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Neuromancer and Humanity in the Age of Knowledge Work

As forms of technology have changed over time, so has the volume of information. As the once-daily newspaper became less popular, the news broadcast brought live news to one's living room; as the internet surged and the age of information knowledge work emerged, news became accessible in live feeds on social media and on websites, often faster than one could digest. People began to absorb media — from news to sports to whatever was going on in other people's lives — at mind-numbingly faster rates. Soon, jobs too began to place a greater emphasis on knowledge and the ability to grow rather than a focus on one specific type of work. William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* depicts an age in which information is even more advanced, one in which virtual reality and body modifications allow people to receive and interact with information in newer and more intimate ways. The result of these new innovations is a new, artificially developed human being. In the novel, Gibson, through the protagonist Case's feelings towards the loss of his ex-girlfriend Linda Lee, establishes that to be human in the age of knowledge work, one must be able to filter through the vast amounts of information and reconnect with one's human emotions.

Case's developing feeling of rage helps him to realize and embrace his visceral emotions and recognize them as part of being human. As the feeling of rage begins to grow inside him, “[Case] knew then: the rage had come in the arcade, when Wintermute rescinded the simstim ghost of Linda Lee, yanking away the simple animal promise of food, warmth, a place to sleep

[...] He'd been numb a long time, years. All his nights down Ninsei, his nights with Linda, numb in bed and numb at the cold sweating center of every drug deal. But now he'd found this warm thing, this chip of murder" (Gibson 162). Case's acknowledgment that the anger inside him derived from the rescission of the very base "animal" instincts or needs demonstrates one of the earlier instances in the novel of Case's accepting of his emotions. Here, Linda does not appear to serve as his girlfriend or romantic interest but rather as a maternal figure — she provided him with a sense of comfort and served as his rock that he could always come back to after dealing drugs or other work that Case did. Thus, Wintermute's virtual presentation and removal of Linda served almost as a second instance of her death, and as a result, the matricide of the only maternal figure in his life. His further recognition of being numb being contrasted with his present "warm" rage establishes his progression as a character. Namely, Case goes from being originally numbed by drugs, cyberspace and simstim, and all of the other artificial feelings that separated him from those base animal emotions to a person who recognizes those base emotions. This numbness did not allow him to appreciate and care for Linda as a proper lover should, expressing a further sense of loss for Case and making Wintermute's "yanking away" of her again even more cruel to him. Presently, however, Case embraces those base emotions. Case eventually transfers that rage to accomplish even more in his job.

Case's sense of rage actually helps him become even better at being a console cowboy. As he begins to break down the ice protecting Neuromancer, "[he] came in steep, fueled by self-loathing [...] And then -- old alchemy of the brain and its vast pharmacy -- his hate flowed into his hands. In the instant before he drove Kuang's sting through the base of the first tower, he attained a level of proficiency exceeding anything he'd known or imagined. Beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he moved, Kuang moving with him, evading his attackers with

an ancient dance” (279). The word choice of “alchemy” and “pharmacy” suggests a contrast between Case’s drug-fueled past and his present self, which must lay off of alcohol and drugs as a result of a surgery ordered by Armitage. Furthermore, Case’s reconnection with his emotions is likened to that of enlightenment, a feeling of rising above his sense of self and awareness. This enlightenment not only gives him a more present state of mind regarding his emotions but also restocks and rejuvenates that “old alchemy” in his system, driving him and making him more adept than ever at breaking the ice and hacking his way through defense systems, as evidenced by his experience of attaining “a level of proficiency exceeding anything he’d known or imagined.” This enlightenment ignites a more adept Case that feels more capable than ever. For Case, reconnecting with his human emotions made him better at his job as a hacker than any drug or technology could, demonstrating that despite the advanced technology found in *Neuromancer*, being human is what allows one to thrive.

Case’s experience with Linda Lee in the virtual simulation created by Neuromancer further establishes his reunion with his emotions and humanity. As he makes love to Linda, the sense of familiarity returns to him, those feelings that he had once felt. That feeling was “[s]omething he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew — he remembered — as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read” (257). Now, Case no longer sees Linda as a maternal figure but recollects on their romantic relationship together. It is here that Case experiences emotion that he is unable to experience in cyberspace as a cowboy. To the cowboy lifestyle, as Case notes, these experiences in the flesh are deemed substandard in comparison to the experiences when jacked into a computer; however, Case now believes that in reality there

are experiences in the flesh that are infinitely better, for they are not bound by ones and zeros. The “strong, blind way” in which the “infinite intricacy” of the body expresses love through sex further demonstrates the illogical nature of passion and love and other human emotions, a distinct contrast between the logical flow of algorithms and computation in cyberspace. This renewed interest in the physical rather than the digital or virtual signifies not only a shift in Case’s beliefs but also serves as a message to reconnect with the world every once in a while, something that might be lost to the digital expanse of cyberspace or the console cowboy lifestyle.

William Gibson utilizes Case’s reaction to the loss of Linda to show that in the age of knowledge work, one must still stay in touch with one’s emotions if one is to be human. In the age of constant information flow where knowledge is predominant both in the workplace and in one’s personal life, it is important to reconnect with one’s humanity and emotions. As information continues to be a presence in one’s life and as competition in the workplace approaches its apex, one might get lost in the flow and lose one’s own sense of self. What *Neuromancer* teaches is the importance of realizing the numbness that this flow has caused and accepting those emotions that are felt when one is not tuned in to the various forms of media. Understanding the humanity behind these social feeds and artificiality as a result of technology allows people to be more accepting of who they are and less focused on the incessant barrage of information around them. So, while these new technologies and information streams remain an integral part of the way people live and work in the present, to live as a human in the modern age of knowledge work is to find the right balance between these information streams and one’s own feelings and desires.

Works Cited

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. Ace, 2020.