p'arts, hum' Papers in Arts and Humanities

Vol. 5, No. 1, Sept. 2025
https://doi.org/10.52885/mrxdcw47

# Digital Theseus: The Ship, the Self, and Cybernetic Transformations in *Neuromancer*

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## Abstract

It is inconceivable to fantasize about a world where everything is stationary. This paper will utilize Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of *becoming* as a foundational framework to analyze the themes of identity and transformation in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. The novel, written in 1984, explores the philosophical contradictions surrounding change and can be linked to the paradox of Theseus' Ship. It explores how technological advancements challenge and redefine personal identity through specific examples such as cybernetic augmentation, mind uploading into the virtual, and body enhancements. These themes reflect Rosi Braidotti's Posthumanist discourse and align with the perpetual change in human ontology. The novel highlights the disruptive forces that push the conventional borders between organic and artificial to their limits. *Neuromancer* interrogates the idea of continuous change in the context of technological enhancements. It replaces and redefines physical and cognitive capabilities by focusing on the fluidity and fragmentation of the self. Gibson challenges Cartesian dualism by portraying characters whose identities are merged with technology, thereby testing the capabilities of the human–machine individual. His work foreshadows contemporary debates on artificial intelligence and regulations governing body enhancement. Gibson extends the paradox of the Ship of Theseus beyond materiality, questioning identity as an ever-changing construct within the age of advanced cybernetics.

**Keywords:** posthumanism, becoming, cyberpunk, identity, Ship of Theseus

## Introduction: Towards the Ephemeral

Change is an inherent property of being, acting as a central driving force that impacts the physical world and the nature of human existence. Both scientific and philosophical viewpoints imply that change should be viewed as anything but an exception. It should be

a defining characteristic of being. The process of constant change is evident in various fields, including biological evolution and technological advancement. This changing property is extended to identity, making the classical notion of an immutable and singular self increasingly problematic. In a modern context increasingly defined by technological advancement, the boundaries between human and machine are constantly transgressed and conquered, thus necessitating a redefinition of the boundaries of humanity. Literature has long grappled with such intricate tensions, and few works capture the nuances of identity change in a cybernetic age as thoroughly as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984).

*Neuromancer* is an early work in the field of cyberpunk fiction, one that depicts in imaginative detail an existence where the human consciousness is interfaced with an artificial one, where flesh is augmented or replaced, and where individuality ceases to rely on the organic. The novel's description of cybernetic implants, mind uploads, and body transformations induces fundamental questions regarding identity in the face of high-tech civilization. Gibson's narrative delves into paradoxes of selfhood amidst an era of constant development. He anticipates contemporary debates regarding the artificial mind, virtual existence, or the fusion of human and machine, and identity crises.

This analysis explores *Neuromancer* in the context of three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's articulation of *becoming*, Rosi Braidotti's *posthumanism*, and the philosophical *Paradox of Theseus' Ship*. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming overthrows traditional, static models of identity in favor of an understanding of self that is dynamic and fluid, constantly in the process of changing. This is precisely the conception illustrated by Gibson's presentation of characters whose identities are continually reshaped through cybernetic enhancements. Braidotti's posthumanism takes this discussion further by emphasizing the need to rethink human ontology outside anthropocentric concerns. Lastly, the Theseus' Ship paradox, a classic philosophical question about the continuity of identity in the face of replacement of all components, provides an engaging paradigm for discussing the way *Neuromancer* challenges the ephemeral state of identity in the context of technological progress.

## On Becoming and Other Interbeings

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are known as the creators of the concept of *becoming*. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), the philosopher Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Guattari antagonize an entire plethora of ideas that are usually associated with being. They do not just bring arguments that sustain becoming as an endless transformation. Still, they

create an entirely different framework for what we think we know about becoming as a concept. They change our views of what we think becoming is. Deleuze believes in the consistency of becoming as a concept, as something more than what we usually associate it with, a process, flux, or change.

They start the argument by analyzing the grammar of becoming. The first notion they set aside is the idea of an object becoming, transforming into something else. Becoming is not a temporary state between two static elements, but, as they state, "there is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at. Nor are there two terms which are exchanged. The question 'What are you becoming?' is particularly stupid" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 2). Becoming is never static, but always in transition. Becoming is never a noun, but, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, "is a verb with a consistency all its own" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 239). The notion of becoming as a verb is a trait that Deleuze discusses in *Logic of Sense*. Moreover, he refers to becoming not as any verb, but as part of the order of infinitive verbs. He states that "verbs in the infinitive are limitless becomings" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 48). But why the choice of the infinitive? What is important to note about the infinitive is that these kinds of verbs do not need a subject. Deleuze argues that "infinitive-becomings have no subject: they refer only to an 'it' of the event (it is raining) and are themselves attributed to states of things which are compounds or collectives, assemblages, even at the peak of their singularity" (2007, p. 48). The verb is independent of any agent; therefore, it is not the agent that transforms, but rather an endless becoming which refers only to itself and functions only concerning itself.

Becoming is often associated with change. However, to strengthen its ephemeral state, this association needs to be challenged. If becoming does not require any subject, change needs a subject to which the phenomenon must be applied. Considering this connection, the essence of becoming is different from that of change. Deleuze explains this rupture between these two terms in an interview with Toni Negri, where he discusses the difference between becoming and history. He explains that, "what history grasps in an event is the way it's actualized in particular circumstances; the event's becoming is beyond the scope of history." Furthermore, "becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new," therefore becoming is beyond history (Deleuze & Negri, 2011, para. 4). If becoming is beyond history and, therefore, not a change that happens to something but rather an endless transformation, then Deleuzian becoming is keener on the unchanged. Hence, in *Logic of Sense*, becoming is associated with the eternal.

He brings into discussion the Nietzschean opposition of history, touching upon terms like *Untimely*. Another approach to this matter is by looking through the lens of opposites rather than similarities. As Deleuze points out, "forgetting as opposed to memory, geography as opposed to history, the map as opposed to the tracing, the rhizome as opposed to arborescence" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 296). However, if one analyses these carefully chosen terms, except forgetting, the other concepts are related to space rather than time. Map, geography, and rhizome are concepts that deal with spatiality. Becoming gradually progresses from a metaphor of time to a geographical one. This transformation will be seen throughout the whole Deleuzian discourse. Forgetting is addressed directly by Deleuze and Guattari by stating that "becoming is antimemory" (Deleuze & Guattari, p. 294). Anti-memory refers to the fact that history is static, but also "history is made only by those who oppose history" (p. 295); therefore, breaking with the present. The separation from the present is stated in earlier work, *Logic of Sense*, where becoming is "not tolerating the separation or the distinction of before and after, past and future" (Deleuze, 1990, p. 1). The infinitive verb is again brought into discussion because it proves the untimely aspect of becoming and its persistence through time.

Deleuze did not discuss *becoming* just in negative traits, such as the infinitive without a subject or antimemory. It is only the moment he employs terminology related to spatiality that he starts talking about becoming in positive terms. The vocabulary seems to be advantageous for becoming because it is enriched with words like territory, middle, and interbeing. Moreover, Deleuzian terminology symbolically related to becoming evolves more drastically with words like contagion, theft, and epidemic. The spatiality of becoming is portrayed beautifully by Deleuze and Guattari through their wasp–orchid symbiosis, where two different species create a relationship in which both benefit but neither has more advantages over the other. The orchid mimics a female wasp, attracting males and increasing pollination; the multitude of wasps attracted to the orchid facilitates reproduction. "Although the wasp and the orchid belong to quite different realms, the deterritorialization that they share allows them to find a common zone of proximity" (Beaulieu, 2011, p.78). The wasp does not become an orchid or vice versa, but rather, they enter each other's zone of proximity. This interaction between forms of life creates a new assemblage in which both benefit and create new possibilities. The wasp and orchid break out of their predefined genetic code and role, and deterritorialize into a shared dynamic, thus establishing a new connection. François Zourabichvili stresses that becoming is not an individual experience. It is not about one thing transforming into another, but rather a process that involves and affects both participants (Zourabichvili, 2012). Deleuzian becoming-animal does not mean

humans literally becoming animals but rather entering the proximity zone of the other. The wasp–orchid example is important and a steppingstone when discussing Deleuzian *becoming*; therefore, it is the reason it is appreciated by the posthumanist discourse.

## Reworking Deleuzian Subjectivity Through Posthumanism

Rosi Braidotti extends Deleuze and Guattari's ideas by addressing the humanist subject in the face of technological and environmental transformations. As she states, "the post-human knowing subject has to be understood as a relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable entity and not only as a transcendental consciousness" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 1). Humans should not be perceived as static objects in a void, but only in connection with other entities, leaving aside their self-created exceptionalism. Braidotti interacts with and reworks Deleuzian philosophy to bring out the relational and dynamic aspects of human and non-human entities in an environment characterized by advanced technologies and ecological crises. As Braidotti emphasises, "the posthuman condition implies that 'we'—the human and non-human inhabitants of this particular planet—are currently positioned between the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Sixth Extinction" (2019, p. 10). Her work comprehensively examines posthuman subjectivity by moving beyond anthropocentric and dualistic models, making extensive use of Deleuzian theory to develop an understanding of subjectivity that is fluid, relational, and immanent. Braidotti argues that the modern concept of human subjectivity requires rethinking. She questions the traditional humanist view of the subject, which is often defined by rationality, autonomy, and individualism. Instead, she advocates a posthuman subjectivity that exists in complex webs of relations with non-human others, such as animals, machines, and environments. "Life is not exclusively human: it encompasses both bios and zoe forces, as well as geo- and techno-relations that defy our collective and singular powers of perception and understanding" (2019, p. 53). Humans should no longer be perceived as different, independent individuals, but rather as entities in a complex relationship with all other entities. This view extends Deleuze's rejection of fixed identities and resonates with his emphasis on relationality, multiplicity, and the proximity zone.

Furthermore, Braidotti's study of posthumanism engages with Deleuze's concentration on assemblages through a systematic investigation of the ways the posthuman is generated within relational ontologies. She defines the posthuman as a transversal being that escapes anthropocentrism and is involved in affirmative ethics, arguing that change implies not the negation of the self but rather a fruitful supplement to subjectivity. "I emphasize the embodied, embedded and transversal selves that we are, bonded by ontological relationality.

Embodied and embedded because we are deeply steeped in the material world. Transversal because we connect but also differ from each other" (p. 52). This position contradicts the established standpoint that describes the human being as separate from the environment and points to the entanglements among human and non-human players, which relates well to Deleuze's rhizomatic schemata, which works through network-based relations in opposition to tree-based hierarchies. Francesca Ferrando locates Braidotti's formulation of posthumanism in the larger field of posthuman studies, stressing that posthuman thinking, in concert with Deleuze, troubles traditional ontological distinctions and offers a feeling of togetherness among human and non-human entities. Ferrando conceptualizes and strengthens the idea of Braidotti that not only has the human changed, but also the framework in which we analyze the individual should be changed. "This shift in the social and individual perception of the human is one of the most important challenges we are currently facing as a species and requires a deeper analysis" (Ferrando, 2020, p. 99). She refers to the term *posthumanities*, which "exceeds the notion of the human, and it turns into an open framework, which is invoked to inclusively address future developments of humankind" (p. 125).

## From an Ancient Paradox Towards a Digital Dilemma

The *Ship of Theseus* paradox originates in ancient Greek metaphysical philosophy and raises fundamental questions about the transformation of identity. This paradox launches "the idea of being able to perpetuate indefinitely an object/artefact resulting from the assembly of several parts through a continuous renewed replacement of all elements composing it" (Geretto, 2024, p. 5). In the context of Deleuzian *becoming* and the post-humanist discourse, it brings up questions regarding human identity and how it has been shaped by advanced contemporary technologies. This paradox questions whether an object, which has experienced a total replacement of its components, can be considered the same with respect to its essential nature. The historical introduction of this paradox seems to be a fragment from *Vitae Parallelae* of Plutarch.

Both Deleuze and Braidotti often use interdisciplinary arguments, especially from biology, the only scientific field that deals with human evolution. Therefore, from a biological standpoint:

> In our organism, a large number of 'parts', dead cells, for example, are continually replaced by others, to the extent that it is easy to think that an adult individual no longer retains any of the cells they had as a child. (p. 78)

However, the human is not just the organic body. "The use of aids, such as contact lenses to improve vision, or dental implants are common example of the progressive tendency toward ever greater hybridization between man and inorganic nature" (p. 78). The integration of everyday artificial elements in our innate body, from everyday objects to organs and ability-enhancing machines, seems more natural in our contemporary world. Furthermore, the relevance of this paradox transcends metaphysical investigations of identity, extending to contemporary debates in posthumanist theory. Braidotti's philosophical posthumanist ideas seek to undermine traditional assumptions about subjectivity and selfhood, arguing that identity is never a static construct, but rather relational and intertwined in networks.

The *Theseus* paradox, with its discussion of identity in the face of material transformation, finds resonance with posthumanist positions that eschew essentialism for processual and relational understandings of existence. When all the planks of a ship have been completely replaced over the years, can one still claim that it is the same ship? If the replaced planks are then assembled into another ship, which ship maintains the original identity? In a traditional humanist context, identity is generally understood as inherent and enduring, as if it were a metaphysical essence that abides despite changes in material parts. By a posthumanist approach, identity is described as neither fixed nor singular; instead, it is conceived as a dynamic construct influenced by both external and internal exchanges. Braidotti argues that contemporary subjectivity should be understood in terms of relational assemblages, as opposed to independent individualism. "The knowing subject is not Man, or Anthropos alone, but a more complex assemblage that undoes the boundaries between inside and outside the self, by emphasizing processes and flows" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 53). A post-anthropocentric approach is required because "subjects are embodied and embedded, relational and affective collaborative entities, activated by relational ethics" (p. 53). The Ship of Theseus problem is a powerful example of this posthumanist view because it argues that identity is not an essential property; instead, it is relational and dependent upon material conditions. If identity can survive even with dramatic material transformations, it logically follows that the nature of identity is not a fixed property but a web of relations, an argument that is at the center of posthumanist theory. This theoretical stance addresses the critical question posed by the paradox: Is transformation compatible with identity, or does it necessarily destroy it? From the posthumanist point of view, identity is by nature changeable, and adjustments serve to increase rather than destroy the essence of a thing. Similarly, while the ship is modified in its material structure, it remains the Ship of Theseus.

## Becoming Neuromancer

Science Fiction literature often deals with speculation. However, Gibson counts himself out of this speculative wave by posing his writings not as prophetic, but as writings about the present. Moreover, the present in which he writes is one marked by the technological product of what will be known as the internet. He creates a literature that is fragmented, hyperreal, and has a collage-like structure. This is the cyberpunk literature, a product born as an answer to human-centered, space-exploring *hard science fiction*. It emerged as a distinct aesthetic and philosophical response to the rise of globalized technoculture in the late twentieth century. Set in decaying urban landscapes and saturated with digital technology, cyberpunk does not simply speculate about the future; it encodes the tensions, dislocations, and transformations of its historical moment. Fredric Jameson's theory of postmodernism provides a crucial lens for understanding the cultural significance of cyberpunk. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson describes postmodernism as a periodizing concept that reflects the structural changes of global capitalism, characterized by the waning of affect, the collapse of historicity, and the proliferation of pastiche. According to Jameson, the postmodern subject struggles to achieve *cognitive mapping*, a way to situate the self within the totality of a fragmented, decentered world system. Gibson's *Neuromancer* exemplifies this condition: the protagonist, Case, alienated from his physical body and immersed in the disembodied flows of cyberspace, becomes a figure for postmodern disorientation. The cyberspace matrix, a simulated reality of global information networks, echoes Jameson's conception of the postmodern *hyperspace*, which "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself" (Jameson, 1989, p.83). This new fragmented environment challenges our position as humans in this unrecognizable world. Complementing Jameson's structural diagnosis, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. investigates the aesthetic and philosophical implications of cyberpunk's engagement with technology and subjectivity. In his essay *Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism* (1992), he contends that cyberpunk reflects both a fascination with and a resistance to the technological sublime. It stages what he calls *neuromanticism*, a longing for transcendence through technology, even as it reveals the posthuman dissolution of stable identity. Cyberpunk, as Csicsery-Ronay argues, "is part of a trend in science fiction dealing increasingly with madness, more precisely with the most philosophically interesting phenomenon of madness: hallucination (derangement)" (Csicsery-Ronay, 1992, p. 5). The genre's protagonists, often hackers, cyborgs, or artificial intelligences, inhabit a liminal space where human agency is distributed across networks and systems beyond individual control. A plethora of metaphors are linking the organic to the electronic,

where "psychology and even physiology are wiring, nerves are circuits, drugs and sex and other thrills turn you on, you get a buzz, you get wired, you space out, you go on automatic" (p. 5). This ambivalence between the seductions of technological power and the loss of humanist coherence makes cyberpunk a privileged site for theorizing the posthuman condition. Cyberpunk texts are often deeply skeptical about the ideology of control and portray technology as both enabling and alienating.

Veronica Hollinger reads cyberpunk as a distinct form of science fiction that deconstructs traditional binaries and humanist certainties. In her view, cyberpunk texts deliberately challenge the limits between human/organic and machine/technological, undermining the very oppositions that classical SF tended to uphold. Hollinger illustrates this with Gibson's *Neuromancer*, considered a foundational work of cyberpunk literature. Its opening scene shows Case perceiving city streets as "the dance of biz, information interacting" and "data made flesh," (Gibson, 1984, p. 18), so that "the human world replicates its own mechanical systems, and the border between the organic and the artificial threatens to blur beyond recuperation" (Hollinger, 1990, p. 31). In short, cyberpunk "invokes a rhetoric of technology to express the natural world" (p. 31), collapsing organic and artificial into one continuum. Linked to this collapse is cyberpunk's ambivalent attitude toward technology. Hollinger notes a "celebratory and anxious fascination" (p. 31) with high tech in cyberpunk, an obsession with technology's immediate (often unmediated) effects on everyday life. This double-edged technophilia is itself cyberpunk's generic hallmark. As Hollinger puts it, the emphasis on human–technological interconnections "is perhaps the central 'generic' feature of cyberpunk" (p. 31). Cyberpunk heroes and settings evoke street-wise, popular culture *punk* sensibilities even as they dramatize near-future tech. For example, Hollinger cites Bruce Sterling's description of cyberpunk as *posthumanist* SF that explores humanity's interface with its own technology, giving rise to hopeful or monstrous hybrids.

The action follows Henry Dorsett Case, a disillusioned hacker who lives in Chiba City, Japan. Once acknowledged as an efficient cyberspace *cowboy*, Case faced a catastrophic downturn when he was caught stealing from his boss. As a punishment, he damaged Case's nervous system, making him incapable of accessing the matrix, a huge virtual world of interconnected data. Now addicted and on the fringes of society, Case is given a chance for redemption by Armitage, a mysterious former military officer, who offers to cure his neural pathways in exchange for performing a hacking task. Case is aided by Molly Millions, a *street samurai* with cybernetic enhancements, who has the ability to retract her claws and augmented reflexes. Wintermute, their employer, is an AI whose goal is to combine with its counterpart, Neuromancer, and achieve increased sentience.

However, the development of AI is limited by the Turing Police, a law enforcement agency that prevents machines from gaining too much autonomy. As the story unfolds, Case and Molly navigate a world of virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and corporate intrigue. The ending of the novel is indeterminate, with Case returning to his former state of being even as the digital persona of the AI provokes him from beyond the bounds of human vision.

Released in the early 1980s, *Neuromancer* coincided with an era marked by rapid technological advancement, growing corporate power, and rising fears about artificial intelligence. Gibson's vision of cyberspace as a virtual and linked digital world was new and foresighted in light of the advent of the Internet. The novel reflects anxieties about corporate control, as multinational megacorporations dominate society, often wielding more power than governments. This theme resonates with the 1980s, a decade of neoliberal economic policies, deregulation, and globalization. The Cyberpunk genre, which *Neuromancer* helped define, often portrays a world where technology benefits the elite while the underclass struggles in decayed urban landscapes. The book's setting is filled with neon lights, high-tech gadgets, and cybernetic enhancements, influenced by Tokyo's technological environment.

One of the dominant themes of *Neuromancer* is the examination of the interface of humanity with technological advancement. Gibson creates a world of virtual reality characterized by cybernetic alterations, with individuals redefining their concept of self. In this technology-saturated world, cybernetics moves beyond the realm of augmentation and becomes a prerequisite for sustenance. Characters like Case and Molly, as we see in Gibson's work, typify the degradation of strictly organic identity for a hybrid concept of identity, hence exemplifying the Deleuzian idea of the concept of being, a never-ending evolutionary process with fluidity and responsiveness, devoid of a fixed identity. In contrast, the body alterations that Case experiences allow for his interaction with cyberspace. "He'd operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (Gibson, 1984, p. 2). The modification of his neural connections transforms his life beyond the ordinary human, making him a product of the world of cyberspace in which he exists. However, this enhancement comes with steep prices, resulting in the inevitable attachment of Case's identity to his ability to function in cyberspace, thus echoing the novel's overriding theme of a fragmented sense of identity.

This opening line already stages one of cyberpunk's central concerns, the dissolution and reconstitution of the human subject through technology. Cyberpunk situates its characters at the liminal boundary between flesh and code, where the body becomes both apparatus and obstacle to fragmented identity formation. Case's very proficiency, his youth combined

with technical virtuosity, thrives on precisely this boundary: every push of biochemical thrill dovetails with the virtual extension of self. This hybrid subject is a hallmark of cyberpunk's posthuman sensibility: characters are no longer simply embodied agents but participants in the web of cyberspace, endlessly reproducible and reprogrammable. The consensual hallucination is not merely a fanciful setting, but a paradigm for how reality itself is negotiated through code. In Gibson's world, perception and meaning, much like identity, are constructed by shared protocols rather than grounded in any stable referent. The language of *projection* and *deck* underscores cyberpunk's fascination with interfaces as both sites of liberation and vectors of control. The deck is emblematic of a broader posthuman irony: the very tools that allow characters to escape the limitations of the flesh also render them vulnerable to new forms of surveillance, commodification, and alienation. Case's rush of adrenaline may feel like emancipation, but it is inseparable from the ideological strings embedded in every byte of cyberspace, a terrain where subversion and addiction often merge.

In contrast, Molly has undergone immense changes to her body, gaining retractable blades hidden under her fingernails and her reflexes being enhanced. "She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails" (p. 16). With such enhancement of capabilities, she is positioned as a posthuman character precariously balanced on the boundary of organic and synthetic life. Molly's hands become both emblem and enactment of cyberpunk's fascination with the body as a site of technological inscription. The *barely audible click* that releases *ten double-edged, four-centimetre scalpel blades* transforms her palms, seemingly soft, vulnerable flesh, into lethal, precision instruments. Cyberpunk repeatedly stages the body as modular and engineered, and Gibson literalizes that modularity: the boundary between organic fingertip and steel blade dissolves, revealing the seamless interface between flesh and machine. Moreover, the juxtaposition of *white fingers* and *burgundy nails* with surgical hardware underscores a gendered dimension of cybernetic enhancement. Cyberpunk's aesthetic often plays on the commodification of the body, especially the female form, as both object of desire and site of violence. Molly's manicure, at once decorative and functional, embodies this paradox: her hands are feminized by color yet weaponized by technology, signaling how empowerment and exploitation are inextricable in a world of high-tech modifications. Finally, the clinical precision evoked by *scalpel blades* invokes medical discourse, suggesting that bodily transformation in the matrix is as much surgical as it is cybernetic. Such imagery can be seen as a critique of narratives that promise liberation through technology, only to uncover new regimes of control. Molly's hidden armament thus both empowers her as an agent of subversion and binds her ever tighter to the circuits and markets that animate the matrix.

In these individuals' descriptions, Gibson examines the implications of cybernetic enhancement on the sense of individual identity. As such, it poses the critical question of whether the individuals of Case and Molly become the same people after the enhancements or have become totally new individuals. This question is linked to the *Ship of Theseus* paradox, which is the problem of preserving identity through changes involving the body and the parts of the ship.

*The Ship of Theseus* paradox questions whether something remains the same if all of its components are altered. In the futuristic world of cyberpunk, the concept of self is not based on the retention of physical form but is instead focused on the ongoing process of change; thus, acknowledging the inherent instability that comes with the self. With body modifications and virtual minds, Gibson's characters question whether they can maintain a consistent identity when body and mind constantly shift. As far as Case is concerned, technology is used to assist and recreate the protagonist's body. Molly's cybernetic implants incorporate both human and machine parts, creating an experience whereby she is more truly herself and yet increasingly not herself. Case's neural implants enable him to transcend the physical world but also link him to a system that he cannot control. This reality destabilizes deeply held assumptions about humanity, arguing for a different understanding of existence in which becoming is prioritized over being.

> Get just wasted enough, find yourself in some desperate but strangely arbitrary kind of trouble, and it was possible to see Ninsei as a field of data, the way the matrix had once reminded him of proteins linking to distinguish cell specialities. Then you could throw yourself into a high-speed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart from it all, and all around you the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market. (Gibson, 1984, p. 2)

The intertwined spaces between urban landscape, identity, technology, and biology are reunited in the final *data made flesh*. Cells are transformed into bits, bodies into avatars. Gibson argues that a possible transfer between these media might be an escape from the dangers of physicality.

The concept of cyberspace in *Neuromancer* extends the discussion of identity beyond the physical world and into a virtual environment where people can exist separate from their bodily forms. This transformation pinpoints the traditional Cartesian dualism that has long defined the distinction between mind and body, as characters like Case interact with cyberspace as a virtual reality, allowing their existence to be separate from their physical bodies. This separation engages with the post-dualist paradigm of posthumanism, as it is

"rather than non-dualistic, in the sense that, within hegemonic systems of thought, the episteme has been repeatedly dualistic—think of the classic sets: body/mind, female/male, black/white, east/west, master/slave, colonizer/colonized, human/machine, human/animals" (Ferrando, 2020, p. 61). Cyberspace is more than a simulation; it creates a space where consciousness can detach from the body and take on different forms. The virtual world allows for the creation of multiple identities, highlighting, thus, the fact that self-identity is not a fixed entity but one that is defined in relation to its environment. Case's interaction with cyberspace radically alters his perception of reality to the point where the importance of the physical world is lost. In addition, the ability to move through cyberspace raises the question of whether identity is necessarily tied to the physical body or can be independent as information. "In Neuromancer, the narrator defines cyberspace as a 'consensual illusion' accessed when a user 'jacks into' a computer" (Hayles, 1999, p. 36). Through his reliance upon cyberspace, Case creates a disconnect with his flesh body, the more he invests in his electronic self. Case feels himself a prisoner within the material universe, seeking release through the gateway of cyberspace. Gibson complements Western metaphysical values like "The famous cogito set the privilege of the mind over the body: 'I think, therefore I am'" (Ferrando, 2020, p. 37). In Case's narrative, physicality is a prison, and virtuality means escaping the struggles of the real world. However, Case is never entirely physical or virtual; he remains in a state between the two, not being able to choose. This interbeing aligns with the posthumanist post-dualistic paradigm. "Although dualism does not have to be hierarchical, in the history of Western thought, the two sides have been placed in a value system according to which one side would be the positive, the other the negative" (p. 37).

The breakdown of identity is also seen in the way characters build and rebuild their identities. The use of *becoming* as a motif appears in the continually changing nature of people as they conform to the effects of technology. The novel highlights the changeability of identity over an essential interpretation through its use of characters who actively seek changes in order to conform to their environment to a greater extent. Therefore, *Neuromancer* promotes the sense of identity as being subject to change, developed by outside forces of technology in place of a core, innate essence. A crucial question asked by Gibson is the degree to which technological innovation works to liberate or oppress individuals. While through his neural implants, Case gains incredible abilities, he nonetheless remains beholden to the interests of those who control the technology. Similarly, artificial intelligence entities like Wintermute exercise a degree of influence over human thought, raising questions about the viability of human agency in a context in which technological innovation can alter thought and perception.

"Wintermute was a simple cube of white light, that very simplicity suggesting extreme complexity" (Gibson, 1984, p. 67). Gibson's vision of the future is both enthralling and unsettling. Cybernetics, on the one hand, creates limitless possibilities to augment and reframe what human existence is about. On the other hand, it poses significant existential questions to the nature of humanity in a world where the organic self continually changes. Hayles acknowledges that the posthuman challenges some foundational ideas of liberal humanism because "in many ways the posthuman deconstructs the liberal humanist subject" (Hayles, 1999, p. 5), especially the notion of a stable, autonomous, rational individual. In liberal humanism, the subject is seen as a unified self, capable of reason and moral agency. The posthuman deconstructs this by suggesting that consciousness can be distributed, that identity can be networked or fluid, and that the interface between human and machine is no longer static. This line signals a shift away from Enlightenment-era subjectivity toward a more fragmented, technologized self. However, it still prioritizes the mind over the body, as "it thus shares with its predecessor an emphasis on cognition rather than embodiment" (p. 5). Both traditions emphasize the thinking self (cognition) as the essence of identity, while downplaying the body as secondary or even irrelevant. Although posthumanism claims to overturn humanist ideas, it often preserves the very mind–body dualism it claims to transcend. In cyberpunk literature (and in real-world discourse on AI), we often see intelligence and consciousness treated as detachable from the body. The phrase *data made flesh*, captures the fusion of code and corporeality that defines the cyberpunk aesthetic. In this vision, the body is not just a vehicle for the mind, but is literally *formed by* data, suggesting that information is the fundamental substance of identity. Hayles considers this a vivid example of how posthuman discourse transforms the human into a pattern-based entity. While poetic, it also reveals the dangers of reducing the body to merely a visualized or encoded surface.

Hayles warns that "the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it" (p. 5). Instead of producing a new way of thinking, it often reframes embodiment as merely a way to run or perform information. It is as if the body were just hardware for software-like thought. In this logic, the body is only meaningful as a container or platform for informational patterns (like neural code or consciousness). Hayles is highly critical of this perspective because it perpetuates mind-over-body hierarchies, reinforcing Cartesian dualism in a more technologically seductive form. Even though the posthuman condition is post-dualistic, it seems that it extends the importance of the mind over the body. Although it appears to shift radically our understanding of the human, it often repeats the old logic of liberal humanism in a new, digital guise. Instead of liberating us from humanist binaries, it reinscribes them,

especially the idea that identity resides in the mind alone, not in flesh or experience. For Hayles, a truly transformative posthumanism must reclaim embodiment, acknowledging the body as central, not incidental, to what it means to be human or posthuman.

## Conclusion: Foreshadowing Contemporary Fears

With the growing sophistication of artificial intelligence, it is likely that human identity will increasingly be interlinked with AI consciousness. Machine learning and neural networks are currently integrated into human decision-making processes. Gibson's vision suggests that the lines between artificial and biological intelligence will merge further, entering each other's Deleuzian proximity zone. The question remains whether AI may eventually be viewed as a continuation of human identity rather than as a separate entity.

A recurring theme in *Neuromancer* is the corporate control over technological enhancements and identity. Case's neurological repairs and Molly's cybernetic augmentations highlight how individuals become products of a system that dictates their transformations. The novel warns of a future where identity is no longer an inherent personal trait but a commodity controlled by those who design, manufacture, and regulate cybernetic enhancements. The contemporary implications of this subject are starkly evident in debates over data privacy, biometric surveillance, and genetic engineering. If identity is vulnerable to change, commodification, or violation in digital spaces, what remains of personal agency? Gibson's vision of a cybernetic age underscores the ethical dangers of a world in which identity is increasingly determined by economic and technological imperatives rather than by human ethical considerations. Both body and mind augmentation go beyond simple individual autonomy, including wider societal implications. Gibson's *Neuromancer*, without meaning to, predicts a future world where those who are enhanced have considerable benefits over those who are not, thus creating a possible divide between augmented and non-augmented populations. The story foresees concrete real-world concerns of accessibility, inequality, and the ethical implications of human enhancement technologies and genome modification. With the rising ubiquity of gene editing, neuroprosthetics, and cognition enhanced by artificial intelligence, ethical questions arise as to their use. Should access to such enhancements be available universally or limited to those who have the necessary financial resources? Will unmodified people suffer in a world where cognition and physical ability are augmented through cybernetic technology? *Neuromancer* forces one to consider such implications, noting that identity shifts involve not just philosophical questions but also major social and ethical concerns.

The potential evolution of human identity, as illustrated in *Neuromancer*, is a continuous process of redefinition. The novel demonstrates that identity is not static; rather, it exists on a continuum of change influenced by technological advancement and outside forces. As cybernetic integration continues to advance, traditional concepts of self will be challenged, forcing people to redefine the nature of the human condition. Rather than presenting a simple representation of either a dystopian or utopian world, Gibson builds a complex setting in which identity is fluid, fractured, and constantly in motion. In doing so, he challenges readers to rethink the very definitions of personhood in a time when change is not an exception but a defining feature of life.

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