Exploring Technoculture in William Gibson's Neuromancer A research based on a master's thesis by the student

Yaman Moayad Abdullah   **Assist Prof Dr. Salih Abdullah Abdulrahman**

Directorate of Education in Nineveh   **College of Arts- university of Mosul**

 Summary:

   This research paper explores the concept of technoculture in William Gibson's first novel in his Sprawl Trilogy: Neuromancer. Through an investigation of the aspects and implications of technoculture offered in this work, this paper aims to explore the reflections of technocultural trends and concerns, as well as the novel's significance and relevance to contemporary society. It shows numerous noteworthy findings. Gibson's portrayal of technoculture anticipates and mirrors many technological trends that have been mere fantasies and later became reality. The paper also manifests Gibson's foresight especially his coining of the term 'cyberspace,' which later became what is known as the global network (the internet) as a new means of communication during the 1980s, followed by the popularisation of many new terms such as hacking, cybercriminals, cybersecurity, neural implants, cybernetic enhancements, virtual communities and artificial intelligence; which spread more widely recently.

   The value and the importance of this paper lies in its representation of technoculture and relevance to society and contemporary era. By presenting a critical perspective through which to study the human connection with technology and by shedding light on the social, cultural, ethical and environmental consequences of technoculture in a fast-paced developing world, the novel; Neuromancer urges the reader to think about the complexities of the technology with awareness, responsibility and critical mindset.

Introduction:

This research paper presents an investigation for the concept of technoculture in relation to the well-known American-Canadian author William Gibson. It is based on Gibson's first novel in his Sprawl Trilogy: Neuromancer. This paper begins by setting its significance, providing an overview for the concept of technoculture with its components and definitions, the philosophy of technoculture, the role of the novel in shaping technoculture, then it will delve into extracting the tecnhocultural aspects in the novel and linking them to our contemporary era.

The Concept of Technoculture: The Definition

Technoculture forms the different ways in which technology and culture impact and change one another. It acknowledges technology not as a neutral entity; but as a result of cultural values, beliefs and ambitions. Simultaneously, technology changes cultural behaviours, conventions and identities. Technoculture, a term that arose in the late 20th century, refers to the intersection of technology and culture, underlining the enormous influence technological innovations have on society, its values, habits, and the way people interact with one another. It recognises technology not only as a tool but as a force that affects and impacts different elements of human life. Debra Benita Shaw, in her book: Technoculture: The key concepts, defines Technoculture as:

An enquiry into the relationship between and culture and the expression of that relationship in patterns of social life, economic structures, politics, art, literature and popular culture. It is also a quintessentially post-modern study in that it is a reflexive analysis from within, as it were, the belly of a beast that has grown to monstrous proportions (Shaw, 2020, p.4).

Within the context of the Gibson's Trilogy; technoculture serves not only as a reference to contemporary technology but also intersects with the sociocultural milieu encompassing human behaviour, relationships and social institutions that

shape and influence individuals within society. It encompasses the accepted norms, cultural traditions, and individual dynamics that reflect the ways in which people think, act and engage with one another. Eko Wijayanto (2023), in his book Technoculture as a Culture Revolution in Network Society, notices the influence of technical advancements impacts socio-cultural life. The social environment is commonly related with the geographical environment. As the changes and digital networks evolve and expand, the culture that sustains the environment will eventually change (p.228).

The Philosophy of Technoculture

In the realm of cultural studies, the outstanding impact of technology laid its effects on culture and society. It consequently has given rise to a field of investigation known later as technoculture. The term 'technoculture' does not have a single specific origin or a single individual who coined it. Instead, it has evolved over time and has been used in various contexts to describe the intersection of technology and culture. The term has been used in many academic programs, modern fiction, media and cultural discourse to explore the impact of technology on society and human experience. The term was popularised by the hands of Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, in their book that carries the same title Technoculture. The book is a collection of essays and articles exploring the intersection of technology, communication and culture. The book delves into various topics such as graphic novels, computer culture, cyberpunk and feminist priorities, offering insights into the impact of technology on society and culture (Penley and Ross, 1991).

Inside the Matrix: A Technocultural Analysis of Neuromancer

William Gibson's novel, Neuromancer, published in 1984, stands as a pioneering piece of literature. It not only captivated readers but also influenced the path of technology and culture. Often considered the founding text of cyberpunk. Neuromancer delves deep into the realms of technology, humanity, and the

convergence of the two. In this paper, there will be an exploration of technoculture within the Gibson's Neuromancer and its lasting impact on culture and our world.

Neuromancer thrusts readers into a dystopian future where mega-corporations wield immense power, artificial intelligence is rampant, and cyberspace is a tangible reality. The novel set in an urban landscape stretching from Boston to Atlanta called The Sprawl or [BAMA]. The novel follows the story of Case, a washed-up computer hacker, as he navigates a web of plots, corruption and technological inventions. Through its vivid imagery and dark and dystopian narrative, Neuromancer portrays a world where the boundaries between human beings and machine blur.

Neuromancer:

This paper makes effort to analyse the technocultural aspects in Gibson's Neuromancer using the cultural study approach. However, it is important to refer to the great influence and reception of the novel that not only did affect the readers and other authors at the time of publishing it. The novel's portrayal of a dark future, virtual worlds and the interconnection of technology with human existence enthralled readers and critics alike. However, like any notable work, Neuromancer also garnered varied reactions, getting both praise and criticism. The following investigation sheds light on the positive and negative elements of its influence.

Neuromancer was welcomed with enormous praise, soon establishing itself as a groundbreaking work of science fiction. Critics and fans hailed Gibson's imaginative picture of a technologically advanced future and his development of the genre known as cyberpunk. The novel garnered several awards, including Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick Awards which marked its great success. Paweł Stachura (2018) concludes in reference to Gibson's Neuromancer and other works as he said that like many surveys of criticism, the current discussion makes no claim to be thorough, but a few plausible conclusions are drawn. Firstly, it is probably symbolic that the majority of critical responses to Gibson's literature, favourable or bad, pertain to

Neuromancer, with an occasional allusion to Pattern Recognition. Gibson's early work, as it is still readable for Science-fiction genre readers, can be examined in terms of its agreement between the real life and Science-fiction, like the effect of technology, the technologically augmented bodies, the possibilities of nanotechnology or aspects of life with artificial intelligence (p.346).

Aspects of Technoculture in Neuromancer

The novel presents a depiction of technoculture, highlighting several key aspects such as: cyberspace, artificial intelligence, hacking and cybercrime, body modification and augmentation, virtuality and simulation, surveillance and privacy, posthumanism, the black market, disenfranchisement and social inequality, the demise of nations, global corporations, information overload, virtual interactions and identities, media saturation and transcendence and finally existential themes.

In Neuromancer, cyberspace is a major aspect and a key part of the technoculture described in the novel. Cyberspace refers to a virtual reality realm or 'The Matrix' that exists within computer networks, accessible to persons through a direct neural interface connected through a cable to the back side of the neck of the characters. Cyberspace in Gibson's Neuromancer brings new forms of identity. The self may be called into question, decentered, broken apart and become unknown where characters lost their true identity and immersed themselves in the realm of cyberspace. Brian McHale, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Veronica Hollinger, Scott Bukatman and John Christie, to mention a few critics, have all contended that in some fashion Gibson's cyberspace represents identity as postmodern (Fair, 2005, p.92).

Another Technocultural aspect in Neuromancer is 'Artificial intelligence (AI)'. It plays a crucial influence in defining the technoculture of the novel. AI refers to the development of computer systems that are capable of doing activities that traditionally require human intellect, such as problem-solving, learning and

decision-making activities. Dani Cavallaro comments on the effect of some technocultural elements beside (AI), that are part of cyberpunk genre and their essential presence to recognise what is real and what is artificial and the interaction between human beings and technology:

Question is undoubtedly central to cyberpunk and crops up repeatedly as so-called real humans interact with Artificial Intelligences, androids, cyborgs, computer-simulated bodies, mutants and replicants and are required to establish what exactly distinguishes the natural from the artificial. Much of the time, this distinction is very hard to draw (Cavallaro, 2000, p.13).

Another important aspect of technoculture is hacking and cybercrime. They are common and repeated components described in the novel. Hacking refers to the unlawful access, modification, or exploitation of computer systems and networks, whereas cybercrime comprises a larger spectrum of illegal behaviours undertaken through digital methods. McFarlane, Schmeink and Murphy (2020), state a key cyberpunk theme that exists in some works of the New Wave era: "the emergence of an information economy, with all its complex impact on the social order, in particular the spread of cybercrime and forms of info-warfare" (p.8). The protagonist of the novel, Case, is a hacker who possesses the capacity to travel and manipulate cyberspace. Hacking is presented as a highly on demand skill in the universe of Neuromancer, with individuals and organisations using hackers for different goals, including espionage, data theft, and corporate sabotage.

Another aspect of technoculture in Neuromancer is bodily modification and augmentation. They refer to the process of augmenting and modifying the human body via the integration or the merger of cybernetic implants and technology. Roger Burrows emphasises the issue of merging technology with humanity and the ways and the locations where being performed in Gibson's Neuromancer:

All of which emphasise the merging of technology and humanity——as an indicator of such a tendency. It is in Japan that Gibson locates his Chiba City with its much quoted 'sky above the port...the color of television tuned to a dead channel' (Gibson 1984:9) where this merging is at its most developed with a myriad of clinics at 'the cutting edge' of body modification through technological augmentation, neurosurgery, nanotechnology and the like (Burrows, 2018, p.244).

Another aspect in Neuromancer is virtual reality (VR) and simulation. They refer to the construction of virtual settings and experiences that imitate or sometimes transcend the physical world. Virtual reality (VR) allows humans to immerse themselves in digital domains. Characters use specialised tools and devices. Dani Cavallaro clarifies the use of VR in Cyberculture:

In its fictional interpretation by cyberpunk, lends urgency to these issues against the backdrop of pervasive forms of electronic mediation, such as virtual reality. 'Virtual reality', a phrase coined by the computer scientist, composer and visual artist Jaron Lanier in the late 1980s, refers to an environment in which reality is simulated through computers and in which the body can experience artificially generated data as though they were coming from the real world. People immersed in a virtual environment can actually experience the realistic feeling of inhabiting that world (Cavallaro, 2000, p.27).

Another important aspect of Technoculture found in Neuromancer is surveillance and privacy. Surveillance refers to the monitoring, tracking and collecting of information on persons. Privacy belongs to the right to regulate and safeguard personal information and actions. In the universe of Neuromancer, monitoring is pervasive and ubiquitous. Powerful institutions, including companies and governments, use modern technology to monitor and track individuals' behaviour, both in the real world and in cyberspace. This state of surveillance is accomplished using a network of cameras, sensors and data gathering systems or

tools like viruses and malwares. The novel describes a dystopian world where privacy is greatly violated. Individuals have minimal control over their personal information and are continuously under inspection. This lack of privacy has major consequences for the characters, as their activities and identities are continually observed and influenced. Carl Gutiérrez-Jones affirms this point as he says:

In the near future as depicted by Neuromancer, exponential growth in technology has propelled the creation of many AIs, all of which are under constant surveillance by a Turing Police force charged with destroying instantly any machine intelligence attempting to operate outside of statemandated limits (Gutiérrez-Jones, 2014, p.72).

Transhumanism and Posthumanism are other key aspects of technoculture that investigates the blurring of boundaries between people and machines. They investigate the possibility for the creation of new forms of existence and identities beyond humanity and its limitations. Timo Siivonen defines cyborgs which are transhuman creatures that integrated machines and technology into human body and says:

Humans use various technical prostheses to improve their physical or mental capacity or simply to look "better," more elegant in an ever more commodified world. Cybernetic organisms are formed also through the blending of religion [...] and technology (Siivonen, 1996, p.228).

In Neuromancer, there is another technocultural aspect which is the black market. It refers to an underground economy where unlawful and illegitimate products, services, and information are bought, sold and traded beyond the confines of legal rules and monitoring. The black market in Neuromancer thrives in the novel's dystopian scenario, when societal institutions and established mechanisms of control have collapsed. It acts as a place for several unlawful operations, including the selling of contraband technology, stolen data, unauthorised software and

cybernetic upgrades. This kind of market foreshadows what is known these days as the 'Deep Web' in which hackers or criminals sell and buy illegal or stolen merchandise like drugs, weapons and hacked information and cannot be accessed by the regular web surfing methods away from the eyes of the government and almost impossible to be tracked using what is famously known as 'Bitcoin' crypto currency. Jihun Yoo comments of Neuromancer's black market:

Gibson's famous description of the Night City landscape effectively portrays a late-capitalist society. First of all, Gibson's postmodern cities like Chiba illustrate a late-capitalist society and its late-capitalistic symptom in which multinational corporations incubate and affect black market technology, inauthentic medicine, and cheap artificial organs that permeate the entire socio-economic strata of Neuromancer (Yoo, 2019, p.67).

Another aspect of technoculture in Neuromancer is disenfranchisement and socioeconomic injustice. They allude to the marginalisation and exclusion of particular persons or groups from social resources, opportunities and power systems, resulting in a stark difference between the wealthy and the disadvantaged. Disenfranchisement in Neuromancer stems from several sources, including economic inequities, restricted access to technology and social marginalisation. The novel presents a world where money and power are concentrated in the hands of a few businesses and the elite, while the mass of the population fights to exist in poverty and misery. Social disparity is prominent in the novel's setting, with people and groups thriving at opposing extremes of the social spectrum. The wealthy few enjoy the benefits of new technology, access to great healthcare and live a pleasant lifestyle, while the disenfranchised majority confront restricted possibilities, lack of basic requirements and most are in a continual battle to improve their situation. Nobuo Kamioka comments on this issue in Gibson's Neuromancer:

In the first place, it is becoming doubtful that people with lower incomes can acquire the newest hacking techniques and the newest machines, capable of defeating powerful organizations [...] the diffusion of personal computers in schools in lower-income areas is much lower than that in wealthy areas, and it may cause even more social inequality and alienation. If that is true, it will be more and more difficult for someone like Case, who has neither been to college nor belonged to any organizations, to acquire the newest techniques and machines (Kamioka, 1998, p.63).

Another aspect found in Neuromancer is the demise of the nation-state against the rise of mega-corporations. It is a concept that echoes technoculture. It analyses the loss of conventional nations and the political rule or governance and results in a creation of new power structures and identities in a world impacted by modern technology and global connections. In the novel, the authority and influence of conventional nation-states have reduced dramatically. Instead, transnational businesses and other non-state players dominate the political and economic scene. These entities have great wealth and influence, frequently surpassing that of nations themselves. The collapse of a nation's authority is illustrated via the failure to successfully administer and control their territory and inhabitants. Claire Sponsler uses Gibson as an example to describe the inevitable control of powerful organisation over global economy and the way he imagines the corporations as will devour territories and spread violence and surpasses the authority of the nation-state:

Gibson is notable for taking seriously recent developments in technology, culture, and socioeconomic organization, attempting in his stories to convey what he sees as their inevitable consequences. The future his novels imagine is one in which multinational corporations control global economies, urban blight has devoured the

countryside, crime and violence are inescapable events of urban life, and technology has shaped new modes of consciousness and behavior (Sponsler, 1992, p.626).

Hyperreality and Information overload are other recurrent technocultural aspects in the novel. They refer to the vast amount of information and data that persons are exposed to and the difficulty connected with digesting, filtering and making sense of this massive amount of information that can lead people to a state of confusion and perplexity. In the novel, modern technology and the interconnection of cyberspace have resulted in a continual barrage of information from many sources. Individuals are overwhelmed with data from virtual domains, networks and mass media, making it difficult to discern relevant and important information from irrelevant content. This state of information overload is also present in our contemporary era where people are continuously bombarded with false news from social media and television to an extent that people reach a state of confusion and hyperreality and tend to believe lies or false news toward what they are exposed to.

Neuromancer by William Gibson is an excellent representation of simulation and simulacra where Case the main character lives a life of simulated experiences that it is only at the end of the novel he understands that even his existence is also stimulated for another real Case outside of this matrix. The whole story is happening in a hyperreal world, with hyperreal characters, objects and lifestyle; however, the characters are unable to realize reality from hyper-reality (Ahagh et al., 2018, p.6-7).

Virtual interactions and Identities are other important technocultural aspects described in the novel. It analyses the nature of human connections and the ways in which sophisticated technology, notably virtual reality and cyberspace, have affected the dynamics of life. Virtual interactions in the novel allude to ties developed and maintained largely through digital platforms, virtual environments, and cyberspace. Characters in the novel engage in interactions that are mediated by technology, frequently without physical presence like using cyberspace. One feature

of virtual interactions in Neuromancer is the capacity to create and use virtual identities or aliases within cyberspace. These aliases serve as representations of people and enable them to engage with others in virtual settings and stay unknown. This helps them to establish connections and relationships that transcend physical restrictions and geographical borders. This kind of interaction is present in our contemporary era and is used by millions of internet users on daily bases. Daniel Punday argues this behaviour as an inherent factor in the contemporary online culture:

Traditionally individuals have interacted with each other using face-to-face verbal and physical cues limited by their own physical and material conditions, cyberspace's conditions of interaction are much more constructed. Individuals can leave their physical characteristics undefined in some types of online communication or can create virtual identities for themselves in others. Many critics have seen this fluidity of identity as an inherent part of the value and power of this new communal space (Punday, 2000, p.194).

Technological and Social Critique in Neuromancer

Gibson's Neuromancer offers a unique criticism of technology and its permanent effects and consequences on society. It shows both the possible advantages and the darker repercussions of the unchecked development of technology. Renegar and Dionisopoulos question the status quo of society by connecting the future to the present, offering a kind of social criticism in Gibson's novel:

By rooting the future in the present, Neuromancer calls the practices of the status quo into question. Although the book is over 20 years old, the self-reflective social criticism it can generate is arguably still important today when many of his futuristic visions have become reality (Renegar and Dionisopoulos, 2011, p.324).

There are several social repercussions for the use of technology presented in Neuromancer. The novel presents a dystopian future where technology has evolved

to the point that it can enhance and influence human experiences. This continual absorption and use in technology leads to a sense of dehumanisation and alienation. Paul Virilio uses a metaphor of a motor to refer to the concept of dehumanisation and alienation of human beings: "[n]ow we are going to treat the human being as if he were a motor, a machine to accelerate constantly" (Virilio qtd. in Cooper, 2003, p.126).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, William Gibson's Neuromancer is an outstanding work of science fiction that captivated readers and heavily influenced the course of technology and culture. The paper sums up that the novel explores technoculture through various aspects and means like cyberspace (the internet), artificial intelligence, hacking and cybercrime, virtual reality and many others. The novel affected and made a lasting impact on technology, life and society. The novel challenges the readers to rethink and contemplate their unique relationship with technology and the world. It leaves an unforgettable mark on the field of literature, film, music, arts and popular culture.

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استكشاف الثقافة التكنولوجية في رواية نيورومانسر لويليام جيبسون

(بحث مستل من رسالة ماجستير)

الباحث: يمان مؤيد عبدالله النعيمي
أ.م.د. صالح عبدالله عبدالرحمن

مديرية تربية نينوى
كلية الآداب - جامعة الموصل

yaman.22arp100@student.uomosul.edu.iq

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة التكنولوجيا، الرواية ، نيورومانسر

الملخص:

تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية مفهوم الثقافة التكنولوجية في أول رواية لويليام جيبسون في سلسلة الانتشار، وهي رواية 'نيورومانسر'. من خلال التحقيق العميق في جوانب وآثار الثقافة التكنولوجية المقدمة في هذا العمل، يستكشف هذا البحث تجسيد الانعكاسات والمخاوف التكنولوجية كمحتوى دارج وسريع الانتشار، بالإضافة إلى أهمية وصلة الرواية بالمجتمع المعاصر. يظهر البحث العديد من النتائج الملفتة للنظر. أولاً، يتوقع جيبسون في تصويره للثقافة التكنولوجية العديد من الاتجاهات التكنولوجية التي كانت مجرد أوهام في وقت لاحق أصبحت حقائق. يظهر البحث برؤيته المستقبلية، خاصةً تسميته لمصطلح "الفضاء السيبراني" الذي أصبح فيما بعد ما يعرف بالشبكة العالمية (الإنترنت) كوسيلة جديدة للاتصال خلال الثمانينات، تلاه انتشار العديد من المصطلحات الجديدة مثل القرصنة والمجرمون السيبرانيون والأمن السيبراني والمزروعات العصبية والتحسينات السيبرانية والمجتمعات الافتراضية والذكاء الاصطناعي؛ التي انتشرت بشكل أوسع مؤخرًا.

تكمن قيمة وأهمية هذه الورقة البحثية في تمثيل الرواية للثقافة التكنولوجية وصلتها بالوقت المعاصر. من خلال تقديم منظور نقدي يمكن دراسة العلاقة البشرية بالتكنولوجيا، ومن خلال إلقاء الضوء على العواقب الاجتماعية والثقافية والأخلاقية والبيئية للتكنولوجيا في عالم سريع التطور، تحث رواية "نيورومانسر" القارئ على التفكير في تعقيدات التكنولوجيا بوعي ومسؤولية وعقلية نقدية.