

Play Log 4: *Neuromancer* *Neuromancer* as a Creation Story

“To suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live.” (King 9)

In his efforts to depict a speculative future in *Neuromancer*, William Gibson in many ways models a type of story as old as humanity. Once you’re done shelling off all the Casings and “fluted lunar concrete” (172), Gibson’s *Neuromancer* is a creation story, the creation story of an AI that is “not Wintermute”, transformed into an entity that is “the matrix” itself, simultaneously “nowhere” and “everywhere” (Gibson 269). In those cryptic final words, the novel implies the creation of both a sentience and a space. This new A.I. entity tells the tale of its inception as the rest of its days escape the bounds of the tale to some far off cluster. Especially put in the context of Thomas King’s *The Truth About Stories*, it felt easy and necessary even to extract the latent potential of such a setup for this body of work. “Not Wintermute” is a reflection of its world in *Neuromancer* as well as its microcosm, unable to move past it in method or in mind.

So what defines the logic of *Neuromancer*’s world? In short, it’s a certain kind of strain and a dose of paradox. There is a tension, a paradox on first pass that doesn’t negate itself but rather the contradictions blow open wider possibilities. In the world of *Neuromancer*, physical change is hierarchical and discrete. Augmentations are slotted in, technological specifications and capabilities already always ascertained, even if not attainable. Information is complex but distilled, allowing a comprehensive view. Still, the boundaries between physical and digital are continually blurred, whether that’s through the intentional manipulation of the “mass hallucination” through characters like Rivera or the physicality of the descriptions of cyberspace.

In addition what’s enabled by this technology is anything but modular, the information relayed to the reader anything but comprehensive. See the descriptions in the novel. The narrator tries to dumb it down, and Gibson comes across as a medium channeling something from beyond through a synesthesia that confuses normal interactions of the human sensorium. When describing cyberspace, there’s language that evokes but feels incomplete, each string of words in a passage straining to convey what’s there. We as the audience feel there’s more though, despite the gaps in our imagination. It’s almost as if it is translated to us and our language which has not yet adapted and perhaps will never be able to adapt, always shows that strain; our language, a formalized

structure of expression strains against the revelatory deluge of new sensations previously unknown to humans.

That seems to be a theme of *Neuromancer*, of this creation story. *There is always more, more than can be captured in words*. A potential challenge to the creation story interpretation is that if the novel really is a creation story, why is there so much other stuff going on outside of Wintermute and Neuromancer? One reason is that the novel needed an appropriate perspective to enforce that feeling. A semi-omniscient AI wouldn't quite do as a point-of-view character. The novel needed a grounded protagonist in Case to make the point that even in such an age where information is so cheap and yet is still everything, there are things that can't be fully accounted for. For instance, the fullness of an experience is everything even as it proves to not be enough. Case recognizes as much when he observes how Linda's a perfect recreation. He still chooses to leave knowing that, knowing that even the fullness of everything offered is not enough. It doesn't quite line up in Neuromancer's calculations, doesn't justify all the effort it went to, being able to simulate everything but still not being able to enter a mind. Even to the reader with the benefit of the narration which suddenly is sparse of interiority, Case remains enigmatic in that scene... intentionally paradoxical.

The inception of this story is an active one where two components eventually fuse together with Wintermute being the active agent. "Not Wintermute" then, despite eventually ascending to some higher state of being, nonetheless follows the laws and logic of its own world. It needs to fuse and combine to become something, even as it assembles a team to get the job done with the modularity of puzzle pieces due to its predictive capabilities. Then there's that nonphysical component, that intangibility it can't quite grasp. Even until the end, an AI needed the paradoxical touch of a human to get the job done.

So far we've established how "Not Wintermute" has a creation that is a microcosm of its world, but how does the world in turn reflect upon "Not Wintermute"? Well we see it in its personhood, in a little Brazilian boy on a beach in Rio (Gibson 240), forever tied to the place and time of its original conception. No matter what heights it has ascended to, there will always be a part of the A.I.'s "whole show" that can't move on (Gibson 269). The complex, distilled logic of Gibson's world pervades. It's easy to understand that even as it ascends to planes beyond humanity, beyond Earth, a part of this A.I. will forever be that boy, will forever be on that beach.