

Landscapes of the Virtual and Real in Neuromancer

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Neuromancer uses interior and exterior landscapes to lead the reader to an understanding of the interface between the virtual and the real. The reader is led into the story by a description of landscape using technological imagery.

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

And the first part of the story proceeds to examine the exterior, or real, world that Case inhabits. The darkness of the Ninsei streets with bright flashes of the holographic arcade and flat, pink octagons of Case's drug addiction gives his world a gritty, punk cast. Since Case's nervous system was damaged by his last Sprawl employer, he is forced to exist only in the real, a device which lets the reader better connect to the main character. Even in the technology infused future, the exterior landscape maintains a connection to the past, and thus a connection to the reader.

"Friday night in Ninsei. He passed yakitori stands and massage parlor, a franchised coffee shop called Beautiful Girl, the electronic thunder of an arcade." (p.10)

This early scene does not seem too different from what readers would be familiar with today through pop culture. Because we can connect to the landscape by the mention of familiar images, Gibson's view of the future becomes more plausible.

Later, the reader encounters a [landscape](#) created with the technologies of today as Molly takes Case to a private room where they can talk out loud. Only surrounded by old fashioned communication devices such as "the guts of a television", "a crumpled dish antenna", and "an enormous pile of old magazines" (p.48), can old fashion communication, i.e. a conversation without the fear of recordings, become the dominate form of interaction. Because our familiar technologies are layered into sludge piles of futuristic landscape, Gibson's world is believable since it clearly evolved from our own.

Having drawn his audience into the future world of the book, Gibson can introduce a landscape to which we cannot easily relate, the interior landscape of the matrix. This landscape is interior because it exists for a person only when they are "jacked in", that is, only when their brain and nervous system are operating to carry them through the cyberspace world. The matrix exists technologically, but its landscape seems to rest inside one's head. Our exterior reality is first grounded in Case's body and experiences so the imaginative wanderings according to coordinates among the colorful geometric shapes are more acceptable because there is a real to come back to.

As Case's jumps between landscapes come with increasing speed, especially towards the end of the book, the notion of what is real is called into question. After exposing the reader to Case's exterior landscape and then his interior one with the Flatline among the matrix, he gives Molly's perspective on the exterior world via an

internal link that Case "flips" to when he is jacked in. Is what he sees through Molly's mirrored eyes "real" in that he is viewing her exterior landscape or virtual in that his senses are through cyberspace ? The reader is introduced to notions of virtual and real, but then these are blended. They are blended again with the two AIs. Wintermute starts out as virtual and Case first encounters him while jacked in, the expected realm of a cyber-technology. But then Wintermute invades the exterior landscape of "jacked out". The Finn appears to Case on a screen in his room and to Molly in a booth. Wintermute then steps out of the landscape and starts effecting reality such as killing the Turing agents. The second AI, Neuromancer, changes the landscape of Freeside by putting the stars into the image of Linda Lee. By blending what is classified as virtual into the real landscape, Gibson shows how interchangeable these aspects are in his world.

The final rapid switching between scenes and consciousnesses as Case flips, jacks in and out, and is flatlined by *Neuromancer* illustrate how meshed the different settings become in one mind. The offering by Neuromancer of a quiet house on a silvered beach with Linda quilts all the landscapes into one. Marie-France's external childhood landscape is made virtual because she is the creator of Neuromancer. In this inhabits Linda who was "real" and is now virtual because she is dead which implies that she could really exist in cyberspace because she no longer exists externally and Neuromancer who was virtual but now is as indistinguishably real as Linda. Case rejects all this which seems as real to him as his other physical existence and chooses to go back to the physical landscape of his "meat". Only his real life allows him to effect the change that brings the AIs together. The first version of the real, his body, lets him change the version of the virtual, the matrix. In the end, seeing Linda, Neuromancer, and a version of himself, shows the virtual and real have blended. Case cannot take away the value of Linda's existence or of his own. They both exist and the small wave as Case slides by their beach shows the landscapes of separate domains are intertwined.