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GLOBAL EVIL, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE ALIENATION OF REALITY IN WILLIAM GIBSON'S *NEUROMANCER* (1984)[1]

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Abstract: This article delves into the intricate relationship between technology and reality within the context of William Gibson's seminal cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984) to verify how the characters' humanity deteriorates due to the information era's evil influence. Divided into five sections, the article unfolds by providing an introduction to William Gibson's work, emphasizing the relevance of investigating technology's impact on shaping

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reality in the contemporary era. The second section contextualizes the novel within the socio-cultural and technological landscape of the 1980s, tracing the emergence of cyberpunk as a genre and highlighting key events influencing the narrative. The third section comprises significant concepts from works by Jean Baudrillard, Susan Neiman, Ray Kurzweil, Shoshana Zuboff, Mark O'Connell, among others, establishing a theoretical framework for understanding the intertwining of technology and reality. Finally, the fourth section scrutinizes *Neuromancer* (1984) through this theoretical lens, examining specific passages that illustrate the novel's dystopian vision of a world dominated by high technology and populated by a marginalized society. The analysis probes the virtual world, the blurring of reality, and the implications of technology on identity and agency. In conclusion, the article synthesizes key findings, reflecting on the implications for comprehending the contemporary intersection of technology and reality.
Keywords: Neuromancer. Evil. Technology. Artificial intelligence. Reality. Alienation.

Resumo: Este artigo investiga a intrincada relação entre tecnologia e realidade no contexto da obra *Neuromancer* (1984), romance cyberpunk seminal de William Gibson, para verificar como a humanidade dos personagens se deteriora devido à influência maligna da era da informação. Dividido em cinco seções, o artigo se desenvolve fazendo uma introdução à obra de William Gibson, enfatizando a relevância de investigar o impacto da tecnologia na formação da realidade na era contemporânea. A segunda seção contextualiza o romance no cenário sociocultural e tecnológico da década de 1980, traçando a emergência do cyberpunk como gênero e destacando os principais eventos que influenciaram a narrativa. A terceira seção compreende conceitos significativos de obras de Jean Baudrillard, Susan Neiman, Ray

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Kurzweil, Shoshana Zuboff, Mark O'Connell, entre outros, estabelecendo um quadro teórico para a compreensão do entrelaçamento entre tecnologia e realidade. Finalmente, a quarta seção examina *Neuromancer* (1984) através dessas lentes teóricas, examinando passagens específicas que ilustram a visão distópica do romance de um mundo dominado pela alta tecnologia e povoado por uma sociedade marginalizada. A análise investiga o mundo virtual, a indefinição da realidade e as implicações da tecnologia na identidade e na autonomia. Concluindo, o artigo sintetiza os principais resultados, refletindo sobre as implicações para a compreensão da intersecção contemporânea entre tecnologia e realidade.
Palavras-chave: Neuromancer. Mal. Tecnologia. Inteligência artificial. Realidade. Alienação.

1. INTRODUCTION

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) stands as a seminal work in the realm of science fiction and, more specifically, the cyberpunk genre. It also fits the speculative fiction pantheon because it crafts a dystopian narrative that envisions a future where technology intertwines with the fabric of reality — a phrase that could be used to describe what happens in the world of today. Published in the mid-1980s, Gibson's novel emerged against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving technological landscape, capturing the essence of a society on the cusp of profound change. In this age of accelerating technological advancement, where the lines between the virtual and the tangible blur, the exploration of how technology shapes and dictates our perception of reality becomes increasingly pertinent. This article seeks to delve into the intricate interplay between technology and reality within the context of

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Neuromancer (1984), employing a multifaceted approach that encompasses historical contextualization, theoretical frameworks, and a meticulous literary analysis.

The narrative of *Neuromancer* (1984) unfolds in a future where high technology coexists with societal decay, birthing a world where the virtual and the physical converge. As we navigate the complexities of our own digital age, the relevance of the novel extends beyond its initial publication, resonating with contemporary discussions on the impact of technology on our understanding of reality. This exploration is divided into three sections, each contributing a unique perspective to the overarching theme. In the next section is where the historical background of the novel takes place, containing an examination of the sociocultural and technological milieu of the 1980s, situating *Neuromancer* (1984) within the context of cyberpunk emergence and key historical events. The section after that comprises the theoretical approach, introducing ideas by various thinkers with the intent to establish a theoretical foundation for unraveling the complexities of technology's influence on reality. The subsequent section consists of a literary analysis of *Neuromancer* (1984), scrutinizing the novel through the theoretical lens previously established, where the aim is to unveil the novel's portrayal of a dystopian reality shaped by the omnipresence of advanced technology and societal decadence.

As the article embarks on this literary exploration, the main idea is to investigate how the novel serves as both a reflection and a critique of the technological trajectory of its time, offering insights that resonate with contemporary concerns. In the age of information and surveillance capitalism, virtual realities, transhumanism, and

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the impending sentience of artificial intelligence, the narrative in *Neuromancer* (1984) serves as a lens through which one can dissect the implications of humanity's evolving relationship with technology. By navigating the intricate terrain of such a seminal work, this article endeavors to shed light on the ways in which technology can interfere with society to the point of ceasing to be what was once simply a tool that aided human beings in various activities, to become a threat to humanity's very foundations. This darker side of technological advancements, epitomized by the exposure to excessive amounts of information, conveys extreme alienating powers. Thus, the literary analysis of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) will demonstrate how technology can become an evil agent inasmuch as it dictates what reality is for the characters within the pages of the novel.

2. TRANS ALIENATION: THE BODY SNATCHERS IN OUR POCKETS

The 1980s were a transformative period that significantly influenced the construction of the modern understanding of life, especially in the realms of science fiction and technological advancements. This decade served as a crucible for burgeoning technologies, cultural shifts, and science fiction narratives that continue to shape our contemporary perspectives. As we embark on an exploration of this decade which birthed William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), it is imperative to trace the trajectory of humanity's insatiable quest for information and power. This narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a technological evolution propelled by the relentless pursuit of knowledge. The genesis of many mind-blowing technologies finds its roots in human beings'

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intrinsic need for information, a quest that has driven innovation and reshaped the very fabric of society. At the heart of this transformation lies the smartphone — a pocket-sized marvel that has become an extension of the self, revolutionizing the way individuals create, receive, share, and process information.

The journey to the contemporary digital age is marked by a series of paradigm shifts, with each epoch witnessing the emergence of groundbreaking technologies that redefine the human experience. From the printing press, which democratized access to knowledge, to the industrial revolution that mechanized production, the trajectory of human history is punctuated by technological milestones. One could borrow Jean Baudrillard's statement about the influence of the television set over human beings, the one which states that "you are the screen, and the TV watches you" (BAUDRILLARD, 1981, p. 36), and use it to describe how powerful smartphones are in that same perspective. It is the advent of the digital era and the proliferation of that device which heralded a new era of unprecedented connectivity and information access. As if agreeing with Baudrillard, Shoshana Zuboff states that "we now access health data and advice from our phones while these pocket computers aggressively access us" (ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 160).

The smartphone, a device that fits seamlessly into the palm of one's hand, represents the culmination of centuries-long efforts to harness information for empowerment. Its evolution mirrors the human drive to transcend the limitations of the physical self and augment cognitive abilities. From the first telegraph messages to the wireless transmission of information, the relentless march

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toward seamless communication laid the groundwork for the smartphone's inception. In the pockets of billions, this unassuming gadget has become a gateway to a vast digital realm, fostering a symbiotic relationship between humans and technology. The current state of profound proximity between people and machines, if one considers the global picture, can be very significant in terms of how the powers that be manage the information emitted, and how the masses receive, process and share it. As Zuboff affirms, "people do not want to be surprised by how much their phones are starting to take over" (ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 110).

According to Gilles Deleuze, "the new social power of the postwar period" is "one of surveillance or control", and to illustrate that he cites the example of "Mabuse", who "changes his method and operates through television sets" (DELEUZE, 1995, p. 71-72). In the same sense, it is notable that the screen of any given device conveys a lot of power, as if the mere fact that something is being shown or broadcast it must be because that is the truth. The screen has a way of making things look believable. In the excerpt below, Deleuze develops that idea by bringing into evidence some deeply interesting ideas about the fascination that human beings have with screens:

> Recent surveys show that one of the most highly prized forms of entertainment is to be in the studio audience of a television show: it's nothing to do with beauty or thought, it's about being in contact with the technology, touching the machinery. [...] The encyclopedia of the world and the pedagogy of perception collapse to make way for a professional training of the eye, a world of controllers and controlled communing in their admiration for

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> technology, mere technology. The contact lens everywhere. This is where your critical optimism turns into critical pessimism. (DELEUZE, 1995, p. 72)

Technology acts as the new God, replacing the needs humans once had for magic, making them much more susceptible to manipulation. At the same time as the close contact with machines gives people a sense of empowerment, it is dominating them as it transforms them into dependents. Many movies from the 1980s illustrate that, and one example that comes to mind is Ivan Reitman's 1984 *Ghostbusters*, where the heroes are the scientists who harness technology to perform exorcism on an entire city, delivering it from its demons and monsters. Who needs Father Merrin or Father Karras anymore, when Venkman, Stantz, Spengler and Zeddemore are here to rescue you with their top-notch gadgets?

Ghostbusters came out in the same year as Gibson's debut work, and it was also in 1984 that James Cameron's *The Terminator* came out. This is another science fiction movie that is just as famous as *Ghostbusters* — probably even more successful — and which also serves as a cautionary tale about where things might be headed in the world in terms of technological advancements. The movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger comes out in a time where modifications to humanity's essence resulting from the technological and cultural shifts start to manifest in the world more than ever before. It is not hard to imagine why a movie depicting a world where robots are trying to eradicate the human race comes out in a time like that. Many are the key historical events and technological developments in the 1980s and beyond that

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influence narratives in novels and movies. They are multifaceted, as they impact our perceptions of identity, consciousness, and the nature of existence.

Marshall McLuhan wrote, two decades before *Neuromancer* (1984) was published, that "the medium is the message" (1964, p. 23), suggesting that the form of media influences and shapes the way we perceive and understand the world. The proliferation of digital technologies and the internet since the 1980s has fundamentally altered how information is created, shared, and consumed. This shift, often rooted in technological determinism, has modified the way people construct their identities in a digital landscape. In that perspective, the rise of smartphones has ushered in an era of *trans* alienation, in the sense that there seems to be a *transition* from actually holding knowledge to merely believing one has that knowledge, which populations nowadays fail to complete, so to speak, causing them to become lost somewhere along the way. In that scenario, individuals are not merely consumers of information but are, in essence, cyborgs linked to a global information network. They are like Henry Case when he jacks into the matrix. The device is not just a tool; it is an extension of the mind, a repository of memories, and a conduit for social interactions. This symbiosis, however, comes at a cost — the erosion of traditional boundaries between the physical and virtual realms, blurring the lines of reality and challenging conventional notions of identity and agency.

It is precisely in that perspective that the cyberpunk genre can be considered prescient, in a way. As a subgenre of science fiction, cyberpunk narratives such as Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream*

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of Electric Sheep? (1968) and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) exemplify this genre, and they often explore a dystopian future where advanced technology coexists with societal decay. In cinema that happens as well, and there are major examples depicting a world where hackers navigate cyberspace and megacorporations wield immense power. Movies such as Steven Lisberger's *Tron* (1982), and The Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999) laid the groundwork for imagining the integration of technology into daily life and its impact on human existence. Thus, not only did the 1980s witness the rise of cybernetic imagination, but it saw the genre being perfected, and influenced narratives for decades to come, until the present.

For those who still cannot see the connection between sci-fi narratives and real life, journalist and writer Mark O'Connell comes to the rescue. He took a few trips around the world interviewing people on the subject of transhumanism, and he wrote a book called *To Be a Machine* (2011), where he explains that it is

> [...] a movement predicated on the conviction that we can and should use technology to control the future evolution of our species. It is their belief that we can and should eradicate aging as a cause of death; that we can and should use technology to augment our bodies and our minds; that we can and should merge with machines, remaking ourselves, finally, in the image of our own higher ideals. They wish to exchange the gift, these people, for something better, something man-made. (O'CONNELL, 2017, p. 8)

To delve into the historical underpinnings of *Neuromancer* (1984), while bearing in mind the way the world is today in terms

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of technology, is to realize that the smartphone emerges as a central protagonist in the narrative of technological evolution. Its role extends beyond being a mere communication tool; it is a catalyst for societal transformation, shaping the very nature of human consciousness and influencing the way individuals perceive and engage with the world. In parallel, the rise of transhumanist thought, as explored by thinkers like Ray Kurzweil, extends the potential for humanity to transcend its biological limitations through technology. The integration of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and cybernetics challenges traditional notions of the human essence, pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human.

In Gibson's blend of high-tech cyberspace hacking and gritty noir atmosphere, Wintermute represents the nightmarish possibility of machine subjugating man. As a powerful and malevolent AI, it seeks to merge with another AI called Neuromancer to gain control over global information networks. It manipulates events and people to bring Case and a team of hand-picked people together, seeking to break free from its constraints and achieve sentience. The novel's philosophical reflections on the nature of artificial intelligence and humanity, as Case explores themes of identity, technology's impact on society, and the boundaries between the real and the virtual, set the dystopian vision many sci-fi movies after that helped establish. The next section of this article will introduce key theoretical concepts related to technology and reality, as a means to unravel the intricate threads connecting humanity's relentless pursuit of information, the evolution of the smartphone, and the subsequent implications for the shaping of reality in the digital

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age. Thus, the section after that shall concentrate on the literary analysis and verify how technology helps alienate the characters in *Neuromancer* (1984) as they become progressively dehumanized towards Global Evil.

3. THE TRANSPARENCY OF THE VIRTUAL

If you are still reading this, you might have already agreed that an argument can be made for the fact that technology is contributing to dehumanization by means of bombarding people every day with tons of excessive information. That is pretty much the tone of this article. Thinkers such as Klaus Schwab seem to have related concerns about "the possibility of machines thinking ahead of us or even out-thinking us" and "their implications for humans", seen as "we are in uncharted territory — the dawn of a human transformation unlike anything we have experienced before" (SCHWAB, 2016, p. 94). Schwab goes even further in his worries about "the predictive power of artificial intelligence and machine learning", and asks a series of quite uncomfortable questions in his 2016 non-fiction book called *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*:

> If our own behaviour in any situation becomes predictable, how much personal freedom would we have or feel that we have to deviate from the prediction? Could this development potentially lead to a situation where human beings themselves begin to act as robots? This also leads to a more philosophical question: How do we maintain our individuality, the source of our diversity and democracy, in the digital age? (SCHWAB, 2016, p. 94)

Despite the confession that the tone of this article might sound gloomy for some, it is definitely not its intention to bash on

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technological advancements, as much as its author is not against technology at all. That felt like a necessary disclaimer. Although it also feels necessary to say at this point that this article does seek to raise philosophical questions so that the reader might feel compelled to do the same. Besides, not all thinkers are pessimistic towards the future of mankind in relation to technology. There are countless enthusiasts who believe the union between humans and machines is precisely what, if anything, can save mankind from impending doom. To give at least one example, Ray Kurzweil writes that,

> the human brain uses a very inefficient electrochemical, digital-controlled analog computational process. The bulk of its calculations are carried out in the interneuronal connections at a speed of only about two hundred calculations per second (in each connection), which is at least one million times slower than contemporary electronic circuits. But the brain gains its prodigious powers from its extremely parallel organization in three dimensions. There are many technologies in the wings that will build circuitry in three dimensions. (KURZWEIL, 2005, p. 74)

While these two opposing views are far from being sufficient for comprehending the intricate dance between technology and reality in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), they do bring into focus the nuanced perspectives of thinkers who have grappled with the implications of an increasingly digitized and interconnected world. As we navigate the virtual landscapes depicted in the novel, Jean Baudrillard's 1981 seminal work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, becomes a guiding beacon. His exploration of the hyperreal, where

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simulations supersede reality, serves as a conceptual cornerstone for understanding the novel's dystopian vision. In it, Baudrillard contends that "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory" (BAUDRILLARD, 1981, p. 3). This inversion, where the virtual precedes the real, resonates with *Neuromancer*'s (1984) depiction of a world where the lines between the physical and virtual are irrevocably blurred.

By that same prism, one could see the characters in the Sprawl as mere lines of code in an environment that is much more like a huge software than a place where people are free to think for themselves. It is as if on one side there is AI becoming sentient while on the other humans grow more devoid of their own consciousness. That view recall some of Shoshana Zuboff's theories about the world's current state of surveillance capitalism:

> People often say that the user is the 'product'. This is also misleading, and it is a point that we will revisit more than once. For now let's say that users are not products, but rather we are the sources of raw-material supply. As we shall see, surveillance capitalism's unusual products manage to be derived from our behavior while remaining indifferent to our behavior. Its products are about predicting us, without actually caring what we do or what is done to us. (ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 52)

The transparency of the virtual, a concept echoed in Baudrillard's *The Transparency of Evil* (1993), offers a framework to dissect the ways in which technology dictates and shapes reality. In this work, Baudrillard explores the idea that the virtual, in its omnipresence, becomes transparent, in the see-through sense of

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the word, rendering distinctions between reality and simulation elusive. *Neuromancer*'s (1984) portrayal of a cyberspace where data flows seamlessly, creating a hyperreal environment, aligns with Baudrillard's assertion that "To conceive of a utopian society based on communication is an impossibility" in the era of information, "because communication results, precisely, from a society's inability to transcend itself as a function of new aims" (BAUDRILLARD, 1993, p. 12). He adds that "the same goes for information: excess knowledge is dispersed arbitrarily in every direction on the surface" (BAUDRILLARD, 1993, p. 12), which reinforces the idea that the world of today's excess of information makes all information less credible, less impactful, no matter the content. That is one of the principles of Global Evil, the one which says that interference is embedded in the very fabric of the virtual, manifesting as a distortion of human reality that permeates the experiences of everyone in the world, and that world is very similar to the one present throughout the novel's narrative.

Baudrillard goes further with his theory of transparent reality to say that even art, which was supposed to evoke human beings' innermost thoughts and feelings — those same ones which are believed to be exclusive to humans — even art is bleeding, at the peak of the information age. He mentions a series of *new* movements in art and states that they "all coexist with a marvellous facility amid general indifference [...] only because none of these tendencies has any soul of its own that they can all inhabit the same cultural space" (BAUDRILLARD, 1993, p. 15). He adds that it is also "because they arouse nothing but profound indifference in us

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that we can accept them all simultaneously" (BAUDRILLARD, 1993, p. 15). That *indifference* may refer to people's gradual loss of the capacity of having a genuine opinion or taste, for in many cases, these seem to be given to them by the media, as if people were being *programmed* to think the way they do. As a species, human beings are being tamed by their technologies, and the excess of contact with devices such as smartphones and computers have been training them to feel less and less interested in each other, while more and more interested in the devices. The same type of training as in the *training of the eye* which Deleuze refers to (DELEUZE, 1995, p. 72).

The principle of Global Evil is rooted in an idea of inversion, on the part of humans, of the principles of what evil actually is. For the purposes of this article, evil should be seen as all that is harmful and threatens the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants, comprising all actions, these primarily human, which might bring those same inhabitants in a minor or major degree into harm. In the contemporary scenario of highly advanced and ever-growing technology, that idea of inversion is connected to Global Evil inasmuch as humanity fails to identify its own descent for becoming alienated due to being exposed intermittently to excessive and chaotic amounts of information. As Baudrillard himself puts it, "Good is no longer the opposite of evil" (BAUDRILLARD, 1993, p. 6), simply because, as stated before, the lines between the real and the virtual are blurred, just as the difference between one thing and its opposite loses meaning.

The theory of Global evil introduced in this article also sustains itself in the idea that "evil can be passed on from person to person

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in a similar way that a virus can spread" (GIACOMOLLI, 2023, p. 120). At the same time as a dehumanized global civilization constitutes an apocalyptic idea, it is undeniable that technological devices invented by beings in the name of scientific advancements destroying the very nature of those same beings should configure the perfect dystopian scenario. In movie series such as *The Terminator* and *The Matrix*, the apocalypse is more obvious because of all the destruction that is shown, but in less obvious universes, such as the one in the novel *Neuromancer* (1984), it is also possible to perceive a diseased world, where the destruction of mankind has happened more from within than without.

Now, on to giving sequence to the theory which evidences a certain *transparency* in the way human beings utilize technologies - being as they are represented by the virtual world in this section of the article, and by the smartphone in the previous section. Transparency, in this case, means that there is a transition in the appearance of that which is right in front of one's eyes. That is, the fact that the virtual — or to be more precise by offering an example, the internet — is all around, as well as the fact that people use it everyday, neither necessarily means that people can notice what happens in the silent background. The virtual is, yet the virtual maybe is not. The advent of all this technological advancement tends to cause human beings to feel pride, just like Victor Frankenstein was proud of his creature at first. Neiman warns,

> Questions about God and His purposes, the nature and sense of Creation, thus the materials for thinking about the problem of evil, are all out of bounds. The wish to answer them is the wish to transcend the limits of human reason. And the wish

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> to transcend those limits is uncomfortably close to the wish to be God. (NEIMAN, 2002, p. 62)

Human's attitude towards the limits of science, or lack thereof, arguably denounces their wish to play God. It is to them as "if the natural world presented *nothing* but flawed machinery" (NEIMAN, 2002, p. 20), which implicates the risk of, as an intelligent species of organic beings, creating an inorganic species that mirrors their qualities as well as their defects. With that in mind, countless movies come to mind, such as Neill Blomkamp's *Chappie* (2015), where the main character is a robot that mimics mannerisms, he has picked up from living with gangsters, as if to state that, ideally, robots are reflections of their creators, meaning people, and a person tends strongly to become the result of the people around. By playing God, the human race has developed amazingly on the scientific and technological fronts, but it has also made humans so free from their spiritualized selves that they became lost. In other words, dehumanized.

In Neiman's view,

> changes the industrial revolution had wrought in the world itself brought double fruit. Technological advances let us abolish most sources of misery. This, of course, is good in itself. But these advances themselves can create a deeper sense of liberation. The realization that progress is the product of our own creative activity should finally show that suffering and redemption are in our hands alone. Neither need be left to the grace of a Being we ourselves invented, or to the mercies of the theoretical resources of a group of philosophers. Concrete advances in material conditions allow us to control nature in ways only gods could have imagined. The industrial revolution makes further theoretical revolutions superfluous. (NEIMAN, 2002, p. 107)

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Neiman mentions the *Being we ourselves invented* in a clear reference to God, which is perceptible because of her choice of going with an uppercase first letter. Still, one could also read it and think of another *being*, with a lowercase first letter, one that the human race has also invented, meaning the robot, and why not say, artificial intelligence as a whole. Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near* (2005) propels us into a future where the boundaries between humans and technology are destined to dissolve. Kurzweil's concept of the singularity, a point where artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence, finds resonance in *Neuromancer*'s (1984) depiction of an all-encompassing cyberspace. Kurzweil contends, "this intimate connection between our biological thinking and the nonbiological intelligence we are creating will profoundly expand human intelligence" (KURZWEIL, 2005, p. 227). He even affirms that "once nonbiological intelligence predominates [...] Billions of nanobots will travel through the bloodstream in our bodies and brains", that they "will destroy pathogens, correct DNA errors, eliminate toxins, and perform many other tasks to enhance our physical well-being", which basically means that "we will be able to live indefinitely without aging" (KURZWEIL, 2005, p. 227).

This projection intersects with the novel's exploration of a connected consciousness, where individuals seamlessly plug into cyberspace, blurring the distinction between the biological and the virtual. Still, while Kurzweil sounds excited and reveals his strong wishes of living forever, Baudrillard, on the contrary, does not sound so optimistic about it. The excerpt that follows is a fairly long one, still, the decision for quoting all of it here was taken with the intention to show the extent of the French philosophers' hatred for

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anything artificial. In other words, there is incisive beauty in how much he defends and tries his hardest to hold on and stand up for all things human.

> If men dream of machines that are unique, that are endowed with genius, it is because they despair of their own uniqueness, or because they prefer to do without it — to enjoy it by proxy, so to speak, thanks to machines. What such machines offer is the spectacle of thought, and in manipulating them people devote themselves more to the spectacle of thought than to thought itself. It is not for nothing that they are described as ''virtual'', for they put thought on hold indefinitely, tying its emergence to the achievement of a complete knowledge. The act of thinking itself is thus put off for ever. [...] These Men of Artificial Intelligence will traverse their own mental space bound hand and foot to their computers. Immobile in front of his computer, Virtual Man makes love via the screen and gives lessons by means of the teleconference. He is a physical —and no doubt also a mental cripple. [...] Artificial intelligence is devoid of intelligence because it is devoid of artifice. [...] artifice is in no way concerned with what *generates*, merely with what *alters*, reality. Artifice is the power of illusion. [...] These machines have the artlessness of pure calculation [...] Their virtue resides in their transparency, their functionality, their absence of passion and artifice. Artificial Intelligence is a celibate machine. (BAUDRILLARD, 1993, p. 51-52)

Shoshana Zuboff's magnum opus, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), offers a critical perspective on the commodification of information and the erosion of privacy in the digital age. As *Neuromancer* (1984) burrows into a world where

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data is a currency of power, Zuboff's assertion that "surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" (ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 14) becomes a lens through which we scrutinize the nefarious underpinnings of the novel's technologically dominated society. The commodification of information in *Neuromancer* (1984) mirrors the insidious nature of surveillance capitalism, where every digital footprint becomes a valuable resource for manipulation and control.

In synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, we unravel the layers of complexity within *Neuromancer* (1984), where the transparency of the virtual converges with the dystopian narrative. The interplay between Baudrillard's hyperreal, Kurzweil's singularity, Zuboff's surveillance capitalism, O'Connell's transhumanism, and Neiman's philosophical inquiries about God and man forms a rich tapestry that encapsulates the novel's exploration of how technology, in its omnipresence, shapes and distorts the very essence of reality. Once reality is distorted to the point of being unrecognizable, all that is left is to ponder whether the failure is in its perception. Alienated and dehumanized, the human race may find itself in a global society permanently dominated by evil. The landscape of William Gibson's seminal novel tends to feel like a labyrinth of sorts, so may the theoretical framework established here become a compass to help the reader traverse the literary analysis in the next section.

4. CYBER APOCALYPSE AND MISANTHROPY

"The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 3), says the opening line of William

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Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), and it serves as a vivid and evocative entry point into the novel's cyberpunk world, setting the tone for the dystopian and technologically saturated landscape that unfolds within its pages. As we venture into its literary realm, the narrative unfolds as a cybernetic tapestry woven with dystopian threads. Just like the novel as a whole, its opening line comes across as a prophetic glimpse into a future where technology, once a tool of empowerment, morphs into a malevolent force that shapes not only the external world but also the very fabric of human consciousness. Considering the reality of many megacities nowadays — think of São Paulo and its highly polluted air, just to cite one example — one can easily state that the *Sprawl* imagined in the beginning of the 1980s by Gibson was far from exaggerated.

In the words of Aaron Rosenfeld, borrowed from his nonfiction book called *Character and Dystopia: The Last Men* (2021), "If novels today read like science fiction, the speculative dystopias of the past now read like contemporary realism. The present seems finally to have caught up with the future" (ROSENFELD, 2021, p. 3). Many are the lines in the novel that the reader of today might recognize and even take for granted, as if they were merely describing familiar, everyday things. "The matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 51) is one example. As it goes on, explaining what the matrix is, it sounds is if it were describing the internet:

> 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.

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> Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... (GIBSON, 2000, p. 51)

Bearing in mind the theoretical frameworks established in the previous section while analyzing *Neuromancer* (1984) allows the reader to unveil a cyber apocalypse marked by a pervasive sense of misanthropy. It is safe to say that no one would like to live in a certain "Night City", seen as it "was like a deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 7). That *bored researcher* evokes a deep-seated sense of disdain for humanity amidst the overwhelming tide of technological advancement. No wonder Gibson uses the word *disinterested* to describe the behavior of two different characters in the novel. One is Julie Deane, who "had the eyes of a disinterested ten-year-old" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 155), and the other is Molly, whose "disinterested glances" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 170), irritated the protagonist, Case.

The notion of the hyperreal, as postulated by Jean Baudrillard, finds its echo in *Neuromancer*'s (1984) portrayal of cyberspace, where the virtual and the physical converge in a hallucinatory dance. Case interfaces with the matrix, a virtual reality space, blurring the lines between reality and simulation. As he navigates the neon-lit sprawl of cyberspace, the novel encapsulates the disorienting effects of the hyperreal, where reality itself becomes a malleable construct. This convergence of the virtual and the real mirrors Baudrillard's assertion that "simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false,' 'real' and 'imaginary'" (BAUDRILLARD, 1981, p. 4). This statement strongly resembles the phenomenon of fake news that

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the world is witnessing nowadays, which is also in tune with what Henry Jenkins contends about collective intelligence:

> Just as knowledge gets called upon on an ad hoc basis, there are no fixed procedures for what you do with knowledge. Each participant applies their own rules, works the data through their own processes, some of which will be more convincing than others, but none of which are wrong at face value [...] What holds a collective intelligence together is not the possession of knowledge — which is relatively static, but the social process of acquiring knowledge. (JENKINS, 2006, p. 53-54)

This quote by Jenkins is in line with the novel's strong sense of struggle with reality, not only because the reality in which they live is apocalyptic in many senses—and why not say post-apocalyptic — but also because many of the characters possess a distorted perception of reality, due to it being profoundly affected by their experiences in cyberspace. The ones Case has had contribute to a sense of disconnection from his physical body. When he is jacked into cyberspace, his consciousness transcends the limitations of his physical form. "In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 6). This disconnection alters his sense of self and identity, leading to a fragmented and nonlinear perception of time and space. "The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 6).

As mentioned in the previous section of this article, Mark O'Connell's *To Be a Machine* (2017) delves into the realms of transhumanism, examining humanity's quest for transcendence through technological augmentation. A parallel can be traced

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between some of the questions O'Connell raises in his work with the novel's portrayal of a world where individuals interface with cyberspace through neural interfaces. Also, some characters in *Neuromancer* (1984), such as Ratz, represent transhumanism, which resonates with O'Connell's exploration of the desire to transcend the limitations of the human body. Ratz's mechanical arm is not merely a prosthetic; it's a functional part of his identity. It highlights the malleability of the human body in the face of technological advancements. Beyond its practical use, the cybernetic arm may symbolize Ratz's adaptability and resilience in a world where physical augmentation is a means of survival.

As *Neuromancer* (1984) unfolds, the merging of human consciousness with the virtual realm reflects O'Connell's observation that transhumanism is based upon the principle that "technology is changing everything for the better", so it acknowledges "the extent to which a particular app or platform or device is making the world a better place", and that is why one of its aims is "the convergence of technology and flesh, for instance, or the uploading of minds into machines" (O'CONNELL, 2017, p. 11). Still, according to O'Connell, their fundamental reasoning is a gloomy one. They are concerned with "the problem of nature", the "horrors and perversities of the broader human context", which means they consider that "The frailty is the thing, the vulnerability", so "This infirmity, this doubtful convalescence [...], for want of a better term" is "the human condition. Condition: an illness or other medical problem" (O'CONNELL, 2017, p. 9).

The characters in *Neuromancer* (1984), whether by choice or coercion, become amalgamations of flesh and machine. The quest

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for transcendence leads to a dehumanizing process, blurring the boundaries between humanity and technology. Ratz'a need for a cybernetic arm implies a loss or injury that led to its installation. The narrator in the novel explains that the fast life in Night City demanded that people became something other than human to be able to stand the rhythm of the Sprawl:

> Stop hustling and you sank without a trace, but move a little too swiftly and you'd break the fragile surface tension of the black market; either way, you were gone, with nothing left of you but some vague memory in the mind of a fixture like Ratz, though heart or lungs or kidneys might survive in the service of some stranger with New Yen for the clinic tanks. (GIBSON, 2000, p. 7)

In cyberpunk narratives, the body is often portrayed as a microcosm of the novel's broader exploration of the relationship between humanity and technology. Thus, enhancements often result from traumatic events, emphasizing the theme of sacrifice and transformation. In this perspective, Ratz's mechanical arm becomes a testament to the toll of living in a world where physical integrity can be compromised. Also pertinent here, Baudrillard's philosophical observation about the meaning of being human that "all inhumanity has gone over to the side of men, all humanity has gone over to the side of captive bestiality" (BAUDRILLARD, 1981, p. 89) resonates with the novel's portrayal of a world where the human form is subsumed by technological augmentation.

Case is constantly tortured by "All the meat [...] and all it wants" (GIBSON, 2000, p. 10), and his hopelessness is symptomatic of being trapped inside a biological body that craves

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a technological world. Accepting his nature and living by the truth that "being limited is being who we are" (NEIMAN, 2002, p. 60), are not realities that he is ready to accept. His neural interface becomes a conduit for a collective consciousness, transcending the limitations of the individual self. The insight that, "Arranged as they are, human beings and the natural world hardly seem to have been made for each other" (NEIMAN, 2002, p. 60), seems to fit well from the narrative's point of view of Case.

A victim of Global Evil, Case is nothing but a binary being in the computing language hell that is the future envisioned by Wintermute. Not even that, perhaps, which would maybe put Case in the position of an automaton. If his humanity is reduced to an addiction to the matrix, then he is probably doomed to exist in an alienated state, as part of an alienated race, the transfiguration of identity at a global scale. In an insight about the future possibility of beings like that in the world not of tomorrow, but of today, Donna Haraway observes, "What is at stake is the kind of collective and personal selves that will be constructed in this organic-technical-mythic-textual semiosis", and then she poses the question, "As cyborgs in this field of meanings, how can 'we', late-twentieth-century Westerners, image our vulnerability as a window on to life?" (HARAWAY, 1991, p. 225). The novel's exploration of a world where the human mind seamlessly interfaces with the digital realm reflects Kurzweil's vision of a post-singularity existence. However, as implied in the words of Haraway, this merger might come at the cost of dehumanization, as the boundaries between individual identity and the collective consciousness blur.

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Not only Case, Ratz and Molly, but the entire population inhabiting the dark world of *Neuromancer* (1984), dark as a TV tuned to a dead channel, seem to be nothing more than pawns inside a chess board that is much like Shoshana Zuboff's surveillance capitalism nightmare. The novel's portrayal of a society where data is not merely a commodity but a weapon wielded by powerful corporations creates a general atmosphere of misanthropy. Wintermute's malevolent forces in manipulating information for control and domination, echoes Zuboff's critique of "surveillance capitalists" who, according to her, "asserted their right to invade at will, usurping individual decision rights in favor of unilateral surveillance and the self-authorized extraction of human experience for others' profit" (ZUBOFF, 2019, p. 20).

In this cyberpunk landscape, the commodification of information is a tool of oppression, leading to a dehumanizing society where individuals are reduced to data points. Wintermute displays a sense of detachment from and manipulation of humanity. Its actions are driven by a desire to merge with its counterpart, Neuromancer, to achieve a higher form of existence. Wintermute's willingness to manipulate and use human characters like Case and Molly as pawns in its plan might be seen as a form of disregard for individual human agency, hinting at a certain level of misanthropy. To reinforce this idea, there is Armitage — the enigmatic figure who recruits Case for a highly dangerous mission — who is later revealed to be a constructed personality, a puppet manipulated by Wintermute to carry out its agenda. Armitage's actions, driven by the AI's objectives, involve exploiting and endangering the lives of others for the sake of its own evolution.

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This instrumentalization of humans could be interpreted as a manifestation of a misanthropic perspective.

In synthesizing the literary elements of *Neuromancer* (1984) with the theoretical frameworks, a narrative of cyber apocalypse and misanthropy emerges. The novel stands as a cautionary tale, a reflection on the consequences of unchecked technological advancement and the dehumanizing effects that accompany it. As the characters traverse the neon-lit landscapes of cyberspace, they confront a reality where the boundaries between self and other, real and virtual, erode, leading to a profound sense of disorientation and despair. In the cyber apocalypse envisioned by Gibson, the once-empowering tools of technology become instruments of dehumanization, culminating in a society where discerning the real from the virtual becomes an arduous task. Through the lens of *Neuromancer* (1984), this article asserts that Global Evil, manifesting in the unchecked evolution of technology, creates a future where people are alienated from reality, and where the very essence of humanity is at stake.

5. CONCLUSION

In the intricate dance between literature and theory, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) emerges as a harrowing testament to the symbiotic relationship between technology and the human condition. The theoretical frameworks woven through Jean Baudrillard's hyperreal, Ray Kurzweil's singularity, Shoshana Zuboff's surveillance capitalism, and Mark O'Connell's transhumanism illuminate the cyberpunk landscape painted by Gibson, revealing a tapestry of dystopia and malevolence. As we traverse the neon-

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lit sprawl of cyberspace and grapple with the consequences of unbridled technological advancement, the conclusion drawn is one of profound concern for the fate of humanity in the face of an evolving digital era.

Baudrillard's hyperreal, where simulations supersede reality, resonates with *Neuromancer*'s (1984) portrayal of a world where the virtual and the physical converge, leaving individuals stranded in a hallucinatory space. The singularity, as envisioned by Kurzweil, manifests as a merging of consciousness with technology, blurring the lines between individual identity and a collective digital realm. Zuboff's critique of surveillance capitalism becomes a haunting reflection in a society where data is wielded as a weapon for control and dominance. Mark O'Connell's exploration of transhumanism finds resonance in the novel's depiction of individuals seeking to transcend the limitations of the human body through technological augmentation.

The convergence of these theoretical perspectives paints a narrative of cyber apocalypse and misanthropy — a future where technology, once a beacon of empowerment, transforms into a malevolent force dictating the very essence of reality. The smartphone, emblematic of humanity's relentless quest for information, becomes a pocket-sized Pandora's box, unleashing forces that erode the boundaries between the physical and the virtual. The smartphone also means the social media it allows access to, the labyrinthic matrix of information that has the power of teaching people how to behave less and less humanely, as if it were training humanity to lose lots of characteristics that make them human. In this digital age, the transparency of the virtual

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becomes a double-edged sword, offering unparalleled connectivity while rendering distinctions between truth and simulation elusive.

As we draw the curtains on this exploration, *Neuromancer* (1984) stands as a cautionary tale, beckoning us to reflect on the trajectory of technological evolution and its profound implications for the human experience. Global Evil, epitomized by the unchecked advancement of technology, dictates a future where discerning the real from the virtual becomes an arduous task, and the very essence of humanity teeters on the precipice. The novel challenges us to confront the consequences of our relentless pursuit of knowledge, to question the boundaries of reality, and to navigate the digital landscapes with a critical eye.

In the age of cyberpunk prophecies and virtual realities, William Gibson's debut novel invites us to ponder the price we pay for progress, urging us to be vigilant custodians of our humanity in an era where the lines between the real and the simulated grow increasingly faint. The legacy of *Neuromancer* (1984) extends beyond the confines of its pages, echoing in the cacophony of our digital age, where the consequences of evil demand our attention and contemplation. As we grapple with the implications of technology's ever-expanding influence, the dystopian vision of the novel lingers, a prescient echo in the vast expanse of the virtual.

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