Hysterical Sublime in *Neuromancer*

Aliaa Jaafer Sadik
aliaajaafer86@gmail.com
Fatima Raheem Hussein, PhD
fatimaraheem@coart.uobaghdad.edu.iq
University of Baghdad/ College of Arts

ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating Frederic Jameson's theory of the hysterical sublime implied within William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984), the Postmodern genre which is taking part in changing the world by the idea of transcending into futuristic horizons where artificial intelligence (AI) is as important as the human, albeit by far smarter. Humans are awed by technology, allowing it to take their role in the world. The paper also explores how the hysterical sublime here is enhanced by Jean Baudrillard's theory of Simulacra and Simulation which suggests four stages for a clone to replace the origin. Here humanity is opening the gate wide for AI to substitute it, motivated by transcendence which technology offers and man's over-reliance on it until the independence of human existence is jeopardised. These arguments are intensified by examining the effect of the hysterical sublime on shaking the anthropocentrism tendency and enforcing technocentrism. The study offers various cultural and philosophical interpretations for the elements of the novel wherever the hysterical sublime lurks.

Keywords: hysterical sublime, Postmodernism, science fiction, AI, cyberpunk, cyberspace, simulacra and simulation, anthropocentrism, technocentrism

السمو الهستيري في رواية نيورومانسر

علياء جعفر صادق

م.د. فاطمة رحيم حسين

جامعة بغداد/ كلية الآداب

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى سبر غور نظرية السمو الهستيري لفريدريك جيمسون في رواية ويليام جيبسون نيورومانسر (١٩٨٤) المندرجة ضمن صنف الأدب السيبراني، إذ يسهم هذا اللون الأدبي ما بعد الحداثوي في تغيير العالم عن طريق فكرة السمو نحو آفاق مستقبلية لا يقل الذكاء الاصطناعي فيها أهمية عن البشر بل يكاد يفوقه اهمية. و ما زال الانسان منبهراً بالتكنولوجيا مطلقاً العنان لها متخذاً إياها بديلةً له. و تستكشف الورقة البحثية هذه كيف تعزز نظرية المحاكاة لجان بودريار من السمو الهستيري في الرواية؛ إذ تقترح هذه النظرية اربعة مراحل يمر بها المستنسَخ ليحل محل الأصل. هنا، تفتح البشرية الباب مشرعاً أمام الذكاء الاصطناعي ليحل محلها بدءاً من التفوق الذي توفره التكنولوجيا وفرط اتكال الإنسان عليها حتى اندثار كيانه البشري المستقل. تزداد شدة هذه المباحث عبر تقصي تأثير السمو الهستيري في زعزعة الاتجاه القائم على مركزية الإنسان وتعزيز نظيره القائم على مركزية التكنولوجيا. تقدم الدراسة تفسيرات حضارية وفلسفية متنوعة حيثما يكمن السمو الهستيري ضمن عناصر الرواية.

<u>الكلمات المفتاحية</u>: السمو الهستيري، ما بعد الحداثة، الخيال العلمي، الذكاء الاصطناعي، الأدب السيبراني (الإلكتروني)، الفضاء الإلكتروني، نظرية المحاكاة، مركزية الإنسان، مركزية التكنولوجيا.

Since the Prometheus myth and earlier, the ‘fire of knowledge’ has been approached cautiously. Curiosity might bring man’s downfall in case knowledge were the pandora box[1] that hides all evils; though it also has hope which will be ever chased to undo the venture taken. In all cases, man’s endeavour to bring such perilous a bliss might bring curse as well, he can be a prometheus who pays hard for his good intentions:

Prometheus: Such are the inventions

[1] A Greek myth relates the story of Pandora, Prometheus’s sister-in-law who opens a sealed jar that her husband had put under her keep. She did that out of curiosity, but different sorts of evils sprang out of the cursed jar (later turned into a box with retelling). Startled, Pandora immediately closes the jar, imprisoning back one last element—hope. Eventually, she opens the jar again to release hope in another hope of ending the human suffering (Ibrahim, Jones 4).

I devised for mankind,

Yet have myself no cunning wherewith

To rid me of my present suffering. (Aeschylus pp. 469ff)

Yet, knowledge (along with technology as the focal point in this argument) is not pure evil, it is the evil-benevolence double-edge weapon. Technology brings hope in the jar as well, but if used properly with huge consideration to nature and moral values. For example, the 'techne' of natural medicine is one of the most valuable 'arts' Prometheus is credited for, as it is a "genuine art" and not a "pseudo-art" (Anderson 33). At the same time, medicine is also employed for anti-nature purposes, like transgendering, human/animal cloning, and so forth. Hence, this debate about science was first aroused by mythology (the earliest face of literature), and is re-tackled by science fiction.

Like many things that witnessed revolutionary recreations ushered by Postmodernism, the avant-garde movement had spawned a new variation of science fiction known as 'cyberpunk', which is a revolutionary movement characterised by the depiction of definitive high-tech products like computers and cybernetic surgical implants; it is set in rather realistic near-future instead of planetary, other-worldly fantasy or far-future fiction, and it treats the existing challenges of the world like poverty, mafias and drugs (Nixon 220). The earlier science fiction (of the 1950s and 1960) focused on space to explore the future. It was the favourite myth in literature during this period. It searched for unusual alienation outside Earth to arouse for transcendence (Porush 539). Afterwards, science fiction shifted the focus "from spatial dimensions to temporal ones", this "transition from space to time" (Zakarneh 245) resulted in the rise of cyberpunk with its unlimited dimensions of cyberspace. Instead of "outer" space of previous literature, the "cyber" space offers the transcendental experience that man can live on his own chair, without going as far as space. David Porush describes

cyberspace as “a soaring through metaspace”[2], where myths are forged “not in outer space but in Kantian inner space” (Porush 539). Therefore, although cyberpunk has not started very long ago (since the 1960s), it is taken more seriously by scientists, especially that many of its visions have come true in our days, such as the World Wide Web, the immersive reality of cyberspace (best known as virtual reality), the integration of technology in every aspect of daily life, and so on. The once-inconceivable technologies produced by such literature have been everyday-use equipment most of contemporary humans own (Renegar, Dionisopoulos 324). However, cyberpunk is the ideal incarnation of Fredric Jameson’s hysterical sublime as much as literature is concerned. It offers the sort of technology that postmodern hysterics yearn for; yet they are inclined to read cyberpunk novels slowly, and reread technology depictions whenever necessary in order to conceive the author’s exciting inventions the coming years or decades might bring forth.

Cyberspace and cyberpunk complete each other. Jack Womack, an American science fiction writer, credits William Gibson in his “Afterword” at the end of Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* (1984) for sparking the hype of cyberpunk by his creation ‘cyberspace’, though he did not coin the term or culture. The Matrix, the name of cyberspace of *Neuromancer,* is a vision that soon came true via web, thanks to some of his readers who “set about searching for any way the gold of imagination might be transmuted into silicon reality” (Gibson 268-69)[3]. *Neuromancer* is one of the earliest archetypes of cyberpunk literature. It tracks the paths Henry Case, the hacker protagonist, passes through in a quest for

[2] Meta means ‘beyond’.

[3] Womack exhibits Gibson's role in spreading cyberpunk by his novels which keeps inspiring more amateur and experienced authors into this field. Womack believes that Gibson has somehow inspected the future of technology and projected that in his works.

different levels of the sublime, earnestly chased by different characters, most of which can be categorised under Jameson's account of hysterical sublime. He lives a miserable, forlorn life after being punished for theft by damaging his nervous system with a mycotoxin, preventing him from accessing the Matrix, the place he cherishes for *a life* and a living. He is stalked by a cyborg girl, Molly Millions or "razorgirl" who recruits him for the benefit of her boss Armitage in a classified hacking mission in return of curing his condition which has cost him a lot of pain, efforts, and money in vain. He reluctantly approves, but Armitage plants his spine with toxic sacs during the operation, in case he thinks of treachery. It turns out that Armitage himself is used and manipulated by another boss, an AI entity identified as Wintermute; it employs the team to steal a ROM that contains the consciousness of Case's dead mentor, Dixie Flatline, also known as McCoy Pauley. Peter Revierra, a thief, drug addict, and hologram illusionist, joins the team in Istanbul, they set out on a more perilous mission. They are ordered to retrieve a code that Wintermute needs to get unlocked to unite with its twin AI known as Neuromancer in order to construct a "superintelligence", a sublime version of AI. Both AIs are created by the Tassier-Ashpool family. The targeted password is protected by the family's grand-daughter Lady 3Jane in their space station known as Freeside. Case and Molly find out that Armitage is the pseudonym given by Wintermute to Colonel Corto, the only survivor of a failed mission against the Soviets who had been severely injured, burned, disabled, and blinded. Wintermute cured him and gave him the new identity of Armitage to use him as a tool, as Armitage had done with Case by curing him for a purpose. However, Wintermute's charm proves weak and the persona of the Colonel floats again during the climax of the mission, endangering its success. Riviera betrays the team for 3Jane and tries to kill Molly, but Lady Tassier stops him out of sympathy. She eventually gives them the password that

releases Wintermute. In the Matrix, Case speaks to Neuromancer (which impersonates itself as a boy in the Matrix) and Wintermute after union. Neuromancer tries to lure him to stay in the simulation world of the Matrix by showing him a virtual reality clone of his murdered ex-girlfriend Linda Lee. However, Case suspects her of being unreal and rejects the offer. The twin (united into one superintelligence) contacts Case after his return to his home city, Chiba, to inform him of receiving signals from other AIs coming from the far space. The ending is open for interpretation, while Case is stranding the city, he eye-sees the Matrix inhabitants that have passed earlier, Linda and Riviera, and hears what sounds like Flatline's laughter, in addition to the Neuromancer-boy. Most strangely, he sees a clone of him intimately holding Linda's shoulder, as if he was in the Matrix without knowing it. He never meets Molly again, suggesting that they exist in different realms now. It is not clarified whether he is killed in the course of events and this is a copy of his consciousness or not. The cyberspace, that was once Case's hysterical sublime, arouses anxiety in the final scene of being locked forever inside such a sort of existence.

Neuromancer treats the hysterical sublime from a very sensitive angle, that is the area of conflict between anthropocentrism versus technocentrism, and man's endeavour to transcend his abilities to semi-god perfection through technology that he supposedly possesses, but is actually possessed by it.

Perfection is the relative incentive that drives people in various directions according to their orientations, spiritual or material. The human is conscious of his imperfection, and the constant urge of transcendence stems from the sense of shortage, regardless of the Kantian sublime which supposes that man's limitedness is compensated by the bliss of reason. Anthropocentrism endows man with his godlike significance according to the fanatics of this belief, but his natural

capabilities cannot endow him the godlike perfection. All he has got is the power of mind which is of so much aid in the quest of transcendence; one of the most powerful creations (and instruments) of this mind is science and technology which the human invests to support his anthropocentrism. However, technology is transpassing its position from the object into the objective (technocentrism). It started as a servant of man, but is becoming man's master that controls most of his affairs.

Man's egocentric fancy of his perfection[4] is shattered at the gap between the godlike and the godmade and the rational impossibility of equality between them. Such a note is thrown by one of its characters, Riviera, to the protagonist, Henry Case, as a well-known maxim in the near-future culture of the novel: "'If God made anything better, he kept it for himself. You know the expression, Case?' 'Yeah,' Case said. 'I heard that about lots of different things'" (Gibson 105). From a postmodern analytical point of view, the sublime resides in that gap between the Creator and his creation; it is the subject's aporic puzzlement of how to imagine, conceive, and approach the Divine, not to mention acquiring His powers. That incomprehensible mystic aura around God makes Him one of the most ancient paradigms of the sublime that man felt, even before Longinus had put it into theory. That applies to any cult no matter what deity it has; even if none, the word 'god' is used by all to indicate superiority, whether believers or unbelievers. Therefore, subjects (man and AI machines) try to be 'gods' themselves to reach the sublime, it is better to attribute the word "the unattainable" to this aporiatic perspective of the sublime rather than the Longinian or Burkean sublimes; it is beyond reach.

[4] As mentioned earlier, Man is 'aware' that he is imperfect, but his ego disillusions him with the 'fancy' of being perfect.

Cyberpunk often depicts technology as if infected by man's feverish desire for godlike powers in order to maintain its technocentric status. But, before jumping directly to godlikeness, technology must pass first through man-likeness (as if ascending up the chain of being). Literature introduced what came to be known as "artificial intelligence" (AI), an imitation of Man's own source of anthropocentrism. Case sarcastically asks the highly-developed AI entity (Wintermute and Neuromancer united together and masked as a yellow-teeth *man* with pores on his nose): "'So what's the score? How are things different? You running the world now? You God?'" (Gibson 259). Wintermute and Neuromancer are the twin cyber supremes that control people's destiny in the novel due to their extreme power, which emerges from their being super intelligent. Yet, they sometimes opt for human-model impersonification for the sake of better impact and communication. That's why Neuromancer impersonates itself to Case as a young boy.

Creating a replica of the human intelligence by man reflects his realisation of the significance of mind in constructing the modern world and the future; so he uses his own intelligence as the means, exemplar, and objective. Out of his anthropocentrism and authenticity, he attributes the mimesis as 'artificial'. However, he keeps improving his creation in literature and applying that in reality through science until the replica is overcoming the origin in intelligence and is competing with him in centrism. The 'real' is drowning more and more in the hyperreal flood of technology in a way that copes with Jean Baudrillard's theory of the orders of simulacra in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. He defines simulacra as "the dominant schema in the current code-governed phase", while simulation is "the dominant schema in the current code-governed phase that is epitomised in the simulacra, which is produced from a model without an original reality" (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange* 50). He proposes that at the first order, the real is so profound and

magnificent “sacramental” that it makes an ideal exemplar to be followed by a simulacrum (Baudrillard 6); that is how the theory of the sublime started considering human intelligence as the core of man’s centrism by Kant, and a model for robotics experts to imitate. AI (the simulacrum here) is a faithful “reflection of a profound reality” (6)—that is human intelligence. In Baudrillard’s second order, simulacrum “masks and denatures a profound reality” and it represents “order of maleficence" (6); hence AI is entitled as “artificial” and it continuously arouses fears of the future with its freaking applications and inventions. In the third order, Baudrillard suggests that simulacrum “masks the *absence* of a profound reality”; the result is pure simulation that no longer refers to any origin. Here, AI compensates for the absence of human intelligence. Why should one think long to solve a mathematical equation while he can solve it in a second by a calculator! Why should one consume so much time and effort in handwriting on paper while he can just type documents on the computer or just ‘dictate’ to the machine what to type through sound-input accessibility choices available in high tech! That is the way many Postmodern people think. Postmodern world is rather swinging here in this stage, between the second and third orders of simulacra. The last and most dangerous order of Baudrillard’s theory is the stage when simulacrum “has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum”, or “hyperreal” (6). Here, the human-intelligence example dies out; it is forgotten forever and AI is the reference, it refers to itself. In Baudrillard’s words, it is “never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference” (6). In the future world of *Neuromancer*, the Matrix is taken for reality which is truer to its inhabitants than their ‘real’ world. The first line of the novel resembles the sky of the city which is distorted by neon lights and holograms to a technological appliance as well “television”: “The sky above the port was

the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (Gibson 3). Hence, technology separates itself from nature and resembles nothing except technology itself. The once-referent nature cannot compensate for the absence of technology, while the latter can "By day, the bars down Ninsei were shuttered and featureless, the neon dead, the holograms inert, waiting, under the poisoned silver sky" (7). That applies to Baudrillard's claim of *"The desert of the real itself* [originally Baudrillard's italics]" (Baudrillard 1). Moreover, Wintermute and Neuromancer are not admired as examples or proof of human intelligence, but as independent entities—Baurillard's fourth order that he identifies as pure simulacrum. That implies the dethronisation of man by his own creation. His role ended the moment technology became the simulacrum. Hence, as man displaced god earlier and tried to empower himself by technology to be a god-simulacra, now he himself is displaced and is simulated by the simulacrum his own hands made.

In one way or another, technology is having an independent personality, releasing itself from its creator's control; hence, its intelligence is becoming less 'artificial' and closer to human-likeness than human-belonging—a counterpart and not an instrument. While man's ignorance of the dynamics and consequences of this emerging personality arouses his excitement out of Jameson's perspective of hysterical sublime, sometimes it is better to arouse anxiety instead. A law paper entitled "The Criminal Liability of Artificial Intelligence Entities - from Science Fiction to Legal Social Control" explains the difference AI has done in machines:

As long as humanity used computers as mere tools, there was no real difference between computers and screwdrivers, cars, or telephones. When computers became sophisticated, we used to say that computers "think" for us. The problem began when computers evolved from "thinking" machines (machines that were programmed to perform defined

thought processes/computing) into thinking machines (without quotation marks), or Artificial Intelligence (AI). (Hallevy 172)

Supported by legal evidence and examples of crimes "intentionally" implemented by robots in real life, the study has even suggested that current AI is legally competent for criminal liability (201). One of the earliest works that qualifies AI for criminal liability is Isaac Asimov's 1950 novel *I, Robot* (172-173). Asimov is famous for his Three Laws for robotics first introduced in his 1942 short story "Runaround" according to which robots are programmed; these laws secure human safety and centrism against AI, as well as ensuring the obedience of robots to human authority. Asimov's Three Laws have anchored an essential ethic in the robotics industry and have since been technically a topic of study (Robotic age).[5] Gibson agrees with Asimov's principles about keeping an eye on technology; in *Neuromancer*, Lady 3Jane supervises the hardwiring of the Ashpools' AI systems in order to keep them under control within the allowed limits set by humans. In addition to criminal liability, *I, Robot* depicts another human-like futuristic aspect in robots—that is psychology. Its protagonist is a Ph.D. "Robopsychologist", working in the newly systemised branch of science "robopsychology" (Asimov X), an idea that is inclusively thrilling in the fifties when most people were not acquainted with robots, not to mention 'robopsychology'. In the same context, Neuromancer and Wintermute have human-like 'emotions', they acquired the human greed for power, revenge, and malice. To satisfy these emotions, they act as the puppeteers which orchestrate and manipulate the dark crime world of

[5] For example, a BBC report mentions that South Korea had released The Robot Ethics Charter in 2007, designed by a five-member expert committee, one of which was a science fiction writer in addition to futurists. The charter is partly derived from Asimov's Laws, as revealed by a representative of the South Korean ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Energy. In the same context, the report reveals that "a UK government study predicted that in the next 50 years robots could demand the same rights as human beings"; such a suggestion equals science fiction in its weirdness yet possibility of happening.

Neuromancer. Ironically, they are so human-mimed that Wintermute *senses* [if possible] the hysterical sublime towards uniting with Neuromancer. All it wants is to be united together for the unmatchable powers their union will bring forth. However, the human residues inherited by AI isolate it from the origin by giving it power of independence and rivalry instead of subordination, a simulacrum where the copy has matured enough to substitute the origin or just be a perceived origin by itself. After Wintermute finally achieves its goal and unites with Neuromancer, it boasts to Case about its new surveillance that was not expected even by Marie-France (3Jane's mother), the woman who designed it out of a hysterical sublime-incentive:

"I'm not Wintermute now."... "I'm the matrix, Case." ... "I'm the sum total of the works, the whole show."

"That what 3Jane's mother wanted?"

"No. She couldn't imagine what I'd be like." The yellow smile widened. (Gibson 259).

It is obvious how the machine disavows its belonging to its creator, a simulacrum that is 'pleased' to be the aporia that "couldn't [be] imagine[d]" even by its designer and to ascend above what human minds can perceive, hence retaining its status of hysterical sublime. This union suggests the beginning of a new generation in cybernetics (Topal 21), a new era that humans curiously try to anticipate about its capacities, and the entity Wintermute-Neuromancer tries to awaken this curiosity in Case. Before Wintermute announces itself as the supreme "the whole show", he plays a prophet over the superstitious Rastafarian[6] founders of Zion who are yearning for a hope. It manipulates them by

[6] Rastafarianism is a monotheistic Jewish-Christian cult that bases its belief on the Old Testament and the Book of Revelations. The movement was established by Africans (particularly Jamaican) who spread around the Caribbean Sea, they wear their hair as dreadlocks. They believe that the Jews were black, and Babylon was their exile while Africa is their Zion (The Promised Land) where they yearn to return (Jackson 27). Gibson borrows this cult for his novel, depicting Earth as their exile or their Babylon which they forsake for the space station 'Zion'.

using their own belief through "voices" transmitted on a lost frequency telling them about the near arrival of Armitage's team (which was sent by it, with the founders ignorance of that) and the importance of Molly, whom it nicknames as "Steppin' Razor", in their salvation. The frequency to which Wintermute orients them aids the group in entering Villa Straylight space station (where the Rom is), a thing they naïvely obey, in spite of their suspicions rendered by the founder "If these are Final Days, we must expect false prophets…" (Gibson 108). Although the novel carries the name of the other AI, Neuromancer, Wintermute is the novel's "conceptual focus" and it acts as "the ghost in the machine" that plays with the personalities and decisions of many main characters (DiTommaso 45). Therefore, technology becomes smarter and more dangerous than it is supposed to be to the degree that it 'fools' man through his own sublime, blurring the line between religious and hysterical sublime.

Ironically, man then tries to be a simulacrum of technology. The roles are reversed here, and technical operations are 'robotising' man, starting from simple health-improving synthetics such as contact lenses or tooth implants to serious surgical-technical procedures like artificial cardiac pacemaker. *Neuromancer* takes these implants to another level of reversed simulacra, only few of them spring from life-extension purposes like the 135-years old Julius Deane who prolongs his life via technology and serums: "His primary hedge against aging[7] [sic] was a yearly pilgrimage to Tokyo, where genetic surgeons reset the code of his DNA" (Gibson 12). Others like Molly use technology to turn into a human-cyborg, a pain she is happily ready for in order to ascend to what looks hysterically sublime for her. Her implanted mirror eyeglasses "were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to

[7] Originally misspelt.

grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones" (25). Her computerised sight endows her perfect assassin skills; as for her cybernetically modified hand, "the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails. She smiled. The blades slowly withdrew" (26). Man's dream of godly superpowers appears more attainable through cybernetics than miracles. Man is becoming more pragmatic; more synthetic. He has adapted to the new robotic age, humans are no more pure biological beings, but posthumans whose bodies are a mixture of flesh, bones, and consciousness, in addition to metals and silicon. The novel redefines "organic" and "artificial" embodiment, as both have integrated into one unit that does not fully belong to man or machine; even his natural mind functionality has adjusted to accommodate the needs of computational neurotechnology (Topal 22). In spite of the alarms such notions in the novel had aroused, it encouraged scientists to experiment such mutations, as if that was part of the unnatural-natural evolution.

Cyberpunk often visions the era when AI is no more an imitation or an equivalent to human intelligence, but rather a kind of techno-deity that enjoys superpowers and is capable of dominating man's whole world. It predicts a futuristic age of cyber-idolisation, when man worships technology and fails to 'exist' or find meaning for his life outside cyberspace. When Case cannot resist the temptation of stealing from his employers, they choose not to kill him for vengeance. They even allow him to keep the money, with a smile. Yet, the revenge is his worst nightmare—depriving him from the cyberspace of the novel "The Matrix" by poisoning him with a mycotoxin that destroys the ability of his nervous system to access the Matrix: "For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall… The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (Gibson 6). The capitalised

"Fall" implies Adam's fall from Heaven, and that is the simulated situation of Case, the deprived pagan who thrives in a hysterical quest for redemption to return to his sublime.

The Matrix described in *Neuromancer* represents the pure simulacrum of man's whole corporeal existence, not just of his intelligence or the deities he used to worship ages ago. The novel depicts a panoramic vision of nowadays' internet-based world structure by which individuals are immersed in an addiction that resembles hysteric hallucination … a hysterical sublime:

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts… A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights (51)

The Matrix, along with its real-life shadow—the internet, makes a good example of Baudrillard's precession of simulacra accelerated by the means of hysterical sublime. Hence, man has created a simulacral equivalent, then deity, existence, and paradise. He is like Case, torn between his real identity and his cyber simulacra that he worships. *Neuromancer* secularises the religious concepts; real life is described as a prison of flesh (or meat), and the human spirit is turned into digitised consciousness, a toy for the AIs. The Matrix represents the spiritual realm Case wants to ascend into by taking octagons (drugs) that help him hallucinate about it when he couldn't access it. His return to the Matrix is his 'paradise regained', where flesh no more matters (DiTommaso 43-44):

This was it. This is what he was, who he was, his being. He forgot to eat… Sometimes he resented having to leave the deck to use the chemical toilet they'd set up in a corner of the loft… Its rainbow pixel

maze was the first thing he saw when he woke. He'd go straight to the deck, not bothering to dress… He lost track of days. (Gibson 58)

This addiction to technology and hysterical attitude towards sublimity of cybernetics put anthropocentrism on stake. For example, Case appears to be the protagonist, but he is thriving to reserve his status as compared to Neuromancer and Wintermute. Even the way he uses his gift of intelligence relies on their cyber realm that controls his mind and destiny.

Yet, man cannot totally isolate himself in the ivory tower of the cyber sublime forever. Case, who is addicted to the hysterical sublime, faces his human natural instinct which puts survival atop everything else. He experiences the Burkean sublime in terms of the terror of approaching death; which is the strongest of all passions as Burke suggests in the section "Of the Passions Which Belong to SELF-PRESERVATION[8]" (Burke 57-58), but for Case, it's by men chasing him not nature:

his heart hammering. When the fear came, it was like some half-forgotten friend. Not the cold, rapid mechanism of the dex-paranoia, but simple animal fear. He'd lived for so long on a constant edge of anxiety that he'd almost forgotten what real fear was. (Gibson 18)

The youth who is drifted by technology obsession suddenly comes in touch with "animal" "real" fear instead of the hysterical frenzy he used to encounter in the Matrix, a comparison employed by Gibson to show how the protagonist has been immersed in fake emotions until he almost forgot the real ones.

The novel denotes another dimension of man-technology relationship that stems out of awe by technology and cybernetics; it is incarnated in the process and purpose of creating Wintermute and Neuromancer. Lady 3Jane Tassier-Ashpool, the heir and CEO of a powerful family

[8] Originally in uppercase letters.

corporation, speaks about her family's project; her mother had created the twin AIs: "She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AIs, our corporate decisions made for us... Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity" (220). Mme. Tassier-Ashpool aims to preserve the family kingdom represented by its mega corporation in addition to its heritage of renown through symbiosis with AI, the Ashpools create and maintain technology and technology prolongs their lives, manage their affairs, retain their health, etc. It is their means for sublime strength in life and immortality afterlife. Hence, uploading their consciousness and memory into cyberspace is an attempt at escaping human mortal nature into a more lasting horizon, in addition to reaching a reunion[9] between AI and the human mind that has created it within one entity, one "hive" that encompasses humans and machines altogether. Even the title of the novel implies that union, as "neuro" refers to the human neuro system, while "romancer" refers to the idea of conjuring. The conjuring here is not implemented by the old-fashioned way of a necromancer who calls spirits forth, but in a Postmodern way by a neuromancer that conjures the human consciousness relying on the subject's life memory encapsulated in a ROM. It is a resurrection in a cyber style. That's how the Tassier-Ashpools, Linda Lee, and Dixie Flatline (McCoy Pauley) are 'cloned' while they are actually dead "It was disturbing to think of the Flatline as a construct, a hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, knee-jerk responses." (74). The Ashpools' corpses are preserved by Cryonics technology on Freeside space station, in the family's luxurious secure section Villa Straylight. Going back into Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, the clones in *Neuromancer* are equally accepted as if they were the real; they act, communicate, plan and

[9] The original union was in man's mind, when AI was an abstract idea roaming in the brain of a scientist or a science fiction author.

make decisions. There are virtual clone characters (like Flatline) and flesh clones like Lady3Jane and her brother. She is the third-generation clone of the Ashpools' daughter, while her brother 8Jean is the eighth clone. They, along with their father, are the only awake members of the family, the rest are hibernating in ice. The original (cloned) characters are of no significance at all; especially that their memories and consciousness are downloaded into their clones, the legacy of the original has been delivered to their simulacra which are no longer so, but have become independent simulations. 3Jane's clone boy assassin and family retainer 'Hideo' is another active example of simulacra and simulation; his mistress sends the clone to retain 'the talking head', a stolen property of the family. The idea is that simulated clones are no less original to characters than real people. Without technology, this process would never be possible. Actually, that is a trait that attaches the Ashpools so tightly with technology—it is the deity that takes good care of their immortality, the hysterical sublime that feeds their continuity.

The hysterical sublime encompasses the choice of settings in *Neuromancer*. Technology not only characterises the postmodern atmosphere in Gibson's work, but it also gives a sketch of postmodern territories: East, West, Middle East and even outer space. The settings of the novel shift vertically, horizontally, physically, and virtually as the conflict requires. Although most of the events take place in Japan, (Chiba City) and Ninesi (Night City), the protagonist is a white American whose story starts and ends in an American city (the Sprawl). The Sprawl bears Case's roots and memories, his American identity. He used to enter into the Matrix when he lived there, it gave him the virtual existence he wanted more than anything else. When he lost that ability, he had to take the journey eastwards towards Chiba City in Japan in order to get cured, because it is so notorious for dark cybernetic-

surgical procedures. He becomes alienated spiritually and corporeally at this stage “The Sprawl was a long strange way home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through” (5). Meanwhile, Chiba is a landmark of human-dehumanisation “The black clinics of Chiba were the cutting edge, whole bodies of technique supplanted monthly,” (4). After Case loses his virtual existence of cyberspace that he was addicted to in the Sprawl, Chiba offers him a parallel deja vu experience, but physically, not virtually. Gibson repeatedly compares Chiba to cyberspace, as if it is an emblem of the latter (Yu 62): Case re-lives cyberspace in “all the speed he took, all the turns he’d taken and the corners he’d cut in Night City” (Gibson 4), his hustles in Chiba are “like a run in the matrix,”, with the city’s streets resemblance to “a field of data . . . information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market” (17).

Gibson tends to imply many nationalities and races in presenting characters, objects, and different elements in his books: in addition to Japan, there is the Russian mycotoxin, nexus and military prosthesis, etc; Chinese drug and program (Kuang), the Armenian secret police torturer, the Australian drunken, German steel, stove and bartender, the mixed-culture in the character of Hideo, the ninja African,... the list goes on! Gibson wants for his works to be global, not targeting American readers solely, foreseeing the universality of cyberspace—globalisation—where all nationalities interact together as if they were all living in the same street “He walked quickly past the crowded tables, hearing fragments of half a dozen European languages as he passed” (141). Though Chatsabu bar is located in Chiba (Japan), “you could drink there for a week and never hear two words in Japanese” (3). Case rarely deals with Japanese main characters, Japan serves as the orient noise in the background, reinforced by many elements like “shurikens”,“sarariman”, “yakitori stands and massage parlours”.. etc (Yu

61-62). Lance Olsen attributes Gibson's choice of Japan in particular as a setting for his cyberpunk novels to his view (along with many Americans in the 1980's) of Japan as an incarnation of the future, or how Olsen puts it as "tomorrow happening today" (Olsen 22). Technological rapid advancement in Japan makes it an icon country of hysterical sublime, even nowadays. It always comes with mysteriously futuristic inventions and ways of building smart cities that makes it the future itself in the American imaginaire as well as that of the whole world, though the United States once had that privilege before Japan's tech-blast. That is obvious in the obsession of American SF writers with this idea that they feel inclined to include Japanese elements in their works to 'make' them eligible for this genre. That is true to many other SF authors in addition to Gibson, such as Bruce Sterling, Kim Stanley Robinson, and Neal Stephenson, only to name a few. Ironically enough, these writers sometimes offer, unknowingly, the raw material of the future for Japan to invest in, such as Gibson's theoretical creation 'cyberspace' and Jaron Lanier's 'virtual reality': "Words are handles for ideas: many scientific or technological advances begin with a writer who coins a phrase or term, and these terms can become very important in the construction of our futuristic *imaginaire*"[10] (La Bare 22-23). That indicates an exchange of hysterical sublimeness between SF writers and inventors; they constantly awe each other with their creations, challenging them of more unusual production.

Between the East and West, Case takes a brief stop at Istanbul (Middle Eastern Europe), following that with a vertical journey to Freeside and Straylight orbital space settings, in an ascension towards a mesmerising sublime built by technology. Nevertheless, as soon as Case regains his ability to jack into the Matrix, the setting moves to cyberspace and

[10] Originally Italicised.

physical existence vanishes. Then he returns to America, to his history, as if "The return to cyberspace frees Case from his Japanese exile" (Yu 62-63). Japan (Chiba) compensates Case for cyberspace-deprivation by making him live it for real there, in addition to offering him a chance to go back to the Matrix again. As soon as he reaches his objective, Chiba's role ends. When Case decides to go back home at the last chapter of the novel, he packs his things, but tosses the shuriken (the Japanese souvenir that has always fascinated him) addressing it: "No".. "I don't need you" (Gibson 260). This move symbolises the end of Japan's phase in his life; his need for cyberspace is fulfilled now, so he moves on to experience the hysterical sublime at his homeland… with no intermediary needed.

Gibson employs sensory tools in order to arouse the sublime; yet, arousing postmodern hysteric subjects needs that untranslatable stop (aporia in Lyotard's terms) between the input of senses and the processing of mind. Therefore, he resorts to sounds, colours, and shapes beyond what is normal according to a 1980's reader. Imagination is evoked to figure out the inhuman melodious voice (but not a poorly synth one) of the talking head, a highly ornamented bust that is also a computer terminal, a property which originally belongs to the Ashpools (72), and Flatline's hideous non-human laughter (described as eerie non-laugh for its ugliness) that always thrills Case. On the visual level, Gibson bombards his descriptions with unusual colour shades such as chrome, metallic, neon lights and digitised colours (like Chiba's sky which resembles a TV dead channel). All of these cinematic effects became a tradition to be followed by next cyberpunk writers, filmmakers, rock music and artists (Prusinowski 146). Gibson's greatest influence was upon cinema; and his cyberspace universe was iconised in one of the strongest examples of hysterical sublime in cinema, the movie known as *The Matrix* (1999) (147), which

started a new exploration of technology and virtual reality that took filmmaking to a new age of cinematic sublime. In addition to sounds and colours, imagery is equally fantasy-like and sublime, especially when it comes to describing techno-artistry such as cyberspace or Straylight. Gibson skillfully presents details that aim to evoke imagination to 'see' what he means but in a quirky manner that causes a temporary blockage in the mind that shuts it from fully perceiving what is read, especially for readers in the 1980's who saw little of science fiction movies or actual tech as compared to recent readers. For example, "In Straylight, the hull's inner surface is overgrown with a desperate proliferation of structures, forms flowing, interlocking, rising toward a solid core of microcircuitry", and the corporate's core is "a cylinder of silicon wormholed with narrow maintenance tunnels" (Gibson 167), while Case saw on his return to the Matrix how it "flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity" (52), it was such a sublime moment for Case that brought him tears out of joy and he gratefully caressed the deck (the device through which he jacks into cyberspace, twinned with trodes that act as the current virtual reality headsets).

Cyberspace (virtual reality) is not the only field for technology enchantment, but holograms (augmented reality) are alike as well. Like the archetype characters of a wizard or necromancer that are created in fantasy works to present the unusual or magic, Gibson presents Peter Reviera, the addict illusionist who playfully makes a show of holographs in all occasions no matter how nonsensical, such as the scorpion-snake combat show he projects during injecting himself with drugs (105). Though holography and augmented reality have recently become a popular (though still enchanting) tool for advertising and fun, they had a deeper influence as a hysterical sublime element in *Neuromancer*.

Riviera got implants that he uses in his 'rational' sorcery, but his skill is equally enchanting; he projects hyperreal shows out of others' (and his) memory and uses them to manipulate others, or merely for fun. He knows how special his naturally inborn skills are, enhanced by his technically inbuilt synthetics and he boasts about them, enjoying his being a hysterical sublime subject before the eyes of the stunned spectators. He is "the ringmaster of his own portable circus". Moreover, he is a simulacra-simulation generator who sometimes simulates real events driven out of memories—simulacrum; while other times he throws whatever his mind makes up into the flow of events—simulation (Davidson 189-190). He overcomes AI in this competence, AIs cannot generate anything that is not driven from human consciousness or memories. They fail in presenting simulations, their only remix and replay human memories, building simulacra out of them.

Regardless of the evil role this sadist psychopath plays in the novel, Riviera strongly intensifies the hysterical sublime and steals the lights from the main protagonists. He fascinates Lady 3Jane by his shows, that is how she allies with Riviera and invites him to Straylight, saving him the effort of breaking in. Though he 'manufactures' himself by implants and overuses his techno-sorcery to fascinate and control others, he underestimates AI monotonicity and lack of human wickedness that he 'enjoys'; in other words, he mocks the hysterical sublime as compared to his human nature, however corrupt this nature is. He says to Molly about Wintermute: "He can't really understand us, you know. He has his profiles, but those are only statistics" (Gibson 211). When Molly asks him about the "unquantifiable" quality that gives him superiority over Wintermute he answers: "Perversity", a trait AIs can never feel or experience. Here the Lyotardian (and Jameson's) sublimes are reversed, the AI reads error (aporia) in decoding the human vice. It may interact with human behaviour, but can never comprehend (if this

word is even applicable to AI) his incentives or why each individual has a different level of vice or virtue. Riviera relates the reason to the fact that the human intricate formation is not a matter of statistics or wiring, it is the gratuitous behaviour or no-causality that does not permit accurate coding of human nature. That is how Riviera explains his perversity: "An enjoyment of the gratuitous act" (211). Although the novel's futuristic theme where high reasoning and mind dominate, Riviera reflects the animal-instinctivity in spite of his advanced cybernetic transformation. In other words, he is at the wildest levels of the Hobbesian state of nature: savage, brutal, and in constant war for the fulfilment of his desires, especially with women.

Similarly, the virtually cloned characters who were once humans cannot "feel" anything anymore, as the conversation below between Case and the digital construct of his dead mentor reveals:

"How you doing, Dixie?"

"I'm dead, Case…

"How's it feel?"

"It doesn't."

"Bother you?"

"What bothers me is, nothin'does." (103-104)

On the other hand, the biological clones retain their human inexplicable conduct, such as 3Jane's amusement by Riviera's shows that made her welcome the intruder into her impregnable estate, and it is this gratuitous behaviour that made her compassion with her enemy Molly and prevent Riviera from killing her, the same non-causality of the treachery of Riviera against his team and his pleasure in torturing them.

Conclusion

To sum up, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* presents a whole legacy of hysterical sublime that has continued for generations through cyberpunk which is attributed to him. In addition, the gratification of the

abstract creations the novel presented adds to its significance in the history of literature and science. The novel employs its settings, characters, and imagery to prepare the world of its period for the new era where technology is an inseparable part of human existence, especially with the universality of the novel and its integration of a countless number of nationalities and races. Nevertheless, the hysterical sublime it aims at does not exempt a constant comparison between man and technology within a conflict for the sublime—an apothocentrism versus technocentrism conflict. Moreover, *Neuromancer* is a fair for the Baudrillardian Simulacra and simulations; they indicate a future where the world of the past is substituted by a mimesis to gratify the Postmodern obsession in technology, chasing the never-ending hysterical sublime that this new deity arouses.

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