Fusion and Friction: Concoction of Humanity and Technology in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*

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Abstract

Humanity and technology are intermingled with each other in the postmodern advanced world of digital humanities. After the industrial revolution, humankind used technology for the sake of all kinds of work in their daily life. In the beginning, technology was used to invent television, cell phones, computers, etc. but artificial intelligence's invention changed humankind's view of technology. This change has made a narrow gap between humanity and technology in 20th-century literature. So, the technology used for utilitarian objects, innovations, and inventions for humankind has changed from utilitarian to artificial intelligence and some other subjects. This defines a strong connection between humanity and technology in literature. In his science fiction *Neuromancer* (1984), William Gibson gives a graphic description of modern technology and its impact on humanity. Through the depiction of the protagonist, Here, the novelist depicts a concoction between humanity and technology through the journey of the protagonist, Case. This paper examines how technology allows humans to create artificial intelligence, how machine takes human's place, and how machine makes humans more resemble them.

Key words: Humanity, Technology, Utilitarian, Cyberspace, Science Fiction, Artificial Intelligence.

From the very commencement of the industrial revolution, humankind stared to used technology to invent machines for the betterment of the society and to take advantages in their daily life as it reduces their labour and gives them comfort. In the latter half of the 20th century men are deeply relying on machines and started to create some path breaking inventions; such as: television, VCR, computer, cell phones, etc. for the access dependence on technology, humankind started to lose their humanity. The most acclaimed science fiction writer William Gibson in his cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer (1984)* shows a strong connection between humanity and technology. The opening sentence of the novel is a well-known symbolic representation of technological influence on human race:

"The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel." (Gibson 1)

The novel, *Neuromancer (1984)* sets in the dystopian world of Chiba city, Japan in the near future where technology has made a great impact on human life. The protagonist, Case, a former talented computer hacker who was caught stealing from his employer. His employer punished him by giving mycotoxin which damaged his central nervous system and leaving him incapable to access the global computer network system in cyberspace generally known as the "matrix". Being

unemployable, suicidal and drug addicted, Case looking for medicine to become a normal human being and he is also the target of the drug lord, Wage. He is saved by

Molly Millions a "street samurai" who works for a US ex-military officer named Armitage. Armitage offers Case to cure his central nervous system from the mycotoxin in exchange for his service of hacking the global computer network. Case accepts this offers happily as he eagerly wants his hacking capacity back. Hence, we can see here how human mind is relying on invention of technology to get back the lost memory and on the other hand how technology is depending on human mind through its hacking ability and controlling power over technology.

Case as a "console cowboy" gets a chance to regain his life once again as hacker but he and Molly are totally unaware what Armitage is really planning for future. Case's nervous system is repaired from mycotoxin by using technology offered by Armitage. But as an assurance Armitage puts a small sacs of poison in Case's blood vessels and promises him that if he completes his work timely, he will remove it. Case also receives new organs which render him give up his drug addiction permanently. Thus, here we see the dependence of Case to get back his lost ability of hacking on technology. The novelist tries to intermingle the world of machines with the world of humankind.

Case's journey was started with Molly when Armitage assigns them for their first work to steal a ROM module which contains the saved consciousness of one of Case's mentors, a legendary cyber- cowboy McCoy Pauley known as "Dixie Flatline". During the work, they both grow close and plan to look into Armitage's past life. They sent out to steal the ROM and to recover Pauley's hacking expertise as Armitage needs it in the headquarters of media conglomerate Sense/ Net. A street gang named "Panther Moderns" was hires to create a false terrorist attack in the Net and they manage to steal the ROM module. The novelist shows here that how humankind is desperately reliable on technology for each and every task in this postmodern era.

The investigation of Armitage's past comes into light that he is actually Colonel Willis Corto, a member of "Operation Screaming Fist" which plans to ransack Soviet computer system. Wounded and mutilated, he was solely survived from the attack. He was then tricked by a military government official into giving a false statement on what transpired. Realizing the troublesome situation, Corto cracked under the weight of the trauma and betrayal, killed US officer and disappeared to reappear later as Armitage. When following the trail of the investigation into Armitage, Molly and Case find Wintermute, an Artificial Intelligence7 which is one half of a super-AI. Forbidden by Turing law, the superAI had to be built as two separate

AIs. Wintermute was programmed with a need to merge with his other half named

Neuromancer. Incapable of reaching his goal on his own, Wintermute enlists the help of Armitage to recruit a team to complete the merger. Case is instructed to break through the software barriers put in place to keep the AIs apart while another member of the team is to obtain the password which allows the merger of the two AIs. Case is arrested by the police, but Wintermute saved him from them.

The cyberspace novel, *Neuromancer (1984)* is fully based on the concoction of humanity and technology in the world of science. Neuromancer seems to benefit from a process

Gibson refers to as 'cultural mongrelization' (McCaffery and Gibson 220). This process is a product of postmodern ideology, which has created a generation 'whose tastes are wildly eclectic' (McCaffery and Gibson 220). The promotion of skepticism and deconstruction of rigid ideas that had been embedded in society for a long-time inspired people to look beyond the archaic notion of

an objective reality and define their own concept of reality. This paradigm shift is responsible for the 'wildly eclectic' (McCaffery and Gibson 220) tastes in cultural and pursuits. To incorporate this way of thinking into his writing, Gibson says that "the trick is to keep your eyes and ears open enough to let all this in, but also somehow to intuitively recognize what you should let emerge in your work, how effective something might be in a specific context." (McCaffery and Gibson 220).

The connection between humanity and technology is perfectly presented through the character of Armitage. It is then explained that Wintermute convinced Corto that he was Armitage while he was in hospital to use Corto to help with the merger. Wintermute kills Corto while a team member sabotages the mission by capturing Molly. Case goes to free Molly, but he also captured by Neuromancer. Neuromancer, who traps him in cyberspace with a copy of his murdered Chiba City girlfriend Linda Lee. Case escapes, confronts the traitor and obtains the password to merge the AIs. Wintermute and Neuromancer merge into a super consciousness and Molly and Case get rewarded for their efforts. Case also gets the poison removed from his bloodstream and feel free after long time. Molly leaves Case and Case finds a new girlfriend. He gets his organs replaced and starts using drugs again. He continues hacking and is contacted by the merged AI which tells him that it is finally whole and is now searching for similar AIs. While logged into the Matrix, Case sees the images of Neuromancer, Linda
Lee and himself. It is suggested that Neuromancer, having copied Case's personality during the time that he trapped him, did this to allow them to live together forever in the Matrix.so, here Neuromancer is the main representative of the amalgamation between human and machine.

The concept of humanity and technology is presented in this novel in a very complex manner. According to Siivonen in his article "Cyborgs and Generic Oxymorons: The Body and Technology in William Gibson's Cyberspace", the introduction of the cyborg, short for cybernetic organism, blurs the normally clear line between the human body and the machine
(227). This blending of identities and change in perception of identity itself can be attributed to a trend referred to as "breaking away from anthropocentric idealism" (Pordzik 148). In Neuromancer, mankind is no longer regarded as autonomous, but has instead built up a strong relation with technology. An example of this is Case comparing his inability to enter cyberspace to the biblical fall in human world. His exclusion from paradise, leaving him imprisoned and helpless in his own flesh: "For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh." (Gibson 3)

The novel also emphasizes on the human personalities and their ability or knowledge to control over technology. The way they look, their jobs, their personalities they exhibit. In many cases it turns out that characters have a hidden identity. An example of this is the character Armitage, who turns out to be a personality engineered by the AI Wintermute to overwrite his original personality, the broken Colonel Corto. With the aim of enlisting assistance in the search for the AI Neuromancer, Wintermute finds Colonel Corto in the hospital recovering from his mission of which he was the sole survivor. Wintermute then proceeds to convince Corto that Corto is actually Armitage.

But at the end of the novel does Corto come back from behind the facade of being Armitage. Corto's reprogramming to the personality of Armitage by an AI suggests that the concept of identity is fluid and changeable in this novel. Another reason the concept of identity has now become more fluid is the fact that mind and body are becoming separated entities in Gibson's world of cyberspace. When jacking into the Matrix, the mind wanders there and leaves the body. This is shown when Case and Molly find the module containing the construct of Dixie Flatline, one of

Case's old mentors whose personality was uploaded in the Matrix just before his death. When they return from finding the construct, Case seems set on the opinion that it is just a "hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, kneejerk responses" (Gibson 46), which is indeed what it looks like on the outside.

The postmodern concept of a relative reality is translated into the concept cyberspace in the novel. Cyberspace is described in Neuromancer as: "a con sensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts … A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system." (Gibson 31) When Case meets the construct, it reasons with him and even tells him a joke, displaying at least part of an identity. At the same time, the laughter following the joke "came through as something else, not laughter, but a stab of cold down Case's spine" (Gibson 62). The construct tells him he knows he is dead. He is also unable to feel anything anymore, requesting Case to "erase this goddam thing" (Gibson 62) after his work is done.

The end of Flatline's existence depicts a conflict between machine and humanity. This duality latent in the novel from the very beginning to the end. A factor which complicates the matter of identity further is the existence of the AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer. These two parts of a super-AI reflect two different identities, Wintermute programmed to be rational and Neuromancer programmed as a personality. Both AIs interact with Case on an intellectual level. Neuromancer even tries to entice Case into staying in cyberspace to prevent his merger with Wintermute.

The novel, *Neuromancer* is purely blended with humanity and technology in the namesake novel *Neuromancer (1984)*. Both Wintermute and Neuromancer are autonomous in their actions. Does that, combined with a complex intellectual system, make an identity? This is one of the questions posed by the novel, yet no definitive answer is given. The one thing that is made abundantly clear in this novel is that the image projected by people or machines is something we should look beyond. It is also clear that technology is ascribed many of the psychological traits used to define an identity in this novel, allowing it to become more than just an instrument of humankind:

"Modem technology is no longer an entity discrete from the user, but rather an environment in mutual interaction with human beings." (Siivonen 228)

In Neuromancer, the interaction between humankind and machine is no longer solely driven by human input, but also by the will or programming of the technology they are working with. Whereas in the past the relationship between humankind and machine was instrumental in nature in the sense that humankind exploited technology, this has changed with the coming of new technology. Cybernetic implants allow humans to make the gap between human and machine extremely narrow, if not non-existent, blurring the concept of identity:

To indicate how he himself handles postmodern influences, Gibson tells McCaffery: "…I don't have a sense of writing being divided up into different compartments, and I don't separate literature from the other arts. Fiction, television, music, film all provide material in the form of images and phrases and codes that creep into my writing in ways both deliberate and unconscious." (220)

With the coming of technology able to mirror or even surpass human intelligence, the interaction between technology and humans is more equal in Neuromancer. Specifically, the way in which Case treats the AI Neuromancer shows this changed relationship. When Case asks for its name, the AI implies that Case should really know the code by which it is known since that's part of

his job. To which Case replies: "A Turing code's not your name." (Gibson 143) Defining the AI no longer by its code, but by a personality and a name, the interaction seems more like one between equals. No longer just utilitarian in nature, technology has evolved to the point where one might even consider the roles reversed.

Wintermute was programmed to feel a need to unite with Neuromancer but has no instructions on how to reach this goal. This makes the decisions made by Wintermute autonomous in nature. Wintermute also seems able to make decisions based on the nature of situations, as he tells Case: "I try to plan in your sense of the word, but that isn't my basic mode, really. I improvise. It's my greatest talent. I prefer situations to plans, you see..." (70-71). Later on, Wintermute proves this by ambushing a Turing police unit who have Case under arrest by hacking robots near their location and commanding them to kill the police unit. The lateral thinking that is required to envision such an idea is typical of how human beings would solve that situation.

In the novel *Neuromancer (1984),* Wintermute utilizes lateral thinking as well as the ability to manipulate people and other machines into doing its bidding, the same instrumental relationship between mankind and machine is created as existed before, only now mankind is an extension of the will of the machine. Since the power the AIs can exert in the physical realm is still limited, the AIs still need humans. This is shown as Wintermute needs people to physically link the separate computer networks on which the AIs are housed so the merger can take place. Both of these characters clearly define the concoction between humanity and technology.

Humankind is difficult to influence without leverage, therefore both Wintermute and Neuromancer make use of psychological tools to entice people into doing their bidding. They both offer Case something he wants to persuade him to join their cause. There is even a distinction between the offers. Wintermute promises to rid him of the toxin that has been ruining his life, whereas Neuromancer offers to store his consciousness in virtual reality so that he can live happily ever after with Linda Lee. These interactions prove that the relationship between humanity and technology in Neuromancer is not only practical and physical, but also psychological and emotional in nature. They both clearly justified Gibson's point of view about humanity and technology:

"Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality. Marie-France must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the thing to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer." (Gibson 210)

The changes in the manner in which identity and interaction function in the relationship between humankind and machine in this novel also have repercussions on the nature of dependence in the relationship between humanity and technology. No longer purely physical, the psychological aspect of the interactions between humankind and technology adds several nuances to the aspect of dependence. Firstly, addiction has become more commonplace in society.

The novel features the use of 'regular' drugs as a common occurrence and there are a number of passages describing the effects of a drug trip in vivid detail, including the comedown the day after. More interesting for the relationship between humankind and technology is Case's addiction to cyberspace. He seems to suffer from severe symptoms of withdrawal as he describes his nights a year after he last jacked in: "he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bed slab, temper foam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there." (Gibson 2). Indicative of a deep

psychological reliance on technology, this quote sets the tone for the general psychological reliance on technology as it has evolved in that future.

A sign of a connection more psychological than physical, cyberspace is the ultimate drug for Case. Not just turning people into mindless machines like soma did, it changes the concept of identity and creates a dependence on being one with technology. The description Case gives of his job as a console cowboy at the beginning of the novel shows how intoxicating his experience must have been:

"Case was twenty-four. At twenty-two, he'd been a cowboy a rustler, one of the best in the

Sprawl. He'd been trained by the best, by McCoy Pauley and Bobby Quine, legends in the biz. He'd operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the con sensual hallucination that was the matrix. A thief he'd worked for other, wealthier thieves, employers who provided the exotic software required to penetrate the bright walls of corporate systems, opening windows into rich fields of data." (Gibson 2)

Case, the protagonist of the novel always finds himself in the bay of conflict between the world of humanity and the world of technology. He had a custom cyberspace deck created to fit his personal hacking needs. This cyberspace deck represents a modern day equivalent of custom made master tools. The description of projecting his disembodied consciousness into cyberspace and making use of exotic software to enter rich fields of data makes his profession sound more like a fantastical dream which induces an almost permanent adrenaline high, making it easy to understand why Case is addicted to cyberspace. Secondly, the fading of the borders between the identities of humankind and machines has affected the mindset of society in a way that the human body is now derisively referred to as 'meat', while cybernetic implants are seen as positive enhancements, as regarded by Case as he looks upon Chiba City:

"Groups of sailors up from the port, tense solitary tourists hunting pleasures no guidebook listed, Sprawl heavies showing off grafts and implants, and a dozen distinct species of hustler, all swarming the street in an intricate dance of desire and commerce." (Gibson 6)

The sample of technology used by the novelist, Gibson raising someone out of regular life. A cyberspace deck is a physical console which hackers use to plug -or jack- into cyberspace and instilling them with a sense of elevated self-reinforces the idea that the nature of the relationship between humankind and technology has become more psychological. A change in the manner of dependence has also occurred on the side of technology. Now sentient and autonomous, technology has become less dependent on humankind to give input to work with. This strengthens the position of technology when asserting its newfound identity. So, in this novel technology and humanity are interdependent on each other.

With the development of technology, the human world is changing gradually and create some greatest invention. At that point where technology is utilitarian as well as an autonomous and conscious, technology relies more on itself to function than on others. That's the only reasons behind the invention of new things by using modern day science and technology. The newfound ability of technology to exert influence in both the physical and the psychological world combined with being regarded as an improvement on the human condition has tipped the balance of dependence in favor of technology. Humankind has become dependent of technology to function properly and at same time technology is also depended on humankind. So, there is a intermingled relation between human race and technology.

In *Neuromancer (1984)*, the concoction of humanity and technology is less tangible and more psychological in manner. The utilitarian part of technology still exists in the form of cybernetic enhancements, but that is only because the body is perceived as weak. The fact that two AIs are manipulating people as well as other technology to reach their goals reinforces the idea that the relationship between humankind and technology is no longer purely mechanical in nature. The complexity of the AIs' interactions with mankind is proof that the psychological aspect of the relationship between humanity and technology has become the dominant form of interaction in the novel. The AI Neuromancer asks main character Case if he wants to stay in cyberspace with a copy of his old girlfriend Linda, so that they can be happy there. This interaction is only possible because Neuromancer possesses the psychological understanding and reasoning necessary to consider making this offer.

Technology is no longer solely a utility; it can now think on its own and react to human input. This leads to an increasing complexity in interactions between humankind and machine.
Since humankind is no longer always in control of what the outcome from given input will be, a power shift in favor of technology is evident in the interactions between humans and machines. This power shift shows a decreasing dependence of technology on humankind, while at the same time humankind is becoming more reliant on the advantages that advanced technology has to offer.

The discussion of changes in the relationship between humankind and technology in these novels shows that technology started off as a purely mechanical influence on the lives of men in *Neuromancer (1984)*. Through development of advanced technology in the novel, the influence has shifted from physical to the psychological realm of humankind, causing people to attribute human traits and emotions to technology and interact with technological inventions on an intellectual level. The above-mentioned concoction of humanity and technology shows that effects of machines on human life and vice versa. Human world is totally depended on the of science and technology and the novelist, William Gibson presents it beautifully in the novel. the concoction of humanity and technology is aptly justified by the novelist through the characterization of: Wintermute, Neuromancer, Case and Armitage.

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