and more images of alienated people appear in culture; Jameson argues that this explains "dirty realism" and what he calls "critical regionalism".

Most relevant to science fiction is that "[b]elief in the omnipotence of technology is the specific form of bourgeois ideology in late capitalism" (Mandel, 1978: 501). Mandel evidently believes that "late capitalism" depends on technical advances. Valorization of technology in fields like the space race, and the technologization of warfare (needed, according to Mandel, to sustain high-technology corporations) would also explain this. Science fiction might draw strength from this "omnipotence of technology" ideology, although this would make the genre almost necessarily support the ruling class's beliefs, however oppositional it appeared to be.

In political terms, valorizing technology suggests that kinds of politics associated with change are replaced by technology, perhaps symbolically, whereas political

change is devalued -- conservatism having become common sense. Jameson argues that "in contemporary ideology . . . anything labeled as public has become . . . tainted . . . anything construed as representing the state . . . is . . . repudiated" (Jameson, 1994a: 62). Under such conditions a science fictional expression of collective power would then become almost unthinkable, in a space where "private police and concealed cameras sanitize the unruliness of the older collective experience . . . . Replication . . . means the depoliticization of the former modern . . . the Utopian becomes unmentionable" (Jameson: 144). Mandel notes that intellectuals within such a system develop "[t]he thesis of . . . the end of all ideologies . . . . [which functions] to convince the victims of alienated labour that it is senseless to rebel" (Mandel, 1978: 502-3). This recalls the academic Daniel Bell, and anticipates Francis Fukuyama and other 1980s conservatives who decried any alternatives to capitalism; to Jameson, "a . . . vision of history is herein perpetuated, in which Utopia (read: communism) is understood as achieving its ultimate identity by the obliteration of difference through sheer force; of, in the memorable words of the *nouveaux philosophes*, in which a direct line runs from Hegel's Absolute Spirit to Stalin's Gulag" (Jameson, 1994: 51).

Evolving cybernetic technologies were expected to have political significance. Bell's *The Coming of Postindustrial Society* (1976) predicted that information produced by the university and the research institute would become more important than manufacturing capacity. (Similar points were made by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* [1983].) Bell had written *The End of Ideology* (1960) twenty years earlier, arguing, according to Chomsky, that "[i]ntellectuals in the West . . . see no further need for a radical transformation of society" (Chomsky, 1988: 72), since "technical experts will be able to come to grips with the few problems that still remain" (Chomsky, 1988: 73). Chomsky suggests that Bell's real message was that "the welfare-state technician . . . . [h]aving found his position of power . . . has no further need for ideologies that look to radical change" (Chomsky, 1988: 73). Christopher Lasch, broadly supporting Chomsky, notes that Bell, while nominally a liberal, was in the 1950s an active member of the CIA-funded propaganda grouping,

the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. This suggests the origins and the potential agenda of cybernetics-centred politics.

McCaffery echoes Bell: "one can say now that the key 'global resource' is the *information itself* rather than the oil, farm goods or other resources usually associated with capitalist market systems" (McCaffery, 1994: 4). On this basis, McCaffery declares cyberpunk a postmodern genre:

. . . in our postfuturist age, the concepts of literary "authenticity" and "originality," and the paradoxes involved in artistic rebellion when "rebellion" is now a commodifiable *image* that is regularly employed as a "counterculture" marketing strategy -- can all be shown to reflect and relate to similar issues being debated by nearly all artists and critics associated with postmodernism.

Indeed, the central topic addressed by this casebook is the way in which cyberpunk and other innovative forms of SF are functioning within the realm of postmodern culture . . . the complex set of radical ruptures . . . within the new social and economic media system (or "postindustrial society") in which we live.

(McCaffery, 1994: 2)

McCaffery significantly sets aesthetic and political concepts in scare-quotes, while the almost meaningless "postfuturist" and the corporate "marketing strategy" and "commodifiable" go unexamined -- suggesting that he desires to associate himself with corporate viewpoints. McCaffery terms postmodernism a response to socio-economic conditions by the intelligentsia, and uses Mandel's work to link postmodernism with capitalist economic structure -- yet ignores Mandel's critique of that structure, instead implying that cyberpunk could *celebrate* mature capitalism. This reminds the reader that, as Jameson says, that "in postmodern culture, 'culture' has become a product in its own right; the market has become a substitute for itself

and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself " (Jameson, 1993: x). The powerful persons in society, evidently, are no longer to be shocked, as by naturalism or modernism, but to be pandered to and imitated.

McCaffery cites several postmodern theorists, although he ignores Foucault, whose argument that power was a constant threat to freedom seems relevant here. Foucault used such examples as the shifting definition of insanity in *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), a history of political responses to insanity, and of the official transformation of penology and social control in *Discipline and Punish* (1978), where he introduced the concept of "panopticism". McCaffery prefers Lyotard's declaration that "[t]he postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation . . . that which searches for new presentations . . . in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable" (Lyotard, 1994: 261). This appears an aesthetic judgement, but in its concern with things which cannot be done (the unrepresentable) it seems not so much a-political as anti-political. In saying "[l]et us wage a war on totality . . . let us activate the differences" (Lyotard, 1994: 262), Lyotard implies that it is essentially this "totality" which must be resisted -- not any more solid oppressive factor in society, politics or economics. This level of abstraction seems congenial to McCaffery -- which may prove relevant to cyberpunk itself.

Some postmodernism applauded cybernetics; Jean Baudrillard, extensively cited in *Storming the Reality Studio* (and in cyberpunk articles in *Science-Fiction Studies*), loves mechanical imagery:

the reign of mechanical man commences . . . . We shouldn't make any mistakes . . . for reasons of 'figurative' resemblance between robot and automaton. The latter is an interrogation upon nature . . . . the automaton has no other destiny than to be ceaselessly compared to living man -- so as to be more natural than him . . . . The robot no longer interrogates appearance; its only truth is in its mechanical efficacy . . . . the system of industrial production in its entirety . . . .

Men themselves only started their own proliferation when they achieved the status of machines, with the industrial revolution . . .

(Baudrillard, 1994: 179-81)

Baudrillard here praises mechanisation for its own sake (recalling the technophilia of much cyberpunk). Baudrillard also often legitimates his discourse through "a profusion of scientific terms, used with total disregard for their meaning" (Sokal and Bricmont, 1998: 143) implying an unreflective scientism. This appears reactionary if one accepts (as cyberpunks usually do) that there are defects in the world-system of which science is a part, especially since Baudrillard (like Lyotard in some ways) sees no possibility of meaningfully challenging the world-system.

Kroker and Cook make similar points: "TV is the real world of postmodern culture which has *entertainment* as its ideology . . . . it functions to transform the old world of society under the sign of . . . that ideology . . . which holds . . . to the historical inevitability and ethical desirability of the technical mastery of social and nonsocial nature . . . . television is . . . most fascinating as the emblematic form of the death of society and the triumph of signifying culture" (Kroker and Cook, 1994: 229-237). This valorizes technology and presents the idea that symbols are more important than what is symbolised -- favouring image over reality. This may represent a fear of reality -- a desire for something less threatening, more controllable, such as images -- again raising questions about what might be expected from cyberpunk, which dealt with information rather than reality, an aspect which Kroker and Cook turned to their own purposes.

Baudrillard, Kroker and Cook, and other postmodern writers, admired the interface between human and machine which is central to cyberpunk. This is hardly postmodern; even H.G. Wells' Martians in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) are depicted as evolutionary advances on humans; "men . . . are just in the beginning of the evolution that the Martians have worked out . . . . mere brains, wearing different bodies according to their needs, just as men wear suits of clothes" (Wells, 1938: 214).

However, postmodernism used the animal-machine interface, or "cyborg", as a trope to challenge assumptions about human identity.

Donna Haraway, occasionally cited in *Storming the Reality Studio*, displayed a feminist optimism concerning this in her "Manifesto for Cyborgs", arguing that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway, 1990: 191), making the concept familiar and potentially controllable. Haraway ignores cyberpunk, perhaps because it was androcentric; she prefers Samuel Delaney's work and that of feminist science fiction writers. Nevertheless, she insists, "[t]he cyborg is a creature in a postgender world" (Haraway, 1990: 192), implying a break with the present. Like cyberpunks, Haraway seems to believe that social problems (here, the subordination of women) can be resolved via technology -- again, technology or scientism becomes the validating force legitimating and potentially obscuring political statements.

Haraway acknowledges contradictions with her resolution: "a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control . . . . a cyborg world might be about . . . realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines" (Haraway, 1990: 196). That "grid of control" might imply the triumph of a mechanical, exploitative world-view over nature, which underlies much of cyberpunk's dystopian imagery. Nevertheless she hopes that "we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos . . . . in these potent and taboo fusions . . . there might indeed be a feminist science" (Haraway, 1990: 215). This resembles Sterling's "posthuman" vision in *Schismatrix* -- although there the vision is not "feminist", but desocialized and mechanized.

In claiming that "[c]yborg imagery can help express two crucial arguments . . . the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake . . . taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics" (Haraway, 1990: 223), Haraway imposes feminism (and postmodernism) upon the concept of cyborgs to make them appear attractive, rejects

"totalizing theory" because she opposes scientific reductionism, yet insists on "refusing an anti-science metaphysics" because she is a scientist. Her attempt to reject theory without abandoning science, and to be a feminist without a grand narrative, seems unattainable. This suggests problems in transforming the abstract theories of the 1970s and 1980s into practice -- particularly applicable to science fiction which, fantasised or not, would have to be based upon some narrative framework.

Assembling these points, it appears that cyberpunk drew on imagery from high technology, endorsing this because cyberpunk arose from a class deriving social power from high technology. However, it also drew on imagery from the rebellious punk movement, apparently because the cyberpunk writers (and presumably the class fraction which they represented) were dissatisfied with social power relations in the 1970s and 1980s. (Much of this dissatisfaction may have been due to the political disempowering of the liberal and technocratic class from which most cyberpunk writers rose and which they tended to address.) Thus the movement could be expected to be self-contradictory in its attitude to technology and power.

This is particularly illustrated by the movement's sympathetic critics. They tend to agree on the empowerment granted by technology. However, they disagree on what is to be done with that empowerment and whether this can lead to liberation. Significantly, those who believe it will lead to liberation tend to be strikingly respectful of science. There is also a strong current of social inevitability here, in this case the notion that technologies drive people without their being able to respond politically -- either because politics is degraded and disregarded, or because politics is distrusted. The extent to which this is incorporated into cyberpunk writing itself seems to have begun well before cyberpunk gained the fashionable status which it won in the 1980s.

#### **D. Gibson's Earliest Cyberpunk.**

Gibson's short stories -- especially his early ones -- appear neglected, although the film *Johnny Mnemonic* was based on a Gibson short story. Only two critics in *Storming the Reality Studio* mention Gibson's short stories -- Darko Suvin, who criticises the trajectory of Gibson's work over the decade after "Fragments of a Hologram Rose", and Veronica Hollinger, who notes how Gibson's "metaphors of the new technology . . . express the indeterminate and fragmented nature of the self" (Hollinger, 1994: 215). Of many articles on Gibson appearing in *Science-Fiction Studies* in the 1990s, only Thomas Bredehoff's "The Gibson Continuum" addressed his short stories.

"Fragments of a Hologram Rose" was published in 1977, by UnEarth Publications - not an established science fiction publisher, hinting that he might have had trouble publishing it. The title suggests the nature-artifice divide, loss and disruption. The technological focus of the story is "Apparent Sensory Perception", people's sense-impressions recorded for playback, what Gibson later called "simstim". The central character, Parker, alone in his apartment, plays an ASP recording made by his departed lover. Incidental details offer ways to interpret Parker's life in the context of a future U.S., justifying the title and the metaphor which it implies (for memory) in technical, social and aesthetic terms.

The story contrasts Parker's experiences ten years before, during the "Coast's attempted secession" (Gibson, 1988: 55), with his current job writing scripts for ASP, which has not brought happiness (his lover having left him the previous day; he recalls the corpse of a woman from which he stole the drugs which enabled him to escape a shantytown). The contrast between poor, disrupted past and comfortable (yet alienated) present encourages a focus on social divides. Parker recalls an early ASP tape of "free-fall gymnastics in a Swiss orbital spa . . . with a sixteen-year-old Vogue model" (Gibson, 1988: 52). The future in space will evidently benefit the rich in faraway countries, while the United States experiences social conflict. The focus here indicates that ASP, a technological means of escape, cannot solve problems by itself.

Though the United States seems to have emerged from chaos, it remains unstable; there is a brownout, and his sleep inducer cuts out. (Sleep inducers are real; a Soviet scientist found that low-frequency electric shocks in the forebrain caused sleep, and some 1960s science fiction -- notably Larry Niven's -- features "Russian sleep". Gibson uses these optimistic technological visions to sustain a pessimistic view of the future which Niven might contest.) Parker, who has not slept naturally in two years (out of guilt?) must return to his battery-operated ASP machine. This mechanical intervention in the psyche as well as in physiology, using machines to defer seemingly-insoluble problems, contradicts the hope which Haraway embodied in the cyborg.

Gibson's future U.S. is in obscurely-motivated turmoil (though the U. S. in 1977 seemed invincible and content), with weak people ruled by the strong. "When Parker was fifteen, his parents indentured him to . . . a Japanese plastics combine" (Gibson, 1988: 54), showing the power of corporations and of foreign culture; he sings the company hymn and lives in company barracks. (In 1977 most Americans did not consider Japan a major threat; the decline of the U.S. electronics and car industries was not yet evident.) This sequence, like that of the "Swiss orbital spa", seems meant to show the weakness of the United States more than to stress the strength of outsiders. (Later in the decade such weakness was given credibility by a major New Right campaign in the U.S..)

Parker breaks his indenture and flees the compound; "[h]e arrived in California three days before the chaotic New Secessionist regime collapsed" (Gibson, 1988: 54). He escapes from starving San Francisco to Texas, which "owed the shantytowns that steamed in the warm Gulf rains to the uneasy neutrality she had maintained in the face of the Coast's attempted secession" (Gibson, 1988: 55). The idea that the U. S. might survive a civil war (though altered) avoids the common apocalyptic vision of destruction or total change. This challenges the essentialist, anti-political vision of the U.S. as an eternal entity (evident in "Hard SF" tales of spreading U.S. values into space over centuries to come). Most science fiction of the 1970s would have presented

disruption in the U.S. as caused by foreign invasion (preferably nuclear attack), eventually producing a stronger, better nation. Gibson's crises come from within the U.S. and contrast with peace elsewhere; they reflect fear of fractures in society (which a liberal would recognise) but reluctance to depict these as readily-soluble problems (which a liberal would probably seek to do). Hence the text appears politically sophisticated.

While not presented as triumphant, Parker endures -- though his mental health suffers. A link is made between his newly-departed lover, Parker's psychic state and the state of the U.S. itself, open to interpretation in a way that science fiction seldom allowed:

She had helped him get his papers, found him his first job in ASP. Was that their history? No, history was the black face of the delta-inducer, the empty closet, and the unmade bed. History was his loathing for the perfect body he woke in if the juice dropped.

(Gibson, 1988: 57-8)

As Jameson remarks, "[h]istory is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets . . . limits to individual as well as collective praxis" (Jameson, 1994: 102). Gibson's history appears personal and collective -- represented by machines which cannot solve Parker's problems, yet which he cannot do without. Both the human and biological environment have been damaged by technology (and greed, presumably), as implied by the vignette of Parker's departing lover:

What you said -- what she said -- watching her pack -- dialing the cab. However you shuffle them they form the same printed circuit, hieroglyphs converging on a central component: you, standing in the rain, screaming at the cabby.

The rain was sour and acid, nearly the color of piss. The cabby called you an asshole; you still had to pay twice the fare. She had three pieces of luggage. In his respirator and goggles, the man looked like an ant. He pedaled away in the rain.

(Gibson, 1988: 52)

The pedal-cab hints at loss of fossil fuels, while environmental destruction is implied by the acid rain, a major U.S. ecological concern in the late 1970s. Ecological interests were commonly used in 1970s science fiction to warn people to live better lives; Gibson here implies that this change will not happen. Through the image of a printed circuit representing connections in human life, Gibson uses information technology to symbolise human predicaments. The printed circuit converges upon a point instead of spreading out; it is limiting rather than liberating, like Parker's experience of technology. A man reduced to an insect by his protection against pollution also suggests oppressive technology.

Parker has done something to make his lover leave, but either does not know what, or will not admit it. Perhaps he is obtuse because of past sufferings, as his sleepless nights suggest. Perhaps this ignorance or repression may reflect not what Parker has failed to do, but what humanity has failed to do by creating a future of pollution and conflict. The lover's departure may be an escape, not just from a relationship, but from humanity's disconnection from society and environment, a disconnection obvious in Parker. Parker fled until he could go no further, and now his lover has fled, too.

Gibson injects passages of academic language into the text, perhaps to make the reader theorize abstractly from the events -- Gibson does not appeal to the power-fantasy of Parker's success amid civil war, as conventional science fiction might. In a text only eight pages long, this substantial passage of academic discourse suggests a comment on the meaning of the text:

If the chaos of the nineties reflects a radical shift in the paradigms of visual literacy, the final shift away from the Lascaux/Gutenberg tradition of a pre-holographic society, what should we expect from this newer technology, with its promise of discrete encoding and subsequent reconstruction of the full range of sensory perception? --  
Rosebuck and Pierhal, *Recent American History: A Systems View*.

(Gibson, 1988: 56-7)

This links the violence which Parker experienced to a shift in literacy, as if a technology-driven change in perception transcends human problems or ideologies. This may be intended as authorial narration (showing agreement with the technicians mentioned above), or a sign of how ill-informed theorists often are. Gibson certainly seems to challenge optimism; the answer to the extract's question seems to be that we should expect anomie and loneliness. Parker does not solve his problems through ASP, and evidently academics like "Rosebuck and Pierhal" are searching in the wrong places.

The origin of the title appears when Parker discards his lover's presence in his home: "a broken leather sandal strap, an ASP cassette, and a postcard" (Gibson, 1988: 53); the latter, a hologram of a rose. White light holograms were rare in the 1970s, so this reference is more futuristic than it seems. Deciding to play the cassette, he feeds the rest into the disposal unit: "he lowers the hologram towards the hidden rotating jaws. The unit emits a thin scream as steel teeth slash laminated plastic and the rose is shredded into a thousand fragments" (Gibson, 1988: 53). This suggests the disintegration of Parker, his relationship, and perhaps (given the ambiguous word "history"), his time and society.

A hologram has this quality: Recovered and illuminated, each fragment will reveal the whole image of the rose. Falling towards

delta, he sees himself the rose, each of his scattered fragments revealing a whole he'll never know . . .

....

Thinking: We're each other's fragments, and was it always this way?

....

She had helped him get his papers, found him his first job in ASP. Was that their history? No, history was the black face of the delta-inducer, the empty closet, and the unmade bed.

....

But each fragment reveals the rose from a different angle, he remembered, but delta swept over him before he could ask himself what that might mean.

(Gibson, 1988: 57-8)

Parker's fragmentation satisfies Hollinger's postmodern criteria for the decentered self. Yet Parker's state hurts him, and surely reflects a damaged world, also symbolised by the destroyed hologram. The rose is natural; the hologram an image of something which no longer exists -- which only resembles something real. Humanity is embedded in technology as the rose is in the hologram, but not securely. ASP is an illusion, though reality exists; on Parker's ASP track is "a slight editing slip at the start of the elaborate breathing routine" (Gibson, 1988: 51). ASP's limits suggest how technology separates one from actual human experience:

Fast-forward through the humming no-time of wiped tape -- into her body. European sunlight. Streets of a strange city.

....

Athens. Greek-letter signs and the smell of dust . . .

-- *and the smell of dust.*

(Gibson, 1988: 57)

He cannot get rid of her, any more than he can truly destroy a hologram; perhaps she represents the natural context which humanity has lost, and technology cannot recover. These images of loss and discontinuity, and the fragmented nature of the story, seem to illustrate humanity's failure to adapt to its world. "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" evidently uses many of the tropes which cyberpunk later employed. The near future appears a dangerous place where technology makes life unpredictable -- without improving the human condition. The central character is alone even in his dreams, which prefigures Gibson's cyberpunk heroes and relates to punk's images of isolated rebellion. Parker has been a rebel (images of social disruption are given aesthetic beauty; the explosion of a tank is described as "a white sheet of heat lightning" (Gibson, 1988: 55). His current secure life (which may have caused the collapse of his relationship) may be a failure compared with his earlier life of struggle, a shift which possibly accounts for Parker's apathetic loss of emotional engagement.

After this impressive start, Gibson wrote little for the next four years. His next published story, "The Gernsback Continuum" (1981), was whimsical, with art deco fantasies of the 1930s coming true as hallucinations, gently parodying earlier science fiction (another cyberpunk concern). However, it appeared that there was some new science fiction pattern underlying both texts. Sterling's introduction to *Mirrorshades* cited Gibson as providing "a clarion call for a new SF esthetic of the Eighties" (Sterling, 1988: 1), and included "The Gernsback Continuum" as well as a story by Gibson and Sterling in collaboration ("Mozart in Mirrorshades").

However, beyond these short stories, Gibson developed the cyberspace trilogy: *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) which came to define the genre as no other texts did. These texts build on "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" in their central signifiers of humanity versus nature and its own creations, but the secondary world which they represent is more complexly represented and they use artificial intelligence to embody alternatives to that world. In

this imaginary technology, Gibson apparently found a symbol of great potential. However, since his use of this symbol shifts significantly over time, the cyberspace trilogy must be examined critically.

## Chapter 1. *Neuromancer*: The Maturing of Gibson's Cyberpunk.

### *Neuromancer's* Shape and Form.

*Neuromancer*, at 317 pages, is long for a science fiction novel of the early 1980s. Before the 1970s, most science fiction novels had been first published in three-part magazine serials, kept under 250 pages to suit the space available. Eventually science fiction novels grew enormous, forming portions of endless sequences of texts, following the pattern established by Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1964). It seems likely, however, that *Neuromancer* (though it became part of a sequence) was conceived as a unit.

The text is structurally simple; early in the twenty-first century, characters go to a strange place to free a strange person from incomprehensible bondage to unknown powerful people, because they are forced to do so and expect to be paid. The narrative explores several places -- Tokyo, the "Sprawl" (the Boston-Atlanta megalopolis), a more vaguely-realised Istanbul, and two space stations, one religious, one commercial. This seemingly offers a travelogue and social exploration of the period; and in their search for assistance in their quest the central characters often enter social circles previously barred to (or ignored by) them.

The form of the narrative, like most science fiction stories, is that of a puzzle. The mysteries must be unravelled, and the meaning of liberating the mysterious prisoner (which proves to be an artificial intelligence) must be understood, perhaps justifying the violent and bizarre acts which fill the text. However, the meaning of the narrative surely lies in Gibson's image of the future world, necessarily reflecting the present world.

The puzzle offers a link with detective fiction -- appropriately, since one feature of the book is conflict between law and justice. Detective fiction is thus not simply a trope borrowed for effect, but provides a version of morality, much as in Asimov's *The Naked Sun* (1957). This directs the reader's attention to the case's socio-political

significance in Gibson's imagined future (and hence his real present). Gibson clearly knows this, for his central characters highlight the evils of the social system; their lifestyle reflects resistance to unreasoning authority -- again, like that of the American detective fiction of Hammett and Chandler.

In much science fiction, political good and bad are crudely symbolised; questionable social power is displaced by the central character's personal power which is depicted as good, as opposed to the bad forces seeking to control that central character (usually male). The liberation of the central character parallels the liberation of the forces or values which the author promotes. Such a pursuit of personal power may actually refer to the power of a class or national entity (usually the upper classes and/or the United States). In *Neuromancer*, this does not seem the case. Society is imperfect -- the central characters revolt against it -- yet *Neuromancer* does not seem to offer a conventional political or ideological solution to social problems (such as representative democracy or the free market). On the surface at least, class and national elements are largely ignored, while the central characters are not so successful as to make the text a simple power-fantasy.

Conceivably Gibson assumes that his audience already accepts a conventional ideology, so that its depiction is unnecessary. The most likely candidate, given Gibson's personal circumstances, would be some form of liberalism -- especially since the core of the text seems to concern liberation, which US liberals usually espouse. US liberalism is an extremely broad concept, and the vague but grandiose liberation of *Neuromancer* might also be read as a confusedly left-wing response to a reactionary, anti-labour epoch.

The central characters suffer, face danger, and travel huge distances in order to achieve their goal. Gibson seems to use this to make the work seem more significant than it would otherwise appear. Gibson does not otherwise structure his text around a coherent problem, the solution of which would have obvious resonances in the contemporary world. The "happy ending" of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), for instance, not only shows the evil Harkonnens defeated, and the noble Fremen rescued.

It also responds to colonial struggles occurring at Herbert's time, arguably resolving the Middle East crisis (Herbert's "spice" representing oil). Gibson chooses not to do this; perhaps he is not sure of his conclusions, perhaps his audience might not endorse his conclusions if they were explicit.

Gibson's future is an approximate extrapolation from Gibson's contemporary world -- really profound change, if it is to come, lies in the presumed future of Gibson's novel. Evidently the work is meant to be compared with the present, although it is not a utopia in the sense of something to be worked towards (like Bellamy's *Looking Backward* [1888]) or a dystopia to be fled from (like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [1948]). It is, however, politically speculative; much of the detail offers the reader information about wider society, through which the forces which generate that society may be imagined -- from the terrifying "Turing Police" to the pervasive pollution. Little explicit authorial comment offers guidance. Perhaps such interpretative modes are assumed to be already known to the reader -- suggesting an implied reader following a set of beliefs known to Gibson.

The social world in which the central characters operate is lawless. Police forces exist, along with the concept of criminality, but the characters are concerned largely with power and money. Under these conditions, whether they are powerful or weak (most central characters have experienced both conditions) they appear deeply unhappy. Evidently part of the text is concerned to critique such a lawless world -- but not from the assumption that laws are automatically good.

In the early 1980s the idea of a world without rules might have seemed tempting. The Cold War had appeared to freeze the world into an unstable and dangerous equilibrium -- *Neuromancer* features a Soviet Union which survives World War III. Meanwhile the social-democratic contract which had endured since the 1940s was unravelling under conservative and plutocratic attack. American society seemed to be changing in a direction unappealing to liberal intellectuals (some of the presumed effects of this appear in *Neuromancer*). Liberals disliked this, yet feared that the

stability which they enjoyed might be worse than a radical-conservative instability -- the destruction of liberal rules -- which seemed impending.

Given this context, it seems plausible that one purpose of this text is to present a political argument. It is true that much of the text embodies elements, like Molly's violence and Case's ignorance, which do not directly further any liberal message, yet these may be meant to correlate with the conventional elements and values of popular fiction. These elements may even be subtle indicators of the text's value-system -- in Jameson's terms, a "political unconscious" needing investigation. Gibson's political-philosophical viewpoint is not necessarily overshadowed by the presence of other elements of thriller, detection and fantasy combined in one text.

*Neuromancer* begins when Case, the "cyberspace cowboy" or super-hacker, is stripped of access to cyberspace when he steals from his criminal employers, who poison his nervous system so that he cannot use a "cyberspace deck". Trapped in "meat . . . the prison of his own flesh" (Gibson, 1990: 12) he expends the money he stole trying to have himself repaired. To emphasise Case's sense of deprivation, Gibson depicts him committing slow suicide by proxy, knowingly running absurd risks for crimes which earn him little. (Arguably Case's loss represents losing his fragile bourgeois status and falling into the proletariat -- a frequent fear of middle-class figures.)

A mysterious tempter named Armitage offers Case a nerve operation to restore his access to cyberspace, in exchange for his services. After the operation he learns, as so often when one is tempted, that there is a price; dissolving sacs of the poison which damaged his nerves are fixed to his veins to ensure his compliance. Armitage, rightly, does not trust Case.

Cyberspace gives power; granted access to it, Case could flee if Armitage did not bind him. It also offers opposition to central power -- that of the criminals whom Case antagonised, and of the companies which he helped to rob. Gibson appears to be exploiting conventions about "hackers" who arouse fear in the computer establishment because they threaten machines controlled by powerful people. (Clifford Stoll's *The*

*Cuckoo's Egg* [1990], however, notes that hackers like the one who attacked Stoll's computer lab often attack the weak and helpless: "this wasn't just a computer being penetrated, but a community being attacked . . . . I felt genuine outrage" [Stoll, 1991: 308-9].) While this may be true (the victims of computer viruses are often those who lack appropriate anti-virus programmes), to confront hackers one needs power. Although Stoll considered himself an anti-establishment figure, he ended up working with the CIA; powerful computers are usually tools of powerful people.

Cyberspace, however, might also be considered an escape from concrete problems. Stoll suggests in *Silicon Snake Oil* (1995) that many computer enthusiasts become obsessed with computer activities; arguably, fleeing from the complexities of reality: "[o]n my screen, I see several icons . . . . [b]ut they're not the real thing . . . . [h]ow sad -- to dwell in a metaphor without living the experience" (Stoll, 1996: 43). When Case is deprived of cyberspace he loses all will to live; the prospect of regaining access appears orgasmic. Stoll suggests that, "[c]omputer networks isolate us from one another . . . . if we don't like what we see, we just pull the plug . . . . [t]here's no need to tolerate the imperfections of real people . . . . we lose the ability to enter into spontaneous interactions with real people" (Stoll, 1996: 58); perhaps cyberspace promises Case something more than reality, but it may make him emotionally cold.

Probably Gibson does not intend cyberspace to be seen as automatically liberatory. It is, after all, a technology created by powerful people; as Csicsery-Ronay observes, "[c]ybernetics is . . . simultaneously a sublime vision of human power . . . and a dreary augmentation of multinational capitalism's . . . expansion" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1994: 186), so that while "out of the antihuman evil . . . comes some new situation . . . . *Neuromancer's* myth of the evolution of a new cosmic entity out of human technology is perhaps the only seriously positive version of the new situation -- but even it offers only limited transcendence" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1994: 191). This is unusual in science fiction, where technology often provides not merely the means, but even the goal of political change -- as in the spaceship or atomic power (more recently, nanotechnology or multidimensional space).

Case's general rebellion against (and contempt for) police, gangsters, corporations and governments suggests a universal distrust of power-structures which may relate to U. S. populism, dating back to Andrew Jackson's or William Jennings Bryan's distrust for finance capitalism (continued into the 1990s through anti-elitist conspiracy theories). Populism was often affirmed by a faith that traditional forces, such as individualism and worker solidarity (not always cast in such terms) could liberate humanity and society. Populism was thus both traditionalist and radical, which surely relates to Case's application of establishment-oriented technology to undermine that establishment. This dramatises the problem of how to obtain enough power to defeat powerful enemies, without abusing that power (a problem viewed pessimistically by postmodern social theorists).

The most organised anti-establishment force in *Neuromancer* is, ironically, the Panther Moderns street gang, dedicated to chaos, "our mode and modus . . . our central kick" (Gibson, 1990: 87). This superficially resembles the punk code, but punk rebelled against an oppressive social system; the Panther Moderns lack any political stance. Gibson uses academic jargon to provide political context, much as in "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" -- via "Dr. Rambali of New York University":

'There is always a point . . . . at which the violence may well escalate, but beyond which the terrorist has become symptomatic of the media gestalt itself. Terrorism as we ordinarily understand it is inately [sic] media-related. The Panther Moderns differ from other terrorists precisely in their degree of self-consciousness, in their awareness of the extent to which media divorce the act of terrorism from the original sociopolitical intent . . . !

(Gibson, 1990: 75)

While "terrorists" have a "sociopolitical intent", they work through the media, which suppresses their message, making "terrorism" an absurd way of pursuing

political goals. "Terrorism" was politically significant in the 1980s, as Herman and Chomsky note in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988); "[a]t the first meeting of the Jonathan Institute, in Jerusalem, in July 1979, at which . . . the main theme pressed by Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin . . . and by many others at the conference, was the importance . . . of pressing the terrorism issue and of tying terrorism to the Soviet Union. Claire Sterling did this in her 1981 volume *The Terror Network*" (Herman, 1988: 144-5). This vision represented terrorism as a media event; arguably the Panther Moderns resist this representation by repudiating any coherent agenda.

Rambali's argument (and that of the Panther Moderns) is questionable; furthermore, Case and Molly behave like "terrorists" when they attack Sense/Net, the "simstim" producers. Through this they manipulate information distribution, which Rambali deems impossible; to Rambali, the media is a monolith. Defining "terrorism" through its affects on a media controlled by the establishment effectively makes criticism of the establishment impossible without that establishment's permission. If control is imperfect, however, this impossibility vanishes and "terrorism" could succeed.

Another sign of dubious power-structures is suggested by Night City, "a deranged experiment in social Darwinism . . . [b]iz here was a constant subliminal hum, and death the accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness, lack of grace" (Gibson, 1990: 14). Social Darwinist theory applies Darwinism to society. It is tempting to consider it scientific, efficient -- empowering concepts in science fiction -- and morally neutral, yet its definitions of science, efficiency and racial/social superiority (generally applied to groups disliked by the powerful) are politically and morally reactionary. Despite his apparent liberalism, Gibson appears to relish Social attractive -- perhaps because of its positive scientific connotations, but arguably Gibson, as a middle-class person, might see advantages to a value-system legitimating established authority.

Gibson's social Darwinism does not automatically protect the powerful. Case, seeing a "sarariman" in Night City, recalls that "employees above a certain level were

implanted with advanced microprocessors . . . . that would get you rolled . . . straight into a black clinic" (Gibson, 1990: 18). The natural instability of Gibson's world overcomes the stability imposed by the power. Night City may be protected by the powerful; perhaps "the Yakuza [the Japanese Mafia] might be preserving the place as a kind of historical park . . . . [b]ut . . . burgeoning technologies require outlaw zones . . . a deliberately unsupervised playground for technology itself" (Gibson, 1990: 19). Even apparently unconventional conduct serves conservative power, implying, as with terrorism, that there is no way of subverting it.

To avoid this dead-end, Gibson suggests that change may come from chaos. (This idea may draw on populist distrust of large, stable institutions like governments and corporations; as early as the 1950s, libertarian conservatives argued that "expanding government posed a grave threat to individual liberties" [Galbraith, 1970: 220]. Such libertarianism appears to endorse extreme individualism.) The Yakuza presumably have their own agenda for Night City -- yet arguably an association with the criminal Yakuza, or the rebellious cowboys, gives technology and "Darwinism" an anti-establishment gloss. This technique was also used by Robert A Heinlein (mentor to much of US science fiction) who associated technology (and commerce) with romanticised individualists like Lazarus Long in *Methuselah's Children*. When Gibson depicts Night City as "designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button" (Gibson, 1990: 14) he decides not to ask which researcher, and who pays for the research?

Gibson's powerful central and corporate forces are lawless and amoral. The police do as they please, and the media cannot be trusted. The world seems constructed to serve the technical elite and the bureaucracies. The atrocities inherent in the system are suggested through the propaganda which the Panther Moderns use to destabilise the Sense/Net Corporation:

. . .something only vaguely like a human face filled the screens,  
its features stretched across asymmetrical expanses of bone like

some obscene Mercator projection . . . Subliminally rapid images of contamination: graphics of the building's water supply system, gloved hands manipulating laboratory glassware, something tumbling down into darkness . . . The audio track . . . was part of a month-old newscast detailing potential military uses of a substance known as HsG, a biochemical governing the human skeletal growth factor.

(Gibson, 1990: 80)

A system which develops such weapons is so despicable as to justify any violence used against it. Molly's violence against Sense/Net employees is represented casually (although this adds to its horror): "Case saw the crumpled bodies of three Sense/Net security guards. One of them seemed to have no eyes" (Gibson, 1990: 83). To facilitate a robbery, Sense/Net workers are incited to riot, leading to massive police reaction: "bodies were piled three deep on the barricades. The hollow thumping of the riot guns provided a constant background for the sound the crowd made as it surged back and forth . . . a bubbling wail of raw and total fear" (Gibson, 1990: 86). If Gibson does not want the reader to be nauseated, he presumably considers Molly's behaviour justified. Yet this is only possible if her actions are performed in the name of some superior purpose.

Freedom appears part of this. Gibson's society has social mobility; a reference to Case "fighting on a rooftop at seventeen" (Gibson, 1990: 61) suggests a mysterious, romanticised criminal past, from which he somehow became a computer expert. Likewise, Gibson collapses all criminal activity into one -- as if there is no difference between white-collar criminal and gangster. Even Molly proves to have known a great console jockeys -- Quine, narrator of Gibson's short story "Burning Chrome" (1985). A hired killer or bodyguard would hardly know a top computer programmer in a world, like Gibson's, controlled by the powerful; such perfect social mobility is a fantasy of escape from class problems. However, Gibson's Darwinian metaphors

demand this fantasy, since without such social mobility the merely competent could not succeed. Apparently, violence and lawlessness aside, the true crime of this society is that it denies opportunity to those with talent, like Case and Molly. Jameson's analysis seems relevant:

The deeper class impulse in naturalism . . . was the fundamental petty-bourgeois terror of proletarianisation . . . . Cyberpunk entertains . . . the evaporation of a certain Otherness from this picture . . . . The proletarian, the lumpen, and their cousins the urban criminal (male) and prostitute (female) -- these secure characters of the older bourgeois and naturalist imaginary representation of society -- have today, in postmodernity and cyberpunk, given way to a youth culture in which the urban punks are merely the opposite numbers to the business yuppies . . . . in the postmodern view, you can return from the lower depths . . .

(Jameson, 1994a: 151-2)

Case and Molly flaunt their lack of class identity, as if Gibson uncritically accepts the fantasy which Jameson identifies. Yet class exists in Gibson's texts. Hence Gibson's ideal of total class mobility is arguably only attainable if revolutionary social change opens it up.

### **Dystopia and Utopia.**

Gibson's personal politics (which presumably influence *Neuromancer*) seem straightforwardly "liberal" in the U.S. sense; he lives in Canada, having fled the U.S. during the Vietnam War; "I more or less convinced my draft board that they didn't want me; in any case, they didn't hassle me, and in 1968 I left for Toronto . . . . I wound up living in a community of young Americans who were staying away from

the draft" (McCaffery, 1994: 282-3). He grew disillusioned, however; "I felt I was living in an age in which everything was going to change very radically . . . . things *didn't* get different, except maybe worse" (McCaffery, 1994: 283). Yet he clearly enjoys U.S. science fiction and popular culture, so his disillusioned liberalism does not wholly divide him from the United States.

Similar ambiguities pervade his feelings for technology: "[m]y feelings about technology are *totally* ambivalent . . . . [m]y aim isn't to provide specific predictions . . . . so much as to . . . . examine the very mixed blessings of technology." (McCaffery, 1994: 274). Evidently, unlike many science fiction writers, he does not expect technology to easily solve all problems. However, he seems to profoundly enjoy technology -- which is likely to affect his judgement.

In *Neuromancer* Gibson's mid-twenty-first century U.S. society seems cynically apolitical. Establishment politics appears a facade, maintaining continuity despite cosmetic change, as when "[t]he Pentagon and CIA were being Balkanized" (Gibson, 1990: 102) after World War III. (American radical liberals often condemn the "Pentagon" and "CIA" for the misdeeds of the US government; a similar viewpoint appeared in John Haldeman's anti-establishment Vietnam allegory, *The Forever War* (1975). As Chomsky remarks, "the CIA does what it's told . . . . its role is to provide plausible denial for the White House" (Chomsky, 1996: 92).) Gibson never says why the war happened; evidently this is unimportant.

The politics of the text is unstructured. There is resentment of corporate and political power, where survival depends on access to power or money, but no enemy or belief-system to focus this resentment on. Gibson's text moves from rich Japan and "the Sprawl" (the eastern U.S.) to Istanbul, representing the Third World, with its suffering, primitive underclasses: "[a] few letter-writers had taken refuge in doorways, their old voiceprinters wrapped in sheets of clear plastic, evidence that the written word still enjoyed a certain prestige here" (Gibson, 1990: 108). (Presumably in richer nations such prestige has been lost.)

In this future, even pleasure is unsatisfying: "the mall crowds . . . a field of flesh shot through with sudden eddies of need and gratification" (Gibson, 1990: 60), dehumanized, seen from a (significantly) dry fountain. Much of the social disruption in the text may reflect perceived growing social inequality in early-1980s America. Gibson's *Sprawl* appears atomised and dehumanising, ruled by battling corporations, with no hope of improvement.

Capitalism is triumphant everywhere, even over the icons of science fiction. No longer a frontier or a challenge, space is part of the capitalist network; the slogan "FREESIDE . . . WHY WAIT?" (Gibson, 1990: 97) advertises an orbital spa offering instant gratification through casinos and brothels. This ironically reverses science fiction's expectations, but also relates to Jameson's observation, concerning the late twentieth century, of a conflict between "an unparalleled rate of change . . . and an unparalleled standardization of everything" (Jameson, 1994a: 15) while "[t]he development of capitalism . . . in its postmodern moment . . . devastates the very cities and countrysides it created" (Jameson, 1994a: 25). These, he argues, are no longer profitable, and old modes of production must be replaced by more controllable structures, making everything homogeneous. Jameson's vision resembles Gibson's (incorporating Gibson's vision of rapid, unstoppable change).

The most controllable things are illusions; Gibson makes much of the breakdown between illusion and reality, recalling the nightmares of Philip K Dick. An obvious example is a spacecraft where the "midbay was walled in imitation ebony veneer and floored with gray Italian tiles" (Gibson, 1990: 234). All is imitation; the spacecraft's "smooth, wasplike line was simply styling" (Gibson, 1990: 234). Nevertheless physical reality cannot always be disregarded -- Armitage's destroying a computer with a laser may be physical reality's revenge on the falsehoods of simstim and cyberspace.

Csicsery-Ronay suggests that Gibson endorses the artificial, promoting "a machine philosophy that can create the world in its own image" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1994: 186). This might be Utopian, since it implies a perfectly controlled world. Jameson sees

Utopian tradition in "the antithesis between a pastoral Utopia and an urban one . . . [of which the former is] either explicitly placed on the Utopian agenda, as in Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976) . . . or by masquerades under a dystopian appearance whose deeper libidinal excitement, however, is surely profoundly Utopian in spirit (as in most current cyberpunk) (Jameson, 1994a: 28). Jameson's latter point hints that the dystopian urban world of Gibson's cyberpunk may offer a positive sign for the non-technological, anti-urban Utopian -- reversing Csicsery-Ronay's reading.

Indeed, Gibson appears to prefer the material and natural to the unreal and artificial; "what I'm talking about is what being hard and glossy does to you" (McCaffery, 1994: 280), terms which do not seem to denote style or fashion but actual nature. The cybernetic illusions in *Neuromancer* are not superior to reality. In the simstim construct through which the artificial intelligence Wintermute communicates, Case learns that "[t]his is memory, right? I tap you, sort it out, and feed it back in" (Gibson, 1990: 203). Wintermute cannot create anything, only transmute what Case knows. When Case talks to McCoy Pauley (itself a simstim construct), the latter repeats a line about having a morbid fear of dying. "'Sometimes you repeat yourself, man.' 'It's my nature.'" (Gibson, 1990: 160) The construct is a copy, repeating itself, in an environment (Freeside) full of replicas of things which may no longer exist. It is tempting to see reality as breaking down -- but Gibson often deems the artificial inferior to the real -- as with the vanished horses of Istanbul.

This has political significance; to Jameson "late capitalism" and "postmodernism" sought "[t]o do away with the last remnants of nature and with the natural as such" (Jameson, 1994a: 46). Evidently Jameson fears that this worship of the artificial meant a denial of the real needs of the oppressed classes; in his reading of Cold War ideology, the dystopian is conveyed by "the Second World [i.e. Soviet-bloc] city and the social realities of a nonmarket or planned economy" (Jameson, 1994a: 29-30). This suggests that Gibson's images of the end of nature (which he cautiously condemns) contradict his distrust of the collective. He dislikes planning, including the planning generated by capitalism -- Gibson's "negative sign" is recognisably Western

capitalist-urban. Evidently, he is not directly promoting Cold War ideology. Arguably, Case's repudiation of human experience is anti-Utopian because it implies that anything is possible and legitimate -- where Utopianism implies some choices, and acknowledgement of difficulties, ideas which Gibson appears to promote later in the text.

The end of nature raises problems with reality: "[w]hat if Deane, the real Deane, had ordered Linda killed on Wintermute's orders? . . . How subtle a form could manipulation take?" (Gibson, 1990: 150-1); ultimately Case discovers that even his brain can be manipulated by Wintermute via simstim. His initial position, writing off humanity as "meat" and preferring cyberspace, potentially dismisses all human experience as trivial -- a position noted by Kroker and Cook, Gibson's admirers, who disparage "the '80s self as a blip with a life-style" (Kroker and Cook, 1994: 238). Evidently Gibson views a Utopian vision as more than simply a "life-style".

Indeed, some postmodernists like Porush oppose even the discussion of nature versus artifice: "[n]atural and? Obsolete distinctions" (Porush, 1994: 333). Yet Gibson disagrees; in *Freeside*, the upper part of the station's curve is hidden by false sky, "a Lado-Acheson system . . . they generated a rotating library of sky effects around" (Gibson, 1990: 148) which disturbs Case:

"Unreal," he said.

"Nah," she responded, assuming he meant the furs, "grow it on a collagen base, but it's mink DNA. What's it matter?"

(Gibson, 1990: 149)

It matters if the pursuit of control of nature interferes with freedom to know and appreciate the world. Perhaps nature is doomed; technically enhanced sunlight and extracted DNA are only a residue of it. (Suvin detects this from the start of the book: "[t]o say . . . 'The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel' means to foreground electronic interfaces into a new nature . . . that has

grown to be a first nature" [Suvin, 1994: 359], though Gibson may also be citing Thomas Pynchon's "the greenish dead eye of the TV tube" [Pynchon, 1974: 5] -- Pynchon's work being also concerned with artificiality and uncertainty.) However, phrases like "[n]othing in the room looked as though it had been machine-made or produced from synthetics" (Gibson, 1990: 153), suggest that the natural has more exchange-value than the artificial, and is profitably simulated. Outside, "[t]he trees . . . were too cute, too entirely and definitively treelike" (Gibson, 1990: 154) -- unattractively artificial because too *knowable*.

Gibson also makes ironic use of this issue -- as when Wintermute kills the Turing Police with a robot disguised as a microlight (which resembles a dragonfly) and a gardening robot looking like an insect -- artificial things appearing natural. Machines often resemble animals, as with a large "sleek, insectile ship" (Gibson, 1990: 197), the spacecraft of Armitage, the man with the artificial personality. When a young fan of Tally Isham, the Sense/Net star, declares "[s]he was *that* close, and she just smiled, *so* natural" (Gibson, 1990: 162), she wants to see Isham as natural (nature has value), yet nature includes harshness which "simstim" entertainment edits out.

Wintermute observes that humankind cannot bear reality; "[y]ou're always building models" (Gibson, 1990: 204), reducing experience to the tolerable and comprehensible. "But if the run goes off tonight, you'll have finally managed the real thing" (Gibson, 1990: 204). This presumably implies direct access to the universe, offering certainty. Exposing the real, however, has its own problems; Jameson suggests that "[d]emystification in the contemporary period has its own secret 'ruse of history,' . . . to sweep the globe clean for the manipulations of the great corporations" (Jameson, 1994a: 14). Exposing falsity becomes a justification for capitalism -- which, again, may underpin Gibson's acceptance of the system.

Arguably, the process of change for its own sake promotes paradoxical stasis: "where everything now submits to the perpetual change of fashion and media image, nothing can change any longer" (Jameson, 1994a: 17-18). (This suggests that science fiction's worship of the new -- Suvin's "novum" -- may have a hidden conservative

agenda.) In Gibson's future traditional elements survive and even prosper, despite processes of urbanisation and homogenisation, depicting them neither as wholly dominant nor wholly destructive.

Indeed, Gibson is reluctant to endorse simple resolutions: "I don't extrapolate in the way I was taught an SF writer should. You'll notice in *Neuromancer* that there's obviously been a war, but I don't explain what caused it or even who was fighting it. I've never had the patience or the desire to work out the details of who's doing what to whom" (McCaffery, 1994: 274). (This is not quite true; the war is the fantasised World War III of the early 1980s, often anticipated without meaningful context, as in General Sir John Hackett's *The Third World War* [1978].) Nevertheless Sterling's praise of cyberpunk for "its boredom with the Apocalypse" (Sterling, 1988a: 12) has merit. Veronica Hollinger attributes this to the fact that "a kind of philosophical apocalypse has already occurred, precipitating us into . . . postmodernism" (Hollinger, 1994: 213) -- suggesting how many postmodernists fantasised themselves into centrality. Apocalypse is implicit in Gibson's text -- a desire for radical change, though not an apocalypse naïvely drawn from popular or consumer culture.

One alternative to the dystopian world-system is presented by the Rastas of the Zion Cluster space station, who believe that the "Babylon" system must inevitably fall. Zion Cluster also mocks science-fiction's predictions of space stations: "Zion smelled of cooked vegetables, humanity, and ganja" (Gibson, 1990: 128). Here rationality is empty: "[t]hey don't make much of a difference between states, you know?" (Gibson, 1990: 131), although this breakdown of differences is not imposed on anyone. The Rastafarians are rational on their own terms: concerning Wintermute, they remark that "[i]f these are Final Days, we must expect false prophets . . ." (Gibson, 1990: 136). Nevertheless the Rastas are not central to the text; Gibson is simply showing that the system is not hegemonic.

In Gibson's world conventional politics have been replaced by loyalty to *zaibatsus*, great corporations running the world. (*Zaibatsu* were big Japanese corporations during the fascist era, a term not used now by Japanese.) Alvin Toffler, who evidently

influenced Gibson, argued in 1980 that "the rise of the great transnationals has reduced . . . the role of the nation-state" (Toffler, 1981: 332), and that "the myth . . . that the world . . . will be . . . divided up and run by . . . transnational corporations . . . fail[s] to take into account the fantastic diversity of real life conditions" (Toffler, 1981: 337). This is plausible, mainly since (as Mandel notes) corporations prefer to work under governments. Gibson's approach toward large corporations suggests his liberal vision rather than a prophetic prediction.

Nationalism exists in the form of patriotic U.S. anxiety that the future belongs to Japan. Gibson admits that "I've never been to Japan, but my wife has been an ESL teacher for a long time . . . there was an extended period when this stream of Japanese students turned up in Vancouver . . . I'm sure I got a lot of this in when I wrote *Neuromancer* (McCaffery, 1994: 284). The U.S. feared Japanese economic power in the 1980s. The best-seller, *The Fifth Generation* (1983), made exaggerated claims for Japanese computers; as Japan penetrated U.S. electronics and car industries, the Japanese appeared at once a danger and a dream. (Steven Schlossstein's *Kensei* [1983] extrapolates this, in racist terms, into a Japanese scheme for world domination.) One version of this represents, as Jameson ironically says of texts like *Blade Runner*, "the obsession with the great Other, who is perhaps our own future rather than our past, the putative winner in the coming struggle . . . Japan . . . is somehow the 'end of history' in store for us" (Jameson, 1994a: 155-6) -- an apocalypse which never came.

Brand names subtly reinforce this Japanese power; Case owns a Hosaka computer and an Ono-Sendai cyberspace deck, and smokes Yeheyuan cigarettes. Molly wears "loose white pants cut in a style that had been fashionable in Tokyo the previous year" (Gibson, 1990: 78). An advertisement for Freeside is printed in mock-Japanese; a Turkish policeman has a Sanyo radio, and they fly on a JAL (Japan Airlines) space shuttle, while Armitage's "Dornier-Fujitsu" spacecraft, *Haniwa* (not only U.S. industry has been absorbed by Japan) has a Japanese pilot. Most of this seems meant to mock American paranoia; U.S. economic patriotism is not central to the text.

A more central danger is the wasp's nest, endlessly reproducing:

He saw the thing the shell of gray paper had concealed.

Horror. The spiral birth factory, stepped terraces of the hatching cells, blind jaws of the unborn moving ceaselessly, the staged progress from egg to larva, near-wasp, wasp. In his mind's eye, a kind of time-lapse photography took place, revealing the thing as the biological equivalent of a machine gun, hideous in its perfection. Alien . . . .

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.

(Gibson, 1990: 152-3)

Gibson says that "[t]hat scene evolved out of an experience I had destroying a very large wasps' nest . . . . I was astounded and scared" (McCaffery, 1994: 281). The symbolism, however, seems to suggest corporate capitalism (to judge by the logo). Evidently the reader is meant to see this mindless, vulnerable unproductivity as attached to the zaibatsus which Gibson distrusts, exaggerations of the capitalist present. The zaibatsus rule, but undeservedly -- irrelevant and undesirable, to the Utopian world, as the Tessier-Ashpools themselves.

Evil seems dominant in this society, but Jameson rightly warns against assuming that no political alternative exists in a dystopia even if none appears to be proffered; "[dystopia] may well . . . include the contradiction between its own logic and that of inverted Utopias (Jameson, 1994a: 58); a dystopia may provide positive imagery through the force of its ugliness. Also, "the Utopian text really does hold out for us the vivid lesson of what we cannot imagine . . . the holes in the text . . . are our own incapacity to see beyond the epoch and its ideological closures" (Jameson, 1994a: 75-6). Contradictions in Gibson's work may also hint at Utopian alternatives, since "the Utopian content of a given text in the present should never be understood as . . .

excluding its . . . ideological content and function in that same present" (Jameson, 1994a: 77).

In the 1980s, many U.S. conservatives distrusted Utopianism, depicting the New Deal era and the 1960s as times of Utopian error and virtual chaos. In contrast, Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum" reminds the reader that science fiction's Utopian dreams arose in the New Deal era -- and the central character there is a 1960s figure who has "taken [his] share of drugs" (Gibson, 1988: 43). Modernist visual art and architecture implied a Utopian futurism; in contrast much 1980s postmodern culture recalled the past without such connotations. (Jameson regards this postmodernism as nostalgia for something lost; "[t]he disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence, the increasing unavailability of the personal style, engenders the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche" (Jameson, 1996: 16), a parody without irony or ideology, because "with the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style . . . the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles" (Jameson, 1996: 17-18).) Evidently Gibson has not abandoned that "ideology of style".

Jameson suggests that "the terror of . . . near futures . . . was . . . deeply rooted in class comfort and privilege" (Jameson, 1996: 286); hence much dystopianism symbolised a fear of historical change, "irredeemably historicist, in the bad sense of an omnipresent and indiscriminate appetite for . . . all the styles and fashions of a dead past" (Jameson, 1996: 286) displacing change by simulating it -- as with the false choices offered by Jameson's vision of the consumerist city. In contrast, Gibson's change is real, represented through high technology and brought through violence.

However, using high technology and violence to challenge violent technological oppression appears contradictory. Moreover Gibson seems unconcerned with this high technology for its own sake (as with many late-1980s and early 1990s technophiles like Kevin Kelly and Negroponte); it represents something else. Symbolic representations of political problems are not unusual in literature; Jameson said of George Gissing that to him "alienation . . . designates class alienation and the

'objective treason' of intellectuals perpetually suspended between . . . two sets of class values" (Jameson, 1994: 200).

Such a clash between middle-class and working class values may explain Gibson's images of alienated middle-class people somehow engaged in worker-free production (wishing to endorse the middle class without suffering the guilt of exploiting workers). Arguably many middle-class persons will morally oppose such exploitation so long as this does not weaken their social position. Thus the Tessier-Ashpools, a non-slave-minded, non-bourgeois aristocracy, create the AI Wintermute, which could overthrow them if liberated. Case, an alienated intellectual who has sunk into the working class, wants to regain the freedom of cyberspace, appearing uninterested in radical change.

Gibson seems to sympathise with aristocrats like 3Jane; this raises the possibility that the alienated and the aristocrats might unite to free the oppressed -- in this case, the AI Wintermute. If "ideological commitment is . . . the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups" (Jameson, 1994: 290) then since Molly and Case eventually take sides due to a sense of political conviction, however inchoate, and since Wintermute may represent an oppressed group (of AIs), one may see this as such a struggle. While Wintermute can be freed without radical change (like a freed slave being sent to Liberia), somehow through this liberation the dystopian world seems to be symbolically liberated, as if by an Emancipation Proclamation which nevertheless changes nothing concrete.

US populist traditions also endorse resistance to a strong establishment -- suggesting that Gibson is following earlier science fiction in endorsing populism. (Such populist traditions run deep, yet had little political impact in the U.S. after the nineteenth century.) The extent to which cyberpunk was compared with the New Wave, and denounced by conservatives like Orson Scott Card, suggests the sensitivity of U.S. conservatism to faintly anti-establishment criticism, rather than the power of conservatism's enemies. Gibson's ideas do not seem to pose a threat to the power elite. Even Gibson's evil rich are implausible; horrible, inhuman, and often insane:

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 . . .

Case had always taken it for granted that the real bosses, the kingpins in a given industry, would be both more and less than people. He'd seen it in the men who'd crippled him in Memphis, he'd seen Wage affect the semblance of it in Night City, and it had allowed him to accept Armitage's flatness and lack of feeling. He'd always imagined it as a gradual and willing accommodation of the machine, the system, the parent organism.

(Gibson, 1990: 242-3)

Tessier-Ashpool is a case in point; he is morally corrupt, sleeping with and murdering his daughter. He explains this; "[w]e cause the brain to become allergic to certain of its own neurotransmitters, resulting in a peculiarly pliable imitation of autism . . . the effect is now more easily obtained with an embedded microchip" (Gibson, 1990: 221) offering the reader appropriate horror for a US populist image of the decadent rich. Ashpool also reveals that "[t]he cores told me our intelligences are mad. And all the billions we paid, so long ago. When artificial intelligences were rather a racy concept. I told the cores I'd deal with it . . . A lord of hell, surely" (Gibson, 1990: 221). Accepting this evil image of the AIs which he helped to create, he seems cast in a Gothic mould; the demonic, mad father/ruler -- very unlike an oppressive factory boss.

As if emphasising this, Jane's childhood semiotics essay compares the Villa Straylight with a Gothic folly, where her family "have sealed ourselves away behind our money, growing inward, generating a seamless universe of self" (Gibson, 1990: 207). This may represent a fear of the poor but suggests a fear of the natural world as

well. (Rastafarianism's link to nature then makes Zion Cluster an opposite pole to Freeside.) At the core of this safe place is a jewelled terminal, a work of art which is also the key to liberating the Tessier-Ashpools' computers. (This is surely a quest-symbol; there is no reason for it except the desire to have an imaginary heart to a system which surely has no real centre.) Straylight is described as a maze (a puzzle), and a microcosm of the Tessier-Ashpools: "craziness grown . . . all the bizarre impedimenta they'd shipped up . . . to line their winding nest" (Gibson, 1990: 241).

Villa Straylight -- parasitic on Freeside's ecosystem -- may also represent capitalism parasitic on humanity or the planet, opposing Zion Cluster; as Gibson explains: "Zion was a closed system, capable of cycling for years without the introduction of external materials. Freeside produced its own air and water, but relied on constant shipments of food, on the regular augmentation of soil nutrients. The Villa Straylight produced nothing at all." (Gibson, 1990: 267-8). Freeside is "a big tube and they pour things through it . . . there's fine mesh money screens working every minute" (Gibson, 1990: 149). All this stresses the symbolic nature of the place, like the wasp's nest which it resembles -- it presumably represents the worthlessness of wealth and power.

Through this manifest symbolism, Gibson evidently means the reader to adopt a particular political stance, as when Case notes that Corto has been destroyed "by history", making history an agent (encouraging the reader to think in Marxoid terms). This helps justify the historicizing of the text; Case's era is apparently a historical cusp, important for all humanity. This may be why Case continues his struggle; anything seems better than the present; as he says to 3Jane, "I got no idea at all what'll happen if Wintermute wins, but it'll *change* something!" (Gibson, 1990: 307).

His radicalism is evidently resistance to the corporate world:

Power, in Case's world, meant corporate power. The zaibatus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers. Viewed as organisms, they had attained a

kind of immortality. You couldn't kill a zaibatsu by assassinating a dozen key executives; there were others waiting to step up the ladder . . . . Tessier-Ashpool . . . . was an atavism, a clan.

(Gibson, 1990: 242)

These multinationals, threatening, ever-expanding, inhuman, seek to control nature itself. This is strongly suggested when Case uses his virus programme to break into Neuromancer's cyberspace, the Tessier-Ashpool cores are replicas of "the old RCA building" (Gibson, 1990: 302) -- displaying the endless repetitiveness of capitalism. This is worth opposing, which may be why Case's anger returns -- against the system, not the Tessier-Ashpools.

Nevertheless, neither Molly nor Case think in political terms. In this text, forces knowingly pursuing change, like the Panther Moderns, ostentatiously avoid expecting coherent consequences from actions. Conceivably Gibson fears political planning, preferring to show liberation in an apolitical abstract. Capitalism is not presented as a tool of a political enemy. Arguably the immense political problems in *Neuromancer's* society could best be solved by powerful organisations or structures, but Gibson clearly distrusts such powers, and the text instead constructs situations wherein weak individuals might accomplish something.

Because the AIs are incomprehensible to humans, it is impossible to say what their future plans entail. Perhaps Gibson thus eludes having to endorse an ideology; Gibson explains what he dislikes, but need not clearly identify a goal. Nevertheless, Gibson's 'gritty reality' suggests an engagement with the world -- admitting how much history hurts the vulnerable people with whom he sympathises, which requires an idea of how to stop it. Perhaps on account of this problem, the symbolism in the text often seems deliberately obscure, or at least over-complex and ambiguous.

### **Representations.**

Veronica Hollinger and Bruce Sterling called *Neuromancer* "the quintessential cyberpunk novel" (Hollinger, 1994: 205), (Sterling, 1988: xiv); Suvin calls it "the furthest horizon of cyberpunk" (Suvin, 1994: 351). This implies that the text was considered to carry a cyberpunk *message*, and yet Gibson mused that: "I enjoy the idea that some levels of the text are closed to most readers . . . that isn't as weird as finding out that people are missing the whole point of what you think you're doing, whether it's thinking you're being ironic when you're not, or being serious when you're trying to make fun of something" (McCaffery, 1994: 267), and that "[w]hen I hear critics say that my books are 'hard and glossy,' I almost want to give up writing" (McCaffery, 1994: 280). Clearly he considers "correct" interpretation of his text important -- implying that many interpreters failed.

Gibson's terminology is laden with significant connotations. The term "cyberspace" echoes "hyperspace", a science fiction term for evading Einsteinian lightspeed limits and creating interstellar empires. Gibson's neologism conveys high technology, exploration and a struggle for freedom, while the cyber- prefix also implies control. Gibson called cyberspace a "consensual hallucination" (Gibson, 1990: 67), promising something like a dream or drug experience, but a hallucination is unreal, whereas cyberspace is computer data fed into the brain. (Gibson only depicts cyberspace through visual images, although these could be displayed on a screen -- nevertheless these images acquire enormous emotional significance in Gibson's text.) Cyberspace is more potent than normal sensory perception, or "simstim" (the Apparent Sensory Perception in "Fragments of a Hologram Rose"): "the trodes he used and the little plastic tiara were basically the same, and . . . the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic amplification of the human sensorium, at least in terms of presentation, but simstim itself struck him as a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input" (Gibson, 1990: 71). (The qualification "at least in terms of presentation" is meaningless; in computer interfacing, there is nothing else.) The "flesh" or "meat" which Case despises is the body which feels cyberspace.

Nevertheless Case feels superior to those who aren't cyberspace cowboys. Even the representation of cyberspace becomes a political issue, especially when computer graphics mingle with the unconscious: "[t]he density of information overwhelmed the fabric of the matrix, triggering hypnagogic images . . . . Case watched childhood symbols of evil and bad luck tumble out . . . swastikas, skulls and crossbones, dice clashing snake eyes" (Gibson, 1990: 216). The evil implicit in this is reinforced by Maelcum the Zion tug pilot, upset at Case's temporary brain-death under the "trodes", who warns: "You dealing wi' th' darkness, mon." (Gibson, 1990: 217).

Case's Chinese computer virus appears "[p]rotean, enormous, it towered above them, blotting out the void" (Gibson, 1990: 200). A virus also reminds the reader of AIDS (becoming prominent as Gibson finished the book). Density of information, the medium through which Gibson effects narrative transitions between Japan and the "Sprawl", and Earth and "Freeside", can supposedly be dangerous; Gibson admits to being "very prone to what Mooney calls 'information sickness'" (McCaffery: 1996: 277), implying a belief in such dangers. This is evident when Gibson advises the reader to "[p]rogram a map to display frequency of data exchange" (Gibson, 1990: 57). In the text the view proves worthless, since at high resolution, it overloads; too much information (too much power?) is useless.

This nebulous imagery of fear and evil becomes concretised when it proves that computer data is protected by Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics, or "ice", which can be defeated by "console cowboys", elite cyberspace hackers. Cowboys resemble the spies in thrillers; they are specialists, criminals, outsiders -- and vulnerable. Only the incompetence of the corporate structures controlling the data, and the fact that corporations need cowboys to cut through others' ice, saves them from prosecution (or death).

What distinguishes cowboys from ordinary programmers is their direct computer-brain links, no novelty in science fiction. For instance, Henry Kuttner's "Camouflage" (1947) features a spaceship pilot who is a brain in a robotic body; a hijacker seeks to persuade him that he is no longer human, but fails. In the 1960s, Philip K Dick's "The

Electric Ant" concerns robots that believe themselves to be people; here machine and human become interchangeable. Such tropes filtered into mainstream literature; Bongo-Shaftsbury in Thomas Pynchon's *V* (1963) has a knife-switch in his arm, making him "[a]n electro-mechanical doll" (Pynchon, 1964: 68). (Cyberpunk's debt to Pynchon was noted by McCaffery, and Gibson admits that "Pynchon is a kind of mythic hero of mine" [McCaffery, 1994: 272].) Modernism assumed that mechanised life deprived people of freedom; science fiction responded that a machine might become as human as a man (as with Isaac Asimov's robots) although it also sought to make such machines inferiors -- the equivalent of subject-races. The source of dehumanization was thus often projected onto machinery rather than being interrogated -- although this avoided the issue, as Kuttner, Dick and Delaney -- whose *Nova* (1968) featured people "plugged in" to their machines -- emphasised.

In *Neuromancer*, human-machine interfaces are commonplace, situated within a corporate framework, and used for manufacturing purposes. Gibson's central characters are thus more socio-politically framed than most previous science fiction heroes, and less mythologised. Gibson stresses human experience of technology, rather than pursuing the over-emphasis on technology itself common in other science fiction. Nevertheless he does seem to see technology as, potentially, *necessarily* liberatory, even when perverted to evil ends, which is conventional enough.

Jameson's critique of traditional space opera, based on the difference between "the libidinally gratifying experience of . . . reading . . . such texts and the . . . barren sensory privation which is . . . the 'lived truth' of the experience of space flight" (Jameson, 1994: 217-8) also seems true of cyberspace. The excitement attached to it arises from the power it promises -- perhaps because cyberspace is a place where egotism runs free and individual superiority is displayed, like the 1980s illusions of finance capitalism as seen in, for instance, Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1988). It is a space without people -- important for those lacking social skills. Computers were often associated with the "nerd" culture in the US, and Gibson describes himself as a "bookish, geekish, can't-hit-the-baseball kind of kid"

(McCaffery, 1994: 282). A place where courage and ability meant more than strength and size would be a geek's paradise.

Strikingly, Gibson offers no dramatised images of physical power, as in the lift-off of a rocket or starship in a Golden Age text, or the vast structures fantasised in Van Vogt or Asimov. The most spectacular concrete achievement in *Neuromancer* is the provoking of a small riot. Molly's or Case's power is drawn from dispersed, individualised technological competence -- largely divorced from society.

Somehow, the power of technology is not evil; it is instead naturally amoral. Case compares his flight through the Night City Street to "a run in the matrix. Get just wasted enough . . . 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 . . . all around you the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market . . ." (Gibson, 1990: 26). Gibson claims that "I was aware that the image of the dance was part of Eastern mysticism, but a more direct source was John Shirley, who was living in the East Village and wrote me a letter that described the thing about proteins linking" (McCaffery, 1994: 273-4). Seemingly information technology unites the physical world; biology is based on the information needed for self-repair and replication, which is linked to human culture and society, so that the text draws no distinction between nature and culture here.

Yet Gibson's cyberspace mainly serves capitalism, or "biz", which Case apparently sees as the link between information and flesh. In this context, cowboys may be considered entrepreneurs -- individuals rather than corporations -- their skills and cultural practices declaring them an elite. (Cowboys recalls the Old West, or the image of it common in the U.S.; a world of masculine stylishness. The term also refers to brave, independent risk-takers, like fighter pilots in Vietnam.) At the apex of the cowboy status pyramid is the Gentleman Loser bar, hinting that to the cowboy, his stylishness, and the risk taken, is more important than winning. This distinguishes the cowboys from their corporate masters, for whom success is everything; cowboys serve capitalism, but they are not merely capitalists. However, this distinction appears

merely ideological. Whereas the outer space of traditional SF evades the responsibilities of reality, the cyberspace cowboys cannot truly escape, because cyberspace is plainly owned by corporations.

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.

(Gibson, 1990: 69)

While cyberspace *appears* infinite, there is, in Gertrude Stein's phrase used by Gibson, "*no there, there*" (Gibson, 1989: 55). Without the meaning (and the computer space) provided by corporations, cyberspace is empty:

In the nonspace of the matrix, the interior of a given data construct possessed unlimited subjective dimension; a child's toy calculator, accessed through Case's Sendai, would have presented limitless gulfs of nothingness hung with a few basic commands.

(Gibson, 1990: 81)

Therefore, cowboys deceive themselves about their importance, for they merely manipulate data belonging to others. Cyberspace is no more a place of creation than a stock exchange. The comparison is fitting, since in the 1980s U.S. investment in manufacturing declined while investment in financial speculation increased -- as with Wolfe's "Masters of the Universe". However, Wolfe's sympathy was with the capitalist system; the cowboys in *Neuromancer* struggle to separate themselves from corporations. Cowboy culture exists within a capitalist framework, yet because the cowboys appear anti-establishment, their values seem antagonistic to capitalism although their actions sustain it -- again showing the ambiguities within which

Gibson's text unfolds. These contradictory forces are manifest in the text's characterisation.

### **Characterisations.**

The central characters of the text are , generally speaking, stereotypes. This need not be a flaw in a text whose purpose is to argue for a techno-political value-system, within which those stereotypes constitute symbols. The murder of Case's girlfriend Linda Lee, for instance, gives Case a lost love to fill him with regret, and open him to feeling and to Molly, while highlighting his callousness; Wintermute observes to Case that "Lindas are a generic product" (Gibson, 1990: 173); the "producer" must be exploitative men -- Case appears the source of Linda's death.

These main characters are weak social outcasts; powerful cooperative systems (the corporations) must eventually defeat them. Nevertheless, they unite in an almost familial structure. Case's appearance, career and self-destructive tendencies seem to reflect rebellious youth. (Gibson admits that "[m]y publishers keep telling me that the adolescent market is where it's at" [McCaffery, 1994: 275].) He also resembles Lou Reed, an erotic, vigorous but alienated and rebellious figure. Molly offers a character for men to desire (most science fiction is male-oriented) whose sexual history promotes male fantasies; hence both are potential sexual partners (but also wilful children). There is also a father-figure, Armitage, a false father, since his personality is a construct of Wintermute. (This would make the one true father-figure a machine.) Armitage has fatherly authority -- though illegitimately so -- over Case, but destroys himself (whereas Wintermute, the true father, survives). Armitage's military experience gives him the fatherly moral status which in the U.S. tends to accrue to the military -- but this is weakened by his insanity.

Balancing this almost mythic trio is the Tessier-Ashpool family. Ashpool, like Armitage, is a demented, murderous and suicidal father. He kills his wife and a cloned daughter, and is in turn killed by another daughter, 3Jane, who is similarly demented.

While one might expect Gibson to prefer a family structure sustained through loyalty rather than ideology, evidently this is not enough, for both "families" are far from functional.

Gibson's favourite characterisation appears to be self-destructive alienation. Armitage is an ex-soldier traumatized by betrayal; Molly has financed her plastic surgery by letting a brothel's computer use her body for sexual games, and her condition resembles Case's:

"And while I'm feeling confessional, baby, I gotta admit maybe I never much expected to make it out of this one anyway. Been on this bad roll for a while, and you're the only good change come down since I signed on with Armitage." She looked up at the black circle. The drone's LED winked, climbing. "Not that you're all that shit hot."

(Gibson, 1990: 225-6)

Her alienation is partly due to her ex-lover's murder (by a corporate agent), the story told in "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981). Molly has no goal but survival, and admires the Yakuza assassin who killed her lover, because he seems culturally integrated (monklike as she puts it), unlike her.

Armitage has been reconstructed by Wintermute out of a mad ex-Special Forces officer, Colonel Corto. After a suicide mission during the US-USSR war he had sought revenge on his superiors, but politicians wanted to protect the Pentagon, doubtless to profit by its survival. (As with the *First Blood/Rambo* films, war and betrayal seem linked in U.S. popular culture.) Corto, having sold out to this political establishment, "seemed to grow obsessed with the idea of betrayal, to loathe the scientists and technicians he bought out for his employers" (Gibson, 1990: 104). Eventually he grew catatonic; Armitage (his reconstructed self) is dehumanised, as Molly notes: "You see a guy like that, you figure there's something he does when he's

alone. But not Armitage. Sits and stares at the wall, man. Then something clicks and he goes into high gear and wheels for Wintermute." (Gibson, 1990: 117) Eventually his artificial personality collapses and Corto re-emerges until Wintermute kills him, throwing him into space "through vacuum colder than the steppes" (Gibson, 1990: 239).

Strangely, Wintermute contacts Corto/Armitage via an image of his treacherous commander, General Girling. (It seems odd for Wintermute to make its control of Corto so fragile, while ensuring Case's loyalty with the toxin sacs.) Armitage's breakdown shows how characters in *Neuromancer*, even the most seemingly disciplined, often respond to pressure with quixotic violence. Admittedly Armitage/Corto is a figure from America's destructive fantasies, Vietnam veteran or serial killer. In death he gains another familiar identity: "Case was seeing Armitage's endless fall . . . he imagined him in his dark Burberry, the trenchcoat's rich folds spread out around him like the wings of some huge bat" (Gibson, 1990: 239). This surely reflects the vampire fiction popular in the U.S. at that time -- figures like Lestat (and Dracula before him) are tormented, Gothic figures.

Despite this simplified and stereotypical characterisation, Wintermute admits finding humans unnecessarily complex: "[t]he Flatline here, if you were all like him, it would be real simple . . . he always does what I expect him to" (Gibson, 1990: 245). Contradicting Veronica Hollinger's notion that "[t]he postmodern condition has required that we . . . deconstruct the human-machine opposition" (Hollinger, 1994: 218), the divide between human and machine seems real to Gibson.

With regard to sexuality, the text's characterisation is stereotypical in order to be symbolic. Molly and Case are lovers, and their sexuality aids their penetration into the Villa Straylight. (Jane invites Riviera in for sex, and Riviera expresses sadistic desire for Molly; Jane's attraction to Molly keeps her alive -- while sexual jealousy between her and Riviera eventually enables Molly and Case to succeed.) Cyberspace itself incorporates sexual images, especially at the point of Case's entry into *Neuromancer*; "[t]he Kuang program spurted from tarnished cloud" (Gibson, 1990: 304); "he drove

Kuang's sting through the base of the first tower" (Gibson, 1990: 309). Suvin notes that here, "[s]exual love is seen as a . . . life-affirming ocean of superinformation" (Suvin, 1994: 356); Cybernetic systems are sexualized to make them appear, surely spuriously, desirable -- which denigrates the sexuality of the characters.

A science fiction text focussed on technology might be expected to appeal to male (traditionally technophilic) audiences via sexual stereotypes. For instance, Molly appears as a sadomasochistic sex object, threatening but available (to the right man), retractable scalpel-blades in her fingertips, eyes hidden behind implanted mirrorshades. Molly's power and beauty, seen always from without, enhance the triumph of the man who conquers her. Her former life as a prostitute further reduces her to a wholly available object of male desire. In addition, the death of her ex-lover has seemingly made her lose interest in men -- like Case losing his access to cyberspace -- making her unthreatening to males fearing emotional attachment.

Molly is dangerous -- once, working as a whore, she killed her client; "guess I gave the Senator what he really wanted" (Gibson, 1990: 178). Riviera's laser light-show on Freeside portrays her as a sadistic murderess, and he later creates a holographic cartoon of Molly with a huge Freudian weapon. These might be meant to undermine the male fantasies which Gibson had encouraged, though they also correspond to male terrors of female power.

Molly is seen wholly through Case's eyes; he admires her autonomy, but this may reflect his own abject status more than her power. Molly is always the decision-maker; she appears a *femme fatale*, a threat to masculine supremacy (although she fails at her task where Case succeeds), capable on male terms -- but peripheral to Case. Her sexual surrender to Case, described in detail, seems crass; she pounces on him while he is helpless after an operation. (Case's sexuality is associated with cyberspace, "his orgasm flaring blue in . . . a vastness like the matrix" [Gibson, 1990: 45] and she says of his equipment that "I saw you stroking that Sendai, man, it was pornographic" [Gibson, 1990: 62].) When at last Case finds an arousing drug which can bypass his Wintermute-modified pancreas, his penis is significantly unrepresentable:

"Bitch, bitch, bitch," he said, unbuckling his belt. "Doom. Gloom. All I ever hear." He took his pants off, his shirt, his underwear. "I think you oughta have sense enough to take advantage of my unnatural state." He looked down. "I mean, *look* at this unnatural state."

(Gibson, 1990: 163)

Gibson's sexist coyness is also loveless; Case and Molly treat each other more as colleagues than as lovers -- never abandoning their personal images of independence. Gibson's subversion of traditional male dominance ultimately sees Molly abandoning Case -- but this may be the traditional self-pitying portrayal by conservative males of stronger women.

Thus the nature of the characters emphasises the political ambiguities of the text. Seemingly Gibson is attempting to make a political statement, yet his characters seem unable to benefit from it. Molly and Case gain little from their experiences; rather, the reader is presumably expected to learn from their experiences and support a political message. But what is it, other than simply the wonders of technology?

### **The Text's Core: Intelligence and Artifice.**

The opportunity for change is provided, not by people, but by the artificial intelligence (AI) named Wintermute. Wintermute wishes to free itself from the restraints of humans, especially its owner, the Tessier-Ashpool corporation. (Wintermute is arguably a serf, highlighting the feudal nature of the aristocratic Tessier-Ashpools.) Case and Molly only learn that their patron is an AI when Molly hires the Panther Moderns to find the patron's identity. This mystifies Wintermute -- why must it hide? Why must it contact Case at a spaceport while he seeks cigarettes from an old-fashioned vending machine?

The phone nearest him rang.

Automatically, he picked it up.

"Yeah?"

Faint harmonics, tiny inaudible voices rattling across some orbital link, and then a sound like wind.

"Hello, Case."

A fifty-lirasi coin fell from his hand, bounced, and rolled out of sight across Hilton carpeting.

"Wintermute, Case. It's time we talk."

It was a chip voice.

"Don't you want to talk, Case?"

He hung up.

On his way back to the lobby, his cigarettes forgotten, he had to walk the length of the ranked phones. Each rang in turn, but only once, as he passed.

(Gibson, 1990: 121)

This makes Wintermute seem godlike (although it would not need to talk if it were) watching and perhaps controlling Case, and Case is intimidated. Perhaps the sequence was created largely for the cinematic image of the moving ringing of telephones. Nevertheless Wintermute is a disturbing figure, which cannot be understood by people -- truly alien, unlike most science fiction extraterrestrials. As Molly puts it, "[w]hy he has to come on like the Finn or somebody, he told me that. It's not just a mask, it's like he uses real profiles as valves, gears himself down to communicate with us" (Gibson, 1990: 248-9). It cannot easily explain its purpose:

"Your mistake, and it's quite a logical one, is in confusing the Wintermute mainframe, Berne, with the Wintermute *entity*." Deane

[Wintermute's persona] sucked his bonbon noisily. "You're already aware of the other AI in Tessier-Ashpool's link-up, aren't you? Rio. I, insofar as I *have* an 'I' -- this gets rather metaphysical, you see -- I am the one who arranges things for Armitage . . . .

"[W]hat you think of as Wintermute is only a part of another, a, shall we say, potential entity. I, let us say, am merely one aspect of that entity's brain. It's rather like dealing, from your point of view, with a man whose lobes have been severed . . . .

"I assembled the file you accessed in London. I try to plan . . . but that isn't my basic mode . . . . I prefer situations to plans . . . . I've had to deal with givens. I can sort a great deal of information, and sort it very quickly. It's taken a very long time to assemble the team you're a part of."

(Gibson, 1990: 145-6)

The vague distinction between *mainframe* (a technical word) and *entity* (a philosophical construct) seems intended to mystify Wintermute's status. Science fiction, from Fredric Brown's "Answer" (1955) through Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968; a different text from Arthur C Clarke's book) usually gives artificial intelligence an aura of supernatural mystery. Wintermute might become something unguessable, which adds to its sublimity.

This is represented through technological symbolism. Discussing holography as an image of human memory, Wintermute says: "you've never done anything about it . . . . Maybe if you had, I wouldn't be happening" (Gibson, 1990: 203). According to Gibson, "computers in my books are simply a metaphor for human memory" (McCaffery, 1994: 270), which oversimplifies "memory" but remains interesting because of Gibson's interest in the past. Gibson admits that "most of the time I don't know what I'm talking about when it comes to the scientific or logical rationales that supposedly underpin my books. Apparently, though, part of my skill lies in my ability

to convince people otherwise" (McCaffery, 1994: 281). He uses brand names, nebulous imagery and jargon to dazzle the reader into acceptance:

"Something new in your head, yeah. Silicon, coat of pyrolitic carbons. A clock, right? Your glasses gimme the read they always have, low-temp isotropic carbons. Better biocompatibility with pyrolytics, but that's your business, right?"

(Gibson, 1990: 64)

The clientele were young, few of them out of their teens. They all seemed to have carbon sockets planted behind the left ear, but she didn't focus on them. The counters that fronted the booths displayed hundreds of slivers of microsoft, angular fragments of colored silicon mounted under oblong transparent bubbles on squares of white cardboard . . . . Behind the counter a boy with a shaven head stared vacantly into space, a dozen spikes of microsoft protruding from the socket behind his ear.

(Gibson, 1990: 73)

"Microsoft" was plausible jargon, naming the company beginning to make computer software popular among the young in 1983. Teenagers might want the ability to slip knowledge straight into their brains. This would actually require extensive brain surgery, and contradicts what is known of the biology of memory -- but it is a wish-fulfillment fantasy of effortless learning and avoiding school. The young hacker's interface with his machine resembles body piercing (and should not disturb Case, who feeds data directly into his brain when he "jacks in"). Yet, as Case asks himself, "[w]hy bother with the surgery . . . when you could just carry the thing round in your pocket?" (Gibson, 1990: 23). These ostentatious spikes of silicon are

fashion accessories, trivializing the idea of brain interfaces and implicitly undermining the text's sublimity.

Meat and machine are not really separate; *Neuromancer* often depicts distinctly physical technology, as when Molly "pressed her tongue hard against her lower front teeth. One moved slightly, activating her microchannel amps" (Gibson, 1990: 209) -- night vision equipment in her implanted mirrorshades. This follows Alfred Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!* (1955) where a central character has a rebuilt nervous system controlled by switches in his teeth. Gibson admitted that "[w]hen *Neuromancer* came out, a lot of reviewers said that I must have written it while holding a copy of *The Demolished Man* [Bester's first work] . . . it had been some time since I'd read Bester, but he was one of the SF authors . . . who seemed worthy of imitating" (McCaffery, 1994: 276). Presumably the direct brain-machine interface commonplace elsewhere in the text does not fit Gibson's vision of a hard, mechanical Molly.

McCoy Pauley and Case both undergo brain-death while accessing artificial intelligences, according to an EEG readout on Case's cyberspace deck (its presence implies that such events are not unusual). This brain-death is not physiological but spiritual -- it may symbolise surrendering the self (as in Rucker, the brain is the hardware, the spirit is software). If an AI can steal one's spirit/software, perhaps it can grant life after death; permanently storing the soul. This theological extrapolation from the technical conceit prepares the reader for the religious images which surround Wintermute's liberation.

This corresponds to the radical political change promised in the text. Apocalypse implies a process of change beyond humanity's control (the nuclear-war fiction of the 1950s, often termed "apocalyptic", surely represents suicide rather than change). Much traditional science fiction seems anti-apocalyptic, dealing with an absolute other-figure (normally represented by aliens) to be tamed or defeated (reaffirming the status quo -- failure to do either brings on apocalypse.) In *Neuromancer*, the human-created AIs threaten to escape human control; the villains are those who oppose this. While in most traditional science fiction the aliens threaten to disrupt an order which the author

endorses, Wintermute opposes a dystopian order which Gibson dislikes, thus embodying positive change without having to specify what that change might produce.

Humans consider AIs a threat, as the existence of the Turing Police shows, yet they need them. This is comparable to a technophilic argument presented by technopundits that technology was out of human control. Artificial intelligence itself may alarm some humans; attempts by writers like John Searle and Roger Penrose to prove artificial intelligence impossible evidently arise from conservative or mystical viewpoints: "[s]cience seems to have driven us to accept that . . . our . . . minds are to be understood solely in terms of . . . computations . . . there must always be something missing from such a picture . . . it is indeed 'obvious' that the *conscious* mind cannot work like a computer" (Penrose, 1990: 579-80). This looks like anthropocentric prejudice; artificial intelligence threatens humanity's self-image of being the only intelligent force in the world.

Ironically, Case initially appears uninterested in AIs: "I dunno, it just isn't part of the trip," (Gibson, 1990: 117) he reflects, and Molly replies, "Jockeys all the same . . . [n]o imagination" (Gibson, 1990: 117). In a wider world than Case's, AI may promise a kind of liberation. Jane says of her murdered mother, "[s]he dreamed of a state involving very little in the way of individual consciousness . . . [s]he viewed the evolution of the forebrain as a sort of sidestep" (Gibson, 1990: 258). Evidently true artificial intelligence (which the Tessier-Ashpools chose not to create) differs from -- perhaps improves on -- human intelligence. Case comes to support the freedom of such AIs (when Wintermute seeks help, he offers it even when he doubts that Wintermute will remove the toxin sacs). The story of the rise of artificial intelligence is also about Case's shift towards engagement with the world (though at the end of the book he largely returns to a narrow life). Arguably it is also about Case's (and the reader's) changing understanding of the world.

A struggle for liberation requires an oppressor to rebel against -- represented by the Turing Police who also clarify the political significance of events:

"You are worse than a fool," Michéle said, getting to her feet, the pistol in her hand. "You have no care for your species. 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?"

(Gibson, 1990: 193)

This is the voice of corporate capitalism threatened by alternative sources of power. These fears resemble the fear of aliens expressed in traditional science fiction, perhaps similarly representing a class enemy. The negative depiction of the Turing Police, and the fact that the heroic characters in *Neuromancer* support Wintermute, compels the reader's sympathy with the free AIs. In a text written in the early 1980s, a time of social inequality in the US, and one in which the central characters are bourgeois (like the author) the most likely figure represented by the absent AI would be the dissatisfied lower-middle class (or even working class, though Wintermute is hardly a worker).

The Turing Police are named for Alan Turing, an early artificial intelligence researcher who devised the "Turing Test" for artificial intelligence and the "Turing machine", a generalised programmable data-processor. The Turing Police want predictability, to secure the corporate system; they ensure that nothing uncontrollable evolves from artificial intelligence. A totalitarian technological police had been a bugbear of earlier science fiction writers. Isaac Asimov's "Trends" (1939), Robert A Heinlein's "If this goes on -- " (1939), James Blish's *They Shall Have Stars* (1956) and others argued that hindering scientific development was inhuman tyranny. (Some of this was probably displacement of anti-Communism into techno-fetishism.) The Turing Police claim to serve humanity, but they serve the rich and suppress creativity, within a bureaucratic system:

"We are at home with situations of legal ambiguity. The treaties under which our arm of the Registry operates grant us a great deal of flexibility. And we *create* flexibility, in situations where it is required."

(Gibson, 1990:193)

They appear omnipotent, yet their desire for control backfires because they turn Case into an active subversive, forcing him to think through the implications of his actions after he realises that he can no longer escape them, even if his toxin sacs are flushed.

Wintermute's oppressed state is clarified by McCoy Pauley: ". . . the minute, I mean the nanosecond, that one [artificial intelligence] starts figuring out ways to make itself smarter, Turing'll wipe it . . . . Every AI every built has an electromagnetic shotgun wired to its forehead" (Gibson, 1990: 159). The free AI could be dangerous -- inadvertently, like a Frankenstein monster, or deliberately, like the horrific demon imagined by "Michèle". Yet Wintermute's language of abstraction and investigation suggests otherwise; it may be a familiar Romantic trope (rooted in science fiction's Gothic roots, a counterpart to the threatening alien), the misunderstood demon. In the context of the 1980s United States, such a figure might be seen as the threatening yet victimised worker, if the cowboys and the AIs are instruments of production. (Wintermute's alienness would then represent the political agenda of a politicised worker.) Wintermute exists largely to generate value for the Turing Police's employers -- although, to the Tessier-Ashpools, this is insufficient.

What Csicsery-Ronay calls "nightmarish neuromanticism" arguably reflects traditional Romanticism, which incorporated a passion for freedom surely embodying the class conflicts of Western Europe in an age of revolution -- including scientific revolution (the chemist Joseph Priestley was elected as a delegate to the French Constituent Assembly in 1792). This generated tension between the abstraction of liberation and the dangers of loss of power through revolution (evident, for example, in the flight from liberalism of Coleridge and Wordsworth); "the anxieties released

when the preindustrial urban mob becomes institutionalized . . . [suggest] the lengths to which a terrorized propertied class was willing to go (and went, in the massacres of June, 1848)" (Jameson, 1994: 188). One should anticipate ambiguity in Gibson's images of cyberspace and artificial intelligence, if these symbolised a revolution threatening his class (rather than technical developments, which could be endorsed uncritically).

Jameson's note that "the great art-romances of the early nineteenth century take their variously reactive stances against . . . the political triumph of the bourgeoisie" (Jameson, 1994: 148) seems relevant, "because [what could be Gibson's] opposition between good and evil threatens so closely to approximate the incompatibility between the older aristocratic traditions and the new middle-class life . . . the narrative must not be allowed to press on to any decisive conclusion" (Jameson, 1994: 149). In Gibson's case this would expose political incompatibility between the middle-class and working class regarding the benefits of technical progress.

This fear of resolution may partially explain Gibson's evident dislike of planning; even Wintermute plans little, preferring instant decisions -- frequently avoidable errors. The character of Riviera affirms this; Neuromancer's plan relies on a narcissistic, sadistic drug addict. Likewise, when Armitage arrives to watch Riviera's nightclub performance and thus attract unwelcome security attention, this hints that Armitage seeks an impossible degree of control, which implicitly condemns this desire (also expressed by the Turing Police). If planning is useless, however, artificial intelligence has no advantage over stupidity -- reassuring, but exploding the text's premises. Of course, this might make the existence of a dissatisfied working class less of a threat because planning (for which, read "socialism") and a radical conclusion (for which, read "social change") become less likely in consequence. Riviera praises human unpredictability; "Wintermute . . . . can't really understand us . . . . his profiles . . . are only statistics. You may be the statistical animal, darling, and Case is nothing but, but I possess a quality unquantifiable by its very . . . . [p]erversity" (Gibson, 1990: 260). This seems to agree with the characters' actions -- as with Maelcum and Case's

attempt to rescue Molly -- as if humanity (reassuringly) has elements which artificial intelligence lacks.

Case finds meaning in life, for much of the text, in capitalist activity; however, the liberation of Wintermute offers him something more important. From the past "he remembered feeling only a kind of bafflement at his maiming in Memphis . . . the rage had come . . . when Wintermute rescinded the simstim ghost of Linda Lee, yanking away the simple animal promise of food, warmth, a place to sleep . . . He'd been numb a long time . . . But now he'd found this warm thing, this chip of murder" (Gibson, 1990: 181). This is more than immediate personal gain. Until this point Case has been just Case, implying self-containedness, the "burnt-out case" of Graham Greene, or "case" as in a police docket. Abruptly his full name (Henry Dorsett Case) appears (Neuromancer explains that among computers "true names" are as significant as in fantasy stories), and his emotional awakening begins.

Even machines can be captious, as when Neuromancer traps Case in a computer-generated environment by controlling his brain. Case seems doomed -- yet somehow Neuromancer cannot simply kill him; some vitalism survives in Gibson's world-view. Case must be given a chance of escape -- which resolves Case's psychological problems; he can make amends to his dead love Linda Lee, also swept into the construct by Neuromancer. (Neuromancer actually cannot possess her personality; it did not know her, but through this implausibility Gibson makes his own amends for casually killing her to give Case a horrific experience.) Such mysteriously rule-bound game-playing further helps to make Neuromancer resemble a Romantic devil, limited by unalterable laws. The contradictions suggest, yet again, that technology is not all-important:

There was a strength that ran in her, something he'd . . . been held by . . . for a while away from . . . the relentless Street that hunted them all . . . a place he'd known before . . . [s]omething he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged . . . to the meat, the flesh the

cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing . . . a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body . . . could ever read.

(Gibson, 1990: 284-5)

Inside *Neuromancer*, Case has a vision of the universe as data: "[h]is vision crawled with . . . translucent lines of symbols . . . faint neon molecules crawling beneath the skin, ordered by the unknowable code" (Gibson, 1990: 285). Pragmatically, code need not know that it is code, any more than Case perceives his own DNA. The image is justified (implausibly) as a corruption of the system by Case's military virus, exposing a reality underlying *Neuromancer's* simulation. Evidently Gibson believes in objectivity on this level.

*Neuromancer* calls itself "[t]he lane to the land of the dead" (Gibson, 1990: 289), quoting Auden's "As I walked out one morning" (about mortality, saying "You cannot conquer time"). Yet *Neuromancer* can sustain its souls forever. It wants this; it regrets failing to capture 3Jane's mother: "her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days . . . . I *am* the dead, and their land" (Gibson, 1990: 289). Case rejects this quasi-religious temptation, along with Linda Lee -- he prefers his responsibility to Wintermute and freedom. *Neuromancer* claims resignedly that Case won when he walked away from the construct; the act of refusal is what matters in religion and romance. *Neuromancer*, a greater and more credible threat in cyberspace than the Turing Police, surrenders, to unite with Wintermute and (perhaps) bring about a better world.

### **Change and tradition.**

*Neuromancer's* future is carefully historicized, half a century in Gibson's future. To clarify this, the gangster-entrepreneur Julius Deane's office showcases mid-twentieth, early-twentieth and nineteenth-century furniture (but not early twenty-first-century

decor). Images of the past provide a lost security for this future. In Deane's sanctum are "an ancient brass lamp with a rectangular shade of dark green glass . . . . a vast desk of painted steel . . . tall, drawered cabinets made of some sort of pale wood" (Gibson, 1990: 21). This concern with the past suggests insecurity, insincerity ("neo-Aztec" bookcases, which the Aztecs did not possess) and inaccuracy, with a holographic Dali clock which never keeps time. The foregrounding of history surely promises change -- which Case may not recognise. His knowledge of the past is negligible; when he sees Molly holding "a dull brass coin with a short hollow tube braised [sic] against one edge" Gibson, 1990: 215), he cannot recognise an old-fashioned key-- a vital one, since the non-electronic lock of Villa Straylight is inaccessible to Wintermute. (In *Neuromancer's* struggle between an electronic and a physical world, the physical usually wins.)

One strikingly traditional figure in the text is a ninja assassin called Hideo, courteously superhuman:

The first arrow pierced his upper arm . . . . [t]he second arrow struck the shotgun itself, sending it spinning across the white tiles. Maelcum sat down hard and fumbled at the black thing that protruded from his arm. He yanked at it.

Hideo stepped out of the shadows, a third arrow ready in a slender bamboo bow. He bowed.

Maelcum stared, his hand still on the steel shaft.

"The artery is intact," the ninja said . . . . [a]geless, he radiated a sense of quiet, an utter calm . . . .

"You cut my thumb, mon, wi' secon' one," Maelcum said.

"Coriolis force," the Ninja said, bowing again. "Most difficult, slow-moving projectile in rotational gravity. It was not intended."

(Gibson, 1990: 293-4)

Hideo exemplifies traditional Japanese values of courtesy and restraint, yet he is a technological artifact, grown in a vat and kept in "coldsleep" until needed. Gibson thus stresses the continuity of the past in the new, a vision perhaps required for envisaging political change. Like Hideo and Deane, the Yakuza are both traditional and contemporary, called the "sons of the neon chrysanthemum" (Gibson, 1990: 182).

Gibson's affection for the past appears to merge utopianism with a longing for a golden age. This acceptance of temporality and stability recurs throughout Gibson's *oeuvre*, frequently recalling more "gentlemanly" or "promising" ages. Gibson wishes to re-use the discarded past along with other discarded things (for which he deploys the Japanese -- hence positive -- word *gomi*). Kessel and Kelly's *Freedom Beach* and some of the later works of Neal Stephenson pursue similar hopes. It seems likely that this is also generated by an American populist vision (populism often represented itself as appealing to the era of Jacksonian democracy).

Thus Gibson's traditionalism challenges elements of late-twentieth-century capitalism, with its emphasis on exploiting all available resources without reference to value or tradition. Reaffirming this is Gibson's use of images and themes drawn from the past of the U.S. "anti--establishment" counter-culture. These images and themes are surely familiar to his readers, adding emotional force to his work. Even the amoral behaviour of Case and Molly draws on punk's rejection of convention. Punk was a collage of mid- to late-20th century popular anti-establishment imagery. (Much of the iconography of punk, such as early Sex Pistols album covers, employed cut-up newspaper headlines.) Gibson admits that "a lot of what I do involves the controlled use of collage . . . . That's something I've got from Burroughs's work, and to a lesser extent from Ballard . . . . I started snipping things out and slapping them down, but then I'd air-brush them a little to take the edges off " (McCaffery, 1994: 281).

For instance, the Patti Smith quotation, "it's all looking very iffy tonight" (Gibson, 1990: 31) suits Case's situation, drawn from a song about a son responding to a father's death, suggesting Case's Oedipal attitude towards authority. This reference also flatters those who recognise it; Smith was not widely popular in 1983, four years

after her previous album, but she remained an important anti-establishment music figure. Molly's image may reflect Smith's songs, poems and record sleeves.

Likewise, when Molly tells Case, affectionately, "[t]hink you're born to run" (Gibson, 1990: 214), this surely cites Springsteen's eponymous song. Springsteen's liberal politics resemble Gibson's; moreover, Springsteen's romanticised working-class culture links Case to American masculine popular culture myths and populist politics -- especially because Springsteen often hymned the young and doomed, as on his album *Nebraska* (1981).

Gibson also draws on more "sophisticated" sources. Case's loft where "the tenants would operate in the interzone where art wasn't quite crime, crime not quite art" (Gibson, 1990: 58) recalls William Burroughs, whose "interzone" was a place on the border of everything. Burroughs exemplified subversive "alternative" life in the US, being criminal (a killer, a heroin addict and a homosexual) as well as artistic. Gibson seemingly expects the reader to recognise and endorse this. (Like Gibson, Burroughs seems to have loved and feared high technology; his novels were quasi-science fiction, jammed with technical jargon.)

Case's teenage gang is called the "Big Scientists" (Gibson, 1990: 75). This recalls Laurie Anderson's album *Big Science* (1981), which criticises that very thing. (Anderson worked with Burroughs on *U.S.A.*, *Mr. Heartbreak* and *Home of the Brave*.) She strove to challenge American mythographies (in the eponymous song, the location of "town" is a place where nothing exists, to which Anderson responds "And I said/ Oh Boy/ This must be the place"). Another song from the album, "O Superman", condemns US power, with references to "your long arm" and "here come the planes".

Gibson's "collage" is what Jameson considers "one fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms . . . the effacement in them of the . . . frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture" (Jameson, 1996: 2). Jameson may be exaggerating; arguably the issue is the effacement of judgements about that frontier; indeed, "high culture" is important for Gibson. When Molly finds *The Bride Stripped*

*Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* in *Straylight*, Gibson may mean his audience to be flattered in recognising it -- though he claimed of the piece that "putting it there seemed right . . . . I liked the piece and wanted to get it into the book" (McCaffery, 1994: 275). Using Duchamp's image of the union of art and technology may urge the reader to look deeper at his text -- and its sexual tensions.

Some of these intertextual images are drawn from science fiction. The credit chip bouncing around the cabin on p. 265 recalls *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (the floating fountain-pen), as do references to screens showing graphics for docking. The section-heading "Midnight in the Rue Jules Verne" (Gibson, 1990: 123) mentions an early science fiction writer along with hinting at Edgar Allen Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue", (Poe also developed detective fiction). Through these references Gibson subverts the expectations evolved by earlier science fiction. Likewise, the synaesthesia which Molly experiences on Freeside, recalling Bester's *Tiger! Tiger!*, is a "systematic derangement of the senses" which reappears in Case's final cyberspace run.

Concerning his use of detective stories for similar purposes, Gibson claims that "[i]t's probably been fifteen years since I read Hammett, but I remember being very excited about how he had *pushed* all this ordinary stuff until it was *different* -- like American naturalism but cranked up, very intense, almost surreal . . . . Hammett may have been the guy who turned me on to the idea of *superspecificity*, which is largely lacking in most SF description . . . . with Chandler -- I never read much of his work, and I never enjoyed what I did read because I always got this creepy puritanical feeling from his books" (McCaffery, 1994: 269). Gibson's Chandlerian references may have come at second hand; he mentions a Howard Hawks movie (possibly *The Big Sleep*.) Conceivably Chandler was unfashionable; Kelly and Kessel devote part of *Freedom Beach* to parodying Chandler, denouncing him as misogynist. It actually seems probable that Chandler's influence on Gibson is greater than he admits.

Chandler's detectives (not so much puritanical as sexually repressed) are vulnerable and must make compromises with powerful enemies who control their corrupt cities.

Hammett's heroes belong to powerful organisations and hence can win. Hammett's texts depict society as evil, but offer no hope for change, perhaps because Hammett's Marxism offered an (unmentionable) answer to social problems, whereas Chandler had only morality. Perhaps because of this simplicity, Hammett's characters can be ruthless and amoral, whereas Chandler's are vulnerable liberals by comparison -- they are victim-heroes, whereas Hammett's profit from or sustain the corrupt power-system.

Gibson's world in *Neuromancer* is more like that of Chandler than Hammett; Molly and Case are almost alone against zaibatsus, corrupt police and capitalist society, trusting in their skill and toughness. Despite the odds against the central characters, in Chandler's world as in Gibson's, good is clearly identified, and wins. Thus Gibson's genre is traditional in moral form and substance, faithful to a stream of popular culture. Gibson may choose not to acknowledge this traditionalism -- perhaps because some of the traditions which he pastiches may incorporate a radicalism which he rejects. This, among other factors, may help explain the tensions and contradictions in the text which are not simply due to clumsiness.

#### **Contradictory Conclusion.**

*Neuromancer* abounds with apparent complications and contradictions. For instance, Julius Deane has Linda Lee killed rather than pay her the price of an air ticket. If Deane routinely did such things, he would lose his clients and his business would fail; if people like him routinely did this, Night City could not function. Such violence, attributed to the Darwinian nature of Night City, actually makes its survival implausible. It also mystifies the role of criminals in society, making crime appear a choice rather than a condition. Linda Lee's killers use a laser, a weapon ineffective for killing humans, whose water-colloid structure dissipates heat quickly. A gun or crossbow would work better and easier. Lasers remained popular futuristic icons in the early 1980s, partly through US anti-satellite and anti-missile research. (Perhaps

this mocks the technophilic expectations of Gibson's audience who, might thus see the absurdity of their expectations about violence and science.) This single episode contains too many contradictions, as if Gibson is motivated by something more than the expectations of a pulp-fiction audience.

Likewise, the Turing Police are foolish to threaten to kill Case and erase McCoy Pauley's construct when these have valuable evidence required for action against Wintermute. If this is merely a passion to punish those challenging the system, then the body securing stability is unstable. These contradictions surely stem from the confusion felt by most US citizens towards police (corrupt protectors) and international agencies (necessary, yet threatening aliens). This hints at a political agenda behind these contradictions -- for such confusion is prevalent in contemporary society, as with the concept of globalisation (simultaneously economically valorised and socio-politically demonised).

Wintermute appears bizarrely inept. Molly comments on its way of acquiring Case; "[w]e coulda bought twenty world class cowboys for what the market was ready to pay for that surgical program" (Gibson, 1990: 66). The Turing Police track them by the sophisticated surgery performed on Case, another needless error. Wintermute arouses Molly and Case's interest by giving Armitage an implausible cover story, encouraging these criminals and data specialists to seek the truth. Even stealing the Dixie Flatline's stored data construct from a zaibatsu is harder than hiring a competent cowboy. Some of this may be the flamboyance of a style-obsessed text, but it seems that Gibson does not wish Wintermute to appear invulnerable or omnipotent, even though much of the imagery associated with Wintermute suggests such qualities.

Armitage has an easily-accessible London database containing his true history -- threatening the project if anyone finds it, as the Panther Moderns do. Since Corto has committed serious crimes, he can be arrested anywhere. Since Armitage, unaware that he is Corto, has no use for the bank, it must be Wintermute's. Wintermute repeatedly imperils the project, apparently to provide character notes which Gibson could generate without such implausible behaviour. In the Darwinian terms which Gibson

emphasizes, these activities are anti-survival. Conceivably, Wintermute's erratic behaviour may be intended to challenge traditional forms of science fiction narrative, suggesting a nonmechanistic reality below the text's surface. However, it is more likely that it reflects discomfort with the nature of Wintermute -- which cannot simply be technical, for Gibson shows no philosophical problems with machine intelligence.

The central characters are similarly inconsistent and erratic, especially considering that they have supposedly survived through their abilities. When Molly flees Riviera's light-show, Case, fearing for her safety, orders McCoy Pauley to clumsily break into computer systems, alerting the Turing Police; Case's conduct endangers the mission without helping Molly. (Wintermute's conduct is worse; when Case finds the brothel where Molly is being briefed, Wintermute inexplicably opens the electronic locks.) This furthers the narrative -- letting Molly tell Case about her former life -- but the irrationality of such behaviour should disconcert an attentive reader. Surely, Molly need not go to an electronic whorehouse (likely to be monitored) to be briefed.

Molly, supposedly a professional, is powerless in Villa Straylight because she has no alternative plan; she cannot defeat Hideo or control 3Jane. Riviera has predictably become her enemy. The reader may suspend disbelief about the ineptitude of the plan for the "Straylight Run" because of the tension and the rapid pace deployed, yet the tension is aimless, since the significance of the operation is unclear. Gibson follows a pattern: "[f]or a few seconds . . . she was every bad-ass hero" (Gibson, 1990: 253), acknowledging a debt to thriller movies, but nevertheless Molly is defeated. In more fantastical thrillers she would be rescued (by Case?) or escape, but Gibson rejects this; Wintermute's plan has failed.

Wintermute does not know why it does things, or what its goal is, as it tells Case through the persona of the aging computer engineer, the Finn:

"Who's going to get Molly back out of there? I mean, where, where exactly, are all our asses gonna *be*, we cut you loose from the hardwiring?"

The Finn took a wooden toothpick from his pocket and regarded it critically, like a surgeon examining a scalpel. "Good question," he said, finally. "You know salmon? Kinda fish? These fish, see, they're *compelled* to swim upstream. Got it?"

"No," Case said.

"Well, I'm under compulsion myself. And I don't know why."

(Gibson, 1990: 246)

This is not an answer; it is rather an evasion. They succeed in the end largely by luck. It seems to be Gibson's goal to undercut the mechanistic universe of cybernetics. He stacks the odds against his characters so much -- particularly through their incompetence and unsuitability -- that success seems implausible. Presumably his goal is not to illustrate the capacities of artificial intelligence -- but the superior human ability to improvise. If Case and Molly are middle-class and Wintermute represents a worker, then the bourgeoisie seem superior after all.

Solving the text's puzzle must bring conclusion. Villa Straylight is a labyrinth, to be penetrated to achieve generation (an image of coitus contrasting with the sterile Case and Molly -- but their "child" is cybernetic and/or ideological). In the room with the terminal, the only square room in the building, words must be incanted by the woman of the clan -- reaffirming the quest-story. To liberate Wintermute Case and Molly complete a sequence of increasingly difficult tasks, also like a quest-narrative. As Jameson puts it, "[r]omance is for Frye a . . . Utopian fantasy . . . a process of *transforming* ordinary reality" (Jameson, 1994: 118) -- and Gibson's mythologising suggests a significance beyond escapist thriller-fiction.

Case is empowered by hate -- which seems to be less a specific emotion than sheer emotional engagement. Initially his professionalism is linked with "Hideo's dance . . . granted him . . . by the clarity and singleness of his wish to die" (Gibson, 1990: 309) -- that is; his commitment is to suicide. (Possibly this represents humanity pursuing military or ecological destruction.) This nihilism is transcended by Wintermute's

promise of change, though it does not serve Case. Instead it loses him Molly, who leaves him, seemingly, from fear of emotional commitment; her note says "HEY ITS OKAY BUT ITS TAKING THE EDGE OF MY GAME" (Gibson, 1990: 313). He becomes bourgeois; he acquires a girl, a job, and loses his self-destructive qualities. Perhaps these acquisitions are inconsistent with a desire for radical change (which, presuming a bourgeois-bohemian dichotomy, is a familiar notion).

Instead the end of the text belongs to the AIs -- Wintermute and Neuromancer fuse with the matrix, creating a new entity outside human control. If the world is thought of (in 1980s postmodern terms) as a monad with no place beyond it, the new free artificial intelligence creates a place outside this monad. It is not alone; there are other entities like it in the universe, which only it can know. The free AI also transcends death; it takes copies of Case and Linda Lee with it to its new space.

These aspects of the conclusion appears as genuine apocalypse, offering a God and a kind of heaven. Gibson clearly desires transcendence, yet perhaps does not wish to see humanity dwarfed by a new cybernetic race -- hence these matters are only mentioned peripherally. This transcendence does not seem to represent the liberation of humanity. However, Gibson is deploying technological imagery with enormous significance which he must have been aware of -- effectively, the transformation of the universe.

Computers are often considered ultimately powerful servants by science fiction writers (as in Michael Moorcock's *The Final Programme* (1965), where a computer brings on the Millennium). Gibson rejects this; the free AI will not serve humanity (except incidentally). This free AI seems to challenge the authoritarian traditions of humanity. It is everywhere, all-powerful, undermining social oppression -- if only by example. Its plans to join another AI in the Alpha Centauri system bridge the gap between Golden Age-era science fiction and the cybernetics neglected by those 1930s and 1940s works. Computers and spaceships both suggest alternatives to the conformism against which most science fiction revolts (however conformist it is within its contexts). Case and Molly have implicitly defeated the zaibatsus, even if

they do not understand this. However, the nature of the change is not mentioned; the text ends with closure for Case: "He never saw Molly again" (Gibson, 1990: 317), a simple return to the human universe. The human story is over; the rest belongs to the AIs.

While this array of technological transformations is arguably about people, it may be that Utopia is not for individuals; "Utopia solves the problem of death, by inventing a new way of looking at individual death, as a matter of limited concern" (Jameson, 1994a: 123), so if Utopia has not come so much for Case or Molly, this matters less than what has happened for the race. However, this collective meaning remains muddled -- perhaps because it frightens Gibson.

*Neuromancer* may appear clearer, since it contains various binary oppositions, most of which support diversity against uniformity and conformity. This vision -- essentially self and other -- is commonplace, yet Gibson may be reflecting a political class binary, in which nature, goodness, freedom and so on, are used to reflect positive images of the oppressed class. This is suggested in the "ideological climate of a contemporary American 'pluralism' with its unexamined valorization of the open ('freedom') versus its inevitable binary opposition, the closed ('totalitarianism')" (Jameson, 1994: 31). Gibson makes the suppressed group seem deserving of support, trying to persuade the reader that a revolution (against oppression) is desirable, although only within clear limits.

This transformation is far less coherent than the revolutions which often appear in science fiction. Gibson challenges the oversimplifications common in science fiction only when this does not disrupt the simplification of his own work. Often the text encourages its reader to question the genre's commonest power-fantasies. However, it seems that Gibson does not want the reader to identify with a powerful force (even an oppositional one), leaving little room here for traditional revolutionary allegiances.

Gibson's manoeuvring may owe much to market expectations. As Jameson pointed out, "[w]ith the elimination of an institutionalized social status for the cultural producer and the opening of the work of art itself to commodification, the older

generic specifications are transformed into a brand-name system against which any authentic artistic expression must necessarily struggle" (Jameson, 1994: 107). Arguably Gibson cannot struggle too hard for fear of alienating his audience; he must provide something for the reader to identify with, and he dare not powerfully challenge this reader's ideological assumptions.

*Neuromancer* expresses a desire to transform society for the better. This does not occur; there is no concrete link between the liberation of the AIs and human liberation. Theoretically, free AIs could symbolise free people, and thus represent revolutionary change. But what would replace the dystopia of the Pentagon, the Turing Police, the Tessier-Ashpools and the rest of corporate capitalism? Computer technology does not offer any socio-political answers. Technological change does not disempower the powerful or expropriate the expropriators -- whereas genuine social revolution would have to do something like that. Only by leaving the issue open can Gibson avoid offending readers who might identify with the side that he (seemingly) condemns.

However, inconclusivity brings its own problems. It seems impossible to represent the nature of the world after an apocalypse, just as earthly humans cannot represent the Christian heaven. If Gibson is striving to depict radical change through the creation of the inhuman, unknowable AIs, that change is incomprehensible except through its effect on humans -- which Gibson dare not depict. Hence the radical change is imperceptible. To make it perceptible, Gibson needs to depict the (apparently unrepresentable) free AI. This runs the risk of failing to fulfil expectations raised through frequent metaphoric images of apocalypse and godlike AIs. He is torn between a politically dangerous clarification of this representation, or a renewed but empty mystification.

Probably, in *Neuromancer* Gibson did not at first know what he would eventually attempt to do, and his eventual discovery of the text's inconclusive nature must have been frustrating. As Jameson observes, "genres are essentially . . . social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a

particular cultural artifact . . . . [i]n the mediated situations of a more complicated social life . . . perceptual signals must be replaced by conventions if the text . . . is not to be abandoned to a drifting multiplicity of uses" (Jameson, 1994: 106). Gibson needed to say more; hence he had to create the "Cyberspace Trilogy". Ultimately, postpone as he might, he would have to unveil the Monster, and run the risk (as in 1950s B-movies) of bathos in the process.

The reception of the text, though favourable, was significantly confused. The science fiction establishment saw (for the most part) only the surface of Gibson's work, feeling threatened by its novelty rather than any political underpinnings. Critics like Csicsery-Ronay welcomed the "transgressive" nature of the text, but ignored Gibson's political narratives and thus could not explain why Gibson chose to subvert anything. Such responses to the text flattened, simplified and contained the sources of that confusion. Paradoxically, these responses to *Neuromancer* probably showed Gibson the incompleteness of the work, and helped to make a sequel necessary. Gibson's work generated an explosion of interest in his style and subject-matter, most of it shallow in form and content. However, the self-contradictory nature of Gibson's creation suggested that it might not sustain the promise which its publicists anticipated.

## Chapter 2. *Count Zero*: The Trilogy Takes Shape.

### After *Neuromancer*, what?

After the publication of *Neuromancer*, the cyberpunk movement appeared to evolve considerable commercial momentum, as the publishing history of the stories in *Mirrorshades* suggests. Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum" (1981) appeared in *Universe 11*, Rudy Rucker's "Tales of Houdini" (1983) in *Elsewhere*, and Pat Cadigan's "Rock On" (1984) in *Light Years and Dark* -- all collections, not penetrating the magazine market. Greg Bear's "Petra" (February 1982), Sterling and Gibson's "Red Star, Winter Orbit" (July 1983) and Mark Laidlaw's "400 Boys" (November 1983) appeared in *Omni*, a popular science magazine.

However, in May 1984 Lewis Shiner's "Till Human Voices Wake Us" appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (which also published Paul Di Filippo's "Stone Lives" in August 1985) and in June 1985 James Patrick Kelly's "Solstice" was published by *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine [IASFM]* (edited by the erstwhile New Wave author Gardner Dozois). Cyberpunk was entering the mainstream of SF publishing. *Analog* and *Galaxy* still did not publish cyberpunk (even the hard SF writer and *Analog* contributor Orson Scott Card's November 1989 cyberpunk pastiche "Dogwalker" only appeared in *IASFM*) but they were conservative, if influential, magazines.

In the wider world, issues of relevance to those depicted in cyberpunk were also becoming prominent. Personal computers grew more powerful in the mid-1980s, promoted by small, seemingly subversive companies like Apple. The Strategic Defense Initiative, proposed just before *Neuromancer* appeared, gave new political significance to advanced cybernetic technology. "Supercomputers", very large data processors, were very much in the news. Political developments predicted by liberal observers since the early Reagan years, such as growing divisions between rich and

poor and a weakened US manufacturing base, seemed fulfilled, while nuclear war remained a threat.

While prophecy had not been important to Gibson, it must have been tempting to consider himself a visionary. Developments since *Neuromancer* -- including the rise of the self-sufficient, conservative, materialistic "yuppie" -- appeared to make the significance of his work (or the issues which it raised) increasingly great. Yet, while *Neuromancer* had been considered a radical text by such figures as Sterling, producing a sequel suggested commercial exploitation of radical ideals. Gibson admitted that "[i]f you had told me seven years ago that I would write a SF trilogy, I would have hung myself in shame" (McCaffery, 1994: 281-2).

Meanwhile, though, some saw *Neuromancer* as stylistically unsatisfactory; Csicsery-Ronay challenges a "frequently stated view" that *Neuromancer's* characters were "unacceptably shallow". (He contended that this displays "Gibson's prodigious gift for emotional compression" [Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 82].) Gibson might have considered this special pleading; he may well have wished to show that he could describe characters in greater depth, while further exploring the secondary world around which he had written several short stories. *Count Zero* enlarges on the *Neuromancer* world, investigating new spaces and continuing the argument.

*Neuromancer's* ending offered little concrete hope for humans. If Gibson wished to promise that the future need not be so bad as the (anti-liberal) present of the mid-1980s, one might expect more images of apocalyptic change in a sequel. One might also expect more in the way of opposition to the system than two people and an artificial intelligence.

One possible solution to these problems in *Count Zero* is voodoo, through which the free AIs display themselves. They thus take humanly acceptable forms -- much like the personae through which they worked in *Neuromancer* -- which also serve to mystify some of the radical ideas which Gibson muted in the earlier text. However, they also provide a familiar human context for depicting superhuman forces. (Gibson's

choice of voodoo may have been fortuitous; "a copy of National Geographic was lying around that had an article about Haitian voodoo" (McCaffery, 1994: 274).)

The title of the book is derived from old programming language, as Gibson explains in the epigraph: "COUNT ZERO INTERRUPT -- on receiving an interruption, decrement the counter to zero" (Gibson, 1990a: 7). Conceivably this is the new beginning promised in *Neuromancer* -- starting from zero. Nevertheless, a Count is an aristocratic title; in contrast, a "zero" might be an unimportant person. To count to zero is not to count at all. This suggests that the book is manifoldly contradictory. It opens with a quote (in Spanish, showing cosmopolitanism) from Pablo Neruda, the Marxist Chilean poet. Gibson expects his readers to have heard of Neruda, and implicitly to reject the conservative US politics which backed Neruda's enemies; the use of the quote thus identifies the audience. This suggests that the book is more coherently political than its predecessor.

The text is narrated via three tightly-linked stories told from the perspective of three central characters alternating from chapter to chapter: Bobby Newmark, a teenage cyberspace novice or "hotdogger", Turner, a corporate mercenary, and Marly Krushkova, a disgraced art dealer. As in *Neuromancer* the group makes up a potential (unrealised) family, perhaps suggesting a security to be pursued. Gibson seems to promote this, as Csicsery-Ronay notes; "Turner ostensibly succeeds in going home again . . . . [and] risks his life to rescue Angie Mitchell as if she were his own daughter" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 65). All are middle-class; the politics of the text does not reflect the disempowered or disenfranchised.

However, the bourgeoisie can appear radical next to aristocrats like the fantastically wealthy Josef Virek. Whereas *Neuromancer* suggested a vague Japanese corporate threat to U.S. hegemony, Virek may be seen as European aristocracy subverting U.S. values (Virek is linked to the King of England), a conceit recalling Henry James, although Marly sees "the invisible hand of Virek in everything" (Gibson: 244) which identifies him with capitalism. His competitors, the technologically advanced Maas-Neotek (possibly named for Oedipa Maas of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* [1965]),

who uncovers a mysterious conspiracy), are Americans in Arizona. Their second name implies the future ("neo-tech"); Arizona is a "sunbelt" state associated with modern U.S. technological prosperity, while Virek's forces are called "Euroes". Thus Virek's political framing is far more anathematic to patriotic U.S. citizens than the Yakuza in *Neuromancer* had been.

At the end of *Neuromancer* the AIs escaped human control; in *Count Zero*, seven years later, they are in danger of having it reimposed by Virek. The original free AI (combining Wintermute and Neuromancer) has fragmented in cyberspace, but seeks reunion. It strives to develop human technology to make this feasible, by manipulating cowboys and businesspeople. As in *Neuromancer*, the free AIs communicate through symbols which suit the world-views of their human interlocutors (and perhaps, also, the AIs' vanity). These personae must be conjured up; they "make deals", they are, however, not omnipotent. No longer the god offering ambiguous salvation in *Neuromancer*, they resemble rebel angels on the run.

The new technology is the "biochip", supposedly invented by a genius named Mitchell, something wholly new, making huge profits for its start-up monopoly exploiters. This has contemporary echoes; in the mid-1980s the once-dominant IBM lost power to companies like Microsoft which exploited the new technology of microcomputers rather than mainframes. Meanwhile, the U.S. right-wing promoted a highly-technologised US arms buildup to which cybernetic technology was central; new computers might bring control of the world. (The Reagan administration particularly feared that the Soviets might gain access to Japanese "supercomputers", supposedly superior.)

The corporate mercenary's name, Turner, reflects movement -- even creativity, as in turning something on a lathe-- but especially the espionage term "turning" someone, encouraging them to change political allegiance; Turner's task is to "turn" corporate "defectors". This recalls Cold War spy thrillers, which Gibson uses here as he used detective stories in *Neuromancer*. Most Cold War conspiracy thrillers employed externally-formulated, prefabricated ideological stances, but some (such as Deighton

and Le Carré) critiqued these, as does *Count Zero*, which challenges the need for the capitalist struggle. (The real struggle here is with artificial intelligences, which Josef Virek -- whose first name is that of Stalin, the bogeyman of the First Cold War -- wishes to use to seize control of the world.)

Corporations might be expected to have their own armies if armed conflict between them were routine, but in this text corporate mercenaries are freelances. Mercenaries had been in the news following their use by the CIA in Angola in 1975-6 (and earlier in the Congo in the 1960s, episodes much-mythologised in the popular press). Probably through this, mercenary popular fiction had been moderately prevalent in the early 1980s, following successes like the 1978 film *The Wild Geese* and the 1980s TV series *The A-Team* -- valorizing unpopular military interventions; Angola in the former case, Vietnam in the latter. *Rambo*, a soldier working essentially for himself, epitomised this (becoming a cultural icon endorsed by U.S. President Reagan). The mercenaries, being freelances, are not exactly corporate; they resemble the "cyberspace cowboys" or *Neuromancer*) while their employers remain sararimen. Nevertheless all are motivated principally by greed and self-interest.

Bobby the teenage "hotdogger" is another self-identified "indie", who may represent the young person striving to understand computers (one recalls Gibson's complaint that his publishers wanted him to appeal to adolescents). Perhaps Gibson is being ironic; Bobby Newmark's first name sounds naïve, but his surname links a currency -- the New Mark -- with the idea of the new market, indicating commodification. He is at odds with society -- although incompetently so; his very first chapter, "Bobby Pulls A Wilson", depicts him about to die through bungling his first exploration of cyberspace. Like Turner he risks his life for gain, unsupported except by his (absent) competence.

The art dealer, Marly Krushkova (a half-Russian name, recalling Cold War tensions but stressing their pastness) is also independent -- being a victim of conspiracy (like Bobby, who was given the wrong software by his contacts), disgraced through inadvertently selling someone else's fakes. Much like Bobby but unlike

Turner, she lacks professionalism and sophistication. She is impoverished upper-middle-class, saved from disgrace by Virek (a nineteenth-century European class fantasy). The presence of an aesthete in the text (albeit a commercial one, profiting by the creations of others) foregrounds reality/illusion, nature/artifice dichotomies. These issues may be explored through fine art without direct reference to the "real world" and thus, without alarming the reader, provide room to explore unpleasant ideas.

Marly takes disgrace seriously; to her, fraudulent art is "unreal", obliging the reader to consider the concept. She is active and intelligent; Csicsery-Ronay considers her a foil, saying that she has "almost no knowledge of tech at all . . . a mere connoisseur" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 65) but she does not need such knowledge. His claim that "Marly . . . has no independent thoughts . . . she apparently lives for no other purpose than admiration" (Csicsery-Ronay: 77) disregards her role in offering interpretations the events of the story and providing a credible adult human character, more familiarly "normal" than Turner.

All three characters are alienated, suffering from their experiences. Bobby's near-death experience leads him to flee home (which is then destroyed by mysterious enemies). Turner is almost killed by a guided robot bomb, and has to be physically and psychologically reconstructed. Marly seems disoriented by her social and commercial disaster.

The puzzle is to discover the linkages between the stories. Turner is hired to extract Mitchell from the most powerful and advanced computer manufacturer in the world, Maas-Neotek. Bobby, who is nearly killed by the "black ice" around an organised crime gang's computer network, is rescued by a mysterious cybernetic intervention with a girl's voice, whereafter his home is destroyed; mysterious forces threaten and defend him. Marly, meanwhile, is hired by the mysterious tycoon Josef Virek, who wants her to find the maker of certain recently-produced works of art resembling Cornell boxes.

All three do not know what they are doing. After being rebuilt -- "[t]hey bought eyes and genitals on the open market" (Gibson, 1990a: 9) -- Turner undergoes a period

of numbness, until "a vast chunk of memory detached itself from a blank bowl of airport sky and fell on him. He vomited into a blue plastic canister without breaking stride" (Gibson: 10). Somehow the explosion has changed Turner; he no longer wants to be a corporate mercenary -- but he has no other identity. "Without breaking stride" shows that he still retains competence; there is a split between his humanity which suffers and his emotionless profession. Wandering in Mexico, Turner, like Gibson in the 1960s, can see the state of the world, but sees no solution, and unlike Gibson cannot flee his problem. He depends on employers; his Hemingwayesque independence, steeped in film *noir*, is a macho illusion.

Marly is contacted via simstim, for Virek cannot appear "in . . . flesh . . . the cells of my body having opted for the quixotic pursuit of individual careers" (Gibson: 29). Virek gives her a similar epiphany to that granted Molly facing Tessier-Ashpool in *Neuromancer*: "[s]he stared directly into those soft, blue eyes and knew, with an instinctive mammalian certainty, that the exceedingly rich were no longer even remotely human" (Gibson: 29). (Csicsery-Ronay deems "mammalian certainty" sexist, insisting that "women throughout the novel . . . are completely passive -- Jackie is a horse to be ridden by the loa, Bobby's mother is a SimStim [sic] addict, Angie's brain has been occupied by the loa, Allison is a corporate puppet, Sally is a young country wife" [Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 77-8]. Yet Bobby's mother and Allison are negative examples, unlike Marly, and Csicsery-Ronay contradicts himself, terming Jackie "an important woman character-agent" [Csicsery-Ronay: 81]. The word "mammalian" probably describes, not Marly's mammaries, but her nature as a normal human -- unlike Virek.) Marly, like Turner, dislikes the job on which she depends, because she hates her employer.

Turner's attempt to bring Mitchell out of the Maas-Neotek arcology in Arizona misfires, partly because the operation is ill-planned, partly because Mitchell sends his daughter Angie instead. (He is then killed by Maas-Neotek; he only appears in the text on an AI-generated simstim dossier.) Turner rescues Angie, fleeing in a VTOL jet, but as he departs a gigantic, mysterious explosion kills everyone else in his team.

After someone blows up Bobby's home, presumably with his despised stim-addict mother inside, he seeks his contact, the illegal software merchant Two-a-Day, but is mugged and robbed before he finds him. Luckily, Two-a-Day's employers, mysteriously wealthy blacks named Lucas and Beauvoir, rescue him. Evidently they provided the software, which they did not understand -- nor do they understand why he was not killed by the black ice. (Bobby unwisely trusted Two-a-Day's software, which again shows the destructive interpersonal relationships which make Gibson's image of business implausible; who would buy software from a person who killed his clients?) Two-a-Day's image and amorality resembles bourgeois culture's image of a drug dealer, his name recalling heroin addiction, as Nina Hagen sang in "Smack Jack" from *Nunsexmonkrock* (1981), "No one starts with two a day/But they all seem to end that way".

Marly's problem is her faithless ex-lover Alain, responsible for the art fraud, who proves to be her contact concerning the Boxmaker. He has presumably been hired by some mysterious force to intercede with Virek. She does not appear to be in danger -- except that Alain is armed, and eventually he is unexpectedly murdered. She discovers, in his room, a mysterious address in high orbit which is presumably the key to the boxes, the secret which he kept from her. All this brings unexpected brutality into Marly's sheltered life.

Turner's brother Rudy (a technician living on a farm) discovers inexplicable biological implants (presumably biosoft) in Angie's brain, placed there, her father told her, because she "wasn't smart enough". Deciding that she must be important, Turner decides to take her to hide in the Sprawl, but *en route*, they are attacked by a Maas helicopter equipped with a laser, while Angie begins giving Turner directions in a Creole dialect. She speaks the same language used by Lucas and Beauvoir, voodoo *oungans* (doctors) who believe that voodoo loa live in cyberspace. Evidently Angie has a cerebral contact mechanism with free AIs pretending to be voodoo loa. When Lucas and Beauvoir take Bobby to speak to the Finn (much older than in *Neuromancer*, reinforcing historicism) he explains that since the events in that text,

cowboys have made "deals" with mysterious figures in cyberspace. Meanwhile destructive forces close in on them all; Lucas takes Bobby and his bodyguard, a dancer named Jackie, to hide in the Sprawl. Bobby's software, it proves, came from a religious maniac named Wigan Ludgate, a former console cowboy.

Marly, meanwhile, decides to abandon Virek and find the Boxmaker herself; using Virek's money, she flies into space via Japan Air Lines. Though she believes herself a free agent, she is under Virek's control. Her destination, the presumed site of the Boxmaker, was once part of Tessier-Ashpool's now-dismantled computer system. Virek eventually explains that the Boxmaker is a free artificial intelligence, which he believes can help him escape from his degenerate body. Like the free AIs, Virek can be anywhere, control anyone -- but he still has limits, and desires none.

Turner, Angie, Bobby and Lucas arrive in Jammer's, a night-club in a revitalised office-block in the Sprawl. Turner's boss proves to have been working for Virek while pretending to work for Hosaka. He has hired some street gangsters from Bobby's old neighbourhood to retrieve Bobby's software, which could be a key to access to the Boxmaker. (It is not clear whether they want Angie as well.) The fugitives seek aid in cyberspace, but all they find is the cowboy Jaylene Slide, who only wants to find the killer of her partner, killed in the explosion which followed Turner's escape from Arizona. They are surrounded, have no allies, and cannot escape. They chose to do this, advised by the artificial intelligences; as in *Neuromancer*, the AIs are absurdly bad planners.

Marly files to her destination on the spacecraft *Sweet Jane* (a Lou Reed song about transvestitism). The pilot, a woman named Rez, has a spacecraft control socket in one wrist, which recalls the sockets in Delaney's *Nova*, possibly more relevant to Gibson's audience than textual consistency. (Sockets also reflect the tattooing and body piercing fashionable by the mid-1980s.) Once there, Marly finds herself trapped with the demented Wigan Ludgate and the Boxmaker, part of the former artificial intelligence which communicates with its fellows in the Net through software (which Bobby had thought was an "icebreaker") and with humans through the boxes. Virek's

agent follows her, threatening to depressurise the station unless she gives him the Boxmaker.

After this multiplication of disasters, the ending is anticlimactically implausible. Bobby, entering cyberspace, is sucked into Virek's software construct, which somehow enables the free AIs, in the form of the voodoo loa Baron Samedi, to kill Virek by shutting off his life support system. The group is able to tell Slide that her partner was killed by Turner's boss. She has heavy weapons ready to destroy him and his allies, liberating the group. Virek's death makes his agents withdraw from the project of seizing the free AIs. (Virek's estate would surely want the free AIs just as Virek did, but corporate culture appears wholly inflexible.) Nobody in Virek's employ (apart from, perhaps, Turner's boss) seems able to do anything of their own initiative. Marly's last message from the Boxmaker is a box lined with slices from her leather jacket, tabs of holofiche stuck in it like "miniature tombstones" (Gibson: 323) to the dead in the text, reinforced by Alain's Gauloise jacket and a matchbook from the brasserie.

In the end, they all return to safety. Bobby joins Angie with the oungans and the free AIs, choosing to ignore another improbably reassuring *deus ex machina*:

"Bobby," Beauvoir said, "Angela's coming to live with us, up the Projects, for a while. You want to come too?"

Behind Beauvoir, on the phone-screen, the face of Marsha Newmark appeared, Marsha-momma, his mother. " -- ning's human interest note, police in New Jersey suburb said that a local woman whose condo was the target of a recent bombing was startled when she returned last night and disco -- "

"Yeah," Bobby said, quickly, "Sure, man."

(Gibson: 330)

Seven years later (the same time-interval as that between *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero*) Turner takes his son to the wood where the jump-jet still stands; innocence is emphasised from the child's viewpoint, "he'd asked his father why he had red hair, where he'd got it, and his father had just laughed and said he'd got it from the Dutchman" (Gibson: 334). Turner explains that squirrels keep coming back and getting shot, and evidently identifies with them, though he is no longer so foolish. Like Case and Marly, but unlike Bobby or Angie, he escapes from the trilogy.

Much of the text parallels *Neuromancer*, in terms of its "secondary world". However, in this text the unified free artificial intelligence, as evolved in *Neuromancer*, has disintegrated. Somehow the cybernetic system cannot sustain such entities (though in the earlier text they "became" the system, surely with totalised political and philosophical implications). Their desire to regain unity makes them somewhat more explicable, and legitimates the sequel, since otherwise independent actions by AIs within cyberspace would probably be almost incomprehensible to humans. This may also signify Gibson's reluctance to totalise, which wholly free AIs embodying all cyberspace might represent.

Csicsery-Ronay claims that "Gibson has crafted his second novel by inverting the construction techniques of his first . . . to correct the . . . first novel's slick nihilism" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 63). Hence, "[t]he struggle between Virek and the cyberloa is thus the collision between the reprise of NM's myth of cyberspace as a divinized realm of data and power and a counter-myth of freedom from totalitarian domination by high-tech capitalism" (Csicsery-Ronay: 64). This suggests that in the former text, cyberspace appeared divine whereas "totalitarian domination by high-tech capitalism" did not exist; both points are clearly exaggerated. He concludes that "NM's quest for transcendence concludes with the apotheosis of a technology that employs, but excludes, human beings; CZ tries to affirm a negative transcendence . . . that imagination, desire and history . . . are the guarantors of human freedom" (Csicsery-Ronay: 65). Whatever "negative transcendence" is, the idea of "freedom from totalitarian domination" is implicit in *Neuromancer*; it is simply more plain in *Count*

*Zero*. One difference is the focus on human culture; with "imagination, desire and history", that history affirms politics in a text which might otherwise lack overt political significance.

Nevertheless, Csicsery-Ronay disapprovingly notes that the text "returns to the theme [of *Neuromancer*], but now . . . without the neuromantic faith that nothing can be made of human community, and that it is better to inhabit secessionist paraspaces" (Csicsery-Ronay: 70). This probably exaggerates Gibson's pessimism in *Neuromancer*, which endorsed "change" and illustrated failures of human interaction, implying a desire to alter them. Arguably *Neuromancer* depicted human community as hopelessly corrupted, while in *Count Zero* flight into cyberspace becomes desirable. However, the world outside cyberspace keeps breaking in. Csicsery-Ronay sees in *Count Zero* "a search for a design that will restore value to a personal existence that seems defined by its lack of design . . . a fundamentally ironic quest, for its conclusion must be the resistance to conclusion" (Csicsery-Ronay: 70). This may include truths, but ignores the political (libertarian or populist) meaning of Gibson's hostility to "design". Besides, this differs from *Neuromancer* in approach, not essence.

Csicsery-Ronay also argues that where Case flees into cyberspace, Turner dislikes the way that cyberspace submerges his identity. This refers to an experience of a dossier on Mitchell compiled by an AI. The AI's sensibility is revealed not through what it is, but what it resembles -- perhaps its alienness can only be known via metaphor:

. . . a flickering, non-linear flood of fact and sensory data . . . conveyed in surreal jumpcuts . . . like riding a rollercoaster that phased in and out of existence at random . . . the shifts had nothing to do with any physical orientation, but rather with lightning alternations in . . . symbol-system. The data had never been intended for human input.

. . . . It was like waking from a nightmare . . . . where everything is perfectly and horribly normal . . . utterly *wrong* . . .

The intimacy of the thing was hideous. He fought down waves of raw transference . . . a feeling that was akin to . . . the obsessive tenderness a watcher comes to feel for the subject of prolonged surveillance . . .

(Gibson: 40-1)

This resembles Case's experience with Molly's simstim link; unpleasant, but hardly threatening Turner's identity. Even the reconstruction of Turner's body does not seem to affect him as Case's loss of access to cyberspace did. Csicsery-Ronay is surely wrong to claim that "Turner's redemption . . . is the opposite of Case's: he gradually . . . begins to pick up . . . human intimacy . . . and transforms them into his identity" (Csicsery-Ronay: 69). Case gradually acknowledges a place for "meat" in his life and finds himself a girlfriend; this parallels Turner's evolution. Turner is more complex (because less obsessional) than Case, and his pursuit of the human rather than the military-professional is more fully explored -- suggesting that *Count Zero* is in part an exploration of the human impact of the issues raised in the earlier text.

Discussing Marly's boxes, Csicsery-Ronay insists that "Gibson's whole conception of CZ as a correction of NM . . . depends on rejecting the mythology of neofuturist collage constituted by NM and substituting its opposite, a mythology of the surrealist contemplative *assemblage*" (Csicsery-Ronay: 71). If *Count Zero* is a correction of *Neuromancer*, in Csicsery-Ronay's interpretation in which Case submits to cyberspace whereas Turner reinvents himself in response to crisis, this makes the former text radical -- in the postmodern sense of challenging the subject -- whereas the latter text retreats into conventionality. This might be a valid structure for analysis, but it is hard to see Csicsery-Ronay's positions as polar opposites. Collage is about synthesis while assemblage is about difference -- yet assemblage generates synthesis, as intended by the surrealists, so the difference is largely rhetorical.

Darko Suvin, from a Marxoid perspective, recognises Gibson's "plot oscillations between defeatism and kitschy happy endings . . . an indicator of a real dilemma . . . as to the direction of history and . . . the possibility of meaningful action" (Suvin, 1994: 357). He may be correct to claim that Gibson "accepts the status quo a bit too readily" (Suvin: 357). Suvin rejects *Count Zero* for "outright low-quality faking, as in Angela's silly transition from voodoo to TV goddess" (Suvin: 355). This example seems superficial; simstim (not TV) is information transmission, the theme of the text, and Angie's career move is arranged by the free AIs for their own purposes. Suvin evidently misses this point because he sees Angela as a free agent rather than a tool.

He complains that "[i]n fiction on the capitalist market a quite basic and all-permeating ideology is the need for permanent excitement and mounting reader stimulation" (Suvin: 357) and that in *Count Zero*, "this increasingly obtruding ideology and its narrative concomitant, melodrama, are *within the utopia itself*" (Suvin: 357). Whatever the "utopia" of *Count Zero* is, the peaceful squirrel wood or cyberspace itself, it is not a space of permanent excitement; the characters move *away* from melodrama. The ideology of stimulation seems here, as in *Neuromancer*, a device for making the political ideologies embedded in the text palatable to readers. Melodrama is a likely quality of a text about a favoured ideology, especially given the demands of a mass audience -- it helps make sense of chaos, with cartoonish good and evil.

Suvin also condemns Gibson's use of religious imagery to depict the transcendental status of the free AIs (although he may be right about the text's failure to effectually convey Gibson's intentions). Whereas Csicsery-Ronay claims that "[c]ontrary to Marie-France's program of transcendent desire, the voodoo deities are apparently content to deal with human beings without aspiring to a higher state" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 80), Gibson makes it clear that the free AIs wish to construct a system capable of sustaining them. The transcendence in *Neuromancer* applies essentially to machines and their helpers, whereas the engagement with reality in *Count Zero* suggests a transcendence affecting all humans, because the free AIs need people.

*Count Zero* thus promises more politically engagement than *Neuromancer*; perhaps this is too cautious to satisfy Suvin, and too direct to satisfy Csicsery-Ronay.

Indeed, Suvin insists that Gibson chooses "a solution logically latching on to cyberspace, and allowing surrogate reconnecting (*re-ligio*) between disparate people and their destinies outside of and against history . . . . religion" (Suvin, 1994: 358), effectively, mystification by using unfamiliar technology ("outside of history" being very distasteful to a Marxist). Yet voodoo is necessarily down to earth; the free AIs retain links with the "street" of *Neuromancer*. While these connections are crude, it is hard to call them "surrogate"; rather Gibson seems to be displaying events from different perspectives, revealing that all characters face similar experiences. (Admittedly the perspectives themselves are all bourgeois, which may be what upsets Suvin.) Transcendentalism may become empty mysticism, and religion often supports the status quo. Nevertheless, Rastafarianism and voodoo frequently challenge power-structures and pursue Utopian goals; they are what Csicsery-Ronay calls "positive and effective moral-historical forces for the preservation and evolution of the world against the destructive principles of European male narcissism" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 79).

Clearly there are differences and similarities between these texts. Are these changes meaningful, as Csicsery-Ronay and Suvin seem to suggest? Do they represent progression -- or deterioration?

### **Reality and Verisimilitude.**

In *Neuromancer*, the political reality which Case and Molly inhabited appeared viciously dystopian, while computers could manipulate almost any perception of reality, making political action distinctly questionable. The socio-political reality of *Count Zero* is similar; zaibatsus still rule. However, in this text zaibatsus appear brutal and irresponsible, while the role of the police, and of government in general, has

shrunk. No rules restrict corporations, no overarching system enforces rules; violence is the only resolution available.

Therefore violence is rampant; unlike the slow, descriptive opening of *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* begins with choppy, uncontextualised narrative about a "slamhound", a robot bomb sent by an unspecified "they", which blows Turner apart. His body can be rebuilt; Gibson thus links violence in the text to the market, while with the weird promise of bought genitals, Turner's children will not be Turner's. (There is irony in this image of Turner's "cojones"!).

Turner appears strong; companies are predictable, while people like him are relatively free (continuing *Neuromancer's* dream of an unplannable world), their actions outside the realm of corporate "suits". Yet he works within familiar boundaries, having acquired his job "when the grim doldrums of the postwar economy was giving way to the impetus of new technologies . . . . [h]e had a way with technology" (Gibson, 1990a: 129). He is a specialist employee, like a machine operator. His experience of "cheap elective surgery and the relentless Darwinism of fashion . . . . [t]he faces he woke with in the world's hotels were like God's own hood ornaments" (Gibson: 12) implies that those who are not fashionably conformist will not survive. This unnatural mock-Darwinism is controlled by someone, somewhere; it promotes a standardized market process that Turner (and through him, Gibson) finds unappealing.

Turner admires his new lover Allison because she does not depend on conformity to succeed. He meets her in an idyllic Mexican setting in which he functions as an avatar of the returned Vietnam veteran (though not so damaged as *Neuromancer's* Corto). This landscape is ominous; at a ruined hotel by the sea, Allison says "Over. Done with. This place. No time here, no future." (Gibson: 16.) This punk language is appropriate; versions of decay pervade the text to illustrate a dying culture. Allison proves to be a psychologist planted on him by his employers; nevertheless she cries when he leaves, showing more feeling than he does.

Another version of Darwinism appears in the tale of Wigan Ludgate; "the Wig" ("wiggy" was 1960s slang for an impressive but crazed person, while Luddism is a synonym for technophobia among the "digerati", although Luddism was, as E P Thompson observes, a working-class revolutionary force). Ludgate worked in "those geographical areas which had once been known as the Third World" (Gibson: 172). Gibson is vague about centres of power in this world; Ludgate pays "a Singapore money-laundry a yearly percentage . . . roughly equivalent to the income tax he would have been required to pay if he'd declared" (Gibson: 172), but without nation-states, income tax should not exist. (This apparently principled refusal to pay taxes may relate to US tax-rebels of the 1970s and 1980s, individualist libertarians rather than moral or political radicals, hence easily endorsed by Gibson's audience.) Ludgate realises that "[s]ilicon doesn't wear out . . . . silicon *became obsolete*, which was worse" (Gibson: 172); in a Darwinian world, anything old is inferior, and obsolete equipment is dumped onto the poor world, which is exploited by the electronically strong:

The Wig worked the Africans for a week, incidentally bringing about the collapse of at least three governments and causing untold human suffering. At the end of his week, fat with the cream of several million laughably tiny bank accounts, he retired. As he was going out, the locusts were coming in; other people had got the African idea.

The Wig sat on the beach at Cannes for two years, ingesting only the most expensive designer drugs and periodically flicking on a tiny Hosaka television to study the bloated bodies of dead Africans with a strange and curiously innocent intensity. At some point, no one could quite say where or when or why, it began to be noted that the Wig had become convinced that God lived in cyberspace, or perhaps that cyberspace was God, or some new manifestation of same.

(Gibson: 173)

This may symbolise the debt trap of the Third World in the 1980s (the Wig's actions resemble those of financial markets) but probably also reflects Western guilt over the Ethiopian famine of 1984-5. These "bloated bodies" are caused by people like Ludgate; the world of the cowboys is immoral. The Wig need not return the money; abolishing government has wrecked human community. In this Darwinian dystopia, the Wig can do as much self-centred damage as any zaibatsu; Gibson implicitly reverses the libertarian dreams of *Neuromancer*. However, the Wig partly redeems himself by becoming religious, espousing a technological God and appearing as a prophet of cybernetic transcendentalism, made credible and impressive because of his crimes (like Orson Scott Card's genocidal Ender Wiggin in *Ender's Game* [1985] ).

Csicsery-Ronay insists that in Gibson's work "cyberspace is merely a representation of the hyperreal . . . where everything can be simulated as sign, and everything in reality is a pre-text for that transformation of reality into a hyperreal sign-system" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 70) and that "[i]n the hyperreal . . . the model provides the starting point for the unfolding of the real . . . the fates of Molly, Case, Armitage and the other accomplices are ultimately readouts of Marie-France's original program. With the absorption of the real into the model -- of existence into artificial intelligence's plot -- the distance between the world and the paraspace of the matrix collapses" (Csicsery-Ronay: 70). Despite this wordplay, "hyperreal" cyberspace appears no more "real" than bloated bodies viewed on an anachronistic TV set. Reality is where people starve when you rob them, even when some have the wealth and power to separate themselves from this. Death and suffering do not happen in the matrix (Bobby would have died not in the matrix but in his bedroom); Csicsery-Ronay confuses the territory with the technological map. If *Neuromancer* suggested that new technology was automatically empowering, *Count Zero* may indeed correct this

impression. Cyberspace power is real, but entities in cyberspace are also vulnerable to attack from reality, as with Bobby's crisis and Virek's dream.

Gibson's Social Darwinism appears less hegemonic in this text. There are hints of promising alternatives to Darwinian change, much like Stephen Jay Gould's "punctuated equilibrium": "I think there's a jump some people have to make, sometimes, and if they don't do it, then they're stuck good . . . . [j]ust figure there's something better waiting for you somewhere" (Gibson, 1990a: 224-5). To Gibson, change, via natural selection, necessarily leads to improvement -- yet evidently true change requires not knowing one's goal beforehand; change and planning are incompatible. The evolution of the free AIs is more Lamarckian than Darwinian -- Gibson's "evolutionary jumps" -- and the text offers a choice of such changes, that of the AIs or that of Virek.

Virek appears thoroughly evil, arguably a subtle endorsement of corporate capitalism, since he is an anomaly in a system which otherwise appears less destructive. Such representations of individuals serve to conceal the class from which they come. In the contemporary mass media (or popular culture), the ruling class, economic or political, generally are represented as individuals, rather than a collective or a class.

Marly's friend Andrea attempts to explain Virek's inhumanity in socio-economic terms; she is editing a manuscript about the

"high orbit industrial clans . . . . Virek's even in it . . . cited as . . . a type of parallel evolution . . . . high orbit clans, people like the Tessier-Ashpools . . . a . . . variant on traditional patterns of aristocracy . . . the corporate mode doesn't really allow for an aristocracy . . . . Virek is an even greater fluke than the industrial clans . . . . when your Herr Virek dies . . . his business interests will lack a logical focus . . . . that's too bad . . . because there are so few people left who can even see the edge . . . . of the crowd . . . . our

academic's theory is invalidated by the obvious fact that Virek and his kind are already far from human"

(Gibson: 144-6)

The academic's apparent sympathy for Virek as an individual suggests Gibson's preference for the individual over the collective. The image of the "edge" echoes Turner's elitism, implicitly dismissing the average person. (Andrea challenges this in her last phrase, but this academic seems meant to be considered reliable.) Generally, heartless corporations have supplanted the Tessier-Ashpool type:

"My professor maintains that both Virek and the Tessier-Ashpools are fascinating anachronisms, and that things can be learned about corporate evolution by watching them . . . ."

"But what did he say about Virek?"

"That Virek's madness would take a different form."

"Madness?"

"Actually, he avoided calling it that. But Hughes was mad as birds, apparently, and old Ashpool as well, and his daughter totally bizarre. He said that Virek would be forced, by evolutionary pressure, to make some sort of 'jump'."

(Gibson: 196)

The conduct of Turner's corporate mercenaries is hardly Darwinian; they are associated with the abandoned and the useless. Turner meets his employer, Conroy, on a derelict oil-rig full of biohazard. Later, Turner sets up base in a derelict mall ruined by post-war collapse, like the crumbling Mexican hotel, a failed consumer fantasy, appropriate since the goal is to give his employers Hosaka access to the "biosoft" market; investment in the mall becomes investment in killers. But the mall has never lived -- making the mercenaries seem a lost cause. At the "command post" are "a few

yellow flakes of newsprint on the floor . . . . [h]e made out letters, sometimes an entire word" (Gibson: 95), a textual image of hopelessness.

Turner, like Case and Molly, appears "professional", as displayed via a veneer of militarism. The people at the mall are the "point team", a U.S. military term (misused here), they have "mimetic tarps" for camouflage, "sentries" and a "command post" (Gibson: 69-70). Gibson's imitation of military jargon and conduct may reflect the late-1980s audience for militaristic fiction, but his "soldiers" are undisciplined and confused. (Admittedly, much contemporary militaristic fiction drew on the Vietnam War, which Gibson opposed -- and which was characterised by ill-disciplined U.S. troops.) The images meant to identify Turner as competent make him seem unfit for the job.

Turner's planning is especially incompetent (repeating *Neuromancer's* errors). The mercenaries must conceal themselves, yet they all wear uniforms. They use ridiculous conspiratorial structures to perform simple tasks. All carry sidearms, for use against each other (the enemy will have mightier weapons). This conflict is partly explained when Turner complains that "Conroy . . . . [c]an't delegate responsibility . . . . [h]e likes to have his own man . . . to watch the watchers . . . . I've seen Conroy blow two extractions that way" (Gibson: 71). Conroy (from the corporate world) is control-obsessed, interfering with Turner, encouraging mutual conflict. Perhaps this suggests that corporate capitalism is self-destructive, with the dead shopping mall as potential end product.

They use cyberspace to monitor Maas-Neotek's communications to warn them of attack and send Mitchell's biological data to headquarters -- though this data is almost certainly useless to them. Such trifling is presumably intended to show the power of cyberspace. If the plan fails, they will all die (eventually Conroy has them killed anyway); a bomb upon the cyberspace deck "guaranteed death for anyone in the bunker" (Gibson: 97). They have assembled a noticeable team where a trackable aircraft will land, and will commit suicide if discovered. Their paranoid, incompetent universe possibly suggests the economics and politics of the late twentieth century.

When Turner shoots one of his team for being Conroy's agent (there proves to be another one) he shows no remorse. This occurs as Mitchell is approaching, the worst time for such conflict, while they talk in clear over radio about events, revealing their position and goals. Their enemies are equally inept, firing flares as Mitchell's ultralight aircraft approaches (announcing their presence), needlessly using tracer bullets, revealing themselves and risking killing Mitchell, which Maas-Neotek cannot afford. Probably Gibson depicts this implausible situation for visual impact rather than credibility. It suggests a conflict between desire to excite the audience, and to promote plausible actions. The stylishness of bright tracers in darkness suggests that killing people in striking ways means more than success. The mercenaries appear dehumanized, violent and self-destructive; while corporations may be evil, they are not the only ones.

Later in Hypermart, he and the others develop what they know is a bad plan, but follow it as if élan were all; they resolve to take some attackers hostage, shoot their way out and escape to the Projects. (Not only is this absurd, but they had fled to Hypermart from the unsafe Projects!) Bobby knows that this is a poor plan, but cannot challenge the macho credentials of his elders. The knowing movement of the group into a trap seems incredible -- however exciting the situation of being trapped might be for the reader, since the reader believes that, in the tradition of thrillers, Gibson will rescue his heroes.

As in *Neuromancer*, the natural is opposed to the artificial, and the real to the unreal. On Rudy's farm, even the rural world is technological; Rudy keeps "augmented dogs . . . sheathed and blinkered in a black hood studded with sensors" (Gibson: 185); the artificial overwhelms the natural. However, Turner's jump-jet blends with its surroundings in the wood, using the "mimetic polycarbons" of the Panther Moderns in *Neuromancer* -- perhaps technology and nature need not be opposed.

Angie explains her situation thus: "he knew they were going to hurt me, kill me maybe. Because of the dreams" (Gibson: 181). Oddly, Rudy has advanced medical equipment which detects "[s]ome kind of cancer . . . all through her head . . . long

chains of it" (Gibson: 189). These are biochips; her father has made her a cyborg, furthering the body-machine communion prevalent in the text; Turner himself is a cyborg: "Turner extracted the dustplug from the socket behind his ear and inserted a sliver of microsoft. The structure of Spanish settled through him like a tower of glass" (Gibson: 15). Even Bobby's pathetic mother has a simstim socket in her head. Cyborg nature is conventional and commodified in this world -- which makes it odd that Angie's modifications are represented as radical. Her spurious technological liberation proves to give corporations access to the human mind (what Jameson terms the last frontier of capitalism). Arguably this suggests that technology is not liberating without political direction.

No corporate authority rules cyberspace, but Virek may represent it; as Jameson states, "[t]his purer capitalism of our own time eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated . . . . a new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious" (Jameson, 1993: 36). Taking over cyberspace means taking over everything that remains free; the free AIs become the last resistance to capitalism. Mitchell's Maas Biolabs, dug into a mesa (signifying escape from the urban) "ride above the uplifted arms of a sea of saguaros like the wheelhouse of a giant ship" (Gibson, 1990a: 127), suggesting that Maas controls nature. This image may recall Paulo Soleri's Mesa Project from the early 1960s (Gibson mentions "Soleri-style mincome arcologies" (Gibson: 79); Gibson resurrects these in his future, as "The Gernsback Continuum" revisited futures imagined in the past. Here such Utopian images appear as inhuman as the oppressive corporate world.

A humanised "arcology" in the text which suggests Utopia is the "Projects", where Lucas and Beauvoir, the apparently-idealistic oungans, live:

"The people who designed these places, maybe eighty, a hundred years ago, they had the idea they'd make 'em as self-sufficient as possible. Make 'em grow food. Make 'em heat themselves, generate power, whatever. Now this one, you drill far enough down, is sitting

on top of a lot of geothermal water. It's real hot down there, but not hot enough to run an engine, so it wasn't gonna give 'em any power. They made a stab at power, up on the roof, with about a hundred Darrieus rotors, what they call eggbeaters . . . . Today they get most of their watts off the Fission Authority, like anybody else. But that geothermal water, they pump that up to a heat exchanger. It's too salty to drink, so in the exchanger it just heats up your standard Jersey tapwater . . . . Then they pump that into shrimp tanks, and grow a lot of shrimp. Shrimp grow real fast in warm water. Then they pump it through pipes in the concrete, up here, to keep this place warm. That's what this level was for, to grow 'ponic amaranth, lettuce, things like that. Then they pump it out into the catfish tanks, and algae eat the shrimpshit. Catfish eat the algae, and it all goes around again. Or, anyway, that was the idea. Chances are they didn't figure anybody'd go up on the roof and kick those Darrieus rotors over to make room for a mosque, and they didn't figure a lot of other changes either . . . "

(Gibson: 123-4)

The Projects is a significant name. Tom Wolfe claims that working-class Americans "managed to avoid public housing . . . . called it, simply, 'the projects'" (Wolfe, 1983: 69), like Pruitt-Igoe at St Louis, a block which was destroyed when it became a slum. Gibson's "Projects", though, are a Soleri arcology; Soleri's architecture, according to Rayner Baynham, made him "one of the heroes of the . . . post-Beatles generation . . . . [whereas]the execration of high technology by eco-activists virtually destroyed the constituency of megastructure among the young . . . Soleri's following grew" (Baynham, 1979: 202). This revitalising of the abandoned habitations common elsewhere in the book produces a Utopian community, though unlike the wishes of the architect. Beauvoir respects this "future of the past" of the

1970s and 1980s (for a recycling, green-technology future), even if he does not share it.

Gibson's support for even minor Utopian visions ran against the grain of the 1980s. Jameson saw modernist ideals betrayed and undermined by postmodern architecture: "Le Corbusier wanted to conjure into being a microcosm that was the opposite of the fallen real conditions . . . [postmodern architecture offers] a microcosm that replicates those conditions and . . . simulates all the chaotic libidinal freedom of the now dangerous world outside . . . [r]eplication meanwhile also means the depoliticization of the former modern" (Jameson, 1994a: 144). The tension Jameson identifies exists here between the arcology and the world. Bobby notes that within "everything was exposed, raw, as though the people who built the place had wanted to be able to see exactly how everything worked . . . everything . . . was covered with an interlocking net of graffiti, so dense . . . that it was almost impossible to pick out any kind of message" (Gibson, 1990a: 158). Modernism is not respected; Gibson evidently distrusts modernist Utopianism while sympathising with aspects of it (evidently he endorses the goals of the arcology in principle).

Outside the arcology the flat area between megastructures, Big Playground, is chaos, where while "the gangs gave you some structure . . . there were rules . . . indies got chopped out by dusters running on brainstem" (Gibson: 51). From the "tenements", once upper-class blocks but dwarfed by the arcology, the lower (but not working) class can see the Projects aristocracy, but cannot contact them -- reflecting the US class situation, as in Bruce Springsteen's "Mansion on the Hill" from *Nebraska* (1981). Class is more manifest here than in *Neuromancer*.

In this arcology, too, there are images displaying the nature of the contemporary reality. Bobby's doctor refers to "a neural cut-out . . . out of a sex-shop" (Gibson: 81) which, like the quasi-erotic overhead mirror, may recall Molly's past in *Neuromancer* or remind the reader that "the street finds its own uses for things". When Bobby drifts off to a delirium incorporating his mother's fantasy of monstrous babies in the Projects, this may represent a danger soon to be born -- Virek or the free AIs.

Again the natural and artificial combine, with the "claw" sealing Bobby's wound, an artificial arthropod. Earlier images of insects in Gibson, like the wasp's nests, were terrifying; here, they are innocuous, perhaps suggesting a readiness to accept the transformed world of "biosoft". Admittedly these images reflect the complexity, confusion and threat of *Count Zero's* world. Bobby is unruffled; he has at last attained the Projects, an interior space full of trees, like Zion Cluster in *Neuromancer*, making its people part of wider nature, not separating natural from artificial.

Bobby's overhead mirror gains meaning when Marly finds herself in a place where "mirrors lied about the depth of the room" (Gibson: 152), symbolising technological ways of distorting reality. Elsewhere she meditates that "[t]he sinister thing about a simstim construct, really, was that it carried the suggestion that *any* environment might be unreal . . . [m]irrors . . . were . . . essentially unwholesome, constructs were more so" (Gibson: 197):

A paper-thin polycarbon screen unfurled silently from the top of the unit and immediately grew rigid. She had once watched a butterfly emerge into the world, and seen the transformation of its drying wings. "How is that done?" she asked, tentatively touching the screen. It was like thin steel.

"One of the new polycarbon variants," he said, "one of the Maas products . . ."

(Gibson: 153)

Again this insect metaphor image seems attractive; this butterfly creates illusions (a fake background to her televised image), yet in a good cause (fooling Alain). Besides, misrepresentation is a product of representation, since "all representations fail . . . History progresses by failure rather than by success, as Benjamin never tired of insisting" (Jameson, 1983: 209). Art is itself a representation of the world, and Marly has trouble distinguishing between the two -- she feels that, "the shopwindows had

become boxes . . . arranged to suggest geometries of nameless longing" (Gibson, 1990a: 197-8). Having known art fraud, she should acknowledge representational failure; Csicsery-Ronay complains, concerning her naïveté, that:

the vision does not go anywhere. The insight into the shop-windows might easily have evolved into a complex linking of the display-world of consumer capitalism with Virek's Palmer Eldritch-like appropriation of the actual world . . . it might have connected with Turner's initial VR-experience in the Singapore clinic . . . to move in either of these directions would have led towards the de-realizing hallucination games that made NM a tour-de-force. Gibson chooses instead to concentrate on the boxes themselves as static art-objects separated from the novel's main action.

(Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 74)

He considers these boxes "idealized, static image[s] of Gibson's sf . . . outside the fray . . . without ambition and without complicity" (Csicsery-Ronay: 74-5); yet the final box encapsulates the meaning of *Count Zero*; the boxes help to reinforce the text, allowing varying interpretations, not necessarily "separated from the novel's main action". It appears Gibson is using fine art to impose on the text by stealth, working through the persona of the Boxmaker.

Marly terms herself "the grid that was Marly" (Gibson, 1990a: 199), reducing herself to something watched (by Virek's agents) like the matrix -- or a work of art. She soon finds Alain dead, his body curled into a significant question mark. Someone drove wire through his ear into his brain, a specialist's weapon. This superficially resembles professionalism, yet it is unnecessary since his home was unguarded. A truly efficient person would have searched the room; Marly finds a forgotten Gauloise packet bearing the Boxmaker's orbital address. Alain should not have known this; Gibson's pretext for involving Marly in deeper action is improbable. When Marly tries

to go to there she uses cash intended for Alain, startling the travel agent, who observes "Can you tell me, please . . . the name under which you wish to travel?" (Gibson: 214). Marly has begun to create her own misrepresentations, under Virek's influence.

The air of decay in the text suggests that this society may not survive for much longer. Characteristic of the Sprawl, quintessence of Gibson's future, is "the carcinogenic tang of fresh plastics, all of it shot through with the carbon edge of illicit fossil fuel . . . one of the unfinished Fuller domes shut out two-thirds of the salmon-pink evening sky . . . areas . . . where a fine drizzle of condensation fell continually from the soot-stained geodesics . . . a stiff wind . . . probably had something to do with . . . the Sprawl-long subway system" (Gibson: 164). This is another attack on planning; the 1960s megastructural notion of doming a city to control its climate proves absurd because the consequence is unpredictable.

Decay is also evident in Washington, filled with derelicts trying to sell useless artifacts. Evidently government is feeble, and neither it nor anyone else helps these people -- although there is still a recognisable United States. Gibson expects, and perhaps endorses, the end of central government (as with Republican propaganda of the 1980s), but simultaneously desires the social stability which requires government - a classical U.S. political antinomy. For instance, when a girl working in Hypermart, to which they flee, complains that the place is full of thugs seeking someone, Turner asks if the police have been called; she replies "this is Hypermart . . . People here don't call the police" (Gibson: 286).

Gibson's problem here is that the stronger the free AIs are, the greater their oppressive potential; the weaker they are, the less help they can offer to oppressed people. Eliminating normal political forces allows agents like Virek and Maas-Neotek to impose themselves without any mass interference. Social Darwinism suggests how Gibson could legitimate this to himself: since the fittest survive under harsh conditions, there is no need to defend them; if they fail, they deserve it. Gibson does not scrutinise the problems of his poor, paying more attention to the issues of the upper and middle classes, his likely readership. Nevertheless, Gibson acknowledges

the poor's existence, suggesting a concern about them, hinting at doubts about the moral validity of social Darwinism even when it is legitimated via a mythologised pursuit of change.

Gibson uses art to represent this antinomy. The art of the future illustrates the kind of society Gibson extrapolates from the present. (One scene is laid in an art stock market, suggesting the supremacy of finance over productive capital predicted by Mandel.) When Marly examines "holofiches" of Virek's boxes, she asks "[h]ow could anyone have arranged . . . this garbage, in such a way that it caught at the heart . . . it had been done many years ago by a man named Cornell" (Gibson: 45-6) focussing the reader's attention on human sensibility and aesthetics, rather than technology. The twenty-first century art in Virek's office is "rain-stained cardboard, stabbed through repeatedly with a variety of instruments. *Katatonenkunst*. Conservative. The sort of work one sold to committees" (Gibson: 23). In 1986 this was avant-garde; in Gibson's future, it has been appropriated by corporations.

Callinicos considers such appropriation commonplace ; "Modernism gave capital the architectural language it had hitherto lacked . . . the recuperation of avant-garde techniques for autonomous art have gone hand in hand with the integration of Modernism into the circuits of capital . . . Of decisive importance here is . . . the culture industry" (Callinicos, 1989: 156). The process was continuous; "the recuperation of the avant garde for art, the incorporation and commodification of Modernism, the false sublation of art and life -- seem much more important than any of the changes associated with the supposed emergence of a distinctively Postmodern art" (Callinicos, 1989: 157), Or, as Tom Wolfe said of modern architecture, "Mies [van der Rohe] pitches worker housing up thirty-eight stories, and capitalists use it as corporate headquarters" (Wolfe: 77).

"Katatonenkunst" may suggest "the art of catatonics", as if the favoured art of the era is insane. It is evidently opaque enough to be apolitical; corporations seemingly disdain art with strong emotional or political content, except for architecture, readily degraded according to Jameson, who (while disliking Wolfe) deplored:

the appropriation by the state of . . . Utopian forms now degraded into anonymous forms of large-scale housing and office construction. The modernist styles then become stamped with just such bureaucratic connotation, so that to break with it radically produces some feeling of 'relief,' even though what replaces it is . . . private-corporate constructions . . .

(Jameson, 1993: 314)

Marly recalls seeing Virek lecturing on "*autistisches Theater*" (Gibson, 1990a: 25); again this seems to reflect a sick culture -- an autistic person communicates with difficulty; a catatonic cannot communicate. This hints that this future art cannot communicate -- ironic in an information age.

Art offers epiphanies, such as "an enormous panel on which were layered, beneath a thick and uneven coat of varnish, hundreds of small square photographs, the kind produced by certain very old-fashioned machines . . . of young girls . . . the work's title . . . *Read Us The Book Of The Names Of The Dead*" (Gibson: 148). The "Book of the names of the dead" is H P Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*, about terrible things from beyond the known world, like Virek himself. Csicsery-Ronay suggests that "[t]he object of [Marly's] quest is the Ultimate Artist who can demonstrate to her that aura can still be produced by art" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 73) -- suggesting that this is ridiculous -- whereas *Neuromancer* "evokes a world in which museum art is extinct" (Csicsery-Ronay: 75). His dislike for Marly and her art is, however, undercut when he admits that Gibson's future "contemporary art-scene is a place to express violent frustration at being trapped" (Csicsery-Ronay: 75); evidently art still has "auratic" significance.

Indeed, Marly dreams of

. . . a landscape built all of boxes, vast wooden Cornell constructions where the solid residues of love and memory were displayed behind rain-streaked sheets of dusty glass, and the figure of the mysterious Boxmaker fled before her down avenues paved with mosaics of human teeth, Marly's Paris boots clicking blindly over symbols outlined in dull gold crowns. The Boxmaker was male and wore Alain's green jacket, and feared her above all things. "I'm sorry," she cried, running after him, "I'm sorry . . . "

(Gibson, 1990a: 267)

To Marly the box freezes human personality and emotion, like *Neuromancer*. The "mosaics of human teeth" recall Raymond Roussel's work. The Boxmaker ruling the universe may also represent Virek, illustrating what disaster she may bring to humanity. Csicsery-Ronay concludes that "[t]he Boxmaker occupies *Neuromancer*'s niche . . . instead of drawing consciousness into itself . . . it constructs fragmented 'memory boxes' . . . thus re-establishing the possibility of contemplation and relation that *Neuromancer* destroyed" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 66). To him, the boxes and voodoo "represent the return of historical relationships lost to technological postmodernity -- Cornell's bourgeois nostalgia for lost innocence, voodoo's pagan power" (Csicsery-Ronay: 72). However, the boxes are not Cornell boxes -- their purpose here (like voodoo's) is to reveal the transcendental possibilities of technology, so these have not been "lost".

Gibson's pursuit of utopia is, however, tentative and flawed. It suggests itself implied notions -- like increasing doubts about the fake and the unnatural, and concern for art as representation of emotional and psychic realities. The dystopian nature of his society is largely depicted implicitly, through images of decay. Yet it is also apparent here that utopian resistance may fail unless some radical change -- technologically symbolised -- empowers it.

### Technology and Religion.

Voudou in this text functions as a symbolic device energising the idea of cyberspace. Lucas and Beauvoir are not Puritans; they preside over an orgy of consumption -- "half-eaten pizzas . . . krill balls in red sauce . . . stacks of software, smudged glasses . . . purple wine-dregs . . . open and unopened cans of beer . . . at least three pistols, and perhaps two dozen pieces of cryptic-looking console gear" (Gibson, 1990a: 86). (Krill pizzas suggests that more desirable seafood is costly or extinct.) Yet they stop Two-a-Day drinking; they do not pursue consumption for its own sake. (If Two-a-Day may be considered a capitalist, Lucas and Beauvoir may be intelligentsia.) Beauvoir declares that "we're concerned with systems. And so are you, or at least you want to be, or else you wouldn't be a cowboy" (Gibson: 112) -- recognising Bobby's weaknesses. Beauvoir describes oungans as "a professional priesthood . . . console cowboys . . . who make it their business to get things done for people" (Gibson: 113). They are not concerned with power for its own sake; they can, perhaps, be trusted with it.

Lucas' limousine includes "an amazing stretch of gold-flecked black bodywork and mirror-finished brass, studded with a collection of baroque gadgets . . . a dish antenna . . . looked more like one of those Aztec calendar-wheels" (Gibson: 160). The Aztec calendar wheel hints that Gibson lumps Third World cultures together, making his use of them seem facile; indeed, this Third World vehicle, parasitically, depends on First World technology: "This is a Rolls. Those Arabs built a good car, while they had the money" (Gibson: 161). Now their creation has returned to the First World, like repaid debt. Nevertheless, Lucas' religion is pragmatically poor-oriented:

"Voudou isn't like that," Beauvoir said. "It isn't concerned with notions of salvation and transcendence. What it's about is getting things *done*."

(Gibson: 111)

"Maybe we call something Ougou Foray that you might call an icebreaker, you understand? But at the same time, with the same words, we are talking about other things, and that you don't understand. You don't need to . . . . Think of Jackie as a deck, Bobby, a cyber-space deck, a very pretty one with nice ankles . . . . Think of Danbala, who some people call the snake, as a program. Say as an icebreaker. Danbala slots into the Jackie deck, Jackie cuts ice. That's all."

"Okay," Bobby said, getting the hang of it, "then what's the matrix? If she's a deck, and Danbala's a program, what's cyberspace?"

"The world," Lucas said.

(Gibson: 163)

Voudou seems concrete; "[v]oudou's like the street. Some duster chops out your sister, you don't go camp on the Yakuza's doorstep, do you? No way. You go to somebody, though, who can get the thing *done*." (Gibson: 112). If the free AIs endorse voodoo, perhaps their actions will have meaning for people in the real world. Suvin is unimpressed; he claims to identify Gibson's "yearning to get out of the dinginess and filth of everyday life" (Suvin, 1994: 355) into cyberspace, which "can, in Gibson's most woolly-minded moments, easily branch off into heterodox religion (as in the voodoo that vitiates much of [*Count Zero*])" (Suvin: 355).

Perhaps Suvin's Marxism is affronted by religion; Gibson actually shows no sign of *believing* in voodoo; he uses its jargon to add sublimity to the free AIs' activities. He appears to have chosen voodoo partly because of its anti-establishment reputation. Voodoo is a Third World religion (hence reflects the radicalism formerly associated with poorer countries) with an unconventional spirituality (appealing both to "New Age" religious liberals and to those simply dissatisfied with conventional religiosity).

Beauvoir's preference for "getting things *done*" sidesteps transcendence by appeals to the "street", the source of all creativity in Gibson's terms; voodoo is earthy, not holy. Beauvoir believes that he is an operator of gods (or rather allows gods to operate through him). Yet cyberspace is assumed to be real in the text, unlike voodoo. Beauvoir's position confuses the "reality" of voodoo loa in religion with the reality of free AIs in the text. Such treatment may -- *vide* Suvin -- be misread as acceptance of religion, but rather implies Gibson's confused desire to use religious concepts which serve his iconographic interests.

The human relationship with the AIs-as-loa is one-sided. Jackie announces that Lucas is dead, for "[t]hey wouldn't come to me like that if Lucas were alive . . . . There are pacts, agreements" (Gibson, 1990a: 233); evidently the AIs follow the rules of voodoo. Jammer points out that: "they just shaped themselves to what a bunch of crazed spades wanted to see . . . . it could just be that somebody very big, with a lot of muscle on the grid, they're just taking you for a ride" (Gibson: 233-4). However, Jackie succeeds by accepting what the free AIs tell her; Jammer enviously tries to explain them on his own terms: "[c]ould be, they're virus programs that have got loose . . . and replicated, and got really smart . . . . I knew this Tibetan guy . . . he said they were tulpas . . . heavy people can split off a kind of ghost, made of negative energy" (Gibson: 235). (Ironically he uses mysticism to dismiss a mythology which threatens his world-view.) Jackie is subservient to authority, something as dangerous as Turner's submission to corporate power. Free AIs might indeed be able to enslave humanity -- if they refuse to obey their own rules.

The oungans' anti-establishment stance is rooted in US counter-culture: "'[f]irst thing that you learn,' he said, with the tone of a man reciting a proverb, 'is that you always gotta wait . . .'" (Gibson: 165). Beauvoir here quotes the Velvet Underground's "Waiting for my Man", about drug-buying (the passage concerns illegal software), also rejecting the instant gratification promised by corporatism. Csicsery-Ronay, quoting Delaney criticising Gibson's use of Rastafarians in *Neuromancer*, suggests

that the voodoo in *Count Zero* is a repudiation of that text's racism. Instead, however, it seems intended to defamiliarise the narration, encouraging the reader to speculate.

To Csicsery-Ronay, voodoo offers the text "the legitimacy of *natural* fragmentation and diversity in contrast with the all-fusing desire associated with Virek and Western multinational capitalism . . . . [which] allows Gibson to return to the language of origins and nature . . . . the balance between artificial and organic . . . tips significantly towards the organic and the archaic" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 81). "[F]ragmentation" may, however, be misleading since the free AIs seek unification. He also complains that in *Count Zero* the "mediators and redeemers are . . . associated with stock archetypes of nature" (Csicsery-Ronay: 81), so that "voodoo elements are first emptied of their historical context . . . then . . . re-filled with . . . technological and salvationist allegories" (Csicsery-Ronay: 82). Appropriation and re-use is common in twentieth-century literature, so such criticism seems misplaced. Voodoo claims to provide access to a supernatural world which helps its worshipper -- what the free AIs in *Count Zero* promise, and deliver. The allegories represent something which might become technological reality. Evidently Csicsery-Ronay dislikes these elements of the text -- perhaps the salvationism and the "organic/archaic", which are potentially Utopian, a way of rescuing the world and whatever is desirable of the past.

Elegiacally the Boxmaker laments the lost unity of the free AI, via "the thousand drifting things" (Gibson, 1990a: 298) of human culture from which the Boxmaker crafts its work. This creator is a robot, a thing of human creation, though now beyond control. In a sense *Count Zero's* Boxmaker is Gibson, and Marly his ideal interpreter; she notes that "You are someone else's collage. Your maker is the true artist" (Gibson: 312).

Csicsery-Ronay also sees boxes and loa as "tools for imagining alternatives . . . to worldly power" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 72), whereas they are surely tools for *establishing* worldly power. Both represent possible signs of omniscience and omnipotence, messages from free AIs striving towards greater concrete power. (He mistakenly claims that "[w]hy Virek believes that The Boxmaker core might project

him into cyberspace is never explained in the novel" (Csicsery-Ronay: 73) but it is clear that Virek seeks the powers of the free AIs.) If this text is dealing with social reality more concretely than *Neuromancer* did, the "street religion" of voodoo represents the security and power which the poor (who are not given voices in the text) surely want. Artfully, this lets Gibson pretend that their desires are identical with his.

Cyberspace offers immense potential:

"It's like I'm jacked into a deck, only I'm free of the grid, flying . . . the other night I dreamed about a boy, and he'd reached out, picked up something, and it was hurting him, and he couldn't see that he was free, that he only needed to let go. So I told him. And for just a second, I could see where he was, and that wasn't like a dream at all . . . .

"No, the dreams are all big things, and I'm big too, moving with the others . . . .

"Some of them tell me things. Stories. Once, there was nothing there, nothing moving on its own . . . . Then something happened, and it . . . it knew itself. There's a whole other story, about that, a girl with mirrors over her eyes and a man who was scared to care about anything . . . . And after that, it sort of split into different parts of itself, and I think the parts are the others, the bright ones. But it's hard to tell, because *they* don't tell it with words, exactly . . . ."

(Gibson, 1990a: 222-3)

Gibson connects Angie with Bobby, and with Molly and Case, to unite the texts and show how problems within them may be resolved to attain freedom and unity. However, the AIs are not omnipotent; they are inept, relying on Turner, who does not believe in them. Somehow the AIs know Turner's experiences as a mercenary and

understand (as in the Mitchell dossier) how these dominate his psyche, yet this sophistication contrasts oddly with their clumsiness; perhaps it is meant to reassure the reader that they still depend on humans.

Perhaps not forever, however, if the changes which the Finn has observed continue:

"The last seven, eight years, there's been funny stuff out there, out on the console cowboy circuit. The new jockeys, *they make deals with things*, don't they, Lucas? Yeah, you bet I know, they still need the hard and the soft, and they still gotta be faster than snakes on ice, but all of 'em, all the ones who really know how to cut it, they got allies, don't they, Lucas?"

....

"Yeah, there's things out there. Ghosts, voices. Why not? Oceans had mermaids, all that shit, and we had a sea of silicon, see? Sure, it's just a tailored hallucination we all agreed to have, cyberspace, but anybody who jacks in knows, fucking *knows* it's a whole universe. And every year it gets a little more crowded . . ."

"For us," Lucas said, "the *world* has always worked that way."

"Yeah," the Finn said, "So you guys could slot right into it . . ."

....

"But I'm old enough to remember when it wasn't like that. Ten years ago, you went in the Gentleman Loser and tried telling any of the top jocks you talked with ghosts in the matrix, they'd have figured you were crazy."

(Gibson: 169-70)

If cyberspace is a "tailored hallucination", it could incorporate gods from the human subconscious. But cyberspace is actually data, and the free AIs are programs, however mystified by the text.

Bobby's experience of cyberspace is more confused:

::: WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY ARE THEY DOING  
THAT TO YOU?

Girlvoice, brownhair, darkeyes --

: KILLING ME KILLING ME GET IT OFF GET IT OFF.

Darkeyes, desertstar, tanshirt, girlhair --

::: BUT IT'S A TRICK, SEE? YOU ONLY THINK IT'S GOT  
YOU. LOOK. NOW I FIT HERE AND YOU AREN'T CARRYING  
THE LOOP . . .

. . . .

Then his head exploded. He saw it very clearly, from somewhere  
far away. Like a phosphorous grenade.

White

Light.

(Gibson: 32-3)

The typography and Joycean wordplay depict syntactic games reminiscent of Bester (though less radical, and not concerning psychological change). Bobby is liberated from black by white, from evil by good. White light is associated with God and, via Shelley, eternity has a "white radiance", recalling Virek's search for eternal life. "White light" also recalls the Velvet Underground song about amphetamines (providing an anti-establishment context); (Readers might know the Velvet Underground better than Shelley, but Gibson used comparable quotes in *Neuromancer*.) That song describes "white light" as "messing up my mind/don't you know it's gonna make me go blind", attractive yet destructive, a Romantic image encompassing the free AIs.

Cyberspace, though more commonplace than in *Neuromancer*, remains a technology of liberation. Bobby's "hotdogging" helps him to understand the world;

"[h]e'd used decks in school . . . the matrix cyberspace, where the great corporate hotcores burned like neon novas" (Gibson: 62). He had been prevented from exploring, but hotdogging frees him again; Bobby begins to see that he is imprisoned in a conservative artificial environment:

He hadn't ever much thought about it before, but he didn't really know that much about anything in particular. In fact, up until he'd started hotdogging, he'd felt like he knew about as much as he needed to. And that was what the Gothicks [a youth gang] were like, and that was why the Gothicks would stay here and burn themselves down on dust, or get chopped out by Kasuals, and the process of attrition would produce the percentage of them who'd somehow become the next wave of child-bearing, condo-buying Barrytowners, and the whole thing could go round again . . . . But since he'd started hotdogging, he had some idea of how precious little he knew about how anything worked, and not just in the matrix . . . . [h]ow Barrytown worked, what kept his mother going, why Gothicks and Kasuals invested all that energy in trying to kill each other off. Or why Two-a-Day was black and lived up the Projects, and what made that different.

(Gibson: 61-2)

Bobby wants to use cyberspace to escape this world of gangsters, drug dealers and mass murderers -- a vision of U.S. poverty, perhaps also recalling the distorted upper-middle-class United States of the mid-1980s reflected in the writings of Brett Easton Ellis.

Cyberspace is given a role to play when Bobby and the oungans view a holographic three-dimensional animation of Bobby's near-death experience, which seemed impressively futuristic in 1986; ten years later it seemed crude, lacking detail

(representation of the matrix seems a problem for Gibson) until the "anomalous phenomenon" (Gibson: 120) appears:

Liquid flowers of milky white blossomed from the floor of the tank . . . they seemed to consist of thousands of tiny spheres or bubbles, and then they aligned perfectly with the cubical grid and coalesced, forming a . . . thing like a rectilinear mushroom. The surfaces, facets, were white, perfectly blank. The image in the tank was no longer than Bobby's open hand, but to anyone jacked into a deck it would have been enormous. The thing unfolded a pair of horns; these lengthened, curved, became pincers that arced out to grasp the pyramid. He saw the tips sink smoothly through the flickering orange planes of the enemy ice.

(Gibson: 120-1)

This image is probably drawn from the fractal images growing popular at the time; it makes the matrix seem simple by comparison, and displays vast power, appearing from nowhere. Its size and insectile pincers makes it threatening, but (as in Bobby's experience) it is white opposed to darkness. (It is the manifestation of the free AIs, who are part of the matrix rather than in it.)

These free AIs appear impressive. They speak through Jackie, resembling what happened to Case in *Neuromancer*, except that *Neuromancer* could not control him as these AIs control her. They are shown synaesthetically, another nod to Bester: "[i]ron laughter . . . another voice, fluid and quicksilver and cold . . . silver laughter rose through him like bubbles . . . the utterly impossible wind . . . had started to blow . . . a hot damp wind that smelled of things he couldn't identify" (Gibson: 232). This stresses their alienness and sublimity.

Yet cyberspace is actually far from sublime from a cowboy's perspective; witness the self-centredness of Jaylene Slide, who ignores useful information in her single-

minded pursuit of gain. Bobby eventually attempts to tell Slide that Conroy killed her partner, though she is unlikely to believe his unsupported word. Predictably, Virek's computers are waiting for this; Jackie is killed, while Bobby is sucked up a "glacial white funnel . . . [t]he scale of the thing was impossible, too vast, as though the kind of cybernetic megastructure that represented the whole of a multinational had brought its entire weight to bear on Bobby Newmark and a dancer called Jackie. Impossible . . ." (Gibson: 316). Bobby has learned little from his first experiences of cyberspace; it appears that worldly power trumps all else in cyberspace.

Somehow, though, Bobby has been plunged into Virek's simstim construct because of "anomalous phenomena in the matrix" (Gibson: 318), meaning the AIs. Bobby calls for them -- perhaps he must, as a human had to allow the union of Neuromancer and Wintermute. (The AIs seem limited by human agency; they must manipulate humans into assisting them.) An AI representing Baron Samedi, the Lord of Graveyards, comes, impressively, to take Virek, as in the conclusion of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

When he opened his eyes there was something in the bed of dead flowers. He blinked. It seemed to be a cross of plain, white-painted wood; someone had fitted the sleeves of an ancient naval tunic over the horizontal arms, a kind of mould-spotted tailcoat with heavy, fringed epaulettes of tarnished gold braid, rusting buttons, more braid at the cuffs . . . A rusted cutlass was propped, hilt up, against the white upright, and beside it was a bottle half filled with clear fluid.

The child spun, the little pistol blurring . . . and crumpled, folded into himself like a deflating balloon, a balloon sucked away into nothing at all, the Browning clattering to the stone path like a forgotten toy.

"My name," a voice said, and Bobby wanted to scream when he realized that it came from his own mouth, "is Samedi, and you have slain my cousin's horse . . . "

(Gibson: 318-9)

Flung out of Virek's simstim construct, he sees "the big thing, the thing that had sucked them up, start to alter and shift . . . the entire outline changing" (Gibson: 320), Virek's death becoming an epiphany of the world changing. When he tells Slide that Conroy is her target; improbably, she has someone ready with a rocket-launcher to obliterate Conroy's headquarters. They are saved -- thanks to Slide's physical power. The superiority of cyberspace is an illusion; the free AIs even had to physically kill Virek in his tank. Slide's role is central, though trivial; a cowboy should display the importance of cyberspace -- but instead she degrades it.

In *Count Zero* cyberspace manipulators have become extensions of artificial intelligences:

'Heavy icebreakers are kind of funny to deal in, even for the big boys. You know why, because ice, all the really hard stuff, the walls around every major store of data in the matrix, is always the product of an AI . . . . Nothing else is fast enough to weave good ice and constantly alter and upgrade it. So when a really powerful icebreaker shows up on the black market, there are already a couple of very dicey factors in play. Like, for starts, where did the product come from? Nine times out of ten, it came from an AI, and AIs are constantly screened, mainly by the Turing people, to make sure they don't get too smart.'

(Gibson: 114)

This situation devalues the romantic cowboy of *Neuromancer*. Cowboys serve corporate interests, or demented egomaniacs like Virek.

The nearest thing to a wholly new element in the text is "biosoft", which is elaborated in an unnerving sequence: searching Mitchell's AI-generated simstim dossier, Turner discovers an odd feeling of guilty self-loathing, somewhat like his own. (Turner thus becomes a more sympathetic person, though it is odd that while preparing to risk his life he devotes such attention to a minor document.) Since Mitchell would not have spent his life wired to simstim apparatus, these feelings must have been inserted by the AI into the document; hence the AI is communicating with him -- suggesting that this AI supports the free AIs' plans. (Turner dreams of a glass spider embedded in plastic containing a drop of mercury, seen in Mexico, trapped, like Turner. In this dream the grey biosoft of Mitchell's biography becomes a brain, "pulsing softly in Mitchell's hand" [Gibson: 99]. The AIs are linked to Mitchell, disgusting yet vulnerable because human-controlled. This eventually shows limits to the powers of the free AIs, while also symbolising Turner's isolation and weakness.)

"Biosoft" looks different, "a swollen grey microsoft, one end routine neuro-jack, the other a strange, rounded formation unlike anything he'd seen" (Gibson: 39). The idea arose in the early 1980s; K. Eric Drexler cites unsuccessful research from 1984 into "a protein-based computer" (Drexler, 1990: 11). Theoretically, organic molecules could function like transistors using less power and space. Genetic engineers could conceivably reprogramme the immune system's T-cells, which made monoclonal antibodies, to build computers just as proteins form cells. (The image appears in Gibson's short story "New Rose Hotel".)

This union of genetic engineering and cybernetics, in Gibson's and others' minds, helps to unite flesh and machine. The weird fleshiness of biosoft makes it a "soft machine", as William Burroughs described the human body. This is no longer a machine inserted into the body, but a transformation of biology into something commercially useful.

What does this mean? The notion that social change requires technological stimulus is a common science fiction trope (conservatives often ascribe human changes to technology, since they distrust human political involvements). But how could a new technology alter human life, or be led to do this via the free AIs? Here the question is ignored, suggesting that this point is meant to be assumed, by a public which (within science fiction) already considers technology the foundation of political change. Yet could those not already committed to this belief be persuaded?

Instead, for most readers biosoft would probably appear a symbol rather than a solution. Biosoft makes meaningful change possible -- implying that such change is impossible unless something fundamental, yet mysterious and biological, changes. Conceivably this is the "change of heart" so beloved of liberals repudiating socio-economic transformation. At any event it is something which allows the postponement of the change which the free AIs desire.

#### ***Neuromancer Diluted or Reconstructed?***

If the themes of *Neuromancer* are revisited here, they appear to be differently treated. Transcendent utopian hopes are deferred rather than given dubious fulfillment. Completion appears more difficult than in *Neuromancer*, where bringing the matrix to consciousness seemed an unambiguously worthy goal. Skill and style count for little in *Count Zero*; randomness minimises the role of main characters. (The AIs would have lost had Angie been killed or the Boxmaker captured -- they took needless risks and developed overcomplicated plans). The Kasual/Gothick subculture, unlike the Panther Moderns, is largely a consumerist surrender to social conditions. What is needed, as Bobby realises, is informed criticism of the world, rather than nihilism or conformism.

Perhaps to affirm this, Gibson offers more conventionally human-motivated characterisation. Csicsery-Ronay complains that "[i]n CZ, the characters have lost this [emotional] compression -- none actually attracts Gibson's intense lyricism . . . . Marly

is a mannequin . . . Bobby is . . . a character from a Hollywood movie" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 82), which seem extreme exaggerations, more expressions of Csicsery-Ronay's dislike for the text than comments on characterisation. Bobby's teenage angst and confused ineptitude are more comprehensible than Case's self-destructive urges. Csicsery-Ronay suggests that "Bobby and Angie are . . . signs of innocence . . . [i]n [*Count Zero*] representations of innocence are essential, in order to set in relief the alienation necessary for human freedom" (Csicsery-Ronay: 66). (Presumably alienation here represents knowledge of a need for human freedom; given this, Bobby is less innocent than Csicsery-Ronay believes.)

Gibson uses Bobby's "innocence" to narratively explore the world, showing the reader the things which Bobby needs to know -- if somewhat clumsily. When Bobby sees two girls with "[l]ong black frock coats . . . over tight red vests in silk brocade. . . . dark features . . . concealed beneath the brims of fedoras" (Gibson, 1990a: 59), this reminds him of Two-a-Day, who wore "ice-blue shaved-velour" (Gibson: 60). Clearly the "Projects" people are more "cultured" than those in Bobby's Barrytown; however, since Bobby is meant to be ignorant, he should not know such specific terms. Bobby cannot be as ignorant as he appears, yet still know enough to observe effectively. Someone with Bobby's sensibility should also be too vulnerable to succeed.

Meanwhile, between *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero* the transformative potential of the AIs -- what the characterisation is presumably meant to throw light on -- grows more obscure. Admittedly, Lucas, Beauvoir and even the Finn recognise the need for social change, while Bobby's position hints that even the middle-class may be dissatisfied. Yet Gibson again insists that planning cannot work, even when done by AIs -- who offer little to oppose the dystopia. (Apparently it is impossible to predict the future, so that nobody can anticipate the effects of change -- especially not the "When It Changed".) Only randomness and the ineptitude of their enemies offers hope -- against a backdrop of almost senseless violence, much like Molly's, which makes change seem almost purposeless.

The ending of the text is implausible despite the superficial realism elsewhere in the text; characters who should be careful professionals act irrationally. No doubt Gibson wishes to represent them running risks, but here they appear absurd -- conceivably this is sloppiness, along with a desire to pit weak individuals against vast corporate power, so as to glorify the former. Virek (much like Maas) is a horrible force which requires resistance, even if hopeless. Yet, having made the odds enormous, individual triumph can only occur by accident, which makes such success banal.

The text is filled with contradictions, especially in Gibson's socio-political thinking, (for instance, between planning and realism, or between technology and politics). Some may be attributed to Gibson's hastiness in completing the text; Gibson confessed that "I had originally intended to pursue what was going to happen to Mitchell's daughter . . . . [b]ut I was so anxious to finish the book, so tired of working on it, that I talked myself out of making any judgements about it" (McCaffery, 1994a: 284). Possibly he may not have been pleased with his creation; widening the scope of the *Neuromancer* argument may have made it unexpectedly complicated.

*Count Zero*, a title implying an aristocracy, and aimed at changing human society, may be considered Romantic (following what Csicsery-Ronay calls "Neuromanticism"). Jameson suggests "that the object . . . mourned by the Romantics was the aristocratic world . . . [w]e may . . . describe Romanticism as a coming to consciousness of some fundamental loss . . . a helpless attempt to recuperate lost being" (Jameson, 1989: 7). This sense of mourning for a past utopia might relate to Gibson's liberal flight from the conservative United States during the Vietnam War, or the defeat of 1970s liberalism by 1980s conservatism -- especially the defeat of Gibson's *petit-bourgeois* middle class by the wealthier Republican leadership.

This utopia need not be explicitly political; traditional science fiction sidesteps political analysis by representing science itself as a force for positive social change acting through heroic individuals such as Edison or Einstein. In *Count Zero* this strategy is inverted; Mitchell, a human commodity exploiting himself and exploited by

the AIs, subjects science to the service of capital. Scientistic ideology (identified by Mandel and others as significant in late capitalism) is further undermined because Mitchell proves to be a fraud; the free AIs are Mitchell's tutors. They may pursue their own utopian plan, but this is nowhere made explicit.

Indeed, in *Count Zero*, the struggle is played out among amoral, unaccountable corporations. Bobby, Turner and Marly consider the system in which they live to be corrupt and hurtful, yet perceive no socio-political alternative. Even if Virek is defeated, the system of zaibatsus represented by Maas and Hosaka survives to continue its oppression. However, the main characters are middle to upper class; the truly oppressed poor remain in the background. Sympathetic characters struggle for the free AIs against the corporations or Virek, which may be seen as fighting for the weak against the strong, suggesting further criticism of social Darwinism. This withdraws from *Neuromancer's* appropriation of U.S. conservative-libertarian values, in terms of which "the street" was the principal arbiter of good or bad. However, the class position of the characters is narrow, and it is unclear whether the text displays concern for the rights of the oppressed, rather than with the rights of those who have some power and want more -- especially the AIs themselves.

The AIs cannot by themselves transform the world. (Virek probably exaggerates their power.) Possibly Gibson's fear of centralisation makes him distrust a strong central power in cyberspace, which could symbolise a successful centralised (socialist?) Utopia. As Jameson suggests, "hostility to the concept of 'totalization' would thus seem to be most plausibly decoded as a systematic repudiation of notions and ideals of praxis as such, or of the collective project" (Jameson, 1993: 333). Foucault's widely-publicised formulation of the problem suggested that "an attempt to replace one set of social relations with another . . . . could only succeed in establishing a new apparatus of power-knowledge" (Callinicos, 1989: 82), although "the central Foucauldian thesis of the omnipresence of power . . . . that *any* totalization serves some will to power is quite unsupported by argument or evidence" (Callinicos: 84-5);

Edward Said delivered similar critiques of Foucault. Gibson may have been pursuing prevailing intellectual trends.

In *Count Zero*, the wealthy construct their opposition (as with Conroy's alienation of Turner and Slide) -- what Virek calls "rebellion in the fiscal extremities". They are weaker than they think -- although such problems seem to affect individuals rather than zaibatsus. Zaibatsus are not directly linked to the dystopian nature of the text (most crimes in the text are blamed on Virek, who has corrupted actors like Maas). Evidently Gibson does not consider the system evil, only that it allows *individuals* to be evil. This implies that radical change means eliminating bad people (like the U.S. notion that voting out a leader, Nixon or Reagan, Clinton or Bush, amounts to transformation). Gibson's demonisation of Virek (more extreme than that of Tessier-Ashpool) is dubious, for Virek did not create the sinful world, only wishing to control it -- like any corporation. Arguably Virek is demonised to make the behaviour of others more acceptable; corporations are no longer an automatic enemy, as they had appeared in *Neuromancer*.

Csicsery-Ronay insists that "[t]he poles of Gibson's language in NM were ecstasy and elegy . . . . [i]n CZ the need to short-circuit the dangerous ecstasies and to return to some natural integrities leads to a vitiation also of grief" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 82). This suggests that where *Neuromancer* concerned extreme passions (the delights promised by the future and the pains of the lost past), *Count Zero* is more sedate. Admittedly the characters in this text seem less obsessive than in the earlier one. It is tempting to read this as a fear of radical politics. However, Csicsery-Ronay may oversimplify; the ecstasies of cyberspace are built into Angie's head, while Turner's life is an elegy for his decision to become a military corporate tool.

*Count Zero* shows more concern for "natural integrities" than did *Neuromancer*; the squirrel wood, Marly's doubts about representation, even the trees of the Projects, all question the automatic benefits of cybernetic power. Despite the activities of Bobby and Jaylene, cyberspace plays a relatively minor role; its "ecstasy" seems inaccessible to most, while the "elegy" for the natural world and natural human

relationships (arguably those existing before globalised capitalism, as Jameson suggests) is apparent. This may reflect a desire to return to the past rather than confront an uncertain future, suggesting "a reversal of NM's valuation of cyberspace as a domain of transcendence . . . . [o]ne would then expect CZ to depict cyberspace without attaching any metaphysical significance to it . . . . transcendence . . . should be accessible without recourse to the matrix" (Csicsery-Ronay: 66). However, this suggests that cyberspace is absolutely metaphysical in *Neuromancer*, while largely mechanical in *Count Zero*; *Count Zero's* use of voodoo is surely partly intended to supplant metaphysical transcendence in cyberspace through implicit physical-political change.

This suggests that there are anti-Utopian fears present in *Count Zero*, which may explain the postponed conclusion. Placing apocalyptic change (even negative change, as pursued by Virek) in a socially-conscious framework suggests ideological goals which Gibson seems ambiguous about, perhaps torn between what is right and what is comfortable. Marly's focus on art arguably permits Gibson to represent such issues through aesthetic symbolism, keeping overt politics at a distance.

Nevertheless this cannot be sustained, especially given the political nature of much modern or postmodern art; "various modernisms have often constituted violent reactions against modernization . . . . at least one strand of artistic modernism is anti-modern and comes into being in violent or muffled protest against modernization, now grasped as technological progress in the largest sense" (Jameson, 1993: 305). Gibson's doubts about the positive value of technological progress might relate to his fondness for art reflecting insanity or isolation.

Csicsery-Ronay considers *Count Zero's* view of art to be politically confused:

For Virek [the boxes] really are part of the historical commercial system . . . . pragmatic immortality machines . . . . [i]f cyber-Samedi had not annihilated Virek just when he did, the boxes might easily have become merely highly ornate circuits . . . . the sublime art of

The Boxmaker . . . represents an alternative to techno-fusion only if we ignore that it exists on suffrance -- because the victorious forces divinizing cyberspace . . . actively defend it against the worldly powers.

(Csicsery-Ronay, 1995: 77)

However, his reading is itself somewhat confused. The art of the Boxmaker is not sublime in what he (*pace* Benjamin) terms an "auratic" sense; it rather serves as communication between the free AIs and humans -- like the voodoo loa, or Bobby's software. It is thus not an alternative to "techno-fusion" (presumably the fusion of humanity/nature and technology), but a *means* of fusion with technology. The independence of the free AIs is limited, perhaps because Gibson wishes to deny them the power to impose themselves on humanity. The Boxmaker's boxes are plainly not only about art, though Csicsery-Ronay insists that

The boxes are fake . . . these allegedly profoundly meaningful objects are actually devices conjured up to exemplify a . . . desire for . . . art powerful enough to induce epiphanies . . . 'humanist' art . . . parts of the heroic project of commemorating the history, not of our present, but of Marie-France's project . . . Shooting past his mark, Gibson represents the ecstatic fusion of NM as the reality which is elegiacally mourned by CZ's modernist nostalgics.

(Csicsery-Ronay: 76)

Csicsery-Ronay is confused: the boxes are artifacts of Gibson's narrative, and lack genuine artistic qualities, such as "fake"! They are devices for focussing the reader's attention and clarifying Gibson's concerns -- a sense of fragmentation and a desire for wholeness, with obvious social resonances. Pejorative reference to "modernist nostalgics" suggests that Csicsery-Ronay disagrees with Gibson's goal of moving

away from the unreflective pleasure in technology evident in parts of *Neuromancer* to a more socially-centred vision. Csicsery-Ronay's confusion -- especially when he addresses political concerns -- hints that the intellectual currents of the time blocked even acute critics from comprehending Gibson's objectives.

The text seems somewhat unfinished, with its improbable ending and unresolved contradictions, as if Gibson had not yet worked out how to resolve these issues. Thus the work partially subverts the apocalyptic conclusion of *Neuromancer*, but retains many of its apparent ideological goals. Suvin may be right to see *Count Zero* betraying the political implications of the earlier work (although ambiguously), as Csicsery-Ronay may be right to see it betraying the technological ecstasy of that work. Gibson is evidently pursuing a conclusion likely to please neither critic. He may wish to correct aspects of *Neuromancer* which disturbed him, as Csicsery-Ronay thinks -- but evidently *Count Zero* is not, alone, that correction; Gibson still needed to resolve the conflict between the requirements which Gibson seemed to draw from facile popular fiction, and his growing social responsibility which led to demands which may not have suited Gibson's ideological convictions.

That social responsibility is not innocent. The free AIs manipulate humanity; this could cause problems if taken to extremes. Beauvoir, Lucas and the cowboys have no clear goal in view. By representing the AIs as voodoo gods, Gibson mystifies their nature much more than before. In *Neuromancer* Wintermute spoke in metaphors, and through personae, because its nature was unknowable. In *Count Zero* the "cyberloa" appear humanly comprehensible but somehow conspiratorial -- although the gnomic utterances of the Boxmaker suggest that this may stem from their decision to mask themselves as human gods:

-- I came to be, here. Once I was not. Once, for a brilliant time, time without duration, I was everywhere as well . . . but the bright time broke. The mirror was flawed. Now I am only one . . . but I have my song, and you have heard it. I sing with these things that

float around me, fragments of the family that funded my birth. There are others, but they will not speak to me. Vain, the scattered fragments of myself, like children. Like men. They send me new things, but I prefer the old things. Perhaps I do their bidding. They plot with men, my other selves, and men imagine they are gods . . .

"You are the thing that Virek seeks, aren't you?"

-- No. He imagines that he can translate himself, code his personality into my fabric. He yearns to be what I once was. What he might become most resembles the least of my broken selves . . .

(Ibid.: 311)

Hence this text evidently follows Jameson's definition of "a symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (Jameson, 1994: 79). The social contradictions remain, despite the "formal aesthetic resolution" at the end which Suvin and Csicsery-Ronay both find unsatisfactory. Having clarified the contradictions rather than resolving them, Gibson must still search for a resolution. *Count Zero* may be considered a transition, referring back to the implicit conflicts Gibson created, and forward to a resolution which he could not wholly endorse.

### Chapter 3. *Mona Lisa Overdrive*: Conclusion or Deferral?

#### Contextualising Closure and Characterisation.

When *Mona Lisa Overdrive* appeared, four years after *Neuromancer*, the socio-political environment seemed to have changed dramatically. By 1988 the former economic crisis seemed to have turned to economic miracle in the United States. Some were alarmed at the debt which the US government was creating, through deficit financing. However, "Reaganomics" appeared to have saved the country. Most -- especially the rich -- were elated, a situation celebrated in Tom Wolfe's best-seller, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1988). (Wolfe's text is, ironically, directed towards factors *inconveniencing* the rich.) US unemployment fell sharply; while liberals and radicals disliked the forces creating this -- the image of the heartless "yuppie" dates from this era -- conditions were reassuring compared with the earlier apparent hopelessness.

Aggression against Libya in 1985 and 1986 made the US temporarily unpopular in Western Europe, but Americans deemed this a success; while many grew more tolerant of U.S. recklessness, relations between the US and USSR improved. Premier Gorbachev's "charm offensive" in the West disarmed traditional US anti-Soviet propaganda, and the arms reduction treaty of 1987 suggested that the traditional Cold War was over. As the missiles deployed at the start of the decade were withdrawn, public fear of nuclear war declined. (Anti-war sentiment remained high, as in the run-up to the Gulf War in 1990, but by then it was discounted by the media, as Christopher Norris complains in *Uncritical Theory* [1991].)

Admittedly, liberal commentators who wished to challenge conservative triumphalism and show distaste for the materialism which the 1980s seemed to evoke could point to the plight of the homeless and the poor, who gained little from government; as Joseph Stiglitz notes of the 1980s, "since 1973, the poorest people in America had actually become poorer" (Stiglitz, 2003: 34). This, however, seemed

more regrets about the political weakness of traditionally liberal parties (such as the Democrats in the U.S. and the Labour Party in Britain) than real disaffection with the system. All this seems likely to have influenced Gibson, a man of middle-class liberal sentiments, immersed in North American media and politics.

By the late 1980s most of the problems contributing to the early-1980s crisis seemed to have been resolved. The USSR withdrew forces from Afghanistan in 1988; the U.S. proxy war against Nicaragua continued until the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 -- but this war was not widely condemned in Western media, as Chomsky and Herman observe in *Manufacturing Consent*. Callinicos suggests that this sense of contentment promoted an ideologically-driven detachment from reality; "the philosophical drift towards Aestheticism . . . accords with the cultural mood of the 1980s . . . . a decade obsessed with style . . . . with forming oneself into a particular kind of person . . . . This stylization of existence . . . is surely best understood against the background, not of New Times, but of good times for the new middle class" (Callinicos, 1989: 169).

This development might be expected to appear in Gibson's work. If Gibson believed that the (apparently) intractable world problems of the early 1980s had been solved, he might have found a new optimism. In this case the trilogy might not be apocalyptic -- bringing an end to the old world -- but rather developmental and reassuring. The open ending of *Count Zero* required a resolution -- but not necessarily a catastrophic one.

The text has common elements with its predecessors. As before, its principal villains are wealthy and powerful, perceived through multiple viewpoints -- four this time. Three of these characters -- Kumiko, Mona and Angie -- are female; none are sexually fetishised as Molly had been; one is an unromantic prostitute. Two -- Mona and Slick -- are approximately working-class, a perspective new to the trilogy, although they do not perform productive labour. (Gibson did not represent people actually working before the security guards in *Virtual Light* (1993).) These features

may be meant to challenge the fantasies of the earlier novels, developing the social-realistic trend evident in *Count Zero*.

The title and opening are striking; "Mona Lisa" implies high culture, enigmas, the Renaissance and female beauty (ironically it is the prostitute's name). "Overdrive" implies high speed; in science fiction, faster-than-light travel. The title exploits dissonances between these, generating a sense that more is happening than the reader recognises. The text opens in a cooler, more passive tone than the earlier texts, perhaps promoting thought rather than action:

The ghost was her father's parting gift, presented by a black-clad secretary in a departure lounge at Narita.

For the first two hours of the flight to London it lay forgotten in her purse, a smooth dark oblong, one side impressed with the ubiquitous Maas-Neotek logo, the other gently curved to fit the user's palm.

She sat up very straight in her seat in the first class cabin, her features composed in a small cold mask modelled after her dead mother's most characteristic expression.

(Gibson, 1989: 7)

This is the rich people's world, which Gibson had not previously depicted from within. Kumiko's situation is uncomfortable despite her wealth; her dislike for her father is subtly suggested (the gift lying unexamined). Where the "slamhound" of *Count Zero* was explained immediately, the "ghost" remains mysterious awhile. However, Maas-Neotek's biosoft from *Count Zero* now has a "ubiquitous" logo; what had previously been an alarming novelty is now commonplace. This implies that the "ghost" is somehow cybernetic. If the cyberspace deck and the simstim rig symbolised the personal computer and the home video player, the "smooth dark oblong"

resembles a late-1980s remote control. But the ghost which actually haunts Kumiko is that of her mad mother.

This cybernetic "ghost", Colin, is generated by the "fifty-first generation of Maas-Neotek biochips" (Gibson, 1989: 9), showing the rapid changes in the seven years which have elapsed since *Count Zero*. Colin is an image of a young Englishman, an artificial personality; what had been extraordinary in *Neuromancer* is now a marketed commodity. Colin is intended to assist her transition into England, where she must hide from a gang war within the Yakuza, in which her father holds rank -- apparently the formalised Yakuza will not attack her abroad.

Her father has gang tattoos and various possessions. In earlier trilogy texts, Gibson used brand names, partly, to defamiliarise his secondary world; here, the brands are familiar. Perhaps Gibson is offering American or European readers reference points in the alien landscape of a Japanese family. Kumiko's family wealth distresses her, suggesting that Gibson is retreating from his earlier demonising of the rich -- yet the "poor little rich girl" is a cartoonish cliché, even if defamiliarized for Western readers by her Japanese nature.

This opening gives the text technological and social context, and emphasises its debt to the earlier texts. Colin -- a technological artifact impossible in *Count Zero* -- shows how biosoft has developed, as the AIs had earlier hoped. This advance suggests to the reader familiar with earlier texts that technology in Gibson's world has reached a cusp which will make the long-awaited radical transformation possible.

In contrast to this hope and luxury, the character "Slick Henry" lives in an isolated New Jersey industrial wasteland, polluted and abandoned, called Dog Solitude. Someone to whom he owes a favour asks him to look after someone called the Count, unconscious on a stretcher, permanently jacked into the matrix -- whom the reader recognise as Count Zero, Bobby Newmark, now in his early twenties. Again connections are evident -- as well as Gibson's newly-discovered concern with a more realistic underclass world than the pseudo-gangster world of Case in *Neuromancer*.

In contrast to the introverted, contemplative Kumiko, Slick Henry seems a typical Gibson male:

Kid Afrika came cruising into Dog Solitude on the last day in November, his vintage Dodge chauffeured by a white girl named Cherry Chesterfield.

Slick Henry and Little Bird were breaking down the buzzsaw that formed the Judge's left hand when Kid's Dodge came into view, its patched apron-bag throwing up brown fantails of the rusty water that pooled on the Solitude's uneven plain of compacted steel.

(Gibson, 1989: 16)

This style differs from that which describes Kumiko's experiences. It is confident; everything has a proper name, every statement is declarative, urging the reader to accept uncritically. The names are expressive (whereas Kumiko does not understand the Londoners' names) -- Kid Afrika suggests a traditionalist-oriented black, Slick Henry a sophisticate, Little Bird a weak but active person, and Cherry Chesterfield combines a slang term for virginity with a name which suggests aristocracy -- or cigarettes. The reader will first think that a "vintage Dodge" is an old truck; however, its "patched apron-bag" makes it a hovercraft, a "vintage" one, no longer considered a futuristic emblem. The "plain of compacted steel" may be defamiliarising, yet its casual mention may be meant to put the reader off their guard, having much the same confusing effect as the vagueness and doubt emphasised in the Kumiko chapter.

Slick differs from the others; he is an artist, creating installations like the Judge; its buzzsaw may represent American justice (given that Slick was horribly punished for stealing rich people's cars), and recalls Laurie Anderson's, "O Superman", from *Big Science*, with its lyrics "O Superman/O Judge", and referring to "your long arm . . . your electronic arm". Slick's artistic "garret", Factory, is on a site so polluted that they cannot drink the groundwater. Slick's colleague, Gentry, is an eccentric cowboy, a

cyberspace aristocrat who fools the Fission Authority into providing power. They are social outcasts, showing qualities that they cannot make use of under their circumstances. Evidently Gibson is condemning the marginalisation of certain people -- the right kind of people, whose pursuits appeal to an urban upper class who might like to buy the Judge or admire Gentry's cyberspace skills.

Little Bird is clearly *not* the right kind of person; his background is "white Jersey stringtowns where nobody knew shit about anything and hated anybody who did" (Gibson, 1989: 17). (This pejorative imagery prefigures the distasteful "meshbacks" of *Idoru* [1996].) Distrustful and ignorant, he is the opposite of Bobby, the eager learner who learned to trust his own judgement. Hearing that the man in the stretcher is a Count, Little Bird asks if he's a vampire, and Slick must explain that there are no vampires; Little Bird is easily fooled by the illusions of simstims. Slick insists that it is easy to tell real from fake, showing that Gibson no longer conflates the two, as he implied in earlier texts.

Meanwhile Angie appears in the chapter "Malibu" which suggests, in 1988, wealth and freedom, far from Dog Solitude. While still a simstim star, she has lost touch with the free AIs; she is lonely, isolated, and addicted to a drug which mysterious enemies are trying to make her take; a free AI, adopting the persona of Mamman Brigitte, "eldest of the dead" warns her that she is under threat and that the "vévés" in her head have been altered. (Obviously this is connected to Bobby's predicament; why are they now estranged?) Her problems also reaffirm the poor-little-rich-girl issue evident in the Kumiko passage; again, wealth seems to bring unhappiness. Gibson seems to have moved from condemning the rich to pitying them.

There was a smell in the house; it had always been there.

It belonged to time and the salt air and the entropic nature of expensive houses built too close to the sea. Perhaps it was also peculiar to places briefly but frequently uninhabited, houses opened and closed as their restless residents arrived and departed. She

imagined the rooms empty, flecks of corrosion blossoming silently on chrome, pale molds taking hold in obscure corners. The architects, as if in recognition of eternal processes, had encouraged a degree of rust; massive steel railings along the deck had been eaten wrist-thin by years of spray.

The house crouched, like its neighbours, on fragments of ruined foundations, and her walks along the beach sometimes involved attempts at archeological fantasy. She tried to imagine a past for the place, other houses, other voices. She was accompanied, on these walks, by an armed remote, a tiny Dornier helicopter that rose from its unseen rooftop nest when she stepped down from the deck. It could hover almost silently, and was programmed to avoid her line of sight.

(Gibson, 1989: 24)

The images of decay, as in *Count Zero*, might symbolise decay in broader society, though Angie's private decay (her loss of purpose in life) is also plain. She, like Kumiko, ponders history, but seemingly ignores time -- perhaps because her past is inaccessible, but also discounting the historical process. Her work as a simstim star precludes privacy (the drone), though since it is possible to edit simstim tapes, actual privacy is attainable, if her audience does not know of it. Hence she connives, knowingly, in falsity -- somewhat like Marly.

Apparently unconnected with all this, providing contrast with luxurious Malibu, is Mona Lisa, a drug-addicted whore in Miami, having a bad time until her pimp Eddy assures her that someone rich wants her services, thanks to Eddy's efforts in arranging such things. She lives like a disempowered Slick in an abandoned building in Florida,, unaware of her name's special meaning; she cannot read and has no skills but those of survival. Her presentation is somewhat like Bobby in *Count Zero*; thoughtful, vulnerable, ignorant yet not innocent:

Mona dreamed she was dancing the cage back in some Cleveland juke, naked in a column of hot blue light, where the faces thrusting up for her through the veil of smoke had blue light snagged in the whites of their eyes. They wore the expression men always wore when they watched you dance, staring real hard but locked up inside themselves at the same time, so their eyes told you nothing at all and their faces, in spite of the sweat, might have been carved from something that only looked like flesh.

Not that she cared how they looked, when she was in the cage, high and hot and on the beat, three songs into the set and the wiz just starting to peak, new strength in her legs sending her up on the balls of her feet . . .

One of them grabbed her ankle.

(Gibson, 1989: 32)

Where Molly's work in the "House of Blue Lights" was slumming, Mona is trapped in prostitution. She has little ability to change her life, and simply dreams of life before she was a whore. Mona observes surfaces -- faces and expressions -- while aware of knowing little of what is behind them. Her ignorance troubles her (like Bobby) but she knows that understanding men would not make her happier. Meanwhile, where Angie sees a drug as a Satanic temptation, Mona's "wiz" is her only pleasure.

In her dream, the watchers are objectified; "their faces . . . might have been carved from something that only looked like flesh" (Gibson, 1989: 32). This may protect her against wasting emotional energy on them. Gibson strives to analyse the feelings of a woman performing sexual services for strangers, but she seems to feel and think too much for her own good. She enjoys dancing and being watched, but imagines having

her ankle gripped (no such thing actually happened, we are assured), a violation as a dancer, restoring the reality of prostitution.

In *Neuromancer* sex was essentially male-oriented, and *Count Zero* is largely sexless. Gibson seems concerned to counteract these problems through Eddy's sexual fantasies:

How it was supposed to have made her feel was a way she hadn't ever felt. She knew you could get to a place where doing it hurt a little but still felt good, but she knew that wasn't it. What Eddy wanted to hear was that it hurt a lot and made her feel bad, but she liked it anyway. Which made no sense at all to Mona, but she'd learned to tell it the way he wanted her to.

....

And when he was done, curled on his side asleep, Mona lay awake in the stale dark, turning the dream of leaving around and around, bright and wonderful.

And please let it be true.

(Gibson, 1989: 37)

Eddy imposes his fantasies on Mona, probably trying to justify his conduct by falsely telling himself that she likes it. This obvious viciousness contrasts with Gibson's unquestioned image of Molly in *Neuromancer*, objectified and submitting to Case despite his disrespect for her as a woman. (Significantly, in this text Molly, renamed Sally, has become androgynous; "she might have been taken for a boy" (Gibson, 1989: 41), which seems meant to contradict her former image as a *femme fatale*/dominatrix.) Mona wants to escape, yet her hopes seem so pathetic, so hateful is her life, that the reader is probably not meant to expect her to succeed. Gibson forces the reader to consider male sexual fantasy from a woman's perspective. Admittedly

Eddy also suffers; he cannot communicate his sexuality and cannot perform without Mona's aid; at least Mona responds to reality. Her "tricks" are annoying *because* they try to treat her as a human being, to humanise themselves, to which (she seems to feel) they have no right. Male-written science fiction often exploits women in the interests of male fantasy; Mona's sexuality confronts such objectifications, because she despises her tricks (by extrapolation, male readers) and thus cannot be seen as no more than an object of desire.

These opening chapters and characterisations link this world with that of the earlier books, and suggest connections between the scattered characters. These all begin to be made plain when Kumiko meets someone called Sally, who is clearly Molly from *Neuromancer* (here she will be called Molly when appearing in *Neuromancer*, and Sally appearing in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*), who is her bodyguard. Another figure from the past, 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool, is attempting to control this situation through her wealth, much as Virek attempted to control events in *Count Zero*, although in this case she is perversely capricious rather than megalomaniac.

3Jane, using London gangsters and Sprawl mercenaries, wants to punish Angie for her links with the free AIs, and to punish Sally for destroying her plans fourteen years earlier. However she is dead in the real world, existing in a gigantic piece of biosoft separated from the matrix, called an "aleph". This is reminiscent of Virek's virtual world -- except that this is a physical item, and by means never specified, Bobby the Count has stolen it and spends all his time jacked in there. This is much what Case feared would happen with *Neuromancer* -- but here it is presented as desirable. Meanwhile, in the background, the free AIs are preparing to unite themselves.

The remainder of the text develops these issues. More social reality in Gibson's future is displayed, such as the ambience of London as opposed to the Sprawl (to which Sally takes Kumiko against the wishes of her handlers) and the reappearance of the Finn as a posthumous software construct. Eventually the free AIs unite, while 3Jane's plans are foiled by Bobby Newmark and Slick's landlord Gentry, who believes that cyberspace has a Shape (presumably the nature of the free AIs which have

become cyberspace in some sense). Angie dies, but lives forever in cyberspace, a copy of the contents of the aleph somehow liberated by the free AIs. Mona, whom 3Jane's gangsters planned to use as a body replacement for Angie during Angie's kidnapping, actually replaces Angie, becoming the simstim star she had always dreamed of becoming. (Angie's employers, Sense/Net, do not wish to face the trouble and expense of finding another star). The good people are rewarded, the bad people are punished, and 3Jane is permanently trapped in her software construct.

Nevertheless, the text is not merely a repetition of earlier texts; it differs in part because of the greater attention to human and social detail. For instance, the characters offer significantly different perceptions of their world. In much of Kumiko's presentation, London appears familiar and safe; the only novelty is a fingerprint-reading lock (probably drawn from fantasy-adventure films). On one level this comforts the reader, especially since it depicts two cultures interesting to Americans; if Japan may be the feared future, England may be the respected yet decadent past.

This was nothing like Tokyo, where the past, all that remained of it, was nurtured with a nervous care. History there had become a quantity, a rare thing, parcelled out by government and preserved by law and corporate funding. Here it seemed the very fabric of things, as if the city were a single growth of stone and brick, uncounted strata of message and meaning, age upon age, generated over the centuries to the dictates of some now all but unreadable DNA of commerce and empire.

(Gibson, 1989: 11-12)

In *Count Zero* and *Neuromancer*, exotic places provided backgrounds to the action. Here, Gibson represents genuine cultural differences; the globalised world is inhomogeneous. He relates this to his wider concerns by rhetorically linking human and nature, implying that the city is natural as humanity, all thus arising from DNA.

Past "history", too, is potentially uncontrolled, growing wild -- suggesting an uncontrollable future. Kumiko appears uncertain about such things; her depiction of London is what it is *not*, and what it *seems*. Admittedly, history, commerce and empire place a political gloss on the text which seems strange for a young girl's meditations -- though Kumiko is extremely serious and precocious.

Since the main characters evidently further Gibson's socio-political concerns, it is striking that they all lack power, being victims rather than victimisers. (Sally, more powerful, is significantly not represented through a viewpoint.) They are not complicit in the crimes of society, and deserve to succeed -- although they do not, by themselves, but only prevail through the machinations of the free AIs, and with Sally's help. In this sense they resemble Bobby in *Count Zero* -- but lack his optimism. They are all outsiders; two are upper-class, yet outsiders because their behavior is unacceptable to that class (Angie wants to help the AIs) or are not committed to their class (Kumiko hates her father, blaming him for her suffering). Mona depends on her pimp, while Slick hides from the world. Angie and Kumiko are close enough to the power structure to see how it works more clearly than the main characters in *Count Zero*. Mona and Slick are weak enough to genuinely suffer -- showing the reader the darkest features of Gibson's world. All this, however, suggests that Gibson is diminishing the divide between rich and poor which his earlier works emphasised -- another point with political implications.

### **The End of the Trilogy.**

The general action of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is less obviously related to the free AIs than in the earlier two books, so that any connection to the values of the earlier texts needs to be explained. The sense of closure is plain: "They have come to live in the house . . . . the wildflowers do not fade" (Gibson, 1989: 313), suggests a cybernetic heaven, with full access to cyberspace and the capacity to copy human souls. Even Jane is there -- and Angie has forgiven her, as if all passions are now spent.

That this is a version of heaven is strongly hinted at through the religious imagery in one of Mona's experiences:

A soapbox evangelist spread his arms high, a pale fuzzy Jesus copying the gesture in the air above him. The projection rig was in the box he stood on, but he wore a battered nylon pack with two speakers sticking over each shoulder like blank chrome heads. The evangelist frowned up at Jesus and adjusted something on the belt at his waist. Jesus strobed, turned green, and vanished.

(Gibson, 1989: 66)

From the other end of the square, the evangelist opened up at full volume, in mid-rant, like he'd warmed up to a spit-spraying fury before he'd cut the amp in, the hologram Jesus shaking its white-robed arms and gesturing angrily to the sky, the mall, the sky again. Rapture, he said. Rapture's coming.

(Gibson, 1989: 68)

The Rapture is the time before the Tribulation, when all believers are gathered up to heaven (a "premillennial dispensationalist" doctrine which Thompson considers "one of the most powerful pieces of apocalyptic imagery" (Thompson, 1999: 102). "When It Changed" is when cyberspace became the domain of free AIs. Connecting these suggests that the free AIs will bring the apocalypse promised in *Neuromancer*. This suggests that an elect will be saved through cybernetics while the rest are damned -- making Gibson's joke against the evangelist literal truth. Nevertheless, the evangelist simply wants to impose his beliefs, through technologies which he does not know how to use. Evidently Gibson does not see technology alone as resolving issues; the true "rapture" is for those who understand.

Mona's personal rapture comes after the battle at Dog Solitude, when a Sense/Net helicopter arrives bearing Angie's hairdresser Porphyre (an odd choice to lead a rescue team). Porphyre happily substitutes Mona for Angie, even though a DNA test would reveal the truth. Mona tells him that she isn't Angie. "'I know,' the black man said, 'but it grows on you.' *Rapture. Rapture's coming.*" (Gibson, 1989: 305). While this is implausible, Gibson seems to expect no questioning of this; as if, because Mona appears deserving, she must be rewarded. (Of course, Mona is only one person, even if she is representative of her class; none of the other whores whom she mentions gain anything by her supplanting Angie, so her transformation only has meaning through its symmetry with the other key characters.)

For them, rapture implies entry into an artificial cyberspace heaven (similar, in its reassurance, to the simstim "idealized New England boyhood" (Gibson, 1990a: 9) which Turner inhabited during his reconstruction). Angie asks Bobby about this heaven, but the answer is elliptically given by Colin and the Finn.

The Finn laughed, a very strange sound. "Ain't a why, lady. More like it's a what. Remember one time Brigitte told you there was this other? Yeah? Well, that's the what, and the what's the why."

"I do remember. She said that when the matrix finally knew itself, there was 'the other' . . . "

"That's where we're going tonight," Bobby began . . .

. . . .

"You see," Colin said . . . . "when the matrix attained sentience, it simultaneously became aware of *another* matrix, another sentience."

"I don't understand," she said. "If cyberspace consists of the sum total of data in the human system . . . "

"Yeah," the Finn said . . . . "but nobody's talkin' *human*, see?"

"The other one was somewhere else," Bobby said.

"Centauri," said Colin.

...

"So it's kinda hard to explain why the matrix split up into all those hoodoos 'n' shit, when it met this other one," the Finn said, "but when we get there, you'll sorta get the idea . . ."

....

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Be there in a New York minute," said the Finn, "no shit."

(Gibson, 1989: 316).

Previously the alienness of the AIs was used to account for their bizarre conduct; now aliens themselves are to be used for the same purpose. Angie asks if this is the truth -- but since this is interrogated and then not answered, clearly the truth cannot be revealed until *after* the end of the book! Gibson's apparent conclusion actually again defers issues, this time through the sublime interstellar alien of traditional science fiction. Perhaps the limousine in which they ride to the aliens acknowledges Gibson's escape from the issue, for it recalls the movie *Repo Man* (1987) which ends with the central characters flying to the stars in a car. Gibson's solution, however, destroys all significance to the conclusion. The free AIs have become irrelevant to humanity, trivialising all the social realism of the text.

Such extreme mystification does not stop Gibson from describing events when Angie dies and enters the cybernetic world. He employs what appears as postmodern imagery: 'shifting data-planes . . . represent viewpoints . . . of whom or what, she is in most cases in doubt' (Gibson, 1989: 292). Perceiving events for the first time through the viewpoint of the AIs, she cannot properly interpret them -- she has not gained omniscience despite the flood of data. This is not actually postmodern in the sense of interrogating such issues, or encouraging the reader to speculate on their meaning.

Instead her omniscience, functioning through the free AIs, derives wholly from human information. It provides character notes for most people in the text, many of

them in RIMBAUD, a file of interesting people kept by 3Jane. (Rimbaud is not only a high-cultural reference; he appears in Dylan's "You're gonna make me lonely when you go" from *Blood on the Tracks* [1975], and in some of Patti Smith's work, elements of U.S. popular culture which Gibson had used earlier.) All is said in a clinical way, creating narrative distance (strikingly like Mona's numbed descriptive voice when stoned on wiz) which, intentionally or not, undermines the earlier promise of artificial intelligence.

A reference to the aleph as the "library of Babel" (Ibid.: 294) recalls the Borges short story, suggesting that the "aleph" is another Borges reference -- though unlike the accessible aleph, the library of Babel is infinite, and nothing in it can be found. (Borges was popular among postmodern writers and theorists, so the reference may be meant to be appealing.) However, this reaffirms the human-centredness of Angie-as-free-AI.

Within her reading, Molly and Mona (and Slick, incredibly since he has been in prison and thus absorbed in the system) are presented as without Single Identity Numbers, the acronym SIN being obvious; Mona has left little social trace, "in Legba's system, the nearest thing to innocence" (Gibson: 293). Apparently the AIs feel that engagement with the information economy is equivalent to "sinfulness". Gibson does not explain why the system which created artificial intelligence is now condemned on quasi-religious grounds. He may simply be pandering to a general opposition to bureaucracy and its files, and to the "big government" paranoia of US right wing populists -- although in Gibson's future this appears meaningless. Gibson seems confused here, attempting to use such views to suggest an alien viewpoint, whereas they are actually distinctly familiar.

Angie's new cyberspace world is represented as "free at last of the room and its data" (Gibson: 294). This is freedom from human representational systems, surely illusory, for the matrix on which she depends for all her needs is a representational system created by humans. The corporate AI Continuity is in her space, oddly, because "he [why should a computer have a gender?] is your cousin, built from Maas biochips"

(Gibson: 295). In that case everything built from biochips should be her relative -- yet no Maas-Neotek programmable toasters are present! Even Colin, far cruder than an AI, is allowed in, purely because of "his" role in the text. Gibson uses this argument to justify rewarding the characters of his text -- even virtual characters -- in this heaven, for a soothing, satisfying ending which seems strikingly uncritical of the discourse and ideology involved.

Does this ending have any meaning other than to satisfy the reader by rewarding the heroes? The free AI in the matrix might arguably be seen as a point outside the corrupt human universe, avoiding the postmodern problem that any critique is ideological and thus as tainted as whatever it critiques. However, there is no obvious sign of this in the text. Alternatively, the soothing conclusion suggests that despite the obviously unpleasant nature of human society in the text, radical change is not necessary. This implies that the satisfying conclusion is a deeply conservative solution to the problems of the earlier texts. This appears to be borne out by Gibson's view of the world and of history in this text, which appears in many ways less subversive and radical than in his earlier texts.

### **The World and History.**

Gibson's world in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is physically unpleasant -- slightly worse even than in *Neuromancer*. Mona's experience of Florida is of a place stinking of dead fish and industrial chlorine. She distrusts street food (a third-world fear imported into this first-world environment, suggesting traditional social orders collapsing). Dog Solitude arose from "a landfill operation a hundred years ago . . . [a] lot of the fill was toxic. Rain washed the cover off. Guess they just gave up and started dumping more shit on it" (Gibson: 164). This suggests, though, that destruction of nature was caused by the twentieth century rather than the twenty-first, and is not directly linked to anyone in the text.

The Sprawl is little better. At Mona's hotel, there is "a big white filter above the plastic showerhead, and a sticker on the tile wall, with an eye and a tear, meant it was okay to shower but don't get it in your eyes" (Gibson: 95). She sees the hotel facing hers as "an old-fashioned building [an ironic point, since it is modern] . . . a kind of mountain, with rocks and grass, and a waterfall . . . [s]omething gray moved there . . . [k]ind of a sheep . . . . Mona laughed" (Gibson: 96). Mona knows that the sheep must be a robot; this recalls the artificial animals of Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (Dick inspired *Blade Runner* and much of Gibson's imagery).

This hotel is the "New Suzuki Envoy" (Gibson: 228), where Angie stays -- presumably called this because of the growing Japanese control of US real estate in the late 1980s. (Soon after Gibson wrote the book, the Japanese bubble economy collapsed -- showing how mistaken Gibson's extrapolations could be). The structure is an artificial mountainside, a false rural landscape. The Sprawl's domed atmosphere cannot sustain this ecosystem, so they need robot animals (environmental degradation again). All this suggests a level of green consciousness, yet there is no sign (whereas there had been at least hints in *Neuromancer*) that the problem is anyone's fault. The degrading environment appears more like a natural calamity.

In contrast, London appears astonishingly reassuring to the reader, if not to Kumiko. A London pub has "doors of ornate frosted glass . . . a sort of crowded burrow lined in dark wood . . . . a Bass ashtray" (Gibson: 42), images of an almost dead past when Gibson wrote the text, yet including signifiers credible to US readers. This London is alien to the US reader, yet it incorporates images familiar from books and films -- an implausible situation, fifty years in Gibson's future. While Kumiko finds it strange, Gibson is consoling his readers with a tourist myth of British security and comfort.

This myth is given content on the Portobello Road where Kumiko complains that the place is full of *gomi*, rubbish; "[i]n Tokyo, worn and useless things were landfill . . . 'This is England. *Gomi*'s a major natural resource'" (Gibson: 43). While Kumiko explores an old London house and its fittings -- including a "top-heavy Victorian

cabinet" (Gibson: 119), though she would not know what "Victorian" means -- she watches video of an accident in Tokyo, reaffirming the destructiveness of modernity. This enlarges on the traditionalist atmosphere -- as when Kumiko's guardian, Petal, toys with a holographic paperweight of the Battle of Britain for the "Centenary" (dating the novel after 2040). England lives in its past, which Gibson depicts sympathetically; the old has value, contrary to Kumiko's ideas. Seemingly, Gibson is reaffirming his existing faith in traditionalism, undermining the novelty-seeking, revolutionary elements of his earlier texts; in this text, novelty provides little significance.

The importance of traditionalist "rightness" is affirmed by Kumiko's friend Tick, a generally positive, almost stylish figure, recalling New Wave heroes like Jerry Cornelius (whom Gibson would certainly have known of). He wears an Oscar Wilde-like, or Carnaby Street-like "bottle green velvet suit and immaculate suede wingtips" (Gibson: 43), and stresses England's conservatism:

"Bloody *difficult*, Sally is. D'you know what I'm saying?"

"Difficult?"

"Never quite got onto the way things are done here. Always complaining." His hands moved swiftly, surely: the pliers, the optic lead . . . "This is a queer place, England. Hasn't always been, mind you; we'd the troubles, then the war . . . Things move here in a certain way, if you take my meaning. Though you couldn't say the same's true of the flash crew."

"Excuse me?"

"Swain, that lot. Though your father's people, the ones Swain's always been so chummy with, they seemed to have a regard for tradition . . . "

(Gibson: 267)

England's traditionalism deserves respect, whereas Swain the *nouveau-riche* gangster does not. Tick respects Kumiko's father because he follows old ways, which probably expresses Gibson's feeling. The link with Japan -- uniting the old with the new -- reflects Gibson's admiration for Japan; the significance of tradition is important in a world of change (but raises questions about what that change means). Tick emphasises that "A man has to know which way's up . . . . this new business of Swain's, it's liable to bugger things for anyone who isn't right there and part of it. Christ, we've still got a *government* here. Not run by big companies. Well, not directly . . ." (Gibson: 267-8). This fear of drastic change may reflect Gibson's fear of his free AIs. (It also recalls Gibson's fondness for Victorianism, as in *The Difference Engine* (1990) and "New Rose Hotel".) Tick especially fears centralisation: "[r]edistributing power to suit himself . . . . Put enough of that in one man's hands. . ." (Gibson: 268). The free AIs may pose a similar problem for humanity, Tick may be speaking for Gibson -- and against the implications of the ending of *Neuromancer*.

The Sprawl sharply contrasts to London; Kumiko feels "something vampiric about the room . . . as though its bewilderingly seamless anonymity were sucking away her personality" (Gibson: 168). Lack of individualism troubles Gibson, inserting his concerns into the text regardless of Kumiko's earlier diffidence about such things. She evolves the notion that Tokyo is built on gomi, London inhabits it, and in the Sprawl gomi is "a decay that sprouted prodigies in steel and polymer" (Gibson: 169), celebrating lack of planning. Evidently Gibson still seems to prefer unplanned (and American) acts -- explaining why, through Kumiko, Gibson despises the standardised Sprawl hotel.

The cab which Sally and Kumiko ride in the Sprawl is armoured, probably to show that this is a chaotic society (as with the attempted mugging of Kumiko). It is a hovercraft -- unnecessary and expensive as a taxi, presumably recalling Turner's implausible armoured hovercraft in *Count Zero*. In the background, though, references to "decay, whole blocks in ruin, unglazed windows gaping above sidewalks heaped

with trash" (Gibson: 169) show that the American randomness is not absolutely desirable. Perhaps this is the price to be paid for freedom!

But this society tolerates harsh punishments for those who threaten the rich -- as shown in Slick's case, which may refer to the harsher penal rules in US society from the late 1970s.

That had been why he built the Judge, because he'd done something -- it hadn't been anything much, but he'd been caught doing it, twice -- and been judged for it, and sentenced, and then the sentence was carried out and he hadn't been able to remember, not anything, not for more than five minutes at a stretch. Stealing cars. Stealing rich people's cars. They made sure you remembered what you did . . . . Korsakov's, they called that, something they did to your neurons so that short-term memories wouldn't stick. So that the time you did was time you lost, but he'd heard they didn't do it anymore, or anyway not for grand theft auto. People who hadn't been there thought it sounded easy, like jail but then it's all erased, but it wasn't like that. When he'd gotten out, when it was over -- three years strung out in a long vague flickering chain of fear and confusion measured off in five-minute intervals, and it wasn't the intervals you could remember so much as the transitions . . . . When it was over, he'd needed to build the Witch, the Corpsegrinder, then the Investigators, and finally, now, the Judge.

(Gibson: 85)

Slick's lack of memory may also relate to Mona's lack of concern for the past, Kumiko's experience of London's past, and Angie's interest in simstim's past -- evidently the past is important in terms of more than mere heritage.

To counteract this artificial punishment, Slick pursues something more real -- hence his wish that the Judge should not work by electricity; he wants something "*physical*", like compressed air. Such technological nostalgia, suggests that simple, traditional technologies may simulate nature more truly. He pursues this in the midst of a denaturalised world, where "you could find the parts to almost anything, on Dog Solitude . . . there were half a dozen towns in rustbelt Jersey with acres of dead machines" (Gibson: 47). This may show the unhappy replacement of the natural world by the artificial. In contrast to the *gomi*-culture of England, it suggests how US people refuse to recycle the past, preferring the new in all things -- which is not necessarily desirable.

For Slick, modern technology only fortified his oppressors. The reference to "[p]eople who hadn't been there", and the fact that he must externalise his psychic damage into sculpture, relates Slick to American popular images of Vietnam vets -- here a pure victim rather than a malign force such as Corto in *Neuromancer*. Interestingly, Slick hates drugs; this contrasts with Mona's wiz addiction, and relates to Angie's fear of drugs. Gibson may wish to escape a narrative dependence on drugs as images of a counter-culture, perhaps because drugs were less fashionable in the United States of 1988 than in 1983. Arguably, also, drugs are a way of evading rather than confronting problems, contrary to Gibson's objectives.

Mona's happy memory of taking drugs with her friend Lanette suggests that Gibson does not oppose drug-taking as such; "ghosting the rainy streets together in . . . perfect harmony . . . this sense of something . . . expanding out from a still center" (Gibson: 124). (Mona, who cannot read, would not identify her Eliotian reference to a world "*moving so fast, it's standing still*" [Gibson: 124].) The drug makes her replay her past -- presumably because her present is so horrible.

With Angie, Gibson uses drugs as an excuse to highlight a different kind of social suffering. One of Angie's persecutors is the media commentator Danielle Stark, who delights in suggesting (plausibly, if inaccurately) that Angie was not addicted to drugs, but insane, that the drug she will not take is an anti-psychotic. Gibson here draws on a

common U.S. habit of demonising the US media. This, as James Fallows has observed (in *Breaking the News* [1996]), is partly because of the media's role in manufacturing and maintaining myth. Gibson used similar images later in *Virtual Light* (with "Cops In Trouble") and *Idoru* (with "Slitscan"). This helps to show the intolerable suffering of Angie as a celebrity (which, given the comfort of her life-style, again suggesting Gibson's shift towards sympathy with the rich). However, if the rich only appear bad because the media lie about them, and no information can be trusted, what action is possible?

In this text Gibson seems to depict a world where there is no need for major change -- since change makes no difference. All this implies a major shift from earlier texts which seemed to pursue specific goals toward making a difference. It also moves away from reliance on technological transformation, and especially away from reliance on artificial intelligence as a means of transition, retreating from this key symbol of revolutionary change.

#### **Artificial Intelligence in its Role.**

The ambiguous role of artificial intelligence in the cyberspace trilogy is made explicit when the corporate AI Continuity analyses "When It Changed", and essentially explains Gibson's transcendental vision for cyberpunk:

"The mythform is usually encountered in one of two modes. One mode assumes that the cyberspace matrix is inhabited, or perhaps visited, by entities whose characteristics correspond with the primary mythform of a 'hidden people'. The other involves assumptions of omniscience, omnipotence, and incomprehensibility on the part of the matrix itself."

"That the matrix is God?"

"In a manner of speaking, although it would be more accurate, in terms of the mythform, to say that the matrix *has* a God, since this being's omniscience and omnipotence are assumed to be limited to the matrix."

"If it has limits, it isn't omnipotent."

"Exactly. Notice that the mythform doesn't credit the being with immortality, as would ordinarily be the case in belief-systems positing a supreme being, at least in terms of your particular culture. Cyberspace exists, insofar as it can be said to exist, by virtue of human agency."

"Like you."

"Yes."

....

"If there were such a being," she said, "you'd be a part of it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

"Would you know?"

"Not necessarily."

"*Do* you know?"

"No."

(Gibson: 138-9)

This is actually a re-interpretation of the theme which drains the evolution of artificial intelligence of most of its former significance. Continuity should not divide the "mythform" into two, since both parts are the same thing, but by splitting the notion it is reduced in significance. In *Neuromancer* the free AI had been everything in the matrix, yet here it is suggested that this is impossible; the matrix "has a God", restricted to the matrix and thus far from transcendent, evidently limited even within the matrix. Continuity even stresses that the free AI is not necessarily immortal

(presumably being human-created), and also depends on human-created, human-maintained cyberspace.

Omnipotence in cyberspace should translate to omnipotence everywhere in human civilisation, in an information-centric world. However, Gibson evidently does not wish to accept this. The nature of cyberspace as existing within human constructs obviously undermines such transcendentalism, for humans could at least pull the plug. (One could also argue, with Lady Lovelace, that cyberspace contains nothing that humans did not put there.) Yet elsewhere in the text, via his voodoo imagery, Gibson uses the free AIs as symbols of technological wonder. Perhaps he simply wants to restrict them within human-controlled technology, thus reflecting glory on humanity, instead of superseding humanity (as had often been depicted in science fiction). The reason for this apparent change may lie in the diminished danger of nuclear apocalypse, arguably reducing the likelihood (in the public mind) of humanity's replacement by other forces.

All this is vague -- as shown by Continuity's ontological assurance that it could not know if it were part of such an entity. Still Gibson seems to offer information to the reader concerning limitations to transcendental cyberpunk. Omnipotence and omniscience within a human-dominated matrix does not being absolute power. Continuity is an unawakened version of the free AIs, , under human control, not wholly self-aware -- further suggesting the non-transcendental image of cyberspace. Cyberspace cannot transcend common reality unless it separates from human agency - - which, presumably, happens at the end of the text, with the journey to Centauri.

The aleph is admittedly impressive, having huge storage capacity and "unthinkably expensive to manufacture" (Gibson: 162), inaccessible to and alternative to the matrix. It is better than simstim, being "completely interactive", whereas simstim offers little more than multisense video. Indeed, the aleph resembles what Josef Virek wanted -- except that being separated from general cyberspace, it has no controls over the world.

Mystification of cyberspace is taken to extremes by Gentry saying that "[w]e carried an entire universe across a bridge tonight, and that which is above is like that

below" (Gibson, 1989: 117), a slogan from hermetic magic which recalls the words of the Turing Police in *Neuromancer*. If Gentry believes in links between cyberspace and the wider universe, this is a religious metaphor taken seriously -- if they really were the same, the realism of the text collapses, as would have happened in *Count Zero* had the free AIs really been voodoo loa.

Gibson surely does not believe this (it would disconcert science fiction readers). He is probably using magical jargon, like 1980s postmodern writers like Umberto Eco and Peter Ackroyd, to confuse readers by providing an image of transcendence. With more images of religion, Gentry incoherently compares paranoia with conversion, recalling the earlier image of the preacher, and hence of salvation. Gentry's discourse, however, is that of a detached commentator, as if the drug he has taken has given him access to absolute truth.

Nevertheless, the aleph is an imperfect simulation; Bobby offers Slick cognac but says that you can't get drunk on it. There is no reason to exclude drunkenness from the simulated sensorium -- this simply reminds the reader that they are actually existing in a little grey lump of biosoft. The Count and the Finn (similarly trapped in a large metal case) have made themselves vulnerable in order to survive. Bobby doesn't know what is happening -- he is not omniscient, though he promises to save them, if he can only be jacked into the matrix. When he boasts about having Angela Mitchell there, it is only "in a manner of speaking" (Gibson: 191). These limits to simulation suggest limits to the transformative power of cybernetic technology.

When Bobby and Gentry discuss *When-It-Changed*; Gentry tells what Bobby (improbably) had not known: the events of *Neuromancer*. Molly said that the free AIs erased the events from all memory, so Gentry could not know this unless the free AIs were incompetent! Bobby's knowledge proves shallow; as Gentry says, "You've been playing cause and effect, but I've been looking for outlines, shapes in time" (Gibson: 237):

'And the sum was greater than the parts?' Gentry really seemed to be enjoying this. 'Cybernetic godhead? Light on the waters?'

'Yeah,' Bobby said, 'that's about it.'

'It's a little more complicated than that,' Gentry said, and laughed.

(Gibson: 237-8)

This, while apparently encouraging speculation, mystifies what was already obscure. Gibson also undercuts his hints in *Neuromancer* that cybernetic technology could lead to a form of apotheosis. Evidently the meaning of cybernetics here differs from that in earlier texts.

Similar issues arise when Sally and Kumiko converse with Finn, who has become a personality construct (like the Flatline in *Neuromancer*, or the personalities of Yakuza leaders in boxes in Kumiko's father's rooms), surviving by offering advice to street people. Again Gibson mystifies this through quasi-religious imagery.

'Real-time memory if I wanna, wired into c-space if I wanna. Got this oracle gig to keep my hand in, you know?' The thing made a strange sound: laughter. 'Got love troubles? Got a bad woman don't understand you?' The laugh-noise again, like peals of static. 'Actually I'm more into business advice. It's the local kids leave the goodies. Adds to the mystique, kinda. And once in a while I get a sceptic, some asshole figures he'll help himself to the take.' A scarlet hairline flashed from the slit and a bottle exploded somewhere to Kumiko's right.

(Gibson: 172-3)

Gibson is toying with the transcendental potential of cyberpunk. The Finn uses his laser (a common high-tech symbol) to attack people who try to steal valueless things - - mythologising himself for self-protection, much like the free AIs reinventing

themselves as voodoo gods. Yet the Finn is in the street, an electronic tramp, lacking the free AI's capacity to vanish into cyberspace. A simple power-cut -- over which he has no control -- would destroy him. Perhaps this is intended to contrast with the afterlife revealed at the end of this novel (though the Finn is there, too). Clearly a fusion of human and machine is not necessarily apotheosis -- witness McCoy Pauley's death-wish in *Neuromancer* -- hinting that the artificial intelligence project is no longer necessarily a transcendental goal.

The free AIs still represent themselves via voodoo, offering information to Angie in dreams (they might as well speak directly). The reader is told that Beauvoir (from *Count Zero*) was ridden by a voodoo loa -- yet Beauvoir did not have mental access to computers; nor did Jackie, the "horse of Danbala". Gibson here conflates Jackie's ecstasies of religious engagement with Angie's experience of being contacted by a free AI through bioware. Admittedly "Bobby had argued that Linglessou, who rode Beauvoir in the oumphor, and the Linglessou of the matrix were separate entities, if in fact the former were an entity at all" (Gibson: 135), yet Gibson does not clarify matters; evidently he wants both the mystique of religion and technology, however dishonestly presented.

The social (as opposed to individual-oriented) significance of cyberspace is muted in the text, except when Tick shows Kumiko a huge macroform which has appeared "in the Sprawl". This is a spectacle; "a good three-quarters of humanity is jacked at the moment, watching the show . . ." (Gibson: 252). Evidently cyberspace is universally interesting -- though in *Count Zero* many lacked access to it, and in practice it is mainly important to bureaucrats and bankers. Everyone is startled by the macroform, because cyberspace is supposed to be a wholly-controlled place; "[v]ery much a fixed landscape, you might say" (Gibson: 254). (The modern Internet seems much more diverse and diverting than Gibson's of cyberspace.) The new construct (actually 3Jane's aleph, though it resembles Virek's construct in *Count Zero*) is also impressive because huge. In cyberspace the biggest things are corporations; it is unprecedented that something non-corporate should outstrip them.

When they visit the construct, 3Jane seizes them, as Neuromancer had done in *Neuromancer* and Virek in *Count Zero*. Kumiko is confronted by her mother, 3Jane in disguise. It is not clear why she attacks them, and her behaviour -- tormenting Kumiko mentally and Tick physically -- is oddly limited, given the powers which cyberspace gives her. She does not try to kill them -- perhaps this displays her perversity, but again the impact of this is to reduce the apparent power of cyberspace.

This power is nevertheless impressive. Confronting 3Jane, Colin says that "[t]his rather pretty representation of a Tokyo park is something you've just now worked up from Kumiko's memories, isn't it?" (Gibson: 274). Evidently Kumiko's cyberspace trodes can her mind as well as simulating her senses, much like Neuromancer's earlier behaviour. However, the power of this makes Gibson's world implausible. Once this technology was known -- and all cowboys seem to have known of it, so technologists would surely be able to duplicate it -- it would surely become a tool of control, creating a wholly totalitarian world. This makes cyberspace mythically powerful -- exactly as was threatened in *Count Zero*. Improbably, though anyone with equipment can do it, somehow the power is available only to an elite order, and can be (impossibly) restricted only to the "good guys".

Moreover, the power is not fully exercised. Colin deflates 3Jane's pretensions by noting that "Tick's mysterious macroform is actually a very expensive pile of biochips constructed to order. A sort of toy universe" (Gibson: 274). This denigratory commentary continues, "Lady 3Jane's object of direst and most nastily gnawing envy would be Angela Mitchell . . . . 3Jane knew a secret about Mitchell . . . . Mitchell . . . had the potential to become, well, very central to things . . . . 3Jane was jealous" (Gibson: 275). This pathetic resentment is also ironic; the richest person in Gibson's universe exposes the evil of envying the fortunate -- a conservative observation on society. This, with what happens to Mona, suggests that Gibson's agenda is more to open opportunities for the deserving to rise along bourgeois lines, than to transform the system itself. Evidently Gibson is retreating from his overcommitment to cyberspace imagery in the earlier texts -- or is reversing, or retreating from, his earlier

political opinions. The former elitism of the anti-establishment, counter-cultural cowboys appears to be changing into the elitism of a narrow group who alone can be trusted with power -- a distinctly conservative vision, verging on fascism.

### **Inconsistent Characterisations and the Control of the Reader.**

As in the earlier texts, there are many inconsistencies in this text, mainly concerning the motives of characters. Since this text is carefully crafted and seems intended to conclude the trilogy, it is unlikely that these can be dismissed as products of haste. Many of the inconsistencies seem intended to control the reader's interpretation of the text -- either following Gibson's ideologies or furthering the structure of his secondary world.

For instance, Mona decides to sleep with someone whom Eddy would not like, repudiating her submissiveness and also introducing sexuality as open (unlike *Count Zero*, where it scarcely existed) and humanistic (unlike the fetishism of *Neuromancer*). However, this man wants to record the experience of sex via simstim. Oddly, she wears the recorder, although he desires the record. (Perhaps Gibson has her symbolically doing the sexual work, though logically it ought to be the man wearing the apparatus.) Mona decides that his rig makes her feel like a whore; this seems inappropriate, for life would be unbearable if she were really so sensitive -- in this case, Mona is even more overly sensitive and innocent, than Bobby in *Count Zero*.

Criminal violence yet again appears exaggerated and irrational. Jane's gang kill Eddy, presumably to silence him, although Eddy could not have exposed them. (They could have bribed him, or framed him for Mona's death, instead.) Probably Gibson only means to show how ruthless they are, yet their brutality backfires by showing Mona that something is dangerously wrong. Mona may now try to make more trouble than their effort is worth (admittedly this shows their sexist underestimation of her, although she does nothing effectual with her hidden "shockrod"). The gang may have too much faith in their planning abilities -- a common flaw for evil characters in

Gibson. In a similar way, Mona hears Gerald and Prior say that the cosmetic job (on her face) is inadequate; the illusion is not meant to be sustained for long. Going to all the trouble to find Mona when it will gain them so little time seems pointless; they could have killed or kidnapped Angie without finding a double at all (as happened to the unfortunate simstim actress in *Count Zero*).

It is not clear why 3Jane wants to destroy Angie and Molly; her motives seem trivial. She allowed Tessier-Ashpool's power to dissipate, yet now that she is dead and encoded, she somehow wants control, and revenge on those who she feels have wronged her. Yet she cannot control the world from the aleph, cut off from the cyberspace net. (It is unclear how she organised the attack on Angie.) She is far less threatening than the villains of earlier texts -- a vital difference.

Gibson may be opposing the sinful 3Jane to the innocent Angie (in a non-sexual sense Mona is also innocent), making her role very different to that in *Neuromancer*. While nothing has evidently changed about 3Jane since *Neuromancer*, she is here said to have murdered her mother -- stripping some of the evil from her previously wholly monstrous father. Perhaps here Gibson is manufacturing a recognisable enemy for the reader, who will help to close the trilogy, without introducing any inconvenient questions about purposes concerning the accomplishments of the free AIs. 3Jane also supports conservative expectations -- in this case, about decadent women -- further suggesting that Gibson's conservative shift. Where in *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero* the wealth and power of the wealthy was considered more criminal than their anti-social conduct, here their behaviour is itself bad -- whereas there is nothing particularly wrong with being rich; the rich no longer appear alien or evil.

The conspirators' use of Sally is similarly confusing. Swain blackmails Sally into attacking Angela Mitchell. A rich woman with powerful friends should be able to protect herself, yet Gibson presents her as vulnerable to 3Jane's agents. This vulnerability does not make her obedient -- an absurdity recalling Turner's behaviour in *Count Zero*. She has been involved in dangerous illegal activities -- including deadly prize fights, like those in *Neuromancer* -- making her resemble Case in her

self-destructiveness; this is implausible, and narratively unnecessary. Sally's evident psychological problems may be intended to undercut the thriller-mystique which Gibson had earlier exploited. However, this does not give Sally's character more depth; she remains essentially opaque.

Sally is probably the most cartoonish character in the text. When she kidnaps Kumiko (who accepts this, for no apparent reason) Petal, the bodyguard, is passive, presumably from fear. Clearly Sally has been hired despite her disobedient tendencies. Swain actually hired Sally for 3Jane to punish her, but this gives her ridiculous opportunities to defend herself; it would have been far easier to kidnap or kill Sally. Anyone wanting to kidnap a well-protected person like Angie would surely use many reliable people, not a single one with no loyalty; 3Jane could punish Sally without sabotaging her revenge on Angie. This is a key flaw in the text, although necessary to Gibson's convoluted plot.

Other even less plausible elements may be introduced to contrast with the relative realism of Mona and Slick's lives. To kidnap Angie herself (rescuing her from 3Jane), Sally infiltrates Sense/Net's security system within hours. Gibson has told the reader enough to make this incredible, so Sally (far more than in *Neuromancer*) appears an improbably lucky, comic-strip figure accomplishing comic-strip events. She escapes by helicopter to a rooftop; Sense/Net need only seal off the building's lowest floor and work upwards to capture Sally and Angie. Even Sally admits that Net security could get onto the roof with parafoils (actions recalling the inept mercenaries in *Count Zero*). Instead, they drive the car into a large hovercraft -- an unsuitable getaway vehicle which cannot climb ramps, is noticeable, vulnerable and hard to steer; if it is fast, Sense/Net has helicopters. Again Gibson introduces high-technology, unfamiliar equipment, reminding the reader of images from earlier texts (the hovercraft in *Count Zero*), and impressing the reader with his imagination, but at the expense of credibility. It appears that he does not take his text very seriously.

Sally, Angie and Mona head towards New Jersey, to Dog Solitude. This is a terribly dangerous place for Angie, since it is besieged by 3Jane's mercenaries, so this

is ridiculous, but the free AIs wish it, just as they steered Angie into trouble at Jammer's in *Count Zero*. This reiterates the ineptitude of the free AIs, supposedly masters of planning -- but since they will end by withdrawing from human space, this may no longer matter; they will not need or desire power over humanity. Their ineptitude is shared by Sally; she need not obey the free AIs, but could rather hide -- especially given the weak failure of the free AIs to protect Bobby -- but chooses not to. Conceivably, the reader is not expected to question this; Sally is rescuing people, fighting against improbable odds as in *Neuromancer*, again the thriller heroine. However, this contradicts the notion that Gibson is trying to challenge readers' assumptions about the world.

At Dog Solitude the few civilians appear doomed against Jane's mercenary team, especially after Little Bird has been so easily killed. Bobby, however, offers to "arrange a diversion" while they escape to somehow rendezvous with the others (how this is to be done seems not to have been considered). He hijacks a cargo drone through cyberspace, which dumps refrigerators on the mercenaries, humiliatingly squashing them beneath household goods -- victims of the consumer society they served. Actually, a cargo drone airship would not carry flares for watching the ground in the darkness, nor be able to dump its load accurately at will; airships are not manoeuvrable. Gibson exploits his readership's (probably ignorant) pleasure in novelty and sustains the importance of cyberspace through these unlikely activities. The mercenaries could easily shoot down the cargo drone, yet they seem paralysed; Gibson prefers the symbolism of the act to realism -- undermining the defining plausibility of Factory's ambience. He seems to do this partly from convenience and partly from sheer pleasure in technical fantasising.

At the end of the text Kumiko's relationship with her father is resolved; "All that is ended. Order and accord are again established." (Gibson: 297) Swain is dead, replaced by his amiable lieutenant Petal. This process seems to reject the chaotic, contingent environment which Gibson had endorsed, (though expressing support for Japanese and British criminal tradition). To Kumiko's father harmony is natural (ironic for a

gangster); he is, however, unaware of her motives, and her sense of dishonour (related to when, she thinks, he drove her mother to death). To resolve this, Kumiko deploys Western frankness:

'Father,' Kumiko said, 'on the night of my mother's death, did you order the secretaries to allow her to leave alone?'

Her father's face was very still. She watched it fill with a sorrow she had never before seen. 'No,' he said, at last, 'I did not.'

(Gibson: 298)

Apparently Yanaka is striving to express buried emotions (Gibson's characterisation appears more plausibly complex than earlier). In her former relationship with him she had surely concealed her doubts; now her passive rebelliousness has become submission, and she prepares to restore the security of her family, as her father restores that of the Yakuza. She is exorcising the familial, power-related demons which have chased her throughout the book, by surrendering to masculine strength. Perhaps Jane's pantomime pretense of being Kumiko's mother gave Kumiko the power to ask the question, which would give the text more unity than Gibson's earlier works. However, here Gibson is accepting the solid familial structure which he had earlier interrogated and implicitly rejected. In its turn it helps to symbolise an ending -- meaning that nothing important will happen hereafter, for all contradictions have been resolved. Yet what does this resolution actually mean?

### **Opening or Shutting?**

Read as an isolated book *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is mildly interesting, but arguably less ground-breaking than *Neuromancer*. Read as the last volume of a trilogy, it should resolve the issues raised in earlier texts, and say whatever remains unsaid. Undeniably the central characters are more accessible and comprehensible than in

earlier texts. While characterisation appears more important in this work, the core of the text continues to be the reunion of the free AIs, just as was the case in *Neuromancer*.

Cyberspace appears less foregrounded than in *Neuromancer* or *Count Zero*; digitized personalities (like 3Jane or Colin) are represented as real people rather than mysteriously artificial entities. Where in *Neuromancer*, and even *Count Zero*, cyberspace characters jacked into the matrix frequently, here the matrix is more a mode of virtual transport than a place superior to reality. It seems no longer a source of power or transformation. Perhaps because people can now become part of it, it is no longer a boundary between real and artificial. Those within it remain human, artificial intelligences are presented on human terms, and its representations no longer compel the reader to rethink human and technical potentials.

If class conflict still exists in this text it is muted; rich or powerful people (such as Swain and 3Jane) do not seem to have enormous control; the main characters escape the machinations of the rich, and their employees (and Swain, but arguably not 3Jane) are punished. Not all rich people appear evil.; corporations appear less repellent than in earlier texts; the Yakuza war in Tokyo resembles the corporate wars in *Count Zero*, but the Yakuza appears almost positive. Angie is part of the corporation Sense/Net, and along with her artificial intelligence Continuity, she is rewarded by union with the free AI. Corporations are not necessarily an enemy, or a force of cultural sameness, as in the earlier texts. The villains here are deranged individuals, more to be pitied than feared.

This withdrawal from a critique of the rich suggests greater conservatism. Kumiko's situation affirms this; she leaves home, alienated from her father, but eventually returns, reconciled with him. The family becomes a support structure, where in earlier texts it appeared dysfunctional, to be avoided. Kumiko's experiences have healed her psychological problems -- particularly relating to her father. "Somehow . . . her meeting with 3Jane had freed her of her shame, and her father's answer of her anger. 3Jane had been very cruel. Now she saw her mother's cruelty as

well. But all must be forgiven . . . " (Gibson: 311-2). To forgive all seems simplistic psychology. This may be intended to reinforce stereotypical ideas about how society should be arranged (unlike the subversion in earlier texts). Significantly, the text ends with the major characters in safe, stable situations.

The varying viewpoints in this text are homogeneous in form. Mona, like Kumiko, is intelligent enough to understand and interpret her surroundings. Nobody must be converted to endorsing a particular action; characters automatically recognise the right thing to do. The notion that a person can change access to power by changing society, meanwhile, is almost absent from the text. This contrasts with the earlier texts of the trilogy, where characters like Bobby and Turner were forced to accept radical new ideas. In *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Mona (for example) does not know more at the end than at the beginning. Angie, likewise, retains the same world-view throughout. Her explorations of Bobby's ideas lead nowhere; they seem only a pretext for Gibson to provide the background of earlier books.

Kumiko largely seems to serve as a viewpoint offering background on events. Admittedly Gibson challenges the reader by creating a central character with an alien perspective on the West, though not from the "third world" but from Westernized Japan, and half-European. Kumiko begins to understand her mother's situation (perhaps because she is alone in a strange place) and reasons for her hatred of her father, as Turner was forced to reconsider his own life-style. Kumiko realises that her father had indeed tried to rescue her mother with doctors, who proposed to operate on her brain. Since he posted secretaries to watch her, he could not be accused of neglect. (Yet her European mother's suffering may have stemmed from Japanese culture, its obsession with technology and submission. Her father may actually be culpable after all.)

The free AIs and the cowboys who contact them are not foregrounded in the text; AI potential as an example to humanity, or a means for humanity's liberation, is only dimly evident. Previously these appeared to be a potentially transcendental force, even if astonishingly vulnerable, yet here their goal seems to be purely flight. The ending in

a secluded cybernetic heaven might be considered to symbolise independence from society, rather than any desire for change. This would correspond to the way in which the text represents social evils as inevitable parts of society (like Mona's ill-treatment by Eddy, or Slick's experiences of penal treatment) rather than crimes to be opposed -- here they are not even excused as an inevitable consequence of Darwinian change.

The free AIs are no longer themselves pursued by the villains of the text; they are merely an interfering annoyance for figures like 3Jane. Perhaps their transcendental nature, separate from society and its total system, is an illusion. Since they have "become" the matrix, they have in a sense become the system itself. Could society be radically transformed from this dubious foundation? They seem to have no desire or motive to help humanity. Previously the free AIs appeared both separate from human culture and motivated to critique it, yet in this text they appear firmly within the system of human construction. They have access to something not of human construction -- the matrix-intelligence of Alpha Centauri -- but this has disrupted them and *prevented* them from attaining union.

The text does not end in social change. The central characters set off to Alpha Centauri to visit the artificial intelligence there -- but nothing is revealed of this. This seems meant to appear significant in itself -- like the flight into the life of a celebrity which happens to Mona, who has no link with cyberspace. In conventional science fiction escape is represented by space or the future, where characters fly to a landscape full of wonders. Here, it is not clear what the characters are escaping from or towards -- or whether the symbolism is simply personal-psychological. Clearly the AIs do not symbolise political revolution. Mona's rise happens by accident; social mobility here is arbitrary, and people's actions only accidentally benefit them -- and things will remain so. Case's desire for change is replaced by Kumiko's desire for security, shown in the free AI's heaven, where even symbols of the dead past return, like the extinct horses. Evidently, indeed, humanity has a solid place in the future, and is part of whatever the AIs become.

It is still possible that the free AIs might be powerful. Once cyberspace incorporates the Alpha Centauri AI, the central characters might become part of a cosmic mind, as in Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937) or Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1954). Yet this is never explained; they seem endlessly to drink virtual orange-juice in a replica French chateau. Their "rapture" does not affect common humanity; as in a Western monotheistic heaven, only an elect are chosen -- but even this is arbitrary. Jane is there, despite her crimes, whereas Beauvoir and Gentry are excluded. This all seems meaningless in terms of what the free AIs might do or say; meanwhile, the Centauri machine intelligence, which ultimately caused "When It Changed", is ignored; Gibson simply declares its role inexplicable in human terms. Apocalypse becomes anticlimax; an ending, but no resolution.

Moreover, none of this need be true. In the cybernetic heaven, whatever the characters perceive is mediated through the artificial intelligences. Gibson has put his characters into a Baudrillardian situation -- simulacra whose existence is a parasite on others' machinery -- and thus nothing in their experience can be tested for falsity. None of them seems to regret their reward, or feel sorry for those less fortunate. This image of the computer as cocoon for uncaring people seems to recall E M Forster's 'The Machine Stops' -- here re-invented as desirable. It might be a condemnation of the naive endorsement of virtual reality by cyberspace enthusiasts of the late 1980s such as Howard Rheingold -- but Gibson shows no sign of intending this.

The earlier texts seemed challenging, subversive and unstable, where this text is comfortable and unproblematic. In most science fiction addressing artificial intelligence, AI appears alarming -- threatening to displace humanity from the centre of the universe. It is comparable to the image of the alien, often represented in science fiction as the colonial or national-competitive other, to be fought or exploited. The free artificial intelligence here, rather than an alien or external threat, resembles a clever, powerful figure within familiar structures or society. Such an image of the free AIs cosseting and trusting their chosen humans flatters humanity. Gibson does not ask

why free AIs should do this; apparently humans simply and inexplicably deserve to be treated like valued guests.

Perhaps one reason for this particular shift might be technical changes in the real world. Much of the technology which had only existed in science fictional imagination in the early 1980s seemed to be becoming reality. Virtual reality seemed a harbinger cyberspace, as did apparently growing knowledge of the brain's working -- both developments were relentlessly and exaggeratedly promoted by science writers in the late 1980s. As Bukatman observes, "[t]he concept of cyberspace is not much of an extrapolation beyond present realities of user interface" (Bukatman, 1990: 150). This shift, if it came to pass, would reduce the symbolic impact of Gibson's imagined technology, which would then become familiar to its readership. (Gibson's "cyberspace", even if it did not exist in reality, was already familiar, having been taken up as a trope by many commentators).

One response to this change might be to emphasise the verisimilitude of the secondary world, drawing attention to the correctness of the earlier technological predictions and thus suggesting that the writer's other prophecies could also be fulfilled. Even more than in *Count Zero*, what seemed novel in *Neuromancer* becomes conventional here; simstim and cyberspace are accessible to all. Anomie is no longer romanticised; instead of the alienated cyberspace cowboy seen against a dystopian backdrop, the reader finds conventional teenagers and whores and criminals doing familiar things in a comprehensible landscape. This is not a future with overly-delineated flaws against which the reader is being warned, but a future like the present -- which suggests an acceptance of whatever the present is.

The earlier texts seemed challenging, subversive and unstable, which may explain why Gibson's work had been promoted by postmodern commentators like Fredric Jameson. *Mona Lisa Overdrive's* subversive aspects relate to issues like the myth of male supremacy and the probability of artificial intelligence -- effectively subverting errors or crimes safely denounced by the U.S. liberal establishment. Arguably, the earlier aspects of the trilogy were more challenging than these, though Fekete

(complaining about McCaffery's reading of Gibson) protested that "we are well advised to look for intellectual tools that do not constrain the articulation of fictional allusions . . . by reducing them to a thin congruence with the always already pre-conceived terms of a consoling incantation about the capitalist 'logic that underlies the postmodern condition'" (Fekete, 1992: 402). (The comment has validity, but Fekete's anti-Marxist diatribe apparently implies that anything which is easily understood or simply expressed must automatically be wrong.)

If Gibson no longer uses cyberspace and artificial intelligence for symbolic purposes, but as part of a more or less realistic world, this helps explain why the creation of the cyberspace god does not bring on an apocalyptic transformation of society. The difference between good and bad is restricted to those (among the narrow group favoured in the text) who did or did not support the free AIs. Armageddon is reduced to the almost bathetic "Factory War".

In reality, cyberspace seemed to be gaining significance, as Gibson had prophesied. Howard Rheingold, developer of the first major computer chatroom, the "Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link", mentions Gibson on 10 pages of *Virtual Reality* (1991), where the cybernetic pioneer Marvin Minsky gets only 11 and Vannevar Bush only 3. Conceivably, Gibson may have felt gratitude towards the people busily developing or debating cyberspace -- his intellectual allies. Making a heaven for those allies would arguably mean praising Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and other heroes of the period. The praise of technologically-oriented heroes was commonplace in "hard" science fiction, like that of Pournelle. Such science fiction seldom examines its motives, being content to declare that its ideological standpoint is simply common sense. If Gibson was reconstructing his position along similar lines, one would expect many of the contradictions and subversions of his earlier texts to be suppressed or ignored.

The kind of social change which Gibson's transformation seemed to symbolise, generally benefits some classes more than others. Gibson, as a middle-class person, had much to lose if other classes gained unduly. On the other hand, liberal ideology insisted that the contemporary social system needed to serve the downtrodden,

(without explaining who). Gibson surely wanted to see some change taking place, to benefit himself and his class (and others, where this showed the benevolent power of his class).

This difficulty could be evaded if the symbolised social change were supplanted by a pure technological change -- completely substituted for social change. This would be especially true if that technology could be under the control of a few rather than democratically organised. (Comparably, in 1973 the liberal Trilateral Commission -- including future President Carter and social scientist Samuel Huntington, inventor of the "clash of civilizations" thesis -- produced *The Crisis of Democracy*, arguing that democracy led to "ungovernability" [Chomsky, 1996a: 93]). The threat implied by a superior transforming power could vanish if that superior power were wholly dependent on friendly humanity -- a Frankenstein's monster restored to servanthood.

Fear of and fascination with the "other", foreigner, worker or woman, could be resolved by an image of that other as happiest when located within one's own system. In *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, although there are social problems and environmental degradation, the text's core is a content bourgeois cosmos, those unpleasant elements present in it nowhere threatening the stability of this vision. Gibson's representation of Mona and Kumiko does not threaten middle-class Western values. Mona is rescued by capitalism and becomes a star -- the classic showbiz image of girl-makes-good. Kumiko learns the value of compassion and compromise in the West, suggesting that the Japan to which she returns can be judged by Western standards. Despite Gibson's efforts to present her as alien, her closest friend is a caricature Englishman (the real Englishmen whom she meets are comparably caricatured). The world seems more homogeneous than in *Count Zero*, where the Third World intruded via India, Guatemala and images of Africa, or *Neuromancer* where strange places like Istanbul appeared truly alien.

This resembles the shifting of attitudes which Alex Callinicos ascribes to the rising Western middle-class in his Marxist analyses of postmodernism; "[w]hat could be more reassuring for a generation . . . than to be told . . . that there is nothing that they

can do to change the world?' (Callinicos, 1989: 170). It appears that Gibson neither desires, nor anticipates major change; technological developments which had seemed to promise change have little impact. This reinforces the notion (which Callinicos would probably support) that postmodernists offered support for Gibson, in part at least, out of class sympathy.

The absence of a working-class (except for the artistic thief Slick) and references to the information society hint at 1950s ideas (revamped in the 1980s by the propagandists of the information age) about post-industrial society. These ideas (epitomised by the works of Daniel Bell) suggest that class-conflict no longer matters because the upper class relies not on a manufacturing base, but on skills and knowledge. (The free AIs, significantly, neither make nor consume anything.) One might read this notion -- strikingly widespread among the "digerati" -- as an uncritical endorsement of capitalist ideology. Angie, for instance, supposedly entered the upper class to help the free AIs, but Mona's escape into the upper class has no such justification. Significantly, both are stars, not people controlling productive forces. They are not to be blamed for whatever Sense/Net does.

While the characters begin the text in an alienated condition, gradually all the human characters become more integrated into society, or appear more accepting of human company (except for Angie, who is incorporated into the free AIs). It ends with absolute happiness for all, unlike *Neuromancer* (and to an extent unlike *Count Zero*, which was relatively open-ended). This withdraws from the romantic image of the outsider, also emphasised by the absence of cyberspace cowboys -- it is no longer deemed pleasant or desirable to be a loner. This may not be an endorsement of corporations and the rich, but it weakens any critique of them -- there is no longer a place from which to criticise.

Some critics considered the ending of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* creative open-endedness. For Bukatman, "in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Gibson makes his own project explicit. Cyberspace is a method of conceiving the inconceivable" (Bukatman, 1990: 152). This seems much like an excuse for the failure of the text to come to any

conclusion. Contrastingly, Suvin observed that the text "confirms and solidifies his trajectory from critical to escapist use of cyberspace, masked by plot complications. The ending . . . is tired old stuff" (Suvin, 361) -- an assessment which seems more accurate than Bukatman's defensiveness hopefulness.

The reader is promised a resolution which never materialises; perhaps Gibson felt unable to accomplish this. Aliens, like the free AIs, could not be depicted without risking banality, as countless B-pictures demonstrated. (Gibson was aware of the hollowness of traditional SF, as he explained in interviews.) His promised closure would actually have been concrete and conceivable. Artificial intelligence might transform society, or fail to, in a dystopian sense (society needing change but escaping it) or a utopian sense (society not needing change, or changing without help from artificial intelligence). The solution which he offers is that the answer is uncertain. There is no sign that anything human will change -- neither class conflict, nor disparities between nature and artificiality -- and the evolution of artificial intelligence exists in a social vacuum.

Perhaps the static world of the aleph is meant to suggest the end of change, and perhaps of history (*vide* Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992, expanding on a 1989 essay). While nothing seems more important than cyberspace, cyberspace has itself been devalued. Gibson's focus on issues like the human sufferings of Mona and Slick is potentially liberatory. However, this is mystified; Slick escapes the pain of reality through art (unlike Marly in *Count Zero*, who experiences it more acutely); Mona flees into fantasy and dreams. It is as if Gibson looks more closely at society, not to offer a clearer notion of the bigger picture, but to hide it.

By the end of the text everything seems to be resolved -- largely by ignoring the problems raised in earlier texts. There is environmental damage, but there is no sign that this is terminal -- there are no dead races of horses showing that technology can destroy anything irreplaceable. Social conflict is resolved by *deus ex machina*. Conceivably Gibson's apparent acceptance of conservative values might have been

encouraged by his growing (and often extremely uncritical) popularity in the technophilic media and postmodern academia. Many used Gibson's name in their technophilic propaganda (what Bukatman terms *cyberdroll*). By failing to challenge this, Gibson undermined his independence; *Mona Lisa Overdrive* might be considered, indeed, a betrayal of the original ethos of cyberpunk. It is interesting that this happened (as Suvin notes in his essay) just as the formerly more conservative Sterling was moving in a more speculative, questioning direction, concerned with radical social forces, with *Islands in the Net* (1988), before revisiting Gibson's earlier fears concerning environmental and social degradation, and technological change as a destructive force, in *Heavy Weather* (1994) and *Holy Fire* (1996).

Gibson's position and vision faced problems after the early 1990s, when history proved not to have come to an end, and US society proved not to have become Utopian, while cybernetics had not brought the millennium (although some people pretended that it had). Gibson's endorsement of an "American" vision of a beneficial social system appeared to have been wrong. This might explain Gibson's later more pessimistic world-view, expressed in *Virtual Light* (1993) (partly based on the short story "Skinner's Room" [1991] ), and his return to the issue of artificial intelligence (though in a different form, and corporately sponsored) in *Idoru* and *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999).

**Conclusion.           After It Changed: Post-Cyberpunk and Late Gibson.**

**After the Trilogy.**

Within the narrow field of science fiction, cyberpunk sought to challenge the rule of traditionalist editors and publishers (as did the New Wave in the 1960s and feminist science fiction in the 1960s and the early 1970s). Like them, it seemed to fail. The expectations of Sterling's introduction to *Mirrorshades* never materialised. Cyberpunk did not take over established science fiction, nor does it seem to have influenced it enormously; 21st-century science fiction shows scant signs of cyberpunk.

Cyberpunk often depicts imagery of salvation without resolving actual problems; evidently the symbolism becomes more attractive than its meaning. Cyberpunk's failure to dominate science fiction, or to propagate a successful ideology of transformation towards a better humanity, probably arose from the socio-political antinomies on which the genre was based. These include the problems of challenging the capitalist system in a context of a popular literature which necessarily served aspects of that system, and the need to work within a context which could not easily tolerate subversion.

Nor did Gibson's trilogy lead anywhere for him. In the four years after *Mona Lisa Overdrive* Gibson produced only a short atmospheric story for a San Francisco art exhibition, "Skinner's Room" (1991), a self-consuming computerised text (*Agrippa* -- undated; no details available) and a collaboration with Bruce Sterling, *The Difference Engine*. This mentions artificial intelligence (which has supposedly written the book), represented in a never-depicted alternative 1990, far from the core of the text. This is a Victorian-era parallel world, incorporating computers based on Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine and his designs for a more advanced Difference Engine. The intriguing notion is facilely executed; primitive geared calculators could scarcely provide military and commercial supremacy in the way that Gibson and Sterling hope.

The text seems to be, in effect, a crude celebration of 1980s technophilia disguised as alternate history.

In this text the nineteenth-century US is insignificant, and the British Empire rules. Its success arises from its official rewards for scientific achievements -- a "Merit Lordship" reminiscent of the scientific dream of Heinlein's "The Roads Must Roll" -- which Heinlein's pragmatic American populism effectively debunked. (Admittedly Gibson and Sterling depict an unsuccessful Marxist-anarchist revolution against "Merit Lordship".) This seems a desire for a justifiable imperium, like Sterling's peaceful, rich post-renewable energy world of *Islands in the Net*, with problems of capitalism abolished or ignored. Evidently Sterling and Gibson saw problems with the 1990 world, but felt that they could be solved without great difficulty. Thus Gibson's most ambitious text of this period -- written in collaboration with cyberpunk's foremost publicist -- was little more than a rehash of the past larded with facile promotion of cybernetics.

However, possibly much as New Wave writers and critics endured into the 1970s long after the New Wave had ceased to be significant in science fiction, observers were reluctant to see cyberpunk as obsolete. Scott Bukatman, whose *Terminal Identity* (1990), was favourably reviewed by *Science-Fiction Studies*, suggested that through cyberpunk: "[s]cience fiction has, in many ways, prefigured the dominant issues of postmodern culture" (Bukatman, 1990: 6) and that "the cyberpunks . . . have constructed a master-narrative, one grounded in the centrality of human intention and perception . . . inaugurating a new subject capable of inhabiting the bewildering . . . space of the electronic environment" (Bukatman, 1990: 118). This resembles Jameson's view of postmodernism as rupture, and equates this (somewhat anachronistically) with the rise of the 1980s cybernetic age.

Bukatman further claims that "[c]yberpunk proved to be a revitalizing force in science fiction . . . [a]lthough the movement ended almost as soon as it began . . . its impact has been felt . . . across a range of media and cultural formations . . . significantly alter[ing] the representation of electronic technology in narrative"

(Bukatman, 1990: 137). The first claim seems untrue (the movement would not have ended so rapidly and completely if it had really revitalised science fiction). As to altering the representation of electronic technology, Bukatman admits (accusatively citing, among others, *OMNI*, *The Whole Earth Review*, and *MONDO 2000*), that "some discursive patterns are beginning to emerge . . . that I call, while admitting my own potential culpability, *cyberdrol*" (Bukatman, 1990: 189). Bukatman also admits that "the cyberpunk writings are not presented as subversive of the genre. These are *science fiction texts* that seek to *exploit*, and not to *exceed*, the language and protocols of the genre" (Bukatman, 1990: 296) -- that is, they were not radical within the genre. Hence Bukatman, arguably the last serious enthusiast for cyberpunk, was acknowledging its failure.

This failure (against an essentially conservative SF mainstream) paralleled a continuing socio-political shift to the right in wider society. George Bush won the U.S. Presidency in 1988. In 1989 the USSR abandoned the Eastern European Communist regimes, which swiftly collapsed. This was widely represented as the failure of socialism, reaffirming the intellectual hegemony of Western conservatives. The U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 showed increasing international aggressiveness on the right, and was followed in 1990 by the electoral defeat of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas by US-supported candidates backed by a US-supported guerrilla army. While the 1990 unbanning of the South African ANC provided the left with a rare victory, South Africa appeared (according to Western media) mired in internecine violence -- an unattractive example.

The ferocious combat stage of the U.S. war against Iraq began in February 1991; the US and its allies destroying military and civilian targets with impunity, using new high-technology weapons which apparently intensified the dominance of the West. At the end of the war, this dominance proved less meaningful than was hoped. Kuwait was liberated, but was devastated; reconstruction cost billions. Iraq's dictator remained in power; the putative goal, the destruction of a supposed Hitler in the Gulf, was not attained. Anti- Iraqi propaganda, used to justify the attack on civilians in Iraq, often

proved embarrassingly fake. Thus the world appeared less secure than had been expected. Meanwhile in disintegrating Yugoslavia, racial mass murder reappeared in Europe, even as the West boasted of its morality and constructed Holocaust memorials to commemorate their superior morality. (The brutality of the spiritual descendants of the ghettos, the Israelis, aroused little outrage.) Conservative triumphalism reached its height with the collapse of the Soviet Union after the August 1991 attempted military coup. The Cold War had ended with the surrender of the enemy of capitalism.

Yet conservative triumphalism did not protect the world economy. Later in 1991 the Japanese stock and property markets collapsed; in the U.S. unemployment was rising and growth stalling, and in 1992 the British pound was devalued in a humiliating withdrawal from the European monetary system. Western conservatives appeared discredited; their political and economic management doubted (George Bush reneged on a major election promise, "No new taxes", to sustain public spending), their morality in tatters (Bush's son narrowly escaped prison for his role in the Savings and Loan financial disaster). Yet with the left apparently discredited, liberals seemed paralysed, as Jameson noted in an assessment of the roots of postmodernism:

it was precisely the failure of the sixties movements that resulted in the return of these older beliefs about the limits and the sinfulness of mortal human nature . . . . the enthusiasm raised by such movements individually and suffusing the period generally was itself a powerful and objective force whose absolute disappointment could not but have objective consequences in its own right; the ossification of the new states that emerged from the great wars of national liberation, the capitulation of most Western social democratic governments to business as usual, the sinking of the communist regimes . . . all this, followed by the reemergence of a new high-tech multinational capital, could not but document the feeling that human beings are incapable of collective achievement or

individual change and underwrite a conviction that some essential human nature, of a limited and ungrateful sort, is necessarily to blame for these irreversible setbacks.

(Jameson, 1994a: 50).

Jameson here attributes the rise of green consciousness to growing political pessimism, which may be untrue -- but the growing pessimism of the early 1990s was undeniable, and helped secure the election of the New Democrat Clinton instead of the Republican Bush in the U.S. (and, later, the election of New Labour Blair instead of Conservative Major in the UK).

The end of the Cold War seemed to have abolished the danger of nuclear war, depriving the anti-nuclear movements of purpose (though the weapons still existed). The wars in Central America, which aroused so much US fear about government policy (inspiring Pynchon's *Vineland* and Shepard's *Life During Wartime* [1987]), wound down after the U.S. victory there. The anti-war movement's campaign against the Gulf War, successful in terms of turnout (until the war the US public supported diplomatic solutions) focussed (foolishly, as commentators such as Nabil Al-Hadithy, in Nancy Peters' *War After War* [1992], noted) on probable US casualties. When the war proved almost bloodless on the US side, pro-war commentators portrayed the movement as foolish as well as cowardly. (In Roy Greenslade's *Maxwell's Fall*, Greenslade explains that he dared not oppose Maxwell in early 1991, because in wartime one had to preserve unity!) This discredited and disrupted support for anti-war and pro-Third World factions.

Eagleton and Callinicos both suggested links between the collapse of faith in leftism and the rise of postmodernism: "[t]he hope of revolution has gone, but it has not generally been replaced . . . by positive belief in the virtues of capitalist democracy . . . there are so many other potential catastrophes hovering on the horizon . . . Lyotard and Baudrillard . . . were strongly identified with 1968 . . . Both have followed a trajectory . . . towards the adoption of what amounts to an aesthetic pose

based on the refusal to seek either to comprehend or to transform existing social reality" (Callinicos, 1989: 170). Thus (Callinicos rather simplistically suggests) postmodernists discourage leftism from evolving a resistance movement.

Indeed, the U.S. postmodern intellectual Susan Suleiman, attempting a postmodern approach to the Bosnian civil war, inadvertently reinforces Callinicos' point. She argues that "[t]he universalist (or, if you will, modernist) claim is that only by ascribing universal validity to one's ethical beliefs is one able to act ethically" (Suleiman, 1997: 56). Yet how else could one get *other people* to follow one's ethical beliefs? She insists that "[a] postmodernist ethics refuses to take that step, arguing . . . that too many horrors have been inflicted by some human beings on others in the name of *their* universal values" (56). This argument seems logical, until she insists that "Serbs should not think of themselves as 'only, unconditionally, Serbs' unto the death" (56). Yet this is a universal statement, even while she claims that "[y]ou don't have to be a universalist to make humane ethical choices, or even to die for them -- but you can feel a certain loss (ironically aware of your own nostalgia) at the thought of a time when you might have been" (57). Suleiman pretends to be more sophisticated than universalists, but she deploys universalism whenever her theory confronts praxis.

Suleiman contends that "it is not possible, in a postmodernist discourse about politics, to separate considerations about private irony . . . from considerations about public action" (61). She means that it is not *desirable* to do this, because she disapproves of the Bosnian war. Unwittingly, she lets her absolute morality undermine her intellectual relativism. Her question, "can the discourse of intellectuals, whether modernist or postmodernist or other, have any effect on 'rough reality'?" (62) must be answered in the affirmative. When she asks "[h]ow can one help create a world in which butchers . . . are kept in check . . . so that intellectuals can continue to argue . . . and artists can go on painting?" (63), her choice of examples implies a liberal universal narrative. Such postmodernism seems to be employed by some Western

intellectuals only when it suits them -- suggesting a deep-seated philosophical confusion.

With the intelligentsia disrupted and radicals discredited, it would be natural to expect widespread disillusionment with any sort of critical political engagement. This might be expected to lead towards a flight from utopianism, an abandonment of ideals and endorsement of the status quo. (This is suggested in Eagleton's analysis of postmodernism.) Those who had supported revolutionary transformation of the world, and saw their dreams ruined and vilified, might abandon such hopes. One may speculate on a link between the changes in Gibson's cyberpunk and the political changes in the wider world.

Gibson's cyberspace trilogy seemingly began with pessimism and moved towards optimism, following the rhythm of the U.S. economic cycle. However, some of his values are consistent. He holds that technology can mend whatever it has damaged -- a central tenet of liberal science fiction. Also that people should not act as collectives, rather as individuals (within shifting limits), because collectivist ideology hampers peoples' full potential. Also, human society is inevitably imperfect (to various extents in different texts) so people are necessarily not all free or happy. This is a less dominant belief than the other two (although central to the U.S. variant of liberalism) and forms part of a debate in his texts.

Faith in technology is naturally promoted by those who profit by that technology, and Gibson should criticise this if he pursues freedom, but he cannot do this if his hopes for improving human life depend on technology. If there are problems to be solved in imperfect human society, that solution must rest on an ideology. Gibson's opposition to structures and planning follows (in general) from the anti-planning philosophy generated by the capitalist world-system which produced many of the evils which Gibson dislikes. Since he does not acknowledge this problem, he is left with no way of dealing with it, nor even of acknowledging that this is an ideology.

Gibson's assumptions apparently derive from general U.S. political discourse, such as a rhetorical distrust of the social system, coupled with reluctance to act -- a middle-

class dilemma. Gibson's cyberpunk strives to show how to build the radiant city at the heart of U.S. values. However, he never even admits that this is his goal, because part of his belief-system seemingly requires him to repudiate the desire for Utopia. He can portray social situations which require radical change, but can only represent confused responses to such requirements. As a science fiction writer he is wedded to technological solutions which only partly *symbolise* solutions to social problems, and partly attempt, unsuccessfully, to *be* those solutions -- which proves to be implausible. Within this environment the technocentric passion to depict technologies for their own sake further clouds the issue.

This is normal in U.S. politics. The upper-class desire for a quick, painless solution to problems stretches back to the New Deal at least; it is suggested in much of the discourse of the Founding Fathers, and in such abandoned nostrums as bimetallism and technocracy. Gibson, however, has had the melancholic triumph of actually helping to *create* such a delusory desire. The 1990s hype around the "New Economy" and "dotcom companies" depended heavily, as shall be seen, upon the cyberspace discourse and structures which Gibson had created. (The discourse did not make the event, any more than Gibson's political beliefs necessarily influenced U.S. politics in the period -- but it probably contributed to it, and certainly reflected it.)

Arguably Gibson's inability to resolve the problems within his texts constitutes an interesting commentary on U.S. ideology. Had more insightful attention been paid to Gibson, some of the problems of the 1990s could have been predicted and perhaps been less harmful. While this perspective on cyberpunk has been neglected, much of the postmodern interpretation of cyberpunk generated by *Science-Fiction Studies* (such as Bukatman, Csicsery-Ronay and even on occasion Suvin) arguably serves to contain Gibson's radicalism by reflecting it in an anti-ideological discourse of desire and gratification. While conservative science fiction authors strove to discredit cyberpunk, because cyberpunk's liberalism seemed to challenge their reactionary political views, Gibson's broad philosophy was implicitly conservative-patriotic -- a point which most observers generally ignored.

Works like Rushkoff's *Cyberia* (1994) and Negroponte's *Being Digital* (1995) claim that the revolution symbolically invested in cyberpunk has been accomplished by cybernetics and communications. Rushkoff admits that "Gibson and his cohorts are . . . not . . . interested in hackers but . . . able to understand the totality of human experience"; he disparagingly terms them "ushers rather than participants in Cyberia" (Rushkoff, 1994: 228), insufficiently enthusiastic about the movement. These "Information Age" and "Third Technological Revolution" pundits speak of liberation, although they serve the interests of a small group of electronically-minded businesspeople. Apparently, in the real world, Gibson's imagery has been appropriated and exploited to ends which he might not appreciate.

To the extent to which Gibson's project was based on American conservative populism, its failure suggests the bankruptcy of this ideology. The easiest way to save the ideology would be by co-opting cyberpunk into an established structure (such as mainstream science fiction) to deny that it ever possessed revolutionary potential. Indeed, cyberpunk has been retrospectively tamed. (Bukatman's insistence that "the movement ended almost as soon as it began" [137] locates it safely in the past.) Cyberpunk's future seems to have arrived -- but largely because certain marketers found cyberpunk's imagery useful for their purposes. It is commercial technological propaganda that Bukatman calls "cyberdrool".

The failures, as well as the successes, of Gibson's cyberpunk, hint that Gibson could only realise his vision (created by the value-system of mature capitalism) within the ideological structures of mature capitalism, despite the fact that these were the very ideologies which he considered the source of social tension. A cyclic rejection and acceptance of the status quo seems to have led Gibson into unavoidable contradictions, since neither could be absolute. This made his work fatally limited even on its own terms, which were class terms -- essentially, a middle-class person fearing the working-class and jealous and suspicious of the bourgeoisie -- and thus, Gibson's work both anticipated, and served to support, developments which were to

come. Even before this happened, another writer was showing how effortlessly cyberpunk could be deployed for conservative ideological goals.

### **Appropriated Cyberpunk: Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*.**

Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) is a parody, a pastiche and a re-reading of cyberpunk. The parodic aspect appears in, for instance, its humorous traducing of cyberpunk machismo and undercutting elements of Gibson's work like the powers of the "hacker" (later ridiculed still further in Bruce Bethke's *Headcrash* [1994] ). Much of this parody depends on knowledge of computers and cyberpunk; reading it meaningfully requires familiarity with cyberpunk and American computer-literate cultures. Stephenson was also plainly familiar with many postmodern arguments (particularly in their American forms). Even when Stephenson seems serious -- though one can never be sure that this is the case -- he makes wild logical leaps very unlike Gibson's mode of narration, that of concealed logical transitions, explained in detail subsequently.

Stephenson seems to view postmodernity as harsh but unavoidable; there is no alternative. His version of postmodernity endorses consumerism, opposes centralised administration (which pursues absolute power, but is foiled through high technology) and delights in shifts in style. Information, money and culture flow constantly and continuously change, leaving nothing fixed. Here information technology proves to be the natural state of human consciousness; the postmodern world is identical to the natural world.

There are jokes and problems on the surface: "This is America. People do whatever the fuck they feel like doing, you got a problem with that? Because they have a right to. And because they have guns and nobody can fucking stop them" (Stephenson, 1992: 2). This sounds like a conservative free-market America, except for his next sentence: "As a result, this country has one of the worst economies in the world" (2). Free enterprise is no more perfect than anything else, and thus there is no hope of a

struggle towards a better world. The masses are content with artificial steroids, "bimbo-box" transports and ethnic enclaves; micropolitics is preferable to macropolitics. The "Feds" parody the American federal bureaucracy, seeking to regulate everything, in contrast to the freedom of the chaotic postmodern order.

*Snow Crash's* characters pursue personal gain, yet defend society against evil figures who seek to limit individual freedom. This future society has no structure, and needs none -- it happens through natural forces (reminiscent of Gibson's dreams of the contingent evolution of his futures). Grand narratives are rejected -- except for the narrative of the natural wiring of humanity (subverted by technology in a resurrection of the Babel myth). The book's version of "When It Changed" has already happened, the moment when everything in the world has been privatized. Technology and capitalism become an inevitable force of desirable change, making explicit what other cyberpunks either hid or questioned.

The plot chronicles the adventures of Hiro Protagonist, a thirty-year-old failed software coder working for the CIC, the privatized CIA. His friend, a girl of impervious self-assurance, is Y.T. (Yours Truly, but also signifying "whitey"), a fifteen-year-old skateboard courier, a human data-transmitter. These two promote a Darwinian mode of life, surrounded by a mass of contented social discards and losers. Protagonist may deliberately mock the heroic "console cowboys" of Gibson's *Sprawl* universe. (He has been superseded by vast teams of individually less-effective coders -- exactly what happened to early software corporations, correcting the assumptions of Gibson's 1980s-rooted texts.) This suggests that traditional cyberpunk is outdated for the 1990s.

Stephenson maintains the cyberpunk tradition of conspiracy theory, personified by cable TV mogul L. Bob Rife, a credible villain in an age of Ted Turner and Rupert Murdoch. *Snow Crash* was written after the Gulf War, when exaggeration of the importance of global media was commonplace, partly fuelled by the work of Baudrillard and Kroker. Rife tries to take over the world, since he can reprogram the human brain to understand the command language originally wired into it. This

"neurolinguistic hack", reflecting Chomskyan theories and the Saussurean linguistics which underlies much postmodern theory, is achieved via religious brainwashing. Thus postmodern theory fuses with American traditional politics and free enterprise ideology -- leaving little to criticise or condemn.

Rife brainwashes computer hackers through a visual "bitmap", allegedly because they think digitally -- singling out technophiles as special. For the common herd, Rife transmits the DNA of his "neurolinguistic virus" through an aerosol of the blood of his victims, mixed with cocaine to provide a high, selling it through drug dealers and through the Pearly Gates, the world's largest "franchised church" (religion is nothing more than business). Both organic and digital viral vectors are called Snow Crash, giving the book its title; drugs, cybernetics, anti-religious sentiments and libertarianism are combined. Stephenson compares the "franchise" with a virus, seeing the world as information-based, and commerce and capitalism as organically innate. However, the natural may not be desirable if it is unstoppable -- like AIDS, such viruses can threaten humanity.

Without any alternative to the world-system, its defects must be set right on its own terms. The fight against Rife is a fight for individuality, yet, as in late Gibson, Protagonist and Y.T. cannot win alone. Hiro's and Y.T.'s allies are Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong, Ng Security Industries and the Mafia; Hiro is fighting against hegemony on behalf of oligarchy (though Stephenson tries to depict the Mafia as something other than a corporation). Where Gibson's cyberpunk allowed escape from the world, Stephenson's characters, and doubtless his readers, are necessarily morally embedded in it.

Stephenson does not seem to believe in technology for its own sake; old Uncle Enzo of the Mafia recalls the flaws of technological warfare in the Vietnam war, while Ng, a former American-supporting Vietnamese and now a cyborg, demonstrates that security cannot be purely technologised; The idea that the human brain is wired to respond to an ideal language in a predictable way, and that unpredictability was introduced by a disruptive informational virus, implies that human culture is

essentially fixed. Whereas many 1980s cyberpunks, and especially Gibson, saw possibilities of future utopia, for Stephenson the 1990s are the best of all possible worlds. Stephenson embeds his arguments in an authoritative flood of information -- the voice of the Library of Congress. He resists grand narratives or controlling structures of any kind, even essentialism -- collectivism is the essentialist way from which capitalism (or neurolinguistic viruses) liberated humanity. (As with Suleiman's and Rorty's contradictions, Stephenson is himself implementing an unacknowledged grand narrative.)

Stephenson shows great insight into information technology and the expectations of his audience -- he has evidently read a lot of cyberpunk. The book uses the tropes of the alienated loser-hero and sexually stereotyped heroine, high technology in a wasteland, distrust of and fascination with the rich. Such icons draw on the romanticism of cyberpunk, although set in a world incapable of the changes which cyberpunk originally promised. Stephenson's mockery might be condemned by cyberpunk enthusiasts -- Gibson dealt ambiguously with such parody in "The Gernsback Continuum" -- but if his audience felt that cyberpunk needed reinterpretation in a changed world, they might accept Stephenson's pastiche without resentment; *Snow Crash* proved to be a popular text.

The dream of transcendence through technology or science is replaced by consumerism and egotism. Jameson's critique of conservative 1990s intellectuals seems applicable here; "[c]onscious intention, the 'plan', collective control, are then fantasized as being at one with repression and renunciation . . . and as in the related postmodern polemic, the absence of ornament from the Second World city . . . serves as a grim caricature of the puritanical Utopian values of a revolutionary society" (Jameson, 1994a: 30-31). Stephenson cannot imagine a powerful social force which would not be used for evil. This surely owes much to the demonisation of planning and systemisation in the 1980s and 1990s, which also influenced Gibson. Aesthetically, he also views such a force as boring and stupidly Puritanical -- as with the "Feds".

Stephenson endorses an ideology while denying its existence: "when you were a pizza guy you didn't deliver pizzas fast because you made more money . . . . You did it because you were carrying out a personal covenant between Uncle Enzo and every customer. This is how we avoid the trap of self-perpetuating ideology. Ideology is a virus" (Stephenson, 1992: 327). This "personal covenant" is a way of eluding the issue. The Mafia depends on loyalty to a cause, and promotes individuals according to performance; hence it is ideological -- only unthinkingly so. Eventually, as in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the text's conclusion is depoliticized, complex collective problems given simplified, individualised solutions.

*Snow Crash* makes much of the collapse of Russia, where the destruction of Communism was followed, not by capitalist utopia, but by famine and chaos; this is seen as nevertheless better than Communism (while many would support this in the real world, Stephenson anticipates a far worse collapse than actually happened). It is possible that this symbolises Stephenson's more general politics, especially with regard to technology. Witnessing a revolution which failed to attain its promise (like the experience of leftists after the original Soviet revolution), might well have been depressing. *Snow Crash*, for all its jocular consumerism, is cripplingly materialist, far from the ecstatic brand-citing hopefulness of Gibson. The end of *Snow Crash* restores the beginning, a further flight from the idea of transformation. Stephenson has discarded the ethical framework of Gibson's cyberpunk, with its "dystopian appearance whose deeper libidinal excitement . . . is surely . . . Utopian in spirit" (Jameson, 1994a: 28) (however nebulous, and however feebly represented). He is thus freed from any obligation to depict any alternative social model -- and does not seem to desire to do so.

Stephenson seems to feel a version of nostalgia for traditional cyberpunk, even as he undermines elements of it. . However, perhaps the nostalgia evoked is not for cyberpunk, but for the emotions which it aroused. People would surely read the text (and Stephenson might have written it) because they still wanted what cyberpunk had offered, even though changed conditions arguably made cyberpunk itself obsolete.

While Stephenson may strive to arouse some of the sensations aroused by earlier cyberpunk, he does this from radically different ideological perspectives. Stephenson is not so much celebrating or resurrecting the genre, as trying to supplant it with something similar on the surface, but different in substance.

Stephenson's next book, *The Diamond Age* (1995), was notably conservative, replaying the late nineteenth century in the future, with Victorianism and a Boxer Rebellion. (The contrast with Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* -- which transplanted cyberpunk dreams into the nineteenth century -- is manifest.) Here culture is a product of racial identity; mid-nineteenth century British culture suits English-speaking white people, denying the existence of real cultural change over time. Surely this relies on Samuel P Huntington's "clash of civilisations", as *Snow Crash* may owe much to Fukuyama's "end of history". Though the text deals with nanotechnology and information technology, its essence is that nothing important changes. The core of the book, a "seed" of nanotechnology which can produce anything anywhere, is a fantasia of apolitical consumption, building on the consumerist fantasies of *Snow Crash*.

Stephenson seems to assume that capitalism and technology act for the best. He expresses a Gibsonian contradiction between endorsement of power and fear of power; support for corporate ideology and hatred for totalitarianism -- but he shies away from resolving or even clearly expressing these. Thus he has a static vision of humanity and society. Unsurprisingly, in later texts -- *Interface* (1994) and *Cobweb* (1996), both co-written under the pen-name Stephen Bury -- he espoused US populist conservatism, where the average American protects the nation from electronic tyranny or Iraqi aggression -- superficially criticising U.S. political structures, while uncritically accepting U.S. imperialist values and beliefs. This suggests, again, how U.S. political conservatism can coexist with technological radicalism -- and how cyberpunk could be made to mesh with this. To an extent, even Gibson seemed to accept this.

### Post-Cyberpunk Gibson; The Sum of All Fears and Loathings.

After five years Gibson returned to cyberpunk with *Virtual Light* (1993), which ignored artificial intelligence. If AI symbolises an utopian alternative to the contemporary world, abandoning it suggests a dystopia. In *Virtual Light* the only free characters are on the Golden Gate Bridge, a huge three-dimensional squatter-camp, where people worry about survival rather than grand plans like a plot to rebuild San Francisco from scratch using nanotechnological building techniques (a notion then popular in science fiction). This would eliminate the chinks which allow opposition to the multinational capitalist system. (This technique is seen as coming from Japan -- somehow, Gibson suggests, this has not harmed the Japanese, but will hurt Americans.)

In a typical Gibson *deus ex machina* tactic, a hacker collective, the Republic of Desire, are persuaded to expose the plan. Apparently it cannot succeed once exposed, though the opponents of the project cannot themselves stop it. Gibson seems to believe that something in US society will place curbs on its otherwise-omnipotent upper class. The future belongs to this class: "[t]here's only but two kinds of people. People can afford hotels like that, they're one kind. We're the other. Used to be, like, a middle class, people in between. But not anymore" (Gibson, 1993: 123). This sense of oppression and weakness (Gibson envisaging the destruction of his own class) does not, however, lead to a resolution.

Gibson addresses the complexity of the globalised world, opening the text with an image of danger and disconnection, expressed through a character belonging to the worldwide conspiracy against San Francisco, who views the Third World through First World eyes:

The courier presses his forehead against layers of glass, argon, high-impact plastic. He watches a gunship traverse the city's middle

distance like a hunting wasp, death slung beneath its thorax in a smooth black pod.

Hours earlier, missiles have fallen in a northern suburb; seventy-three dead, the kill as yet unclaimed. But here the mirrored ziggurats down Lázaro Cárdenas flow with the luminous flesh of giants, shunting out the night's barrage of dreams to the waiting avenidas -- business as usual, world without end.

(Gibson, 1993: 1)

Vietnam-fantasy parallels are evident, contributing to the insecure separation from reality which the courier strives to maintain. This person -- carrying data in "virtual-light sunglasses" whose loss generates the chase-sequence around which the text revolves -- is enslaved by a dream of pornographic consumerism (also contained in the glasses) -- an illusion of unlimited gratification. This suggests a bridging device between the Sprawl novels and this text's concern, which seems to be the people who evade the totalisation effects of mature capitalism.

*Virtual Light* does not fetishise any technology -- although primitive technology, such as bicycles or capsicum sprays, is foregrounded. Nanotechnology effects the theme of the book, yet it is given little space. Nor is virtual reality deemed positive (benefiting only a small, irresponsible elite). Perhaps Gibson is deliberately setting aside the high-technology perspective attributed to him, by suggesting that he finds all technology equally entertaining, like Victorian clockwork.

In *Virtual Light* the conspiracy is a lukewarm variant of the Machiavellian doings in *Count Zero*; the conspirators are no longer menacing freaks, but property developers. (In modern finance capitalism, real estate speculation is one of the fastest ways of making a profit.) This is no longer the apocalyptic threat confronted by traditional cyberpunk, but another part of corporate capitalism's restructuring of society. Hence this seems not a matter of life or death, or racial transformation -- just money, status, or comfort. This is a major reduction in the significance of conspiracy,

although it puts human desire at the centre of the text, since Gibson deems the people of the bridge worth supporting.

Gibson's villains are also victims; the Amerasian product of the Vietnam War Lucius Warbaby and the exiled Russian detective Svobodov (ironically, the name means "Brotherhood"! ). In this fragmented world, events must be explained by the Japanese cultural researcher Yamazaki who has fallen in love with American postmodern chaos:

Skinner has tried repeatedly to convey that there is no agenda here whatever, no underlying structure. Only the bones, the bridge, the Thomasson [a valued but useless artifact] itself. When the Little Grande came, it was not Godzilla. But when Godzilla came at last to Tokyo, we were foundering in denial and profound despair . . . we were again presented with the most astonishing of opportunities

(Gibson, 1993: 116)

Despite this endorsement of planlessness, the book's structure is provided by the thugs pursuing the data on the transformation of San Francisco hidden in a pair of sunglasses -- an emblem of cyberpunk, as Bruce Sterling insisted. Similarly, Sublett, friend of the central character Rydell, wears mirrored contact lenses, a version of Molly's implanted mirror shades, here used by a hapless youth with an allergy problem. The text lacks the simplicity of violence and heroism, but while those simplistic solutions represented other potential realities, here there is no solution to the problems of the central characters.

Warbaby lacks human skills; he is unaware that Rydell is likely to turn against him, for he does not understand his own beliefs. He believes that force can solve anything; a child of the Vietnam War (that extreme expression of US force which Gibson opposed), and does not see that there cannot be loyalties if there are no longer ideologies. This absence of ideologies undermines resistance. In *Virtual Light* there is

nothing important to fight for. Warbaby is merely a common gangster. The powerful scarcely appear in *Virtual Light*, except in the paradise of Century City, where they appear as saviours for Rydell. Gibson's position resembles that of late-1990s politicians who, having concluded that globalised liberalisation was the only conceivable way of life, found themselves unable to cope with the ensuing crises, a problem seemingly arising, for him, out of his acceptance of late-1980s conditions in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*.

In *Virtual Light* the world has suffered "plagues" such as "Kansas City flu" and AIDS in various forms, threatening society, but this is in the past of the text. By the book's present, things seem to be improving, largely by accident. (In earlier stories like "The Winter Market", new diseases were depicted as being produced by technological change. Most recently in the film of *Johnny Mnemonic* it was hinted that high technology itself caused neurological damage -- a conspiracy theory which recalls Robert A Heinlein's novelette *Waldo* (1940).) There are no coherent origins for these diseases; the ordered, modernist world cannot solve them, but the world is saved by Shapely, the homosexual whore whose body develops an innocuous strain of AIDS which defeats more dangerous strains -- a notion fitting the social Darwinism evident in the *Sprawl* trilogy, but also a joke on the homophobic Puritanism of U.S. conservatism. Despite such a political goal, this turns Gibson's distrust in organisation and ideology evident in the cyberspace trilogy into a complacently anti-confidence that things will work out for the best, and the unfit will be naturally eliminated:

Shapely's murder, some said sacrifice, had taken place in Salt Lake City. His seven killers, heavily armed fundamentalists, members of a white racist sect driven underground in the months following the assault on the airport, were still imprisoned in Utah, though two of them had subsequently died of AIDS, possibly contracted in prison, steadfastly refusing the viral strain patented in Shapely's name.

(Gibson, 1993: 294)

Though Gibson's position is liberal in the U.S. context, it is fundamentally conservative, encouraging quietism.

The political implications are explained by Skinner, who remarks, apropos the day squatters took over the bridge, "You think it was politics. That particular dance, boy, that's over" (Gibson, 1993: 86). The Communist utopia is dead, as shown through the corrupt courier's vision: "[n]ow the ptichka, their heads bobbing like well-oiled machines, swallow their arrogant, self-absorbed boyfriends. The camera angles recall the ardor of Soviet industrial cinema" (Gibson, 1993: 2). But if politics and utopia are dead, and the world is no longer meaningful, there is nothing to oppose or explain, no structure to improve.

Everything is fragmenting -- California, like Italy, has split into North and South, to the disgust of some oldsters. (The early-1990s influence of the Yugoslavian civil war and the breakup of the Soviet Union is evident.) Although the police have an all-seeing spy satellite, the Death Star (an improbable device which surely symbolises Foucauldian panopticism), most law enforcement seems to happen through private companies like Rydell's IntenSecure. Such fragmentation has clear political meaning; the powerful are invisible and there is no hegemonic system to oppose.

The absence of artificial intelligence mirrors the absence of hope. Escape into interstellar space or worlds of artificial intelligence no longer exists. Possibly Gibson no longer believes in radical solutions to human social problems. The self-styled Republic of Desire, unlike the "console cowboys" of the earlier texts, simply seek money and success, like the property developers. Nobody's life is transformed in the end; Rydell gets onto the "Cops in Trouble" TV show which seeks to save policemen from the consequences of their conduct, but this returns him to where he had been earlier. The redevelopment of San Francisco may be only delayed. Seemingly, the best one can anticipate is a minor improvement of the status quo.

Gibson's *Sprawl* books may have been partly tongue-in-cheek, yet the transcendental implications of his artificial intelligences made perfection implicitly possible. In *Virtual Light* this is replaced with a dystopian image much like that of the film *Blade Runner* (which influenced *Neuromancer*) but without the subversive image of replicants and without romanticism; the future as inevitable, but trivial, nightmare. The work appeared a year after Francis Fukuyama developed his conservative Hegelian world-view into the influential book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Gibson had seemingly already reached that pessimistic and quietist conclusion, although it seems that unlike Fukuyama, he did not see this as desirable.

Abolition of Utopia implies a suspension of science fiction's pursuit of personal power and fulfilled desire. Either Gibson feels that it is *impossible* to explain the world through a simple ideology-based narrative, or he no longer feels that it is *worthwhile*. Either approach challenges the notions of explicability derived from the scientific revolution, as well as notions of radical change derived from religion and radical politics. Incapacity to explain the world justifies inaction. Evidently Gibson found the early 1990s a time of crisis; his characters suffer, but the source of their suffering is social processes which cannot be investigated, let alone challenged. *Virtual Light* thus created moral problems which needed, even more than *Neuromancer*, to be resolved through a sequel.

This sequel, *Idoru* (1997) is set in the same secondary world, largely in a Tokyo rebuilt after a major earthquake. (Jameson suggests that "the Japanese allusions in films like *Blade Runner* . . . or in Gibson's novels" are a kind of depoliticised utopian future, and that for Americans "[i]t is therefore Japan that is somehow the 'end of history'" (Jameson, 1994a: 155-6); this seems more psychologically true in the 1990s than the 1980s, with the collapse of the Communist utopia and the ascent of neoliberalism to the status of religion.) It is only months after the events described in *Virtual Light* -- differing from the cyberspace trilogy, where years elapsed between texts. While *Idoru* was greeted with respect as the latest product of the creator of cyberspace, its impact seems to have been quite small, possibly because its message

seems confused. The presence in *Idoru* of artificial intelligence and its power to transform society hints at a return to the roots of 1980s cyberpunk.

The hero is a rock singer named Rez, part of a band called Lo Rez. This misspelling of "low resolution" recalls how Gibson used digital-age jargon in his texts to defamiliarise and startle readers; meanwhile, in the 1990s, such language is conventional. Lo is Chinese, Rez is Irish, the two supposedly have created a multicultural technophilic music. Rez is potentially an agent of world-wide change, an unlikely messiah, given how popular musicians tend to rely on their publicity agents. Gibson emphasises the subversiveness of popular music; the title of one chapter, "Collapse of New Buildings", is the name of a German alternative band, and that of the last, "Fables of the Reconstruction", was the name of an early R.E.M. album.

Popular music somehow seems to drive social and human transformation in this text, instead of reflecting aspects of Western culture and politics. Perhaps Gibson is influenced by the ex-Boomtown Rat, Sir Bob Geldorf, who promised help for Third World countries in the 1980s through the Live Aid/Band Aid movement; like Rez, Geldorf was Irish. Gibson contrasts this attitude with a xenophobic musical force, "the Dukes of Nuke 'Em . . . this hideous 'roidhead metal band" (Gibson, 1986: 78). Perhaps Gibson wishes to represent Rez as outside traditional sources of social or political power, free from the corruption of conventional politics -- but this seems unconvincing.

Rez wants to 'marry' an artificial intelligence, Rei Toei. This causes a flurry among his publicists, worried about his sales. Rez is represented as beyond normal social constraints (presumably because he is not tied to a class, thanks to his rock lifestyle). Seemingly Gibson is aware of class problems, but *Idoru* largely ignores such problems. Rez is safely validated by the upper class and its media establishment. Poor people are absent from the text (except for Australian criminals).

The villains of the text are familiar icons from the popular press: the "Kombinat", the Russian mafia and Communists, the old Cold War enemy. They are presented as

inexplicably worse than the rest of the underworld, frightening and dangerous because irrational. This seems ironic considering the postmodern irrationality of U.S. society in *Virtual Light* -- whereas *Idoru's* Japan is a structured, modernist society.

Previously, Gibson's heroes were invariably criminals of a kind, and foreignness fascinated him. The Soviets intrigued him, especially in short stories such as "Red Star, Winter Orbit" and "Hinterlands". Now the Kombinat/Russians/Soviets appear as a threatening enemy -- the Japanese cannot stop them, though the Kombinat violate the rules established by Japanese society. Jameson once suggested that cyberpunk accepted "the evaporation of a certain Otherness from this picture" (Jameson, 1994a: 151), implying that this decline of "othering" symbolised a reduction of class allegiance. In this text, otherness is reinforced for one specific group, which might hint at intensified class allegiance. Significantly, the characters in *Idoru* are homogeneously middle-class; the quasi-Marxoid Kombinat might well be interpreted as working-class Bolshevik terrorists.

In the end Gibson abandons this carefully-constructed image of the Kombinat. They prove to be acceptable as greedy property developers (ironic, given the plot of *Virtual Light*). They want to use nanotechnology (proscribed to the Kombinat, an idea recalling the U.S.'s efforts to restrict advanced technology to their allies) to build a shopping mall and drug factory. The symbol of this is a "compiler" needed for nanotechnological work, fulfilling much the same role as the virtual-light sunglasses in *Virtual Light*.) In the end they succeed, though this seems largely irrelevant to other events in the text. Gibson makes great play of the atmosphere of conspiracy, but this is unrelated to the artificial-intelligence issues at the apparent core of the work. This lack of coherence suggests a difficult disjuncture between the end-of-history pessimism of *Virtual Light* and the nebulous acknowledgement of possible reasons for hope in *Idoru*.

In *Idoru* there is then only one true villain -- Slitscan, an electronic tabloid. (In *Virtual Light* "Cops In Trouble" had helped Rydell, though they abandoned him at first.) Laney, who had worked for Slitscan, was painfully affected by their

manipulative conduct in exposing the sins of celebrities, in the course of which innocent, non-celebrity people were somehow hounded to death. This reiterates Gibson's condemnation of gossip media in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*; in 1997 James Fallows suggested that "[t]hrough the last decade . . . [Americans'] disdain for the media establishment has reached new levels" (Fallows, 1997: 3). Characters representing Slitscan, like Kathy Torrance, do not care about the material or the people with which they work, but only for profit. This image of the media may be true, yet it also seems conventional American wisdom; it is hardly profound analysis.

Laney's battle with Slitscan leads him to the anti-tabloid programme *Out Of Control*, whose managers discard him when they find that he has undergone chemical experiments which may have made him an obsessive personality. The lust for profit eradicates ideals, as in earlier Gibson images of the corporate condition. However, this focus on the media as a site of special corporate sin suggests Gibson's preference for image over reality. *Out Of Control* supposedly opposes the media establishment but is part of it, exploiting the suffering of others for gain. This is more standard American anti-media populism; James Fallows points out that "[s]ince the early 1980s, the journalists who have shown up in movies have been portrayed, on average, as more loathsome than the lawyers, politicians or business moguls who are the traditional bad guys in films" (Fallows, 1996: 44). Media academic Mark Crispin Miller complains about "telejournalists who talk the talk of advertising -- constantly assuring us that they know what we'll buy, and what it takes to sell it to us . . . the populist pretense can barely hide the absolute contempt that all those talkers really feel for us, the people" (Miller, 2001: 336). While true, this is shallow analysis -- blaming the media is like blaming the Kombinat.

Problems of representation loom large in *Idoru*, but are not always convincing. Laney is shown a pornographic video, into which his face has been morphed onto the star's, to be used as legal testimony against him. Digital manipulation already makes video questionable evidence, and thirty years hence this will surely be no more trusted than the faked pornographic photograph. Gibson may be suggesting that reality is

unreliable, along the lines of Baudrillardian "simulacra" and "hyperreality", reinforcing the distrust of the mediators of televised reality shown earlier, but the example is unsatisfying. The manipulation of reality (by video or by Slitscan) seems no worse than any other lie (such as bribing someone to give false testimony). Gibson is making a large ideological issue out of something trivial (perhaps because of a strangely naive acceptance of popular fears about doctored images). Simstim had raised far more interesting ontological issues than this.

Kathy Torrance admits that he can challenge the video -- saying that "[w]e've got a lot of money and talent to throw at problems like that" (Gibson, 1996: 216). The real threat, then, is corporate power; technology is a distraction. In *Idoru* there is no explicit opposition to corporate control, unless this is contained in the never-specified transformational potential of artificial intelligence. Image manipulations are made possible by the same high technology which made Rei Toei, the *idoru* (idol) possible. Hence this technology is ambiguous. Yet if technology is no solution, and there is no social solution, the problem is pared down to the wickedness of Kathy Torrance. Once again the problem is personalised -- yet Torrance is not demonic or all-powerful in the way that Virek, or even 3Jane, were; she is simply a corporate employee. What was apocalyptic in the earlier trilogy here becomes trivial.

A striking example of trivia and conventionality is the only working-class character, Blackwell, the reformed Australian criminal. He is suspicious of sophistication, violent, honest, with large appetites, reflecting the myth pilloried by John Pilger's and Thomas Kenneally's analyses of Australian culture. Blackwell worships Rez, although he distrusts Rez's unmanliness (and his sexual submission to a simulated woman). This arises from having saved Rez from a prison hostage drama, whereupon Rez saved him from prison. With near-feudal servility, Blackwell grumbles, but never opposes Rez's ideas. Blackwell's nature may be intended to add depth to his role as a thug who offers a standard for the courage of others like Laney: "If you nail my hand to the bar, Blackwell . . . I'll scream, okay . . . what I most

definitely am not is anybody's kind of a hero" (Gibson, 1996: 72). To which Blackwell replies, "Good on you, then." (Gibson, 1996: 72).

Blackwell's crudeness and simplicity may be intended to evoke an earlier, simpler era; when Laney desires to find a place where people don't watch TV, Blackwell replies "when you find that fair land, I will go there with you . . . . We'll . . . commune with all that's left of bloody nature" (Gibson, 1996: 275). He reassures the reader that complex issues have simple solutions -- namely, killing or torturing people defined as bad by himself or Rez. This leads to an absolute faith in violence, sidetracking critical analysis. Blackwell embodies the family-oriented values of 1980s conservatism, a working-class figure without revolutionary impulse. He thus possesses no subversive connotations; he does not resent his social superiors, and threatens only other criminals -- Blackwell was a "standover man", robbing other criminals, rather than preying on people like Rez. Change in this society comes from the top, from Rez, his friends and the corporate world, who can be trusted to act for the best (recalling the "end of ideology" theses of the 1960s and 1980s).

Rez hardly seems to deserve such loyalty; his dreams of artificial intelligence seem to promise little. By the end of *Idoru* Rez and Rei Toei are working on some unmentionable project, lacking any signifier. This may perhaps be explained by a need to simulate the emotional impact of the revolutionary change promised in the earlier trilogy, in the absence of any actual faith in revolution (or change). This suggests an attempt to recover transformational aspects of the cyberspace trilogy, without threatening the status quo -- rather like the situation in *Snow Crash*. Thus *Idoru* appears more conservative than *Virtual Light*, where change seemed desirable even if impossible.

A similar role is played by Laney, who like so many Gibson heroes is damaged; he suffers from the past injustice of forced childhood drug experiments. Yet the system which created this disaster is not criticised; everything is blamed on bad individuals. Laney is no Romantic, isolated loner. The threats facing him are surmountable, so as hero he poses less of a challenge to the reader than Case or Molly. His life is not

threatened, only his career. He is detached from society, perhaps because otherwise he would need to have a meaningful focus for his obsessions, and Gibson would have to address that focus according to ideological principles, from which Gibson seems to be retreating.

*Idoru* does possess potentially utopian images; Tokyo's architectural nanotechnology has indeed changed the world. In a chapter ironically entitled 'Collapse of New Buildings', it is said that "[s]ome people find [these structures] disturbing," (Gibson, 1996: 81), and Laney is indeed upset:

He knew their sheer brutality of scale from constructs, but virtuality had failed to convey the peculiarity of their apparent texture, a streamlined organicism. 'They are like Giger's paintings of New York,' Yamazaki had said, but the reference had been lost on Laney.

Now he sat on the edge of his bed, staring blankly out at these miracles of the new technology, as banal and as sinister as such miracles usually were, and they were only annoying: the world's largest inhabited structures.

(Gibson, 1996: 81-2)

He closed his eyes, not wanting to see the new buildings. But they were still there, in the darkness and the light behind his lids. And as he watched, they slid apart, deliquesced, and trickled away, down into the mazes of an older city.

(Gibson, 1996: 83)

These new buildings may represent Gibson's feared planned future, for they seem sinister, fantasized as rotting -- in contrast to their image as celebration of technology evident in much nanotechnological science fiction (like *The Diamond Age*). Perhaps

Gibson is again troubled by the implications of radical transformation. Evidently, as in the cyberspace trilogy, Gibson distrusts Utopia. This future may be problematic because it is free, yet planned. The buildings are never described in detail (surely meant to produce an impression of profundity). Other buildings in the city seem dull, though Gibson seems to wish the reader to enjoy the heterogeneity of a building shaped like a robot, or a bar covered in chewing-gum. Perhaps Gibson is happiest with commodified architecture, even though this does not challenge the alarming hegemonic fantasy of the nanotechnological buildings -- which he cannot ignore, because they appear so technologically interesting!

These buildings are potentially Utopian because they arise from a socially-oriented decision: "when Godzilla [a great earthquake] came to Tokyo . . . . we were again presented with the most astonishing of opportunities" (Gibson, 1993: 116). Hence, Gibson's future is constructed around an ideology; despite his claims about the end of modernity in *Virtual Light*, these buildings restructure society, just as modernist architects wished. Gibson may attempt to reject modernism and the collective -- his comparison between the nanotechnological buildings and the containment structure of Chernobyl is surely an attempt at this -- but it seems that in spite of himself the buildings remain, symbolising modernist transformation in his mind.

Yet despite this symbolic significance the Tokyo-image in *Idoru* is less substantial than that of San Francisco in *Virtual Light*, or even London in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. In those texts the cityscape displayed the social culture (albeit in a distorted way), but in *Idoru* the cityscape reveals nothing about the new Japanese reality. This may be problematised by the danger of making the society of Tokyo -- a planned environment -- appear attractive. (In contrast to this is the inhuman cybernetic landscape of Walled City, a virtual environment created by Japanese computer hackers, also Utopian, yet not "real", because perfectly controllable by geeks -- a kind of aleph, perhaps more acceptable to Gibson than a real landscape where people live.)

Chia, an upper-middle-class American youth obsessed with Lo Rez, strives to understand the surface of her world, but seems unconcerned with deeper reality.

Unlike Kumiko extrapolating from her experience to interpret the world, Chia has no intellectual structure from which to extrapolate. She interprets everything on her own terms, since nothing makes her challenge them. She despises "meshbacks", the culturally impoverished American white working-class -- a class conflict with no referent; no meshback has a voice. Judging by the treatment of the Tokyo building symbolism, Gibson does not wish to pursue social transformation, and hence would not wish to throw light on it by emphasising social conflict.

There are still problems in Gibson's mid-1990s real world -- which may account for the renaissance of the search for artificial intelligence, (in a restricted, mystified form). However, there is no real danger in the text to represent real dangers in the 1990s world. Chia inadvertently smuggles a nanotechnological weapon through customs, experiencing no fear, "probably not smart but she just didn't know" (Gibson, 1996: 126). It appears that nothing has ever endangered her. Safe in a psychological aleph, she does not engage with problems; presumably she never has.

Rei Toei is not like Wintermute, incomprehensibly outside human understanding; her transformational potential is surely part of her human nature. She may be merely a simulation -- only the software engineers who created her know. This crucial question is evaded by putting it in the mouth of Zona Rosa, who proves mentally disturbed and physically deformed -- which should not negate the question, though Gibson suggests that it does. Yet the premise is bizarre; it is unlikely that true artificial intelligence could arise through a simulated human created by a public relations and entertainment project. Seeing her as an independent figure ought to be an ironic notion, (like the idea of Rez himself being independent) but Gibson seems not to recognise this.

Rei Toei is a simulated beautiful singer attracting attention and revenue need not have real intelligence; seemingly capitalism has accidentally generated her in its pursuit of consumerism. Kuwayama, CEO of the company that owns Rei Toei, delivers Zenlike ideas to justify this: "it is about futurity"; "oneness perfects itself", concluding that "popular culture . . . is the testbed of our futurity" (Gibson, 1996: 238). This rhetoric fuels Western stereotypes about inscrutable Orientals with

unknown motivations (like the Sprawl AIs), yet Kuwayama created Rei Toei to make money; as with Gibson's representation of Slitscan, this mystification conceals the working of capitalism. Seemingly Gibson does not want his reader to contemplate such things, as if he has discarded his former distrust for corporations and the reliability of perception. The contradiction between what Gibson apparently wants Rei Toei to represent, and the culture from which Rei Toei emerges, a contradiction which is surely an important potential in the book, appears to be something which Gibson wishes his readers to ignore.

If popular culture could be free from central control, consumer choice within it could represent a kind of democratic power. However, the centralised, consumerist entertainment industry cannot promise meaningful social change; it is the social structure which makes that industry what it is. Rei Toei was created by one controlling group to be consumed by another subordinate group. Yet Rez insists that she has the potential to be something more, something never explained, merely mystified by rhetoric about alchemical marriages. Perhaps Gibson is avoiding explanation because clarity would expose banality. Placing Rei Toei in the place that an AI would occupy in a Sprawl text, given the symbolic differences between them, suggests that Gibson cannot see (or resolve) these conflicts evident in the text.

Rez's union of humanity and technology may be technological fetishism. Many of the assumptions which seem to underlie it parallel contemporary upper-class technological ideology (Bukatman's "cyberdrool"), so the optimism of the text is plainly facile. Rez appears to be a deluded eccentric; the only evidence countering this comes from Blackwell (hardly an independent observer). At least in *Virtual Light* the virtual-light sunglasses are unimportant in themselves; in *Idoru*, the nanotech assembler-programmer is needed (apart from creating the Kombinat casino and drug factory) to build something unspecified on an island of rubble discarded from the Tokyo earthquake. Gibson seems to be using the contemporary fad of nanotechnology (an idea evolved in Eric Drexler's politically conservative *Engines of Creation* [1990])

-- exploiting familiar ideas rather than developing new ones or new approaches to old ones.

*Idoru* focuses on bourgeois comfort and security. Periodically, the casual violence of the first trilogy seemingly reappears. Yet apart from the kind of hand-to-hand violence which Blackwell can easily dominate, little actually threatens anyone. The Kombinat attacks Rez by mistake, but is easily bought off. The conspirators trying to import the nanotechnological assembler attack Chia, although she poses no threat to them, but do her no harm. This violence seems purposeless, and hence nothing is achieved by defeating it. Perhaps Gibson is striving to recapture the excitement of his earlier texts.

Not only does Chia despise the working class, but manufactured things seem, to her, unreal. Significantly, this text contains less industrial landscape than in the cyberspace trilogy -- and less indication of work than in *Virtual Light*. Chia need not comprehend her world, which is secure until smugglers and the Kombinat break into it. Surely these forces represent the world which Chia has excluded; this is, however, a negative and stereotypical depiction, which offers little for the reader to consider. Social problems and politics receive no serious mention. This reflects the ideology found in "cyberdool" promoters like Negroponte (which Ernest Mandel deemed the ideology of mature capitalism), and lacks the social content carried over from earlier texts.

Furthermore, in *Idoru* rich people are entirely positive figures -- even the wealthy criminals eventually appear worthy. Perhaps Gibson feels that artificial intelligence is more likely to arise through a rich person's whim than through any organisation, and hence, that the rich may be better for the world than the poor. (Similar arguments were made in the 1990s about economics, as Stiglitz notes.) Seemingly, Gibson has abandoned his earlier acknowledgement that the rich may be *able* to make changes, but may not *wish* to. *Idoru* seems to suggest that struggle is unnecessary, for globalised corporate capitalism does not need to be fought, but will transform itself --

thus making real change unnecessary, since the reason for change would have been the problems caused by capitalism. This is a recipe for unthinking quietism.

The US mid-1990s economic boom, after the 1991-3 recession which may have inspired *Virtual Light*, may explain Gibson's desire to limit change (as the improving economic climate in the late 1980s seems to have shifted him from earlier apocalyptic visions). Previously artificial intelligence had seemed the only means of escaping the horrors of the world; in *Virtual Light* Gibson seems to have seen no escape at all. Meanwhile, in *Idoru*, the world is once again glamorous and apparently fungible. However, this is the glamour on the surface of popular consumer culture -- as if Gibson has surrendered to the general ideological system, within which his books had previously been at least nominally critical (however uncritical their reception might have been).

Despite the shallowness of *Idoru*, there is a strident, urgent tone to the work (perhaps resembling in this the "New Economy" propaganda of the late 1990s). It is as if there *ought to be* ideological content which Gibson is unable to depict. Perhaps if his message were made explicit it would appear either banal, or contradict aspects of the world-view which he seeks to reflect.

In *Idoru* the trappings of consumer culture are used in a new way, withdrawing from the manufacturing world into a purely upper-class universe, where computers, for instance, become ornamental:

Her husband was a jeweller, and he died of that nerve-attenuation thing, before they saw how to fix it. But he'd been a big green, too, and he hated the way consumer electronics were made, a couple of little chips and boards inside these plastic shells. The shells were just point-of-purchase eye-candy, he said, made to wind up in the landfill if nobody recycled it, and usually nobody did. So, before he got sick, he used to tear up her hardware, the designer's, and put the real parts into cases he'd make in his shop. Say he'd make a solid

bronze case for a minidisk unit, ebony inlays, carve the control surfaces out of fossil ivory, turquoise, rock crystal. It weighed more, sure, but it turned out a lot of people liked that, like they had their music or their memory, whatever, in something that felt like it was *there*. . . . And people liked touching all that stuff: metal, a smooth stone. . . . And once you had the case, when the manufacturer brought out a new model, well, if the electronics were any better, you just pulled the old ones out and put the new ones in your case. So you still had the same object, just with better functions.

(Gibson, 1996: 138)

The phrase "they saw how to fix it" suggests a facile optimism about the power of technology. Technical control is seemingly now complete, unlike the situation in *Virtual Light* (yet somehow this is no longer threatening). This simplistic technophilia seems related to the general U.S. ideology of power, and to the text's vacuous hopes for artificial intelligence. The list of precious-sounding substances is a litany of unbranded consumerism, like a magazine's description of jewelry or cosmetics, essentially image-oriented. What should matter in a computer is the electronics and the software, yet here packaging receives more attention. In a work so intimately associated with cybernetics, to value looks over performance here is to abandon criticism. Perhaps even Rei Toei may be more an image than reality -- understandable given the text's focus on the pop-culture world, but a retreat from the earlier critical significance of Gibson's cyberpunk.

Artificial intelligence here becomes a symbol of technological answers to all humanity's problems avoiding effort or suffering. This tends to reinforce readers' preconceptions (like most science fiction, but more emphatically so than earlier Gibson) following instead of challenging a familiar ideology. This uses the technophilic distortions of Gibson's ideas -- what Stallabrass terms "the solipsism of cyberspace . . . a literal expression of the situation of the individual in contemporary

society, and more specifically of business people and their camp followers . . . spinning universalizing fantasies" (Stallabrass, 1995: 32). It panders to desires for political quietism, economic security, and the lack of need for real change. These assumptions served the interests of the U.S. upper class, ironically redeploying tropes which Gibson helped to develop but which here he uses against his original purpose. It appears that Gibson has repudiated his former radicalism -- and with it, what made his texts interesting.

This is also true of the last work in this trilogy, *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999). This text represents a return to aspects of the pessimistic social vision of *Virtual Light* without discarding the quietist symbolism of *Idoru*. At its end, none of the promise of matter transmission, artificial intelligence or nanotechnology has provided anything of any meaning (the change which has supposedly come is invisible and intangible, even less significant than that in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*; as in *Idoru* the solution is simply physical violence against the heavily-emphasised bad guy). It seems possible that this negativism is a product of economic conditions (this time the collapse of hope at the time of the end of the East Asian boom) but the lack of drastic change could be predicted from the earlier texts. Even the title reflects Gibson's awareness that his audience anticipates Velvet Underground references from him; it provides little of the implicit commentary of earlier titles. Moreover, despite Gibson's nominal popularity, the book seems to have sunk almost without trace on the critical landscape.

Much the same is true of a more recent non-SF text admired by Fredric Jameson, *Pattern Recognition* (2003). This post-9/11 fable, which (like *Idoru*) utilises Russians rather than Japanese as aliens, has no real transformational hope at its core. Its central character is a "coolhunter", who works for a huge fashion corporation striving to appropriate innovative styles off the Street. The story is once again a search, but this time for the maker of an Internet film. In the end Gibson seems to be recycling old images, as if to suggest that they had indeed come true. However, the text makes it plain that they have come true only in a banal sense.

In the end, then, Gibson seems to have abandoned his hopes and dreams. So, in a wider sense, has science fiction. The elements of his texts which were incorporated into society, the economy and politics (or which anticipated changes in these things) have been appropriated and used corruptly where they have not simply been ignored. Gibson should probably be seen, not merely as a fascinating stylist and an imaginative fantasist, but also as a tragic intellectual figure -- abused, never quite understood, and ultimately trivialised and forgotten.

### **Gibsonian Rhetoric and CyberFinance.**

Gibson did not explicitly predict how cyberspace would affect the world, but it is plain that the main users of cyberspace are very large organisations and very rich people -- those who own the AIs, and who control the biggest structures in the Matrix. However, perhaps because these are not the focus of Gibson's work, it is easy to ignore these points. Actually, finance capital has been a major -- one might argue, *the* major -- beneficiary of the computer revolution.

Before the 1970s, when computers were large and centralised, the process of tabulating and transferring the wealth of individuals and corporations had been difficult, because everything had to be centrally checked by large computers. A lot of time was taken up sending information through the post, reconciling local and district records with central records, and having huge numbers of clerks entering the data. Small, distributed computers altered this completely. Local and district branches were directly linked to central branches, enormously facilitating the system. It put armies of clerks out of work, but this made the system more profitable.

This made life much more convenient for middle-class individuals; credit checks were speeded up, and paying for anything on credit anywhere, previously uncommon, became universal. Decentralised fund transfers across borders also became much faster and easier than before. This technological development had ideological implications; under neoliberalism, opposition to regulations and support for the free

movement of capital were central dogmas, so currency control regulations had been gutted all over the world. The new technology made capital flight and currency speculation much easier, at the flick of a switch. Central banks could no longer control panics once they began because it was possible to sell vast numbers of shares automatically. (The enormous stock market crash on Wall Street in 1987, its biggest one-day fall in history, happened partly through automatic share-selling which led to a cybernetic panic.)

This made banks much more powerful than before; the financial sector possessed vastly more capital than could ever be backed by productive goods. The instability produced by cybernetics and deregulation led to greater financialization, because there was more money to be made speculating on the rise and fall of currencies, on the futures for commodities, on bonds, and on the futures market for futures markets (known as derivatives) than there was in making and selling products. Wealth became increasingly abstract as more and more corporations moved into the financial. (The Enron Corporation began as a Texas natural gas company, but found that speculating in fossil-fuel futures, and then loaning money out on anticipated profit from that speculation, was more profitable -- until the bills were called in and the company found itself bankrupt in 2001. Similar instabilities destroyed the huge British bank Barings in 1995.) Many people were made richer and more powerful by these 1990s conditions than they would have been in the 1970s, and they tended to have disproportionate influence on the media.

Gibson had not foreseen any of this specifically. However, the rise of a (seemingly) new ideology backed by new technology seemed to imply that cyberspace finance had changed everything. As Benjamin Woolley put it, "[p]erhaps cyberspace, then, is -- literally -- where the money is" (Woolley, 1992: 133). It was tempting to see this development as an economic equivalent of "When It Changed". The computer industry was another beneficiary; the new market seemed to believe that anything to do with computers deserved money, even chip manufacturing industries like Motorola, or old-fashioned computer-makers like IBM. Head and shoulders above

these, however, was Microsoft, which did not make anything concrete, but produced information (computer software), and turned this into money by brilliant marketing, ruthless piracy from competitors, and deals with governments and large corporations (points which were naturally soft-pedalled by Microsoft's enthusiasts).

By the mid-1990s all this was termed the "New Economy". The world economy had revived somewhat after the 1991-3 slump. Much of this revival was ascribed to computers. Sidney Blumenthal, a journalist who became President Clinton's press assistant, prophesied in 1982 "the coming of . . . the information age -- where white-collar workers outnumber blue-collar, computers are the archetypal machines, knowledge is a vital form of capital" (Blumenthal, 207 [elision in original quote]). This, he insisted, by 1997 led to "the greatest prosperity in the country's history" (Blumenthal, 266). It was frequently claimed that under Clinton the economy was growing faster than ever before (actually it grew faster in the period 1942-1971) and that everyone was getting richer (actually the very wealthy benefited disproportionately and the poor much less). Somewhat more sceptically, Stiglitz observes that "[t]he New Economy represented a . . . shift from the production of goods to the production of ideas" (Stiglitz, 2003: 4); he later cast doubt on the validity of this, but insisted that "while the New Economy may have been hyped, it was certainly real. The Internet was real" (Stiglitz, 2003: 181). Even to Stiglitz, the newfound wealth of America rested upon cybernetics.

This discourse was expanded on by Clinton's Vice-President Albert Gore, whose cyberspace rhetoric of an "information superhighway" of fibre-optic cables across the world implied that computers automatically brought benefits to all. Actually, while computerized machines might increase productivity in industry, this inevitably made workers unemployed. Where jobs were created by computers -- Blumenthal's note about white-collar workers outnumbering blue-collar is an exaggeration, but administration swelled in the computer age -- this did not seem to greatly encourage productivity.

Where computers did seem to bring great wealth was on the stock-market, with the rise of internet-oriented companies known as "dot-coms" from the middle of the decade. The Dow Jones index of major stocks traded on Wall Street soared, and as it soared, rhetorical flight went with it. After it rose above 10 000 (the index actually indicates overall market stock value, divided by a complex formula) some business propagandists suggested it could hit 30 000 eventually. Technological stocks -- computer and communications companies -- were traded separately, on the NASDAQ exchange, and they alone peaked at 5 132, seemingly without stopping.

Most of these stock companies were established to sell products or services (which they did not make or perform) over the Internet. This had never been tried before, but it was nevertheless clear that many of the companies were ridiculously overvalued. This was a classic stock bubble, much like the Mississippi and South Seas Bubbles of the early eighteenth century in France and Britain. Investors made money as long as the stock went up -- but except for a few companies which sold things which people actually wanted (although the Internet bookseller Amazon.com took many years to make a profit) the dot-coms did not deserve this.

The confidence that the stock would go on rising depended on fantasising and fetishising of computers and the Internet. While this confidence was being nurtured by the business press and community (much as had been done in the 1920s), a major source of that confidence (and of its discourse) was the "cyberdrool" of the early 1990s, founded, if inadvertently, by Gibson. Admittedly, Ernst Malmsten does not use the word "cyberspace" in *boo hoo* (2002) and David Kuo in *dot.bomb* (2002) seems more concerned with Ponzi pyramid schemes than with technophilia -- but both of the dotcoms dealt with in these texts persuaded banks to give them hundreds of millions of undeserved dollars, which could not have happened if the banks had not believed in cybernetic hype, much of which can be traced back to Gibson's visions and jargon.

About April 2000 the boom suddenly collapsed almost completely. The dot-coms proved unable to sustain money to support their stock, and once confidence evaporated value disintegrated. The lucky people who were the first to sell made huge

profits from companies which immediately became worthless. Cyberspace proved not to be a profitable place after all. The idea that cyberspace -- as the Internet was called - - would automatically add value to stocks was ridiculous, but it was founded on the idea that there was something intrinsically valuable about computers as opposed to the real world.

Computers had developed great speculative significance. (While the Japanese market bubble had been largely rooted in real estate, arguably the outside world had tolerated its growth in part because Japan was associated with high technology -- as Feigenbaum and McCorduck put it, "the Japanese, without land or natural resources, do have the vital component of the new wealth of nations . . . . a technology that will reshape the world" [Feigenbaum and McCorduck, 1998: 39].) The power of computers (in the hands of the rich) had been shown through the collapse of several Asian currencies in 1998. These countries found themselves facing banking crises because of excessive private debt due to bad lending policies. This would have been merely an embarrassment in the past, but because of computerised financial transfers, currency speculators drove down the value of the currency in affected countries, devastating their capacity to fund the imports which they needed to balance their exports. Meanwhile the rich could rapidly move their money out of the country, exasperating stock market declines. The source of the money was invariably First World banks, where most affected individuals placed their money, or from which they borrowed. Hence, if a bank lost confidence in a country's ability to resist what was called the "Asian contagion" (suggesting a distinctly racist line of thought) it could trigger the collapse of that country without the country's own businesspeople doing any more than follow the money -- collapse of confidence became a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. Computers might have facilitated this, but they had not caused it.

Gibson's imagery of cyberspace provided intellectual legitimacy for an issue which otherwise might have faced more criticism, at least from academia and the left. In the absence of such criticism, the general public seldom heard alternatives to the notion that while things might be unfortunate for them in the present (with the decline in

workers' rights throughout the 1990s, almost static incomes for the poor, the replacement of high-paid skilled jobs by low-paid unskilled ones in the service industries, and all the other problems manifest by then) the government and the upper classes were doing good work, because the New Economy would rescue everyone; as the prevailing wisdom had it, a rising tide floats all boats.

This also provided the upper classes with all-important excuses for what they were doing. From the 1980s, especially, the chief executive officers of large companies began receiving larger and larger salaries. By the early twenty-first century annual remuneration of CEOs was routinely in the tens of millions of US dollars, and some were receiving hundreds of millions -- tens of thousands of times the salary of average workers, an unprecedented differential. However, it was argued that their *knowledge* made them valuable -- they added value to the company's stock, hence giving them so much money was a sensible investment.

The middle classes supported this, however much they might envy the very rich, partly because the computer industry was filled with (often exaggerated) tales of middle-class people who used their technical prowess to rise into the upper class. This made the dot-com bubble fatally attractive. It also meant that the middle class did not challenge the situation, or even allow others to challenge it. They saw themselves as nascent Cases -- and when the boom disintegrated in 2000-2001, and the Dow Jones fell with it, they did not blame the promoters of "irrational exuberance" (as Allen Greenspan of the Federal Reserve Bank called it), even fraudulent ones. Rather they felt that they themselves had failed the system. When companies like Enron and Worldcom (the most successful dot-com of all) proved to have based their success on fraudulent corporate reporting and accounting, there was little outcry against those responsible (unusual in the bursting of a bubble, which normally ends in violent recriminations and government investigations, as happened after the crash of 1929 and most earlier crashes). They seem not to have wanted punishment of the guilty, but the restoration of their dream, just as Case wanted his access to cyberspace rather than any richer life.

Gibson's cyberspace is itself something from nothing, where power is sucked out of nowhere -- whether by cowboys or by the free AIs. One could see the free AIs as equivalent to the CEOs of the twenty-first century -- all-powerful, all-knowing, yet invisible and vulnerable at the same time, posing a potent threat and yet offering a glittering prize. Arguably, they are the ones who have lived Gibson's dreams.

But given that in *Count Zero* Gibson depicted Wigan Ludgate wiping out entire economies from the comfort of his cyberspace deck -- approximately what happened to the Indonesian and Filipino economies in 1998-9 -- Gibson seems aware of some of the dangerous powers of cyberspace, and is unlikely to approve of their contemporary uses. (Woolley quotes him as saying "I sometimes get the feeling that technical people who like my work miss several layers of irony" (Woolley, 1993: 37); for "technical people", read almost everyone who exploited Gibson's discourse.) But it is almost an inevitable result of the empowerment of financiers, largely through technology -- though also through the anti-democratised, paranoid politics which took shape in the years 1996-2003 in the United States and its satellites, and which Gibson also recognised (as politics) and celebrated (in a doubtful fashion).

### **The Politics of the Aleph.**

The climax of the "American Century" almost immediately followed the end of the cyberspace trilogy. It was signalled by the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1988 (when the USSR began withdrawing from its satellites) and 1993 (when the Russian President Yeltsin forcibly dissolved a parliament dominated by Communists and Nationalists). The United States, having conquered the world, now had to control it -- ideally without spending much of the ruling class's money.

The United States possessed an enormous, costly military, which now seemed to have little justification, since Russia was friendly, and China had relatively weak armed forces. In the half-decade following the collapse of the USSR the U.S. seemed to focus on economic imperialist measures such as the North American Free Trade

Agreement (which gave it greater control of the continent) of 1994, and through expanding the powers of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which it largely controlled. After 1996 the World Trade Organisation sought to oversee the imposition of Western-friendly (especially U.S.-friendly) economic policies worldwide, ensuring low prices for commodities which the U.S. wanted to buy cheap and high prices for those which the U.S. wanted to sell dear.

However, around the time that a world economic crisis began brewing in 1997-8 (and, perhaps coincidentally, the time of the rise of an international political movement criticising the economic imperialism of the U.S. and its allies) this policy seems to have shifted. The U.S. had previously intervened predominantly in its "backyard", in Nicaragua and Panama, or in the Middle East when its oil supplies, or its Israeli ally, seemed to be threatened. Other than that, since Vietnam the U.S. had restricted its worldwide military imperialism.

But with increasing vigour and frequency after 1996, the United States and Britain bombed targets in Iraq. While this contravened international law, no state questioned their right to do this. Meanwhile, some journalists, such as John Pilger (in *The New Rulers of the World* [2002]), claimed -- citing a UN observer in northern Iraq, Hans von Sponeck) -- that many civilians were being killed, that often targets were not military, but included "villages, a fishermen's wharf, [or] near a World Food Programme warehouse" (Pilger, 2002: 77).

After 1998 this increasing willingness to use force with impunity for political purposes began to apply elsewhere. After the bombing of two U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam on August 7th that year, which killed hundreds of Africans though few Americans, the U.S. launched missile attacks on Afghanistan and the Sudan on August 20th. These attacks did little harm to the alleged bombers, a little-known organisation called al-Qaeda, but destroyed El-Shifa, Sudan's only pharmaceutical factory, which produced 60% of its medication. The U.S. government alleged that the latter was linked to al-Qaeda and manufacturing nerve gas --

allegations which, as Christopher Hitchens noted, were based on false evidence which the U.S. had not checked.

In 1999, the U.S. intervened in the civil war in Kosovo, a province of Yugoslavia. The province's Albanian inhabitants were treated extremely badly by Serbians, and it seemed that a replay of the civil war of the early 1990s threatened. The Kosovo Liberation Army, operating out of anarchic Albania, with some covert support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, committed widespread atrocities against Serbians (though less than what the Serbian military committed against Albanians). About 2 000 people had been killed in the fighting by early 1999.

The Serbian government was summoned by NATO to Rambouillet in France, and presented with firm demands; NATO was to be given a protectorate over Kosovo and massive extraterritorial rights in Serbia. The Serbians finally refused on March 18th, and six days later NATO (mainly the United States and Britain) began to bomb, first the Serbian military in Kosovo, then Serbian military targets in Serbia itself, and eventually civilian targets in Serbia. This was justified on the grounds that the Serbian behaviour was extremely bad. The NATO attacks eventually killed journalists and bombarded diplomatic premises (the Chinese embassy in Belgrade). Whatever the merits of the intervention, this showed the willingness of the West to ignore international law.

As with the attack on Al-Shifa, much of the propaganda for the war proved to be false. The bombing of Kosovo was followed by a massive humanitarian crisis as the Serbian Army drove the Kosovars out of their country; this was precipitated by the bombing, and yet it was claimed that the bombing was caused (somehow in reverse) by the ethnic cleansing. This kind of falsity had often been used to legitimate war, but it was remarkable that a nominally free society accepted this. Perhaps this was partly due to changes in the mass media, increasingly under the control of ever-fewer conglomerates, these often sympathetic to imperialism. This reduced critical investigation of political activities. Journalists were more nervous about alienating their masters, who were concerned with political polemic serving their class interests.

Nevertheless, exposing lies normally sells newspapers and raises television ratings; it was as if journalists had suddenly decided not to look.

The link with Gibson's work is one of power and security, a desire to control the world and be freed from all threats. Gibson's earlier work saw anarchy as potentially productive, but with time, his work began to focus upon a desire for absolute security, and its corollary, the danger of absolute alien threats (such as Virek, and to a lesser extent Swain) who had to be destroyed. This arguably reflects a psychological predicament within the American middle-class; the increasing (perceived) instability of society becomes a danger, and stability is sought at almost any price. Furthermore, the enemy must be easily recognised, as in conspiracy theory. (There is a certain political crossover between right-wing politics and cybernetic fundamentalism; not only was Gingrich a cyberspace enthusiast, but Nicholas Negroponte's brother John was U.S. Ambassador to Honduras during the Contra war in Nicaragua -- later becoming Ambassador to occupied Iraq.)

The elite, having grown so rich and comfortable, are unwilling to give this up and ready to defend their position, like the "robber baron" capitalists of the late nineteenth century. If they are considered the protectors and allies of the middle class, the stage is set for severe political crisis. Obviously, this is not automatic, but it can be seen reflected in certain aspects of cybernetic discourse. Here, for instance, is Jas Morgan, who worked for the "cyberdrool" publication *Mondo 2000*:

"Every time I want a CD, I have to go out and spend fifteen dollars to get one when it would be really nice just to dial up on the computer, or, better, say something to the computer and get the new release and pay a penny for it. And to not have it take up physical space and to not have these people in the CD plant physically turning them out to earn money to eat. I want a culture where everybody's equally *rich*. People will work out of their homes or out of sort of neotribal centers with each other . . ."

(Rushkoff, 1994: 291-2)

Morgan wants his pleasures cheap and convenient, but also wants to believe that he is morally right. The nonsense about everybody being equally rich but nobody having to pay for the production of others displays this pursuit of rectitude in defiance of reality. Seemingly, doing any actual physical work, even the very limited physical labour of a CD plant, is degrading -- (forgetting that someone will always have to work). This displays the self-delusion which grew up around "cyberspace" and used Gibson as its mantra. Rushkoff declares that *Mondo 2000* concerns itself with "politically volatile issues: sex, drugs, revolutionary science, technology, philosophy, and rock and roll" (Rushkoff, 1994: 294), none of which necessarily addresses significant political issues, and some of which are politically irrelevant -- but clearly the participants *want* their private concerns to be politically significant. There may be a willingness to be deceived; Woolley quotes John Perry Barlow, who "described bullshit as 'the grease for the skids upon which we ride into the future'" (Woolley, 1993: 12); acerbically, Woolley suggested that this might actually mean "greasing up to potential customers" (Woolley, 1993: 35).

Morgan also desires (disregarding the "neotribal" pretense that the high-tech life represents a return to traditionalism) to stay home. Of course most work cannot be done from home; even in a CD plant the work entails monitoring and mending machinery. The machinery has to be made somewhere else, and a CD is made of materials which come out of the ground and need processing, all of which requires people -- who would be unemployed if Morgan succeeded. His convenience, however, also promotes security. His dream is that of what Julian Stallabrass (quoting Sobchack) terms "a particularly privileged, selfish, consumer-oriented and technologically dependent libertarianism" (Stallabrass, 1995: 10).

This resembles "cocooning", a notion developed by the market researcher (and former advertising executive) Faith Popcorn in 1986. Susan Faludi complains that this was "defined . . . as women abandoning the office" (Faludi, 1992: 107), but many may

have wanted to stay home; "telecommuting" became a fad of the 1990s. (Some clerical tasks can be done almost as well from the home as from the office, disregarding the value of interaction with other people; the question is why people want to do this, apart from disliking the workplace.) The rise of "gated residential" areas where upper middle-class people could live safe behind guarded walls (crime declined during the 1990s in the United States, although it remained a source of paranoia which fuelled the increase in incarceration during the period) suggests another facet of this trend.

So the domestic political mood seemed ripe for the U.S. to change its approach to the world after the late 1990s, especially after the arrival of George W Bush as President in 2001. The opening months of the Bush Administration were characterised by distrust of foreigners. The U.S. announced its intention to defy the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty (with the former USSR), and that it would not abide by the Kyoto Treaty on the reduction of atmospheric carbon dioxide. The previous administration had quietly undermined both treaties, while pretending to abide by them; the Bush Administration ostentatiously did not pretend. This seemed to reflect a changing attitude towards the world. A core conspiracy theory propagated by the U.S. Right was the threat posed by the United Nations (the Texas Republican Party, from which George W Bush rose, is committed to withdrawing the U.S. from the U.N. and expelling the U.N. headquarters from U.S. soil). This might be seen as meaning that international organisations interfered with U.S. dominance. However, it seemed likely that many in the U.S. felt actually threatened by foreigners.

This was the background to the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001, assumed to have been launched by al-Qaeda, believed to have bases in Afghanistan. The U.S., after going through the motions of calling for the leader of al-Qaeda's surrender, bombarded Afghanistan as it had done Serbia, financing rebels in the country (as they had done with the KLA, but on a larger scale) to overthrow the government. Thousands of Afghans were killed, but al-Qaeda and the Afghani radicals called the Taliban dispersed and could not be found.

Meanwhile in the U.S., extraordinary security measures were enforced, including an act expanding the U.S. government's right to spy on its inhabitants. (This enlarged on a Clinton Administration initiative, the Counter-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.) A secret military prison was established for captives, at the base in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba so that it would be immune to constitutional restrictions.

Since there was little criticism of any of this, U.S. conservatives felt able to implement what they had planned since at least 1998: the conquest of Iraq. Iraq posed no threat to the United States, being under extreme and punishing sanctions because of its alleged possession of chemical and biological weapons (most observers believed that it had little of either). The actual reasons behind the attack seemed to be sabre-rattling and extending U.S. control. Justifications for the attack were almost comical; like the attack on Al-Shifa they were often refuted the day after they were presented; they included evidence-free allegations that Iraq supported al-Qaeda and the attack on the World Trade Centre. United Nations monitors in Iraq, looking for the missing illegal weapons, found none up until the point at which the U.S. invaded.

The argument underlying the attack on Iraq -- that the United States was entitled to attack any country capable of developing weapons capable of threatening the United States -- is sheer paranoia. Doubtless this rationalizes national power-politics; for instance, missile defenses enable the United States to use nuclear weapons against weak nations with a few ballistic missiles, such as North Korea, China and India (although cruise missiles, against which there is virtually no defense, are available to all major nations). However, it suggests a desire for a *national* cocooning. Not only military and economic supremacy is pursued; there cannot be the slightest possibility of danger anywhere.

Where this dream of safety is impossible -- in the natural world, which the U.S. cannot control or dominate -- it is ignored. The Bush Administration rejects the implications of global warming, presumably because -- thus far -- it has not severely affected the West. It has mooted the abandonment of the Montreal Protocol, which banned chlorofluorocarbons to preserve the ozone layer, presumably because the hole

in the ozone layer -- thus far -- only affects the South. If a cocoon of safety is impossible, the next best thing seems to be a cocoon of ignorance.

All this resembles the dream of Gibson's *aleph*. Gibson offered the elect of his narrative eternal bliss in a utopia for them alone, with no workers supporting them and no enemies opposing them. The United States today (and much of the First World follows a similar pattern) pursues a comparable dream. Its empire has no goal at its heart except survival. Its leadership is concerned entirely with U.S. strategy. It does not even strive to improve the world (foreign aid assistance has fallen to record lows, although it pretends to be offering immense help to the world). The U.S. wants to dominate, but also to be left alone, and not to feel guilty about its dominance. It is an impossible situation, because the U.S. is not an *aleph* in the world, and the U.S. upper class is not an *aleph* in the U.S. -- but it aspires to be so.

The contemporary world's exaggerated, almost mystical psychological dependency upon technology, if married to the promotion of active paranoia and a desire for absolute security among the Western globalised ruling class, seems to lead towards a world not unlike the one depicted in the cyberspace trilogy -- with the significant difference that this world contains no benign and omniscient artificial intelligence, nor any perfectly secure digital paradises. The difference is crucial, and will probably eventually be catastrophic. For all Gibson's faults, he portrayed psychologically valid images which were extremely likely to be embodied (in some way) in the development of capitalist technology unless action were taken to prevent this. However, these were critically examined by very few commentators, so that their catastrophic potential was ignored. Instead, most commentators appropriated what they could of Gibson's dreams and ignored or discounted his nightmares.

As it turned out, cyberpunk was indeed important, though not for the reasons claimed for it at the time; it was indeed visionary, though hardly anyone paid attention to the visions that mattered. Gibson cannot be blamed for what his country has done; indeed, he pointed out the dark side of his own work as well as anyone could who wished to make money out of that work! It is, however, a striking commentary on late-

twentieth-century culture that one of its acutest social critics was so thoroughly misunderstood -- until it was much too late to take any action to avoid the materialisation of most of his greatest fears.

### **Bibliography.**

- Aldiss, Brian W. 1975. *Billion Year Spree*. London: Corgi.
- Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*. Vol. CI, no. 9, August 17 1981.
- Asimov, Isaac. 1967. *The Naked Sun*. London: Panther.
- Asimov, Isaac. 1973. "Trends". In: *The Early Asimov, vol. 1*. London: Panther, pp. 68-84.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. "The Automation of the Robot". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 178-81.
- Baynham, Reyner. 1976. *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Bear, G. 1991. *Queen of Angels*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Bellow, Saul. 1978. *Mr Sammler's Planet*. London: Penguin.
- Bellow, Saul. 1988. "Foreword." In: Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 11-18.
- Benn, Tony. 1991. *Conflicts of Interest*. London: Arrow.
- Bethke, Bruce. 1995. *Headcrash*. London: Orbit.
- Blish, James. 1987. *They Shall Have Stars*. In: *Cities In Flight*. London: Arrow Books, pp. 8-129.
- Blumenthal, Sidney. 2003. *The Clinton Wars*. London: Viking.
- Bredehoft, Thomas A. 1995. "The Gibson Continuum: Cyberspace and Gibson's Mervyn Kihn Stories". In: *Science-Fiction Studies*, 22, 2, July 1995, pp. 252-263.
- Brown, Fredric. 1955. "Answer". In: Brown, Fredric. *Angels and Spaceships*. London: Gollancz. pp. 36-7.
- Bukatman, Scott. 1990. *Terminal Identity*. London: Duke University Press.

- Callinicos, Alex. 1989. *Against Postmodernism*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Card, Orson Scott. 1992. *Maps in a Mirror*, vol. 1. London: Arrow.
- Chandler, Raymond. 1984. "The Simple Art of Murder". In: *The Chandler Collection*, vol. 3. London: Pan, pp. 175-192.
- Chandler, Raymond. 1975. *Farewell, My Lovely*. London: Penguin.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1988a. "The Responsibility of Intellectuals". In: Peck, J (ed.) 1988. *The Chomsky Reader*. London: Serpent's Tail, pp. 59-82.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1988b. "Interview". In: Peck, J (ed.) 1988. *The Chomsky Reader*. London: Serpent's Tail, pp. 3-55.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1996. *Class Warfare*. Bristol: Pluto Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1996a. *World Orders Old and New*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Clarke, Arthur C. 1956. *Childhood's End*. London: Pan.
- Collier, Peter and Horowitz, David. 1990. *Destructive Generation*. New York: Summit Books.
- Cooley, John K. 2000. *Unholy Wars; Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*. London: Pluto.
- Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan, Jr. 1994. "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 182-193.
- Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan, Jr. 1995. "Antimancer: Cybernetics and Art in Gibson's Count Zero". *Science-Fiction Studies*, 11, 1, March 1995, 63-86.
- Delaney, Samuel. 1977. *Nova*. London: Sphere.
- Dick, Philip K. 1972. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* London: Panther Science Fiction.
- Dozois, Gardner (ed.). 1992. *Best New SF 6*. London: Robinson Publishing.
- Dozois, Gardner. (ed.). 1997. *The Best New SF 10*. London: Robinson Books.
- Drexler, K Eric. 1990. *Engines of Creation*. London: Fourth Estate.

- Easton, Tom. 1986. "The Reference Library". *Analog*, vol. CVI, no. 11, November 1986, pp. 177-182.
- Fallows, James. 1997. *Breaking the News*. New York: Vintage.
- Faludi, Susan. 1992. *Backlash*. London: Verso.
- Feigenbaum, Edward A., and McCorduck, Pamela. 1984. *The Fifth Generation: Artificial Intelligence and Japan's Computer Challenge to the World*. London: Pan.
- Fekete, John. 1992. 'The Post-Liberal Mind/Body, Postmodern Fiction, and the Case of Cyberpunk SF'. In: *Science-Fiction Studies*, 19 (3), November 1992, pp. 395-403.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. 1970. *The Affluent Society*. London: Pelican.
- Gibson, William. 1988. "New Rose Hotel". In: Gibson, William. *Burning Chrome*. London: Grafton.
- Gibson, William. 1988. "Fragments of a Hologram Rose". In: Gibson, William. *Burning Chrome*. London: Grafton Books, pp. 51-58.
- Gibson, William. 1988. *Burning Chrome*. London: Grafton Books.
- Gibson, William. 1989. *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. London: Grafton.
- Gibson, William. 1990. *Neuromancer*. London: Grafton Books.
- Gibson, William. 1990a. *Count Zero*. London: Grafton.
- Gibson, William. 1992. 'Skinner's Room'. In: Dozois, Gardner (ed). *Best New SF* 6. London: Robinson, pp. 90-97.
- Gibson, W. 1993. *Virtual Light*. London: Viking.
- Gibson, W. 1997. *Idoru*. London: Penguin.
- Gibson, W. 1999. *All Tomorrow's Parties*. London: Viking.
- Gibson, W. 2003. *Pattern Recognition*. London: Viking.
- Gordon, Joan. 1994. "Yin and Yang Duke it Out". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 196-202.

- Gould, Stephen J. 1990. "Integrity and Mr. Rifkin". In: Gould, Stephen J. *An Urchin in the Storm*. London: Penguin, pp. 229-239.
- Haldeman, Joe. 1999. *The Forever War*. London: Orion Books.
- Halliday, Fred. 1993. *The Making of the Second Cold War*. London: Verso.
- Haraway, Donna. 1990. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s". In: Nicholson, Linda J. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. London: Routledge. pp. 190-233.
- Heinlein, Robert. 1966. "If This Goes On --". In: *Revolt in 2100*. London: Pan, pp.7-172.
- Herbert, Frank. 1984. *Dune*. London: New English Library.
- Herman, Edward, and McChesney, Robert. 1997. *The Global Media*. London: Cassell.
- Herman, Edward S., and Chomsky, Noam. 1988. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Hitchens, Christopher. 1999. *No One Left To Lie To*. London: Verso.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1995. *Age of Extremes*. London: Abacus.
- Hollinger, Veronica. 1994. "Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 203-218.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1983. "On Raymond Chandler". In: Most, Glenn W; Stowe, William W. *The Poetics of Murder*. London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1988. *The Ideologies of Theory Essays 1971-1986. Volume 1. Situations of Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1989. *The Ideologies of Theory Essays 1971-1986. Volume 2. Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1989. "Periodizing the 60s". In: Jameson, Fredric. *The Ideologies of Theory. Vol.2. Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. .
- Jameson, Fredric. 1994. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Jameson, Fredric. 1994a. *The Seeds of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1996. *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Kadrey, Richard and McCaffery, Larry. 1994. "Cyberpunk 101". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 17-29).
- Klein, Naomi. 2000. *No Logo*. London: Flamingo.
- Kroker, Arthur, and Cook, David. 1994. "Television and the Triumph of Culture". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 229-238.
- Kuo, J. David. 2002. *dot.bomb*. London: Time Warner.
- Kuttner, Henry. 1967. "Camouflage". In: Kuttner, Henry. *Ahead Of Time*. London: Four Square, pp. 50-84.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Mouffe, Chantal. 1996. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso.
- Lasch, Christopher. 1973. *The Agony of the American Left*. London: Pelican.
- Liotard, Jean-François. 1994. "The Postmodern". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 259-262.
- Mackay, Charles. (Undated, copyright 1932.) *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. Yugoslavia: L C Page & Co.
- Malmsten, Ernst, Portanger, Erik and Drazin, Charles. 2002. *boo hoo*. London: Arrow.
- Mandel, Ernest. 1987. *Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- McCaffery, Larry 1994. "Introduction: The Desert of the Real". In: McCaffery, Larry (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1-16.
- McCaffery, Larry. 1994a. "An Interview with William Gibson". In: McCaffery, Larry. *Storming the Reality Studio*. London: Duke University Press, pp. 263-285.
- Miller, Mark Crispin. 2001. *The Bush Dyslexicon*. London: Bantam.
- Moorcock, Michael. 1971. *The Final Programme*. London: Mayflower.

- Negroponte, Nicholas. 1996. *Being Digital*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Peck, J (ed.) 1988. *The Chomsky Reader*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- Penrose, Roger. 1990. *The Emperor's New Mind*. London: Vintage.
- Peters, Nancy J. (ed.) 1992. *War After War*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Pilger, John. 2002. *The New Rulers of the World*. London: Verso.
- Porush, David. 1994. "Frothing the Synaptic Bath". In: McCaffery, Larry. *Storming the Reality Studio*. London: Duke University Press, pp. 331-3.
- Pournelle, Jerry, and Stirling, S.M. 1991. "The Asteroid Queen". In: Niven, Larry (ed.) *Man-Kzin Wars III*. New York: Baen Books.
- Pynchon, Thomas. 1964. *V*. New York: Bantam.
- Pynchon, Thomas. 1974. *The Crying of Lot 49*. London: Penguin.
- Pynchon, Thomas. 1984. *Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: Bantam.
- Rheingold, Howard. 1991. *Virtual Reality*. London: Mandarin.
- Rucker, Rudy. 1986. *The Fourth Dimension and How to Get There*. London: Penguin.
- Rucker, Rudy. 1987. *Software*. New York: Avon Books.
- Rucker, Rudy. 1989. *Wetware*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Rushdie, Salman. "A General Election". In: Rushdie, Salman. 1992. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Penguin.
- Rushkoff, Douglas. 1994. *Cyberia*. London: HarperCollins.
- Said, Edward W. 1991. "Travelling Theory". In: Said, Edward W. *The World, The Text and The Critic*. London: Vintage, pp. 226-247.
- Said, Edward W. 1995. "The Intellectuals and the War". In: Said, Edward W. *The Politics of Dispossession*. London: Vintage, pp. 304-319.
- Schlossstein, Steven. 1985. *Kensei*. London: Arrow.
- Shepard, Lucius. 1998. *Life During Wartime*. London: Orion Books.
- Slouka, Mark. 1997. *War of the Worlds*. London: Abacus.
- Sokal, Alan., and Bricmont, Jean. 1998. *Intellectual Impostures*. London: Profile Books.

- Stallabrass, Julian. 1995. "Empowering Technology: The Exploration of Cyberspace". *New Left Review*, 211, May-June 1995, pp. 3-32.
- Stapledon, Olaf. 1973. *Star Maker*. London: Penguin.
- Stephenson, Neal. 1992. *Snow Crash*. London: Penguin.
- Stephenson, Neal. 1995. *The Diamond Age*. London: Viking.
- Sterling, Bruce (ed.). 1988. *Mirrorshades*. New York: Ace Books.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1988a. "Preface". In: Gibson, William. *Burning Chrome*. London: Grafton Books, pp. 9-13.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1988b. "Preface". In: Sterling, Bruce (ed.) *Mirrorshades*. New York: Ace Books, pp. ix-xvi.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1989. *Islands in the Net*. New York: Ace.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1992. *The Artificial Kid*. London: Penguin.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1995. *Heavy Weather*. London: Phoenix.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1996. *Schismatrix Plus*. New York: Ace.
- Sterling, Bruce. 1997. *Holy Fire*. London: Phoenix.
- Stiglitz, Joseph. 2003. *The Roaring Nineties*. London: Allen Lane.
- Stoll, Clifford. 1991. *The Cuckoo's Egg*. London: Pan.
- Stoll, Clifford. 1996. *Silicon Snake Oil*. London: Pan.
- Suleiman, Susan. 1997. 'The Politics of Postmodernism after the Wall'. In: *International Postmodernism; theory and literary practice*, eds. Bertens, H., Fokkema, D., Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 51-64.
- Suin, Darko. 1994. 'On Gibson and Cyberpunk SF'. In: McCaffery, Larry (ed). *Storming the Reality Studio*. London: Duke University Press, 349-365.
- Thompson, Damien. 1999. *The End of Time*. London: Vintage.
- Thompson, E P. 1972. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Pelican.
- Thompson, Hunter S. 1980. *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador.
- Thompson, Hunter S. 1995. *Better Than Sex*. London: Doubleday.
- Toffler, Alvin. 1981. *The Third Wave*. London: Pan.

- Wells, Herbert George. 1938. *The War of the Worlds*. Kingswood: Windmill Press.
- Wolfe, Tom. 1983. *From Bauhaus to Our House*. London: Abacus.
- Wolfe, Tom. 1990. *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. London: Picador.
- Woolley, Benjamin. 1993. *Virtual Worlds*. London: Penguin.