

Virtual is Real

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"The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel."
-- William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

Introduction

The purpose of the following work is to describe postmodern motifs that not only appear in, but form the indispensable part of the cyberpunk fiction belonging to the Sprawl series (1), written by one of the founders (2) of the cyberpunk genre and its most representative author, William Gibson.

For the purpose of the analysis provided herein we need to assume somehow simplified (in order for them not to be too wide) definitions of the terms cyberpunk and postmodernism (which especially needs this simplification). The author needs to stress that these proposals of definitions are made exclusively for the sake of this work and cannot present absolutely objective interpretation of neither of these two terms.

Cyberpunk

To precisely define cyberpunk is to do something impossible, as, according to Bruce Sterling, it "has little patience with borders", but for the purpose of this work an approximation of the definition has to be assumed.

First, let us consider the origin of the word. Although the term cyberpunk for many people, especially fans, automatically brings an association with the guru of the genre, William Gibson, he was not the person who coined the word itself. The genre was brought to life as early as in the seventies, when the first stories that shared the common features of the genre were published (e.g. Gibson's *Fragments of a Hologram Rose*, published in *Unearth* in the summer of 1977), but it was not given a proper name until November 1983 when Bruce Bethke published a short story entitled Cyberpunk in *Amazing Science Fiction Stories Magazine*, volume 57, number 4, purposely inventing the word that formed the title.

According to The Cyberpunk Project the word coined by Bethke "applied to the SF emerging in the eighties" and was meant to include the following notions : of children having an "undefined wiring", enabling them to learn languages, including not organic languages, with natural ease; of teenagers being dangerous because of lack of empathy and full consciousness of the results of their actions and, finally of the danger those teenagers could bring about when equipped with the computer knowledge of the modern world.

Gibson was not the author of the word that became the name of the genre, but he invented the terms cyberspace and cyberpunk science fiction and it was with publishing his famous cyberpunk books (namely the novel *Neuromancer* in 1984 a book that became the first novel to win the Triple Crown of science fiction literature, capturing the Nebula, Hugo, and Phillip K. Dick awards and the stories of the Sprawl series, later published as

the part of the collection entitled *Burning Chrome* in 1986) in the eighties when the genre flourished.

Precise definition of the genre is difficult to formulate, because cyberpunk is not only literary, but also social movement and there are many distinct approaches to the subject, as different people engaged in the movement stress different features of the genre (3) and, therefore, each of the definitions is more complex which does not mean clearer. However, divergent as they are, the opinions of the cyberpunks share the core that is common for all the definitions and the core itself forms the definition, outspoken by Erich Schneider, that is one of the shortest and, at the same time, most adequate. According to it cyberpunk is the literary movement that deals with "marginalized people in technologically-enhanced cultural".

This core definition is coherent with the point of view of Richard Appignanesi (who, not being involved in the cyberpunk movement, is probably more objective than the fans), identifying "total intrusion of technology into human lives" as one of the major features of cyberpunk.

As this total intrusion is becoming reality nowadays, cyberpunk authors may be perceived as prophets. Gibson invented the notion of cyberspace in the eighties. In the nineties the Internet was brought to life...

Postmodernism

The author of this very work is not as pessimistic as Christopher Borst, who claims that : "is, like all words, an essentially meaningless word".

Nevertheless, the author admits that Borst is right saying that the term can be "filled with widely divergent contents". Clearly, as the post prefix suggests, the term depicts a movement that comes after modernism. But is it merely chronological succession or is there something more to it ? And if there is, what is it precisely ? Appignanesi (1995), at the beginning of his book questions the word itself, wondering whether post is a result, the aftermath, the afterbirth, the development, the denial or the rejection of modernism.

More concrete solutions are proposed by John M. Fritzman, who puts forward six possible definitions of postmodernism. In his opinion postmodernism can be interpreted :

1) As "the cluster of cultural phenomena which constitutes late capitalism" (completing or fulfilling the modern); 2) "in the sense of opposing the modern" as "that which comes after the modern" only in the chronological terms; 4) as "the abandonment of linearity"; 5) as "eclecticism in the arts"; 6) and, finally, as "antifoundational pragmatism".

However, the author adopted the definition, based on some features of postmodernism suggested by Appignanesi, which combines some of the above proposed definitions. That combination is in accordance with Fritzman's remark that "it would be possible for something to be postmodern in senses 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6" or "in senses 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6" but "it would not be possible for something to be postmodern in both senses 1 and 2".

Appignanesi suggests that postmodernism derives from modernism. He says that "modern is always historically at war with what comes immediately before it" and, therefore, "is always post-something". Postmodernism would therefore be modernism that was taken to its extremes and became its own contradiction (4). According to the description of Fritzman's definition No. 2, Lyotard claims that "postmodernism appears within modernism, first disrupting modernism, and then later being absorbed within modernism". This necessity of modernism to become its own negation in order to reborn in a new form derives from the fact that any kind of art "can only progress towards its own self-annihilation". According to French philosopher, Jean-François

Lyotard, the condition of postmodernism is "scepticism towards all metanarratives". Metanarratives, in other words self-legitimizing myths, are "supposedly universal, absolute or ultimate truths that are used to legitimize various projects, political or scientific". Postmodernism rejects all the myths of the previous conceptual periods and epochs but proposes nothing new. Instead, with all the knowledge available, it draws inspiration from the resourceful past, including rejected modernism itself, and takes parts of the myths to create a new quality by playing with conventions (Fritzman's definition No. 5). As Appignanesi denotes, the people of today "are living what has already been lived and reproduced with no reality anymore but that of the cannibalized image". That really sounds pessimistic, but on the other hand, the knowledge mentioned can be beneficial, as it includes understanding of the motifs and archetypes but also of the rules of their application, based, among others, on the literary counterpart of the Heisenberg's principle that forbids interpreting the meaning of the text separated from the role of its reader (Fritzman's definition No. 6). That was first proposed by Jacques Derrida, who claimed that "there is nothing outside the text". Additionally, following Lyotard's definition, we have to abandon Fritzman's definition No. 3, if we take the previous notions as the basis of our theory of postmodernism, as to admit that there is a chronological link between modernism and postmodernism would be "an admission of historic progress and a relapse into Grand Narrative mythology".

Now, after those major terms have been defined, let us, armed with these definitions, take the step into the dominion where the words of the definitions are made flesh, into...

...the world of the Sprawl.

The postmodernism of Gibson's stories starts at the very basis : it can be traced back both to the style of narration and to the setting the world described that is common for all the stories that are analyzed in this very work.

The style of the stories bears one of the most characteristic traits of postmodern writing : the relativity that makes it open for various and numerous interpretations. As it has been mentioned in this work, that trait is the result of applying the Heisenberg's principle to literature. As Heisenberg "introduced a measure of permanent uncertainty in science with his principle", so did Derrida in literature. Heisenberg claimed that it is impossible to precisely determine both the mass and the velocity of a particle at any given moment. To put it simple, our observing a particle changes its parameters, because to observe we must use light that interacts with the particle. Analogously, we cannot make an objective judgement about a work of literature as our analyzing it alters its message. We cannot determine what was the author's intention, either, as it is the reader that adds the final interpretation to any text and fully objective interpretation of the text must include the reader. Obviously, such ideal interpretations simply do not exist, but there is potentially an infinite number of subjective interpretations one for each of the potential readers however, some of the readers may propose very similar, even identical interpretations, which is, again, in accordance with what Derrida postulates, saying that "there is never just one (meaning)", but the number of meanings may be finite. He also claims that, while some of the interpretations may be better than the rest, we cannot determine which are these and must not be prejudiced against any.

Gibson's Sprawl short stories remain open for interpretations of any kind. The protagonists in them do not judge they only tells us complete stories and, while analyzing the circumstances and events not only physically, but also in terms of their emotions, they still remain somehow detached. Because of that, we do not get descriptions of their feelings, only of the emotions, which seem to be more physiological than spiritual and are presented as a set of picture, drawn from characters memories just like in the case of *New Rose Hotel*, where the main character patiently recounts his tragic romance, being at the same time surprisingly indifferent and leaving the possibility of feeling the pain to the readers...

As for the setting, in order to establish truly postmodern environment, Gibson needs to present a world that is beyond conventions of both contemporary society and the metanarrative of science fiction utopias and anti-

utopias. He does it by de-americanizing the setting and by breaking the science fiction conventions of the time setting.

All the stories of the Sprawl Series share the vision of the world with the most famous of the Gibson's novels, including *Neuromancer* (5).

The events seem to take place in America, but, just like in *Neuromancer*, "the United States is never mentioned in the book. And there's some question as to whether the United States exists as a political entity or if, in fact, it's been Balkanized in some weird way". Also, it seems that the American culture is not a predominant one any longer. There are symptomatic signs telling that the USA waged war against Russia. The most obvious one is a account of Bobby in *Burning Chrome*. He recounts the story of the lead character, Jack despite Jack's unwillingness to reveal his past answering Rikki's question about what happened to Jack's hand : "Hand gliding over a wheatfield, (...) place called Kiev. Our Jack's just hanging there in the dark, under a Nightwing parafoil, with fifty kilos of radar jammed between his legs, and some Russian asshole accidentally burns his arm off with a laser". That war between two superpowers not necessarily ended with the defeat of the USA, but, apparently, it did not end with Russians' defeat, either. American economy is no longer predominant. Among the most wanted product there are Russian ones like the Russian program in *Burning Chrome* a powerful virus that is so perfectly designed that Jack admires it to the point of worshipping, feeling "like a punk who'd gone out to buy a switch-blade and come home with a small neutron bomb". All these factors contribute to mirroring the fall of one of the greatest metanarratives and correspond to the skepticism advised by Lyotard. The vision of the world without the USA ruins the metanarrative supported by most of the American writers !

The time and environmental settings is also unconventional. The world presented is the effect neither of the utopian evolution, nor a nuclear holocaust those two most prevalent concepts of reality from pages of science fiction books. It is not even the world of the future. Instead, it is our world reflected in a funhouse mirror.

Clearly, the environment created by Gibson's imagination is far from being utopian. The image of the world is dark. It is the reality of cheap hotels, like the New Rose Hotel from the story of the same title, which is "a coffin rack on the ragged fringes of Narita International. Plastic capsules a meter high and three long, stacked like surplus Godzilla teeth in a concrete lot", each of the capsules having as much of comfort as is provided by "a television mounted flush with the ceiling". Gibson writes against the criteria of the episteme of modernity that, according to Michel Foucault, exclude "the mad, the sick and the criminal". His characters come from slums, live in cheap hotels, such as the one mentioned above and buy hackers equipment from fences like Finn, whose shop is described in *Burning Chrome* : "The Finn's place has a defective hologram in the window, METRO HOLOGRAFIX, over a display of dead flies wearing fur coats of gray dust. The scrap's waist-high, inside, drifts of it rising to meet walls that are barely visible behind nameless junk, behind sagging pressboard shelves stacked with old skin magazines and yellow-spined years of National Geographic". The Sprawl world is the world of ruins. It is the reality in which Europe is "a dead museum" and the center of the world is shifted eastwards. Here, cutting-edge technology coexists with the primitive, yet colorful reality of the eastern cities of the past : "Djemaa-el-Fna was thick with jugglers, storytellers, small boys turning lathes with their feet, legless beggars with wooden bowls under animated holograms advertising French software". This type of setting reflects two postmodern tendencies : of blending the old and the new and of commercializing everything, the state of "technologically-streamlined cannibalization", depicted by Appignanesi, in which the everyday reality of poor street beggars is eaten up by the commercial world but is not changed for better. It also coincides with Appignanesi description of South-East Asian postmodernism, in which "the postmodern premise that reality and its simulacrum are indistinguishable has espoused a thriving culture and economy based on fakes", where, therefore, everything is accepted as is, without judging and choosing.

Darkness of this image is deepened by the fact that it is also the world controlled by the ruthless rulers. In these dark times nothing is new and untouched. All the power has been taken by two forces : the first one has taken up

a form of the almighty corporations, whose "blood is (...) information, not people", whose "structure is independent of the individual lives" they are build of and that are "life form"; the second force is the mob, namely the Yakuza the Japanese mafia, "the world's wealthiest criminal order" that is "so powerful that it owns comsats and at least three shuttles". If one is down and under, like most of the Gibson's characters, she is much likely to be interconnected in some wrongful or tragic way with one of them and their methods, despite the fact that one operates legally and the other does not, do not really differ. Johnny Mnemonic, who carries in his head a program stolen from the Yakuza, has a professional killer sent after him and the Yakuza "would be settling its ghostly bulk over the city's data banks, probing for faint images (of him) reflected in numbered accounts, securities transactions, bills for utilities". The situation of the main character from *New Rose Hotel*, when he understands "for the first time the real extent of Hosaka's reach" is different in only one way it is even worse : "Every door was closed. People we'd done business with for two years saw us coming, and I'd see steel shutters slam behind their eyes. We'd get out before they had a chance to reach for the phone. The surface tension of the underworld had been tripled, and everywhere we'd meet that same taut membrane and be thrown back. No chance to sink, to get out of sight".

There is no way out of this trap one is either with or against the Yakuza or one of corporations, otherwise one does not mean anything. Nevertheless, Gibson does not picture a Orwell-like vision of the society here. People who are persecuted by those rulers of the cyberpunk world can only blame themselves or their stupidity for their situation : they simply played too dangerous a game for them (like Johnny, the title character from *Johnny Mnemonic*) or came into contact with wrong people (like the main character from *New Rose Hotel*, entangled in the tragic love relationship with Sandii) and either have had a narrow escape or have to be running forever. It is true that the cyberpunk world is that of the control over people's lives. Johnny Mnemonic says : "We're an information economy. They teach you that in school. What they don't tell us is that it's impossible to move, to live, to operate at any level without leaving traces, bits, seemingly meaningless fragments of personal information. Fragments that can be retrieved, amplified". It is also true that people in such a world are mostly condemned to be only pawns in a greater game, like Johnny, who had even no idea about the program he had in his brain the program that was going to bring about his death. Johnny describes this state with all simplicity, saying : "The program. I had no idea what it contained. I still don't. I only sing the song, with zero comprehension". On the other hand, there are different ways, for example the way chosen by Lo Teks and, finally, by Johnny himself to live away from the society in a group that may be primitive but is peaceful and to be free. From this we can see that anti-utopia is not the word to describe Gibson's vision of the world either.

The vision that was briefly described above is indisputably frightful. Nevertheless we must not forget that it is our world Gibson is writing about. Again, it is one of the benefits of postmodernism the ability to write about known things in unusual way. Therefore, we must not be frightened or, at least, we should not be more frightened than while watching evening news. We know all these factors from our everyday life-slums, contrasting living conditions of the rich and the poor, powerful corporations, crime syndicates, helpless alienated people one can turn on the television and see the same, only not that magnified. What Gibson does here is very postmodern he blends the various elements to form a new picture only this time the elements are not taken from previous literary periods, but from the real life and puts on them the light of cyber imagery presenting the technology that is not available to make our everyday horrors more visible. The impression that the world described belongs to our own everyday reality is deepened by the characters talking to the imaginary readers as to people living in the same reality that is absolutely familiar to them. The phrases they use are subtle details but their presence is very significant : Jack from *Burning Chrome* describes the hardware he uses as looking "like your workaday Ono-Sendai VII, the Cyberspace Seven" which automatically suggests that potential readers of the story use that kind of equipment everyday. The reality of the Gibson's story blends here with the real world, suggesting that the technological breakthrough that will bring about this kind of hardware is bound to happen within the readers' lifetime.

Furthermore, the world of post-war reality is not what we might expect from a typical science fiction book. It

rather reminds us of the Earth after World War II, fought with lasers and computers : no atomic weapons whatsoever, but a conventional bloodshed. It is clearly postmodern : the pseudo-future of high technology is blended with the reality of the past. Significantly it is the past of the war whose atrocities have brought postmodernism to life as some of the critiques mentioned herein see World War II as the primary and direct cause that has triggered the foundation of postmodernism, for example according to Abrams "the term postmodernism is sometimes applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-1945), when the effects on Western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation". Cyberpunk, seems to be naturally one of the leading genres of the postmodern kind as there is no place for poetry in the post-war world (because "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" according to Appignanesi), cyberpunk responds with techno prose that belongs in the environment of posts : post-humanism (transcendence of the flesh, obtained through enhancing human body with cybernetic parts, through drugs or through virtual reality and resulting in a simulacrum-like state that characterizes postmodern condition), post-industrialism (reign of mega-corporations, with information being the main currency) and post-nationalism (ruined world, often ruled by corporations instead of governments, in which "the nation as we know it is an endangered species").

Gibson himself claims that his stories are not about future. A proof of this can be seen in his utterance about *Neuromancer* (the same words could concern any of his short cyberpunk stories) : "What's most important to me is that *Neuromancer* is about the present. It's not really about an imagined future. It's a way of trying to come to terms with the awe and terror inspired in me by the world in which we live".

This coming to terms is performed by cyberpunk characters in different ways. The world of *Sprawl* in truly postmodern way lives on the fragments of the past. If true is what Appignanesi states, saying that the fin de siècle we live in is unprecedented in its absolute lack of originality that characterizes postmodernism, then Gibson's world of *Sprawl* is monstrously postmodern : here everyone "is feeding on the originality of the past, on a data bank not simply of information but of already experienced reality". The problem is, however, that the reality that inspires cyberpunks is the same reality of the 20th century that Appignanesi already accuses of cannibalization. In Gibson's short stories the past is touching the imagination of people in different ways. They abandon the originality for the previously mentioned postmodern blends of bits and pieces of history. Common things of yesterday become art of nowadays. Even being primitive is considered art and Johnny Mnemonic accepts the word crude as a compliment, because, according to his opinion "(t)hese days (...) you have to be pretty technical before you can even aspire to crudeness". Johnny himself, in order to be crude, takes a lot of trouble to prepare a shotgun for himself : "I'd had to turn both these twelve-gauge shells from brass stock, on a lathe, and then load them myself; I'd had to dig up an old microfiche with instructions for hand-loading cartridges; I'd had to build a lever-action press to seat the primers". Johnny is very proud of his achievement, although he only replicates another fragment of the already replicated past. But other people go even further : they live the reproduced past all the time, wearing faces of the 20th century idols thanks to the achievements of plastic surgery like Ralfi Face, an unsophisticated gangster who buys stolen programs from Johnny and who "owed his acquired surname to a singular vanity. Built something like an overripe pear, he'd worn the once-famous face of Christian White for twenty years Christian White of the Aryan Reggae Band, Sony Mao (6) to his generation, and final champion of race rock". This remark of Sony Mao is not unintentional, as even Johnny, quite against his will, wears a face that is not his own, because the "girls at Under the Knife were big on Sony Mao, and it was getting harder to keep them from adding the chic suggestion of epicanthic folds". The old is worshipped in forms as trivial to us as graffiti, which in this ruined world has the status of archeological find : "Everything there had been covered with that same uniform layer of spray bomb graffiti : gang names, initials, dates back to the turn of the century". Instead of building a new reality of any kind, people prefer to refer back to the past, even to the war, like veteran Jones (7), who "was dreaming of his war in the Pacific, of the cyber mines he'd swept, nosing gently into their circuitry with the Squid".

Indeed, nostalgia is what overwhelms everybody. People lack originality and their lives suffer from the postmodern illness of repetitiveness they live in a world of memories. The whole narration in both *New Rose Hotel* and *Burning Chrome* is built up around chaotic series of memories and memories of their lovers is all the protagonists of the two stories are left with. Jack from *Burning Chrome* meets her beloved one only in his dreams : "when I'm trying to sleep, I see her somewhere out on the edge of all this sprawl of cities and smoke, and it's like she's a hologram stuck behind my eyes, (...) and I see her wave goodbye". For the unnamed lead character of *New Rose Hotel* the only thing that reminds him of his lover, Sandii, is her "cheap little gun in the New Rose Hotel". As this is the case, he goes into details, describing the thing : "The chrome is starting to peel. The machining is clumsy, blurry Chinese stamped into rough steel. The grips are red plastic, molded with a dragon on either side. Like a child's toy". This is exactly a type of situation Appignanesi refers to, when the image does not "mask(...) and pervert(...) a basic reality" but it "marks the absence of a basic reality". The cheap Chinese gun is the image of the lost lover a postmodern simulacrum that in the absence of the real person replaces her and becomes more important than her because of its availability. This tendency to live in the world of simulacrum is showed in its strongest form possible in *Burning Chrome*. In one of the passages of the story Jack recollects the depressing evening he once had, when had just broken up with his girlfriend and he missed his ex-lover so badly that he decided to take Vasopressin, because "booze and Vasopressin are the ultimate in masochistic pharmacology; the juice makes you maudlin and the Vasopressin makes you remember, (...) really remember. Clinically they use the stuff to counter senile amnesia, but the street finds its own uses for things. (...) Trouble is, you get the bad with the good".

As one could see from the above examples the everyday reality of the Sprawl world offers little hope and originality for its dwellers. However, according to Lyotard, if there is anything new, it is "cyberspace information-processing which quantifies knowledge according to computer logic" and Appignanesi informs us that it is not the only reality at hand : "The crux of postmodernity is that there are two presents. One is a spectre present, a Virtual Reality techno-media simulacrum that makes the other real present appear borderline, fugitive, elusive". In the Sprawl reality what is virtual, is real (8). The real essence of life consists of cyberspace and virtual reality. But what exactly is VR ? According to Cyberpunk Dictionary it is a "completely virtual environment : the sum of all BBSes, computer networks, and other virtual communities" that "is constantly being changed, exists only virtually, can be practically infinite in 'size'", where "communication occurs instantaneously world-wide physical location is completely irrelevant most of the time". For Gibson cyberspace, sometimes referred to as the matrix is "the electronic consensus-hallucination that facilitates the handling and exchange of massive quantities of data", a "monochrome nonspace where the only stars are dense concentrations of information, and high above it all burn corporate galaxies and the cold spiral arms of military systems" clearly another simulacrum, but this time there is certain originality in it. The newness of the experience gives birth to a whole simulacrum culture, including modern legends. Again, they are new form of classic fairy-tales, replacing them with their doubtful originality but, at the same time, destroying the metanarrative of those old stories. Instead of the tale of a dragon, cyberpunks share the myth of black ice (9) that "is a part of the mythology. Ice that kills. (...) Some kind of neural-feedback weapon, and you connect with it only once. Like some hideous Word that eats the mind from the outside out. Like an epileptic spasm that goes on and on until there's nothing left at all".

The common accessibility of cyberspace in cyberpunk stories has produced what Appignanesi calls "a completely new type of knower". Knowledge is no longer a type of state of mind we achieve through training. Now it has become a product that can be produced and sold, a product people are supplied with, changing from "knower(s) to consumer(s) of knowledge". As the result of this process especially technical knowledge has become so widespread that it is used on the streets. A good example of a knowledge consumer is Johnny Mnemonic, for whom it is nothing unusual to use sophisticated technical jargon in a everyday conversation, when he "(reels) off a numb version of (his) standard sales pitch" "The stored data are fed in through a modified series of microsurgical contraautism prostheses. (...) Client's code is stored in a special chip; barring Squids,

which we in the trade don't like to talk about, there's no way to recover your phrase" and when he explains that Squids are "superconducting quantum interference detectors".

Knowledge, however, is not the only intangible item of trade. Cyberpunks also purchase emotions like Rikki from the story *Burning Chrome*, who does not only live in virtual reality, but lives other person's life, using a VR device called simstim. She spends "hours jacked into that unit, the contact band across her forehead like a gray plastic tiara" in "the recorded sensorium of simstim's biggest star", experiencing "simulated stimuli : the world (...) as perceived by Tally Isham (10)". Here, again, we have an example of monstrous consumerism and lack of originality but together with an ironical denial of the metanarrative of Hollywood still, presenting a grim vision of annihilation of originality and, therefore, annihilation of art, described by Appignanesi.

On the other hand, the virtual part of life is its only poetic part. When Johnny is in idiot/savant mode, he does not retell the program encoded in his brain, he sings it as "an endless tone poem in an artificial language". When Jack connects and goes into cyberspace "a silver tide of phosphenes boil(s) across (his) field of vision as the matrix beg(ins) to unfold in (his) head, a 3-D chessboard, infinite and perfectly transparent". The passages describing virtual reality are the most poetic parts of all the stories. Here is just one of numerous examples of such passages, describing the hackers committing virtual burglary from *Burning Chrome* : "Bodiless, we swerve into Chrome's castle of ice. And we're fast, fast. It feels like we're surfing the crest of the invading program, hanging ten above the seething glitch systems as they mutate. We're sentient patches of oil swept along down corridors of shadow".

These poetic passages probably best represent and summarize the postmodern elements in Gibson's prose. Virtual reality represents modern art that reached the extremes as it offers unlimited opportunities. At the same time it is modernism that reached the point of self-annihilation, as it bases on the already invented reality that is being consumed, processed and recreated. Moreover, it contributes to the destruction of another important myth, or metanarrative of limited access to the sources of information for these are computer hackers who set information free and destroy the myth. Morley characterizes postmodernism as a period in which "the modern romantic image of the lone creative artist was abandoned for the playful technician (perhaps computer hacker) who could retrieve and recombine creations from the past" and in which "data alone becomes necessary" the exact picture of cyberpunk reality (11). Finally, despite its lack of originality, VR creates new quality by applying the principle proposed by Derrida (a literary version of Heisenberg's principle) to everyday life in cyberspace where everyone can not only watch, but take part in this ever-changing reality.

Notes

1. Cyberpunk Dictionary defines the word sprawl as "used by William Gibson to mean large mega-cities, and places where different cities collide".
2. Different sources enumerate different authors who are supposed to be these founders, e.g. according to The Cyberpunk Project they were Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, Pat Cadigan and James Patrick Kelly and according to Tom Maddox (1992) William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Lew Shiner, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, Pat Cadigan, Richard Kadrey and Tom Maddox himself, but the names of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling are repeated throughout all the sources available to the author.
3. According to different sources and people cyberpunk is : "the integration of technology and literature in a world where the gap between science fiction and reality is rapidly closing" (Guyen, 1995); "merely a

product of pop culture (that) should not have any true literary importance"; "the voice of the underground in modern society, and the vision of a new technological world" and even "fiction that focuses on the actual or projected technological nature of society and that utilizes sexual imagery as a representation of the importance of sex in our culture" (Bonner, 1995) and so on possibilities seem to be infinite...

4. A similar approach is presented by Abrams (1993) : "Postmodernism involves not only a continuation, sometimes carried to an extreme, of (...) experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms".
5. To the point of sharing at least one character : Molly Millions, who appears both in *Johnny Mnemonic* and in *Neuromancer*, and under different names in other Gibson's novels.
6. Sony Mao is mentioned in the way that suggests us that the narrator assumes this person is known to any of his readers and is an indispensable part of the readers' reality just like in the case of Ono-Sendai hardware in *Burning Chrome*.
7. A dolphin. Jones is nothing else but a talking animal, as known from numerous fairy-tales. Ironically, a wise beast here morphs into a high technology-educated addict. This sarcastic image is a representative example of a postmodern play with conventions, done by a sage, who knows all about his predecessors and can successfully blend the elements taken from them, poking fun at them at the same time. Another example of this kind of postmodern literary game is a description of a Yakuza killer, who pursues Johnny Mnemonic. Possessing all the traits of a professional killer, he is "looking like your standard tourist tech, in plastic zoris and a silly Hawaiian shirt printed with blowups of his firm's most popular microprocessor; a mild little guy, the kind most likely to wind up drunk on sake in a bar that puts out miniature rice crackers with seaweed garnish".
8. Here we go back to what we have started with : the famous opening sentence of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* : "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" that stresses the fact that the differences between the natural world and the technical world are constantly compared with each other in cyberpunk fiction and the borderline between these two worlds finally blurs.
9. The name ice comes from the abbreviation ICE, meaning Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics. In cyberpunk books ice is the ultimate defensive weapon against hackers.
10. Tally Isham is, in the world created by William Gibson, that biggest star of simstim, comparable to the Hollywood stars of the real world, but obviously much more influential, as people do not only watch her, but literally live her life or at least fragments of it.
11. The importance of information in cyberpunk genre is well characterized by Rudy Rucker who states that "What's really good about (cyberpunk) is that it's fast and dense. It has lot of information. If you value information the most, then you don't care about convention. It's not 'Who do you know ?'; it's 'How fast are you ? How dense ?' It's not, 'Do you talk like my old friends ?'; it's 'Is this interesting ?'".