

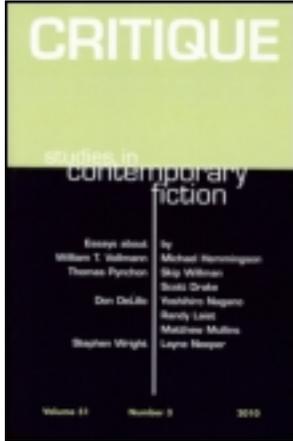
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Stepping Razor in Orbit: Postmodern Identity and Political Alternatives in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*

BENJAMIN FAIR

Much has been written about how cyberspace in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* allows new forms of identity. Within that cyberspace, the self can be called into question, decentered, split apart, and rendered unknowable. Brian McHale, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Veronica Hollinger, Scott Bukatman, and John Christie, to name a few critics, have all argued that in some fashion Gibson's cyberspace represents identity as postmodern.¹ In *Neuromancer*, the new forms of identity point not so much to where we are headed in the future as to where we are in our present condition. The novel is social commentary for contemporary Western society, extrapolating the trajectory of our social practices in the latter years of the twentieth century. The novel illustrates how technology and global capitalism influence our ontology by generating a world of images that have no original referent: meaning is cut loose from our surroundings, so that the self and the world we knew are in question.²

This questioning of ontology in *Neuromancer*, the representative text for the cyberpunk genre, has caused concern because of its political ramifications. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. finds cyberpunk to be the apotheosis of postmodernism as self-conscious bad faith: he argues that cyberpunk concerns itself not with hopes and solutions but with the difficulties of representation in a hyperreal setting ("Cyberpunk" 193). Along with Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., many have criticized cyberpunk or *Neuromancer* for a lack of positive alternatives to an impending, dystopic future.³

What has generally been overlooked in *Neuromancer* is an enclave of political resistance found in the Zion cluster, the home of the Rastas Aerol and Maelcum. Tom Moylan has pointed out its role as a seemingly utopian alternative that might shift the novel's focus from a dystopian pessimism to a utopian

pessimism, in which hope remains possible. However, Moylan rejects the Zion cluster as a utopian alternative to the dystopia of postindustrial capitalism in the novel. He finds that the Zionite Rastas consistently adhere to patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial models. Moylan's discussion raises important topics, but it fails to recognize connections between Rastafarian culture and many details of the novel. Zion cluster does represent a political alternative to the novel's setting of alienation, once Gibson has twisted the cultural tradition of Rastafari into his postmodern, tech-intensive milieu. Gibson's version has disregarded Rastafari's essentialist roots in favor of a cyborg politics, as laid out in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. Molly becomes the most unlikely of heroes for the Rastas, but they accept her as an icon of resistance and affirm their own contradictions in identity. The Zion cluster appears in stark contrast to the postindustrial world represented by cyberspace, just as the Rasta Maelcum fundamentally contrasts with Case.

As noted above, critics have shown how Case's identity and the electronic world he covets reflect a postmodern paradigm, yet several critics have also argued that this electronic world reflects a distinctly modern paradigm.⁴ In relation, the Rastas and their enclave are both premodern and postmodern, and they construct this identity in opposition to a worldwide electronic matrix rooted in modernity. The Rastas highlight the fact that Case's identity is built on the alienating system that the matrix represents and enacts. The Zion cluster reveals a political alternative to the hyperrational, individualistic, parasitic realm that characterizes postindustrial capitalism in the novel because it affirms social commitment and community, intuition, and the body. Maelcum both explicitly assists and implicitly underscores Case's acceptance of his physical self, so that Case's death wish seems to relent in two climactic moments of self-affirmation. Here, Case goes through a transformation of paradigms, from a modern, humanist one to what N. Katherine Hayles describes as a posthumanist one (290). In these moments, Case sheds the humanist ideal of disembodiment in favor of a posthumanist affirmation of embodiment.

This shift is dependent on the influence of the matrix as a formative ground for identity, not only within cyberspace itself but also outside it and against it. *Neuromancer's* four Rastafarian characters identify themselves by their opposition to this space. Michael Heim describes them as "a human group who instinctively keeps its distance from the computer matrix" (80). Heim cites a definitive instance in which Aerol experiences the matrix through Case's trodes. "Aerol shuddered. Case jacked him back out. 'What did you see, man?' 'Babylon,' Aerol said, sadly, handing him the trodes and kicking off down the corridor" (Gibson 106). Aerol's visceral and direct rejection shows that cyberspace plays a powerful role in the Rasta's worldview and self-identification. That cyberspace allows a relational identity has significant political implications. *Neuromancer's* Rastas illustrate a positive political alternative to Gibson's dark future, but only in the light of the sociohistorical context of Rastafari as a religious and political movement. The novel relies on this con-

text of Rastafarian culture to portray potentially empowering modes of identity that may counter the alienation of cyberspace.

In Rastafari, the process of *detournement* predominates, as the colonized appropriate and alter the culture of the colonizer for their own ends. *Detournement* is the practice of turning something away from its officially sanctioned meaning toward one's own purpose. Glenn Grant asserts that the process of *detournement* is a prevalent practice in *Neuromancer*, as well as a distinct feature in the novel (46, 44). Gibson's adage, "The Street finds its own use for things" ("Chrome" 186), is certainly appropriate for a religion conceived and perpetuated in shantytowns, which are an amalgam of detritus like the "makeshift hull" of Gibson's Zion—a metaphor for Rastafari's amalgamation of cultural forms. Rastafari constructed an empowered black identity out of colonial sources. It adopted the Bible, yet it rejected previous interpretations. Its language is a chimera of colonial forms. Its music is a "sensuous mosaic cooked from vast libraries of digitalized pop" (Gibson 104). These traits paint a picture of a hybrid that Donna Haraway sees as a potent cultural and political figure: to an extent, Rastafarians have pursued the conditions in which "we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras" (Haraway 313).

Although it is a cultural amalgam of preexisting ideas and practices, Rastafari is recognized mainly as a politicoreligious cult, a millenarian protest movement based on essentialist ideals such as an everlasting African homeland and an African deity. Rastafari formed in Jamaica in the 1930s, largely from the words of Marcus Garvey, a leading black rights activist, and the Revivalist Christian movement. Jamaican lower-class spiritual leaders found in Garvey's speeches and in biblical scripture a prophecy that a black messiah would lead the African diaspora of the world from captivity and exile to their own divinely granted kingdom (Waters 47). This messiah was Ras Tafari, crowned Haile Sellasie I, emperor of Ethiopia. His nation was Zion, the promised homeland. As it developed, the religion of Rastafari supported a unified, pan-African black identity. It promoted a return to the African homeland in Ethiopia, but it also promoted a return to African peasant values and practices, including subsistence economy and communalism (Lewis 4).

The protest aspect of Rastafari, which in Gibson's Zion predominates over the advocacy of a fixed black identity, is rooted in Rastafari's resistance to European colonial society. Rastas characterized that society as "Babylon," the biblical land of oppression and alienation. Rastafari violently rejects capitalism and state law and denounces the institutionalized beliefs of Christianity while maintaining its own interpretation of the Bible as divine revelation. It carries out this opposition with several cultural strategies: for example, Rastafarians deliberately created a dialect of Jamaican English, which is full of implicit resentment for the colonial language, for the purpose of obfuscating their speech from their oppressors (Pollard 27, 87). The dialect was a "doctoring" or mutation of the colonial language, and expresses Rastafarian ideology with altered phrasing and puns ("I and I" replaces the nominative first-person pronoun, for example). Other strategies pro-

moted an antimodern lifestyle, including a withdrawal from both state politics and profit-based economy (Lewis 57). The “various traffics” of Gibson’s Zionites implicitly refer to the trade in marijuana that makes up the majority of Rastafarian commerce—solely a means of subsistence rather than profit (Gibson 110).

Although Rastas identified themselves by their own practices and beliefs, they also, in their resistance to Babylon, came to be identified to an extent as an other that is considered distinctly separate. By the 1970s, Rastafari had become a politico-economic movement as much as a movement of racial equality. It had splintered into several sects but had become one of the most prominent protest movements in Jamaica (Pollard 23), and it claimed to represent the interests of Jamaica’s poor, who were almost entirely of African descent. The significant difference is that some groups accepted non-black people as members (Waters 48–49). The groups that accepted whites offered a racially inclusive identity of faith in God (“Jah”) and opposition to Babylon, along with pan-African identity (Chevannes 274). Now, Rastafari “rejects vulgar racialism” (Waters 49); it advocates “premodern values which Rastas use as a means of differentiating themselves; they are values which create a social enclave for [the Rastas]” (Lewis 62). The community is defined to some extent in relation to an other, politically and culturally, as well as according to resemblance within itself. Identity in Rastafari seems to have shifted slightly toward difference rather than congruence: as Stuart Hall states, “[cultural boundaries] become, not only what they have, at times, certainly been—mutually excluding categories, but also what they sometimes are—differential points along a sliding scale” (227).

Rastafari’s persisting claims of essential cultural identity through Zionism and Ethiopianism counter its empowering tactics and relative identities. Critics of Rastafari have condemned as escapism the traditional imperative for repatriation in the divinely decreed homeland. Hall discusses the problem of there being no everlasting home in Africa: “The original ‘Africa’ is no longer there. [. . .] To this ‘Africa,’ which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can’t literally go home again” (Hall 231). In Gibson’s Zion, Rastafarians at last confronted this problem with *detournement*: out of bits of Babylon itself they created a new homeland, which clearly denies any original plenitude. The name of the community, Zion cluster, suggests that with technology they have at last claimed their own territory, but it is a constructed one (both literally and figuratively), not the birthplace of any essential identity. The return to the “homeland” has in a sense been achieved, yet the Zionites still maintain an adversarial engagement with Babylon.

The Rasta elders still hold millenarian beliefs as they anticipate Babylon’s ruin in the Final Days (Gibson 110). For the Rastas, Babylon has further developed into an icon on which their identity is based. Just as, for Case, the matrix is the ideal representation of the physical realm’s blur of images, Aerol’s response to the matrix expresses that, for him, the matrix is the ideal representation of Babylon. Maelcum seems to share this notion when he tells Case, “You dealin’ wi’ th’ dark-

ness, mon" (181). Despite different backgrounds, the elders' shared identity and leadership is based on disregard for Babylon's law (111). Their opposition to and resignation from the affairs of Babylon are key to their Rastafarian identity.

The significance of their identity of opposition comes to a head in their acceptance of Molly as "Steppin' Razor," a redeemer that brings "a scourge on Babylon" (Gibson 110). This reference symbolically associates Molly with reggae musician Peter Tosh. Reggae music, Rastafari's greatest source of publicity, is the forerunner of dub, the "bass-heavy rocksteady" that Molly defines as Rastafarian "worship and a sense of community" (192, 104). Peter Tosh sang alongside Bob Marley in The Wailers, a seminal reggae group and the most far-reaching voice for Rastafari in its time. "Stepping Razor" was Tosh's nickname and also the name of one of his signature songs with the repeated line, "I'm dangerous." The name fit his confrontational attitude and his unyielding demands for "Equal Rights and Justice" (another of his signature tunes). As a political figure, Tosh was one of the most outspoken and belligerent hardliners: in the late 1970s, when escalating ghetto warfare caused most reggae spokespeople, like Marley, to call for peace, Tosh refused to endorse nonviolence while brutal persecution of the poor continued (Waters 232). Nicholas Campbell's documentary on Tosh, *Stepping Razor: The Red X Tapes*, suggests that his murder in 1987 may have been a political assassination intended to put an end to his revolutionary provocations. The connection between Tosh as Stepping Razor and Molly the razorgirl might appear to be simply a grab at counterculture-savvy hipness (while portraying the Rastas in a "gullible savage" stereotype because Wintermute manipulates them with the apocalyptic "Stepping Razor" prophecy), but this connection has significant implications for identity and politics in the novel. The Rastas' acceptance of a nonblack, nonmale cyborg as a political icon is an anomaly for a religious movement that has focused almost entirely on black male identity, and it highlights the differences of the Zion cluster community from a more traditional Rastafari.⁵ To the Rastas, Molly is a warrior figure who represents violent resistance to a global system of oppression, as Peter Tosh did. Tosh is the warrior figure that the Rastas idolize, as they do Molly: "'Jah seh I an' I t' bring Steppin' Razor outa this.' [. . .] 'She a warrior,' Maelcum said, as if it explained everything" (Gibson 248). Molly's identity is the farthest thing from a potential Rasta, yet the elders accept her not only as a member in their cause but also as a symbol of resistance.

As the Zion community lionizes a cyborg, it affirms to some extent the politics of difference that Donna Haraway describes in "A Cyborg Manifesto," even as the Rastas are "involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other" (Haraway 313). The Rastas show the influence of an "oppositional consciousness" that Haraway sees in Chela Sandoval's women of color. Women of color is a rubric that acknowledges and works through a multiplicity of conceivable social categories without sublimating particular aspects of identity within them. "Sandoval's oppositional consciousness is about contradictory locations and heterochronic calen-

dars, not about relativisms and pluralisms” (Haraway 296). No locations could be seemingly more contradictory than that of the Rastaman and the cyborg, yet the Rastas lionize Molly, just as they constructed their own nonoriginal homeland.

Since writing the manifesto, Donna Haraway has pointed out that the cyborg should not be an all-inclusive label. “I’d be much more careful about describing who counts as a ‘we,’ in the statement, ‘We are all cyborgs.’ I would also be much more careful to point out that those are subject positions for people in certain regions of transnational systems of production that do not easily figure the situations of other people in the system” (Penley and Ross 12–13). Gibson may be falling into the fault Haraway mentions as he uses the Rastas’ voices to establish a first-world cyborg as an emancipatory icon. However, just as the Rastas aggressively adopt and revise cultural forms for their own purposes, Gibson adopts the cultural form of Rastafari for his own purpose of presenting a postmodern condition. The Rastas form a trope of *detournement* that is one of the defining features of this novel as Glen Grant suggests; Gibson’s aesthetic vision works with trash (44). Tom Moylan condemns *Neuromancer* for this approach: Moylan claims that Gibson compromised any political potency in the novel when he “sought refuge in recognizable film noir plots and macho heroes already embedded in the dominant ideology” (184). On the contrary, the tactic of *detournement* enables an ironic and distinctly postmodern politicization of the dystopian novel. Questions of voice aside, the Rastas illustrate political and cultural resistance without a desire to return to an original, pristine state. Their own political efficacy might be contentious, but Zion enacts a more positive alternative to Case’s intense self-loathing.

The novel emphasizes this disparity with distinct comparisons of Case’s world to the Rastas’ world. The Zion cluster appears in direct and stark contrast to the first-world Babylon, as premodern versus modern, in that Zion is a community of unalienated production, economic communalism, and an egalitarian politics of difference contrasted with liberal, humanist, global capitalism. Zion is described as “a closed system, capable of cycling for years without the introduction of external materials” (Gibson 226). In contrast, Straylight, a “Gothic folly” of bourgeois ideology, is “parasitic” and produces nothing (226). Molly describes dub as “a sense of community,” whereas a sense of community seems conspicuously absent from “the mall crowds swaying like wind-blown grass, a field of flesh shot through with sudden eddies of need and gratification” (104, 46).

Just as Zion contrasts with Babylon, Maelcum has a key role in the novel as a character foil to Case. Neither Case nor Maelcum understands the other’s behavior (Gibson 192). Maelcum—healthy and strong, faithful to his beliefs, and heroic in the pursuit of them—is unlike Case, who is sickly and unconcerned with loyalty except when it coincides with saving his own hide. Although Case is the antihero, Maelcum plays the hero in the rescue of Molly from Straylight and the rescue of Case from *Neuromancer*’s construct with the “righteous dub” and the stimulant drug.

This contrast between Case and Maelcum extends to the way that Maelcum and Aerol depict a nonmodern (pre-/post-/anti-) subjectivity established in opposition to a modern subjectivity. The Rastas reject normalized conceptions of perception, largely as a result of their ganja use. Several times Maelcum says, “Time be time.” He refuses to adhere to a systematized chronology (Gibson 113, 232). Molly explains how they do not adhere to any normative state of perception: “They don’t make much of a difference between states, you know? Aerol tells you it happened, well, it happened to him. It’s not like bullshit, more like poetry” (106). Perception is not regulated according to a quantifiable, normative system so that an individual can be distinguished in relation to it. In this way, the Rastas are premodern because they reject the systematization of life (in the sense of Foucault’s “discipline”) that is a hallmark of modern subjectivity. This is also postmodern or anti-humanist because everything dissolves into hallucination, and the Rastas act without a need for any certainty granted by an objective reality. Randy Schroeder finds that the perception of the Zionites represents the postmodern in the novel’s tension between modern and postmodern paradigms of referentiality—objectivity versus subjectivity (339). Here, premodern and postmodern flow together in contradistinction to a modern paradigm.

This type of perception also contrasts embodiment and disembodiment, which are key concepts in the novel. For Case, a sense of disembodiment is the ideal, but the Rastas clearly do not share his and others’ “contempt for the flesh.” Case does not like the way “[t]he Zionites always touched you when they were talking, hands on your shoulder” (Gibson 106). The “long pulse of Zion dub” clearly connects with bodily rhythms when it restores Case’s neural functioning after he flatlines (263). Maelcum and Aerol, in contrast to Case, are consistently described as physically well developed and adept at moving through their low-gravity environment.⁶ In all facets of their lives, the Rastas show a strong value in physicality and embodiment.

As Case tries to forget himself in the ethereal speed of the matrix, his relation with the Rastas emphasizes that he bases his identity on an alienating system that the matrix represents and enacts. Case’s desire to leave the body behind is rooted in self-loathing: in the climax of the story, Case reaches a superlative level of proficiency “fueled by self-loathing.” It is “a grace of the mind-body interface granted him . . . by the clarity and singleness of his wish to die” (262). His total rejection of his own physical identity is juxtaposed with a reference to embodiment that affirms it as the source of his power: with the “old alchemy of the brain and its vast pharmacy—his hate flowed into his hands” (262). For him, “the prison of his own flesh” is presented as his source of empowerment (6).

Altogether, the novel affirms embodiment at least as much as it glorifies disembodiment. As Gibson notes,

For me, given the data in the books, the key to Case’s personality is the estrangement from his body, the meat, which it seems to me he does overcome. People have criticized *Neuromancer* for not bringing Case to some kind of transcendent experience. But, in fact, I think he does have it. He has it within

the construct of the beach, and he has it when he has his orgasm. There's a long paragraph there where he accepts the meat as being this infinite and complex thing. In some ways, he's more human after that. (Rucker et al. 170)

The passage to which Gibson refers is most likely the following:

There was a strength that ran in [Linda], something he'd known in Night City and held there, been held by it, held for a while away from time and death, from the relentless Street that hunted them all. It was a place he'd known before; not everyone could take him there, and somehow he always managed to forget it. Something 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. (239)

Furthermore, in the resolution following Jane's climactic announcement of the AI's name, Case blacks out and finds himself in "his own darkness, pulse and blood, the one where he'd always slept, behind his eyes and no other's" (263). For Case, the body eventually becomes a place of security and belonging—self-acceptance—in contrast to the insecurity and alienation of cyberspace. The body is a vast complexity that cannot grant the power of godlike certainty that Case finds when he crashes *Neuromancer's* construct, but it does grant Case's peak of proficiency through the brain's "pharmacy." More important, his body becomes his own space as much as any space can be. The novel does not so much glorify the disembodiment of cyberspace as it analyzes the desire to transcend the body that resists perfect transparency and the demands of capital. The issue in question is the urges behind the ideals promoted by those who find the body inadequate.⁷

The repetition of "pulse" as Case awakens from the blackout connects the state of self-acceptance with "the long pulse of Zion dub," just as dub "defines itself at the center of things" and draws him from the *Neuromancer* construct back to his body (Gibson 263, 244). Zion provides the alternative to the world that has driven Case to suicide: it is a symbol of embodiment that contrasts with the matrix as a symbol of disembodiment. Tony Myers argues that in *Neuromancer*, Turkey provides an other by which the homogeneous first world society can recognize itself (892). Case's first response to the Zion is to recognize the resemblance to Istanbul, so that the Zion functions in a similar manner to Turkey as an other by which Case can recognize his own Western world (Gibson 103). But, unlike Istanbul, Zion is presented as a utopian enclave of resistance, or at least a positive alternative to Babylon, one that reverses the drive to transcend the body. Zion represents social commitment and community, intuition and the body, as a political alternative to the hyper-rational, individualistic, parasitic realm that characterizes postindustrial capitalism in the novel.

Tom Moylan claims that the Zionites may initially appear to be a utopian enclave of resistance to an otherwise irresistible capitalist system, yet they follow capitalist practices and maintain colonial and patriarchal stereotypes. He argues that the Zionites are “independent contractors who supply transportation.” Zion is marked as a heterosexual male territory, “populated only by men, and Maelcum serves Case as a manly buddy”; whereas “Maelcum (through the signifiers of his music, his attitude toward time, and his easy undertaking of violence by means of a machete that is just this side of the razor used by the Steppin Fetchit stereotype) is basically a humorous sidekick in the ignoble popular culture tradition of Pancho and the Cisco Kid or Tonto and the Lone Ranger” (192, 191, 190).

Each of Moylan’s statements can be contested through the cultural context of Rastafari. “Independent contractors” refer to the Rastas’ “various traffics,” for the most part to the trade in ganja. Moylan portrays the Rastas as petty capitalists, despite the traditional subsistence economy and antiprofit culture of Rastafari (Gibson 110). In a case study of Rastafarian culture, William F. Lewis claims “[the Rastas’] values limit rather than increase [their] productive potential” (63). Regarding the masculine bonding with Case, Moylan claims “the rastas of Zion persist in helping Case and Molly not because of their radical political vision but because of their male-bonding with the edgy hero” (189). Several passages in the text suggest otherwise: twice Case and the Zionites clearly feel a mutual incomprehension (See Gibson 106, 192), while Maelcum justifies his own role with, “this no m’ fight, no Zion fight. . . . But Jah seh I an’ I t’ bring Steppin’ Razor outa this” (248). Maelcum is acting out of religious and political devotion, not out of male-bonding. Moylan claims that Maelcum’s character adheres to pejorative cultural stereotypes (190). Although the character fills the narrative convention of the trusty sidekick, Moylan’s characteristic examples (Maelcum’s music, attitude toward time, and razor-wielding) are called into question by the importance of each (dub, resistance to systematized perception, and the Stepping Razor icon) to Rastafarian cultural identity.

Furthermore, as well as political characteristics, the gendering and sexualizing of Zion are deeply caught up in these cultural references. The terms of the opposition between Zion (social commitment, intuition, and the body) and postindustrial capitalism (hyperrationalism, individualism, and parasitism) appear to align with femininity and masculinity as they have been historically and culturally constructed: collectivity, intuition, and the body as feminine and individualism, reason, and disembodiment as their masculine opposites. Zion clearly fits the feminine, despite that we find only male members of the community. Gendered characteristics are questioned to an extent as much as the split between human and machine. Contrary to any claims of an utterly dominant masculinity, Zion participates along with Molly in valorizing the breakdown of this distinction.⁸

Moylan claims that “Gibson’s work is refashioned into a postmodern simulation of the modernist dystopia: it fades into an anti-utopia closed to the processes of history and vulnerable to the stasis of political resignation” (190). On the contrary,

with Case and with the Zionites the novel promotes an empowering posthumanist identity as much as it might hold on to a humanist one. N. Katherine Hayles outlines an example of a potential posthumanist ideal: “embodiment replaces a body seen as a support system for the mind, and a dynamic partnership between humans and intelligent machines replaces the liberal humanist subject’s manifest destiny to dominate and control nature” (288). For much of the novel, Case pushes toward a sense of total transparency of volition that the matrix seems to provide and the body seems to impede. This pursuit is a humanist ideal, Cartesian mind free of encumbrance, pure independent will. Hayles discusses this questionable attitude toward consciousness and embodiment:

[T]he very illusion of control bespeaks a fundamental ignorance about the nature of the emergent processes through which consciousness, the organism, and the environment are constituted. Mastery through the exercise of autonomous will is merely the story consciousness tells itself to explain results that actually come about through chaotic dynamics and emergent structures. (288)

Once Case realizes that his body is a data system (“faint neon molecules crawling beneath his skin, ordered by the unknowable code” [Gibson 241]) and accepts his intimate connection with it, he finds an alternate means for identity. Case perceives his body as a data system (as the matrix is a data system) through which he works. In the final moments of the Straylight run, when Case blacks out, there is an acceptance of the limitations of that system, its vast complexity, along with the prodigious power that it offers. Case’s self-loathing is eased somewhat by a new comfort with his own body as a medium, as the thickness that renders his subjectivity possible. He allows the pull of “all the meat, [. . .] and all it wants” to supersede his need for transparency (Gibson 9). This change appears in a vital repetition: in that climactic moment before blackout, Case senses “[a] girl’s hands locked across the small of his back, in the sweating darkness of a portside coffin” (262). The identical image appears much earlier, juxtaposed with “all the meat” (9). For Case, that image represents the moment of his strongest emotional attachment, and it brings a powerful sense of comfort. He finds that comfort in the influence of the body, and in this way, he can, to an extent, shed his humanity in favor of posthumanity. Only when he relinquishes his rejection of his own body can he find that comfort. Hayles relates her discussion of a posthumanist, posthuman ideal to Case’s condition:

[W]hen the human is seen as part of a distributed system, the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to *depend* on the splice rather than being imperiled by it. [. . .] This vision is a potent antidote to the view that parses virtuality as a division between an inert body that is left behind and a disembodied subjectivity that inhabits a virtual realm, the construction of virtuality performed by Case [. . .] when he delights in the “bodiless exaltation of cyberspace” and fears, above all, dropping back into the “meat” of the body. (290)

Case briefly finds that antidote to his alienation on these two occasions, during the orgasm and before he blacks out, in a sort of unconscious acknowledgment and acceptance of his own embodiment. In these moments, the steady pulse of dub is in the background, where it “defines itself at the center of things” (244).

Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., maintains that the novel does not affirm Haraway’s cyborg politics because of its lyrical nostalgia for the lost human subject (“Sentimental Futurist”). I would not argue that this tone does not appear and dominate at times in the novel, but I think there is a powerful tension between humanist and posthumanist identity in *Neuromancer* that is bound up in the body. Gibson explains his own feelings regarding technology and its effects on our lives, and his statements seem to be in accordance with *Neuromancer*’s approach: “My feelings about technology are *totally* ambivalent—which seems to me to be the only way to relate to what’s happening today” (McCaffery 274, emphasis in original). In the light of this discussion, Michael Heim’s reading of the erotic ontology of Gibson’s cyberspace is apt: “The ideal of the simultaneous all-at-once-ness of computerized information access undermines any world that is worth knowing. The fleshly world is worth knowing for its distances and for its hidden horizons” (80). As Heim notes, the Zionites are its representative.

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NOTES

1. Bukatman’s version of this argument appears in *Terminal Identity*; Christie’s version is in “Of AIs and Others.”

2. For example, this argument has appeared in some form in Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (“Cyberpunk”), Bukatman (*Terminal*), Dery, and Christie (“Science Fiction”).

3. Ross, Suvin, Dery, and Moylan, to name a few.

4. Scott Bukatman argues that cyberspace achieves the modern ideal of a body dissolved into pure motion and perfect mechanized efficiency (Bukatman, “Typewriter” 637–38). Tony Fabijancic argues that the architecture of both Gibson’s cyberspace and nineteenth-century urban spaces “[contribute] fundamentally to a wider modern rhetoric of being and thinking” (108). N. Katherine Hayles writes, “the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as being a body. [. . .] William Gibson makes the point vividly in *Neuromancer* when the narrator characterizes the posthuman body as ‘data made flesh.’ To the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it” (4–5).

5. Chevannes discusses the marginal status of women in traditional Rastafari (255–60).

6. For some examples, see Gibson 245, 196, 113.

7. For example, Hans Moravec, who foresees the complete downloading of human consciousness (109) or Stelarc, for whom the human body is obsolete (118).

8. For a discussion of Molly in this regard, see Gordon 198.

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