Virtual Realities and Posthuman Consciousness in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*

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Abstract in English

Paper Info

As virtual reality art and technologies shape humanity's experience in new ways, literature is providing an important glimpse of possible futures where the lines between the virtual and physical worlds blur. This study analyses the ways in which Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) and Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011) engage with the potentially transformative relationship between virtual reality and posthuman consciousness, an area replete with both utopian and dystopian potential. Using comparative literary analysis, this study examines how these classic science fiction novels depict the transformation of human identity, relationships, and minds in a virtual space.

The study discloses important differences in how the two authors approach virtual reality's effect on humanity. Stephenson's Metaverse serves as a philosophical exploration of language, consciousness, and social fragmentation, while Cline's OASIS is utilized as both an escapist fantasy and a critique of corporate-controlled digital spaces. Both novels reveal how virtual environments can simultaneously liberate and constrain human potential, offering new forms of self-expression while possibly detaching users from physical reality and true human relationships. These works function as sites of posthuman becoming, where traditional limits between human and machine, real and artificial, vanish. The novels warn against uncritical technological adoption while admitting virtual worlds' ability to address real-world limits.

Keywords

virtual reality, posthumanism, metaverse, OASIS

Introduction

With the acceleration of technological advancement expected within the next few decades, we can anticipate a burgeoning of metaverse-style virtual realities that completely absorb human consciousness and restructure society altogether as Evans et al. (2022) argue, virtual reality technologies are "pushing the real and virtual world closer and closer to each other" (p. 15). Two novels that exemplify the essence of the metaverse and can be regarded as providing accurate predictions about future possibilities with regards to virtual realities include *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson, published in 1992, and *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, published two decades later in 2011. (Domsch (2022) emphasizes that these works represent "wide streams of communities from technologists on one side to entertainment and gaming enthusiasts on the other" (p. 170). The two novels represent wide streams of communities from technologists on one side to entertainment and gaming enthusiasts on the other (Naydan, 2021). The researcher adopts their metaphors and connections between the virtual reality on one side and the underlying technological substrate and humans with their minds as elements within such a virtuality on the other. As such, important issues of human consciousness, acting towards it, and potential modifications to human minds that become possible as a consequence of that exploration are discussed.

This study employs N. Katherine Hayles' critical approach to posthuman consciousness and cybernetic embodiment as its primary theoretical framework. Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999), discusses that the posthuman situation arises from the interaction of informational technologies and man's consciousness, creating conventional borders between mind and machine, presence and absence. Hayles introduced "flickering signification" to provide a critical approach to understand how virtual worlds of the novels establish new layers of meaning-making that occur between the material and immaterial. Hayles' "liberal humanist subject" is a critique to reveal how characters like Hiro and Wade search for identity creation in worlds that transcend physical embodiment while staying chained to physical presence. (Hayles, 1999) Moreover, Hayles' investigation of

cybernetic feedback loops provides an awareness into how virtual settings reform consciousness through recurrent interventions between human agency and technological systems.

Through their conflicting representations of virtual worlds, Stephenson's Metaverse and Cline's escapist OASIS in both *Snow Crash* and *Ready Player One* show how virtual reality technologies work as places of posthuman transformation. At the same time, they release human potential through new forms of self-expression while threatening to break relations to physical reality and reliable human connections.

Definition and Evolution of Virtual Realities

Rapid advances in the development of information technology, Tomášková (2021) explains that "the invention of multimedia graphics and the applications of 3-D interfaces, the invention of the World Wide Web, its expansion, and the rise of numerous different-ranged real-life applications using the Internet have created unprecedented possibilities for virtual interaction" (p. 23). Postmodern societies search for themselves in virtual reality's timelessness, which Evans et al. (2022) describe as "a new conceptual place as space, security, and power." (p. 18) These technological developments, combined with "the most recent development of the metaverses (virtual worlds in which a massively multiplayer online game has already been created without any requirement of expense or delay)," are pushing the real and virtual world closer together than ever before (Tomášková, 2021, p. 24). The real world is experienced by virtual reality technologies, and even some posthumans and post-human expressions, can be observed in these technologies as well. Virtual reality, as Seo and Kang (2023) notes, "the communication tool of 21st-century people" (p. 8) In this study, it is conducted that in terms of virtual reality and posthuman terms, the aim is to question the influence of modern and even postmodern people's identity, both in terms of scientific and visionary awareness of this future from the future's present.

Most dictionary meanings contain the adjective definition of virtual as "actual, effective, or considerable" meanings that refer to what Tomášková (2021) calls "a significant and obligatory presence" (p. 25). All these meanings refer to a significant and obligatory presence. The simulation is reality without getting into the discussion of

quality. In the case of virtual reality, the word "virtual" becomes a reference to reality. As our understanding of "virtual" evolves, virtual reality becomes the front and center, not fake, not lesser; instead, a well-crafted world which envelops us and has real weight behind it. It's not merely a simulation of reality; it's a new sort of reality, one that is mediated by technology, but experienced with the depth of feeling and sensation that characterize our interactions with the real world. Virtual reality represents "the use of technology to create an environment as close to real as possible" (Evans et al., 2022, p. 19). In the sense of virtual reality, information technologies such as computers, video, headsets, head-tracking devices, gloves, and wraparound screens provide humans with continuous contact with the external world. When we think of virtual reality, the world of digital entertainment comes to mind. The result of the virtual reality's impact is seen in today's people's perceptions and structures (Seo & Kang, 2023). Virtual reality becomes the communication tool of 21st-century people. The important issue is that different forms of these realities determine today's people's social and psychological lives. Monteith (2022) particularly notes how *Ready Player One* demonstrates that "the spirit-like post-human has reached a point where they pursue a game-like artificial pleasure and that their spiritual behaviors are directed towards the ending of their personal and social lives" (p. 6). Especially in *Ready Player One*, it is emphasized that the spirit-like posthuman has reached a point where they pursue a game-like artificial pleasure and that their spiritual behaviors are directed towards the ending of their personal and social lives (Monteith, 2022). This virtual reality gamer has no God or a real feel. This point of view emphasizes that virtual reality has directed them to religious or spiritual reflexes. This study explores how, in *Ready Player One*, the OASIS game becomes a space where future users interpret and express religious or spiritual meaning, examining the ways virtual reality shapes, or even replaces, traditional notions of faith and transcendence. (Monteith, 2022).

Posthumanism and Posthuman Consciousness

When a person asks the question, As Butterworth-Parr (2024) provocatively states, "When a person asks the question, 'Am I only a machine?' he has already lived for a long time as a machine" (p. 47). The concept of posthumanism and posthuman consciousness has emerged as one of the most complex challenges in the field of neuroscience and philosophy of mind in recent decades. Naydan (2021) describes this

shift as moving "from the classical Cartesian question on 'What is a human being?' to the current topic of the 'architecture of the mind' and 'self-consciousness'" (p. 34) The proclamation of maturity of cyberspace with the rise of new virtual realities brings the topic to the next level. Naydan calls "the external timeless and spaceless mental worlds." (p. 35) The main conflict (even in understanding consciousness of having a moment of joy and hearing the sound of some echoed protolanguage) seems to be conceptual because the gradual replacement of ancient secluded elements by new smart neuroprostheses technology for social wellness, life enhancement, and personal safety is rapidly creating the posthuman society.

The new challenging question may be that if robots were half-conscious and teenagers become deactivated in a few days, is not the displacement of teens in the status of minor citizens opposed to children replacement and increasing poverty through increased technological unemployment (Butterworth-Parr, 2024) These advanced neuroprostheses appear to prevent brain aging, restore/modify functions lost due to trauma, or enable people with severe impairments to perform activities of daily living. However, what happens to the human and non-human mind and the mind of the social structure of posthuman beings? The ethical considerations and the development of neuroprostheses, as Monteith (2022) argues, "can have a considerable effect not only on the traditional moral questions relating to technology but also to the recent 'Modification of Humans' and 'Posthuman Consciousness and Adoption of Non-Human Minds' problems" (p. 12).

<div align="center">Section Two</div>

Virtual Realities and Posthuman Consciousness in *Snow Crash*

McFarlane (2022) observes that "linguistics and its relationship to the concept of mind are central issues in the work of Neal Stephenson." (p. 297) The protagonist of *Snow Crash*, the hacker-swordsman Hiro, is "an aficionado of both ancient languages and computer jargon and is the last of the 'greatest generation' of hackers" (Stephenson, 1992, p. 25) On yet another level, the book manifests a conspicuous linguistic

inheritance: Donets and Krynytska (n.d.) note that "*Snow Crash* employ[s] the trope of the magical naming of things, from the protagonist's subtitle to the metavirus, but it also partakes gleefully in a polyphonic exploration and exploitation of the cavalcade of American pop culture." (p. 94) This approach creates what they describe as a work that "yok[es] fragments of Sumerian and Akkadian myth - including the famous Enuma Elish - to a bewildering range of comic book heroes and similar iconography." (p. 95) The result is a text of self-aware characters, as McFarlane (2022) puts it, "obsessively create their own personalized-driven realities" (p. 298). This references to both comments on and creates the multilayered environments of virtual reality, which are an essential component of the book.

The book's central conceit in this direction is the juxtaposition between the two worlds of the "real" and "MetaVerse." As Stephenson (1992) describes it, the Metaverse is "a computer-generated universe that his computer is drawing onto his goggles and pumping into his earphones" (p. 17). This virtual space introduces what Evans et al. (2022) call "a meta awareness with the term roughly being invoked in a technological sense and in use for computer games- a form of computerized, graphics-based interaction which exists asynchronously with 'real' time" (p. 21). However, Donets and Krynytska (n.d.) argue that "in the context of the book, however, the metaverse is far more than just flat characters on a computer screen - it is a shared dream of reality, a consensual hallucination, and a postmodern vehicle for the hero's journey." (p. 96)

Stephenson's definition of virtual reality, remarkably prescient for 1992, demonstrates what McFarlane (2022) describes as "careful linguistic deconstruction and interpretation" (p. 299). The world's other inhabitants include self-segregated ethnic groups no longer delineated by geographic borders and private police forces available for hire, which often protect their corporate masters' interests over those of their contract with the citizens of their respective little enclaves. The Metaverse, a virtual city, connects everything through a global switchboard system and an all-pervasive religious cult of the Central American goddess Asherah haunts everyone's Reality (McFarlane, 2022). Multiple themes interwoven through *Snow Crash* play with the possibilities of intertwining virtual and physical space and the long-term survival of human intelligence via language. These concerns include the consequences of privatizing everything from the police force to the government itself, the existence of

different realms of consciousness, and the cyclical nature of historical events (Stephenson, 1992).

The remarkably accurate definition given in 1992, prior to the advent of the current incarnation of virtual worlds, is possible through careful linguistic deconstruction and interpretation (McFarlane, 2022). Fascinatingly, although the idea of virtual reality plays only a marginal role in the text of *Snow Crash*, it has received much greater attention in literature reviews. The emphasis Stephenson places on cyberspace occurs exclusively in what the novel terms a technological context, creating what Evans et al. (2022) identify as "the presence of another organic dimension known as the Metaverse" (p. 22).

The novel's treatment of virtual reality creates what Donets and Krynytska (n.d.) call an "exo-real' reality [that] contrasts with cyberspatial reality, the latter serving as its counterpart, the underlying mirrorholder, and the mediator for information in cyberspace" (p. 97). However, it becomes clear that at least Stephenson's formulation of cyberspace could not satisfy the central concept of the term "virtual reality," in being sensory immersive. Rather, as Stephenson (1992) defines it, cyberspace in *Snow Crash* is characterized by being "the place where all the perceptual dead-ends the real world throws up are reinforced" (p. 47).

When Neal Stephenson's protagonist swings his sword in the Metaverse, and later manages to pull off the same maneuver on his physical skateboard, the novel shows us that line between "virtual" and "real" was never quite so solid to begin with. It's not merely games or gadgets; it's how that what we do online begins to influence who we become offline, and the two worlds dance, step by step. (Stephenson, 1992). McFarlane (2022) notes how "Stephenson's protagonist wielded his franchise sword in the Metaverse, only to do the same thing in the real world with his 'real' skateboard, [thus] the text blurred the distinction between virtual and actual." (p. 300) This is interesting merely in terms of how thoughts become events, but in terms of understanding phenomenology. There are reasons that prior to VR, the difference between VR and "real" life seemed so stark. At first, virtual life seems complete, but as virtual reality grows, the very word "virtual," or even "game," becomes limiting. These concepts turned the experience to mere entertainment: a ghostly, secondhand reality that lacked

the sense of ownership or emotional investment even something as abstract as war chess. (Donets & Krynytska, n.d.). Virtual life "considered to be a step removed from 'real' life - and thus it did not suffer from the moral responsibilities of truly life-threatening events" (Donets & Krynytska, n.d., p. 98). However, when actual life and Cyberspace begin to trade metaphors, as they do in *Snow Crash,* "the justification for applying 'real' life as a metaphor essentially breaks down" (Butterworth-Parr, 2024, p. 53). The novel suggests that Cyberspace becomes "the persona (mask) that we willfully use as culture producers and consumers" (Stephenson, 1992, p. 203).

Virtual Realities and Posthuman Consciousness in *Ready Player One*

Strømme (2020) describes the novel as one that "evokes a retro wave in pop culture" while presenting "a dystopian story is set in a torrid USA where society looks forward to indulging in a virtual world called OASIS, distancing themselves from reality more and more" (p. 15). The novel's central premise revolves around the death of eccentric programmer James Donovan Halliday, who "leaves his enormous fortune and the power of the OASIS to the one who can find the 'Easter Egg'" (Cline, 2011, p. 7). The plot unfolds in what Domsch (2022) characterizes as "the vivid world created by Halliday, which also embodies a much-needed escapism" (p. 175). For the main character Wade Watts, being immersed in the OASIS represents what Cline (2011) describes as "a rediscovery of self" (p. 34). Most significantly, Wade becomes Parzival, "an alias that shields him from his usual life as Wade Watts, a high-school student who goes unnoticed" (p. 35).

Ready Player One explores what Seo and Kang (2023) identify as "an environment where characters actually desire and long for the opportunity to be part of this virtual world, making it a tale deeply rooted in technology"(p. 4). The novel presents a scenario where those who did not experience the cultural period referenced in the game "find it maddening to be left out" (Monteith, 2022, p. 8). This creates what Monteith describes as a "digital longing for the American Atomic Family" rooted in "the current obsession with deus ex machina and the failure to understand and appreciate the past" (p. 9).

In *Ready Player One*, thousands of citizens of Earth are hooked up to the OASIS, a sort of virtual world where one can do anything. "Everything inside the OASIS was

beautifully rendered in three dimensions. Unless you pulled focus and stopped to examine your surroundings more closely, it was easy to forget that everything you were seeing was computer-generated." (Cline, p.30) This online game was initially created to be freely accessible to everyone, but hidden in some unexplored realm by the dead creator of the game, James Halliday, there is an Easter egg that awards the one who finds it half of the economic power (Strømme, 2020). Society was divided after a series of energy, economic, and political crises, and now there is tension between the big six companies that control the OASIS and the users who are tired of being controlled by it (Cline, 2011).

Domsch (2022) argues that "virtual reality in *Ready Player One* does not worry solely with the conceptual representation of the virtual world" (p. 176). Instead, "the OASIS is a skilled fabrication platform of the alternative to real life, filled with complex societies, culture, and well-designed architecture" (p. 177). The technology also offers a practical skill that is unattainable through real life and virtual experiences. "In here, I was safe." — Reflects the refuge that the virtual world offers from real-world bullying and insecurities". (Cline, p.35) Schools are set in ad hoc simulators. This comprehensive world-building creates an environment where Wade "does not only go through homemade simulations or get sucked into the online school every time he decides to utilize the visor, but takes part in a live society designed to substitute reality completely" (Cline, 2011, p. 156). While it "allows its users to experience an alternative form of consciousness that short-cuts the organic abilities of our brain" (Seo & Kang, 2023, p. 6). Cline's vision discusses what Monteith (2022) calls "the future towards which the creation of an ideal virtual reality could point reality" (p. 11). In this discussion, the primary role of OASIS turns out to be political, as what Evans et al. (2022) describe as "much similar to Metaverse, an Old Cybergraphic space prototype of OASIS from *Snow Crash*, that, even though different from the outside world, yet has a tremendous influence as its embodiment" (p. 24).

Cline's *Ready Player One* presents posthumanism through the lens of societal decline and virtual escape. The novel "is based on a future society caught in decline due to an energy crisis, overpopulation, and an excess of pollution" (Cline, 2011, p. 12). In stark contrast to this deteriorating real world, "the virtual world of the OASIS offers many advantages to its users" (Strømme, 2020, p. 18). *Ready Player One* is

generally considered to be a nostalgic novel since it appeals to many with its 1980s pop culture references, but there doesn't seem to be nostalgia for the post-human here (Monteith, 2022). Strømme (2020) identifies five main advantages that the OASIS provides: "the freedom of movement throughout the OASIS not constrained by real-world physicality and gravity, the opportunity to escape from real-world problems, the extreme protection of one's privacy, self-expression, and creativity" (p. 19). The above mentioned advantages refer to the reality in which the individual is not subject to gravity, disability, space, or even the natural laws. What is impossible in reality becomes accessible in this artificial reality. Moreover, OASIS provides a refuge and anonymity for the escapists of reality, where the natural disasters and economic recession vanishes the moment of logging in that world.

Section Three

Comparative Analysis of *Snow Crash* and *Ready Player One*

This section carries out a comparative analysis of the representation of virtual realities and posthuman consciousness in *Snow Crash*, and *Ready Player One.* Domsch (2022) emphasizes that both texts "present elaborate visions of how VR could take over the future and seem to position themselves as divulgative odes by paying tribute to 1980s gaming" (p. 180). Domsch observes that the novels are not forecasting the future, they are mourning and celebrating the past. The console beeps, pixelated heroes and cassette-tape are not ornamental Easter eggs; they are harbors of feelings. In a future owned by cold, corporate VR, the 1980s is a kind of symbolic Eden, an age when play was raw and exuberant and human. Thus, the VR "takeover" is not depicted as straightforward progress, it is rather bittersweet, as the gains come with haunting losses. Both novels, as Seo and Kang (2023) argue, "ring a very loud bell as they stress that an entire society plugged in a 'monocathode' - the technotopia as a Fata Morgana - is actually a dystopia" (p. 9). McFarlane (2022) notes that "*Snow Crash* shows all the seductive power of the dark side's Mandelbrot mirror, the pseudo-simplification of the real world leading to an illusory homogenization of knowledge and simulacral globalization" (p. 301). In contrast, "*Ready Player One* tells about the potential of the

mechanism of 'easter egg' - getting the best treats, prizes and power-ups by using easter eggs, little details scattered throughout game scenarios to resolve an enigma" (Cline, 2011, p. 245). Naydan (2021) argues that "*Snow Crash* and *Ready Player One* contribute to the discussion that supports the idea that at least some forms of fictional mediations enable its audience to envision the various futures that societies may (not) want to have" (p. 156). The novels ultimately suggest that VR may spawn what Butterworth-Parr (2024) calls "the wildest posthuman ideals," offering "possible worlds without bodies, even without gender, in which great entrepreneurs become managers of the virtual representations of larger than nation-state territories, reducing the complexity of the real world to the simplicity of their models" (p. 89). The Metaverse in Stephenson's Snow Crash refers to the kind of "possible world without bodies" that Butterworth-Parr critiques. Characters are there as avatars in a digital world where physical shape becomes flexible or unnecessary. The idenity traditional markers as gender can be changed at any time. The novel's involves powers like L. Bob Rife function as those "great entrepreneurs" who try to rule large virtual regions that surpass national limits.

In Cline's novel Ready Player One, it takes this picture even further, introducing the world of OASIS as a place where people aspire to live in virtual reality rather than physical one. Wade Watts, the novel's protagonist wastes away physically while chasing digital revolution, exemplifying the danger of giving priority to virtual existence over embodied existence.

Both novels operate within what Naydan (2021) identifies as "postcyberpunk works," meaning that "in the fictional world, we have already made huge jumps in integrating technology into our everyday lives and, despite the flaws of our capitalist posthuman societies, we have come to accept those technologies as something commonplace" (p. 158). However, the tonal differences between the novels are significant. Domsch (2022) observes that "while *Snow Crash* has a dystopic feel, much like many other cyberpunk novels, *Ready Player One* presents us with a grim, but somehow light-hearted story, full of hope and near overwhelming optimism" (p. 181).

In their representations of the 'Metaverse' in *Snow Crash* and the 'OASIS' in *Ready Player One*, Evans et al. (2022) note that "Stephenson and Cline present their

trustworthy readers with contrasting aspects that are essential to the works' exploration of concepts of both technologies and consciousness, also in what Posthuman concerns" (p. 25). These differences are motivated not only by the different epochs in which they were published but also by what McFarlane (2022) describes as "accurate reflections of the different technologies and imaginaries that are being presented, reflecting two different macro-historical perspectives" (p. 302). Butterworth-Parr (2024) argues that "facing with those realities and changes in the availability and usage of these technologies, both Stephenson and Cline pose themselves the same sets of questions that belong to the concerns that, in general terms, face modern societies" (p. 91).

The exploration of posthuman consciousness in both novels centers on how virtual reality serves as "a medium for human-like connection being established through the interaction of characters with their virtual avatars" (Tomášková, 2021, p. 45). Seo and Kang (2023) argue that "in these novels, viewing the virtual world as a real place affects characters not only in the sphere of their seeing or hearing the virtual world, but rather on the level of their identity, their consciousness, and understanding of the 'self'" (p. 10). The novels demonstrate how "perception of futuristic virtual worlds is crucial to experiencing new spaces, but through interaction of characters with the virtual interface, the characters develop their new type of consciousness which is bonded with technological gadgets, surrounded by the new technology" (Monteith, 2022, p. 15). This essay is concerned with how *Snow Crash* and *Ready Player One* illustrate these shifts in how a character is perceived by other characters and how this character interacts within their virtual world and with virtual consciousness.

The existence of VR and the possibility of escaping into bodies different from the physical one should inevitably have had a profound impact on identity and how individuals perceive themselves. Strømme (2020) notes that "both authors have characters that they describe with physical differences: different race, body shape, sex, but they act very similar to the physical world" (p. 22). Even if in *Snow Crash,* "virtual life is a choice of the characters," and the "Metaverse is a form of world that has evolutionary consequences on the literally fractured physical world," *Ready Player One* presents a scenario where "reality is such a bad place to live that the vast majority of the population chooses to spend their entire real lives only because their physical body is hosted in Columbus, while the OASIS is what really gives value to their entire lives"

(Cline, 2011, p. 234). This "back and forth" life creates what Domsch (2022) calls "the 'massaging of the possibilities': spending part of the real life in the OASIS makes Parzival and the other participants acquire skills and knowledge that are valuable to get the prize and would not have had the opportunity if they had invested the same time in studying or creating something in the real world" (p. 184). This phenomenon parallels contemporary gaming communities where players develop real skills and social connections through virtual interaction. This phenomenon is not that different from that one of the players of World of Warcraft who considers themselves part of the guild. (Cline, 2011) The attitude of the bosses of IOI is emblematic, who hope that the selectees will be available from 10:00 to 22:00 every day, without exception, which means that for them, outside of "working" for the company, there is no world, or better, there is no possibility for their younger employees to realize that the precious thing in life is not the money that one accumulates, but the experiences that are carried out (Cline, 2011).

Conclusion

Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash and Ernest Cline's Ready Player One comparative analysis show the intricate connections between virtual reality technologies and posthuman consciousness. Stephenson's Metaverse and Cline's escapist OASIS and their contrasting views, both reveal an essential contradiction: virtual realities have exceptional capacity to increase human ability, but concurrently menacing human relationship and embodied survival. Though two decades separated these two novels, both works handle similar troubles of identity transformation in the digitalized world. Stephenson's philosophy explores consciousness prefigures issues that Cline discusses through his account of corporate-controlled virtual settings. Both authors agree that virtual realities as locations of posthuman becoming, where the lines between machine and human, and what is authentic and artificial, become blurred. But their methods are different: Stephenson based on cautious philosophical consideration while Cline introduces sentimental but optimistic technological redemption.

The novels show how avatars become projections of the self, challenging traditional ideas of real identity. Wade's transformation into Parzival and Hiro's search between physical and virtual selves explain the fluid nature of posthuman subjectivity. This

offers exceptional chances for self-expression. But this release has a price, as broad virtual involvement could lead to emaciated physical connections and reduced embodied knowledge. What is important is that both novels work as prescient cautions about virtual world's social consequences. Stephenson's industrial themes of control and Cline's exploration of lack of digital inequality predict our time fears of platform dominations and digital divisions. The novels hint that virtual worlds could generate current hierarchies of authority while producing new ways of manipulation.

The tensions, as metaverse technologies grow, between virtual liberty and restraint become gradually crucial. The acceleration of digitalized world makes virtual settings essential to every life, turning these cautions mainly pertinent. Snow Crash and Ready Player One prove that virtual environments denote neither utopian salvation nor dystopian destruction, but intricate constructions increasing both human capacity and susceptibility. Their investigation discloses that future relationships of human-technology is considered a continuing mediation between improvement and restriction.

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Abstract in Arabic

حين تُشكل تقنيات وفنون الواقع الافتراضي تجربة البشرية بطرق جديدة يوفر الأدب لمحة مهمة عن المستقبل المحتمل حيث تكون الخطوط الفاصلة بين العالمين الافتراضي والمادي غير واضحة. تغطي هذه الدراسة الطرق التي تتعامل بها رواية نيل ستيفنسون *سنو كراش* (1992) ورواية إرنست كلاين *ريدي بلاير ون* (2011) مع العلاقة التحويلية المحتملة بين الواقع الافتراضي والوعي ما بعد الإنساني وهي منطقة مليئة بالإمكانيات الطوباوية والديستوبية على حد سواء. تستكشف هذه الدراسة باستخدام التحليل الأدبي المقارن كيف تُصور هاتان الروايتان الكلاسيكيتان من أدب الخيال العلمي تحول الهوية الإنسانية والعلاقات والعقول في الفضاء الافتراضي. وتكشف الدراسة عن اختلافات مهمة في كيفية تناول الكاتبين لتأثير الواقع الافتراضي على البشرية. حيثث يعمل عالم الميتافيرس عند ستيفنسون كاستكشاف فلسفي للغة والوعي والتشرذم الاجتماعي بينما يُستخدم عالم الواحة (OASIS) عند كلاين كخيال هروبي ونقد للفضاءات الرقمية المسيطر عليها من قبل الشركات. تكشف كلتا الروايتين كيف يمكن للبيئات الافتراضية أن تحرر وتقيد الإمكانات البشرية في الوقت نفسه حيث تقدم أشكالاً جديدة من التعبير عن الذات بينما تنفصل ربما بالمستخدمين عن الواقع المادي والعلاقات الإنسانية الحقيقية. وتعمل هذه الأعمال كمواقع للصيرورة ما بعد الإنسانية حيث تختفي الحدود التقليدية بين الإنسان والآلة والحقيقي والاصطناعي. وتحذر الروايتان من التبني التقني غير النقدي بينما تعترفان بقدرة العوالم الافتراضية على معالجة قيود العالم الحقيقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الواقع الافتراضي، ما بعد الإنسانية، الميتافيرس، الواحة