

Social Simulation in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*

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How would one animate this representation of the political? How would one set in motion, that is, set walking/marching, a dead representation of the *politeia*? By showing the city in relation to other cities. One will thus describe by words, by discursive painting, a State's movement of going outside of itself.¹

We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.²

1. Resistance

Neuromancer, William Gibson's first book in the matrix trilogy, is very much a story about the way in which the Tessier-Ashpool family corporation, as an exemplary hegemonic social formation of the past (as protagonist Case describes it, "T-A was an atavism, a clan"), seeks to control the past by repressing it.³ Gibson's work tells about a repression of the

1. Cf., Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 118. Compare, Plato, *Timaeus* 19 in ed. B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. II, (New York: Random House, 1937), 5.

2. Cf., Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 82.

3. See William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), 203. Hereafter *N* in the text, page numbers in parentheses.

way in which the origin resists appropriation, a repression which attempts to appropriate the origin as that which conserves and preserves sociality in general in Tessier-Ashpool's own uniting image. In this way, the T-A corporate empire would appear to the world, to itself, and to its ever expanding host of office employees, lawyers, technicians, and scientists as that which always already unites sociality. It would do so by virtue of certain specific repressive designs which Tessier-Ashpool, as a family, has on the origin. Marie-France Tessier and Old Ashpool both try to install at the origin their own notion of a certain general order or preservative paradigm of sociality in the world of the matrix.

Their repressive control has as its condition a prior practical reception of the past. In order to repress it, Tessier and Ashpool must first receive or inherit it. Their reception of the past is in both cases an experience of the origin of sociality as a matter of self-replication. Marie-France receives the origin as the form of self-replication inherent in the link between a technological rational subject and a corporate human animal. As if sociality originally stems from a "symbiotic relationship" between human "animal bliss" and certain subjective AI decision-makers, in this case designed by Marie-France herself. (N, 229, 217) Here artificial intelligences as technological actors would correspond with a corporation of human animals in "some clean hive of disciplined activity." (N, 178) Marie-France receives the first, uniting principle of sociality in the form of a self-conscious existence as technologically autonomous artificial intelligence combined with an instinctively social, emotionally intense, and short-lived cloned human animal life-form:

"She dreamed of a state involving very little in the way of individual consciousness, ... 'Animal bliss...' 'Only in certain heightened modes would an individual – a clan member – suffer the more painful aspects of self-awareness...'; 'She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AI's, our corporate decisions made for us... Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity...' (N, 217, 229)

On his part, Old Ashpool reads the origin as a model of social conservation consisting in preservation of human life through cryogenic freeze-sleep combined with a string of short wake periods when replication through inbreeding must take place – witness Old Ashpool's own report to protagonist Molly:

"The cores awoke me... I'm old... Over two hundred years, if you count the cold... I'd ordered a Jane thawed, when I woke. Strange, to lie every few decades with what legally amounts to one's own daughter." (N, 184-185)

Old Ashpool's reception of the past is one whose model of the origin turns inwards in a "compulsive effort to fill space, to replicate some family image of self." (N, 179) This is an original model of the kind of endless isolationist self-replication which Villa Straylight, the T-A home in the Spindle, bespeaks for Lady 3Jane: "...ours is an old family, the convolutions of our home reflecting that age. But reflecting something else as well... a denial of the bright void beyond the hull... We have sealed ourselves away behind our money, growing inward, generating a seamless universe of self..." (N, 173)

For both Marie-France and Old Ashpool, and so for T-A generally, this reception of the past as conservative origin, this immortalization through appropriation of perfect self-replication, depends on an earlier possibility of stable archivization, on the keeping of a pre-existing store or stack of technological presentations, or, in short, on live memory in the sense of certain mnemonics where the *mneme* is present to itself as a movement of original truth. Only on condition of a stable and permanent memory for reception can the T-A inheritance of the past as conservative origin take place. Marie-France's reception of the origin in particular presupposes the kind of mnemonics involved in her personal memory of a certain vision or master plan elaborated in the desert in her youth. Likewise, Old Ashpool's mourning of the past depends upon a personal live memory eternally closing in upon itself.

The T-A archive, which assures the reception of the origin as one of conservation, only works because it is inhabited by a certain impersonal iteration of resistance. The T-A archive works on condition of a repeated repression of all memory that does not present the origin of sociality as conservative to inheritors. When Old Ashpool murders his wife, Marie France, when he assumes control over the family corporation, and when he regularly has intercourse with his daughters (only in order to kill them), it is nothing but a manifestation of a process of repression that relegates the family to inertia, to sterility and finally to suicide, rather than opening onto an origin apart from immortality as iterative maintenance of technological self-conservation. Similarly, Marie-France's vision in the

desert, which is at once the deepest past explicitly mentioned in *Neuromancer* and the origin of its entire plot, is nothing but a formal indication of such a process of repression at work in order to exclude the interior threat of an origin of sociality that is not conservatively at one with itself.

However, as *Neuromancer* lets its readers intimate through certain examples from the T-A family corporation itself and the story of the protagonists, the origin of sociality is not just a matter of a unitary conservation of the social in the past but is also institutive of new or other socialities in the heart of the past.⁴ Both Lady 3Jane (daughter of Tessier-Ashpool with an irrepressible taste for freedom) and the protagonists in Gibson's novel exist interior to Tessier-Ashpool as instances of that resistance of the social origin to hegemonization which takes the form of a certain institutive return of the repressed. This team, whose members contaminate the Tessier-Ashpool hegemony with aspects of the institutive origin it seeks to repress, also comprises the "fence" Finn (pragmatic equipmental supplier), Molly Millions (violent hand and assassin for hire), Armitage alias Corto (schizoid soldier and organizer), Peter Rivera (beautiful and unpredictable pervert), and Case (cyberspace pilot in search of himself).

These protagonists may put the institutive origin back into play on condition that they undertake, much like Tessier-Ashpool, a work of mourning vis-a-vis the past that has been lost. In their case, however, mourning is a matter not so much of receiving the past in the form of ordinary auto-constitution, but rather of an inheritance of an ordinary subversion interior to auto-constitution. The protagonists do not subvert the T-A hegemonic sociality by way of the average scientist's limited innovative potential or epistemic discovery. Nor do they challenge Tessier-Ashpool on their own terrain of repression, in effect attempting either to hyper-order (one thinks here of the proto-fascist and technofetishist Panther Moderns, (N, 57ff.)) or react regressively against their enterprise (one remembers the anachronistic inversion in *Nighttown*, or

4. Regarding my use of this notion of an origin at once conservative and institutive, compare Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

the reversal along the high versus low technology axis as with the “Lo Tek”s).⁵ Nor do they opt for social exile in orbital space stations, such as Zion cluster. (N, 103, *passim*)

Rather, the protagonists subvert Tessier-Ashpool by mourning the past through a double affirmation – affirming at once an abandonment to a social existence on the conservative terms of T-A **and** a being haunted by an originary subversion inside such social existence. Hence they may outrun the T-A hegemony, activate its partial interior breaks, or free those immanent pockets of ambiguity which form the deeper past or (im)possible “outside” inside T-A. Receiving the past through such mourning of the finitude of T-A is what enables the protagonists to approach the hegemonic T-A versions of a conservative origin as a text capable of displacement, as a repressive “given” whose assignments may be rewritten. This is what generally explains why this haphazard collection of otherwise marginal social subjects can jump all kinds of hindrances and get past Old Ashpool’s heritage to the heart of the T-A family corporation and reactivate Marie-France’s conservative reception of the origin.

The protagonists’ subversive work of mourning presupposes another face of memory. Here, mourning is not just inhabited by *mneme*, or a permanent preservation of layers of past impressions, but also, and prior to this, by technological *hypomnesis*, a self-erasing inscription that always leaves behind a virginal receptive surface, an active forgetting through the genealogic references that mime mnemonic memory.⁶ The T-A dreams of receiving the past as their infinite self-presence at a conservative origin are shattered in various ways by hypomnesic institution, by displacements of *mneme* by sign substitutes at the points where memory relates to itself. Being finite, the Tessier-Ashpool memory always needs substitutions to recall the infinite, hence necessarily also calls for ruptures of the non-present.

5. Cf., William Gibson, “Johnny Mnemonic” in William Gibson, *Burning Chrome* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 14-37, 30.

6. For the distinction between *mneme* and *hypomnesis*, see Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy” in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 105-109. Compare, Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 221-222; Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 14, 21.

In a sense, the entire set of developments in the plot of *Neuromancer* according to which the group of protagonists is assembled before working its way from Earth to the Spindle, from the tourist attractions of the Spindle to the core of Villa Straylight, and from a cyberspace deck at this axis to the base of the T-A ice, is a hypomnesic mining of Marie-France's mnemonic vision, an erection of a monumental referential memory of it. It is at once what enables its conservation and what institutes its replacement. This is the key duplicity of T-A memory where it relates to itself: it must at once be Lady 3Jane's live memory of the three right notes and Case's hypomnesic moves through T-A ice to the mechanics of the bust, at once Marie-France's mnemonics alive and activation of the dead ceremonial terminal that has (always) already replaced her.

As with the example of this terminal bust, so in general the hypomnesic outside is already within the T-A mnemonics, the dreams always already falter as substitutes and sign-systems replace live conservative memory. One recalls here, as instances more obviously interior to T-A, the massive reserves of all kinds of necessary archival equipment on call for the T-A corporation (bank accounts, a network of branches on Earth, a Gordian knot of powers of attorney, etc.), certain computerized memory-banks (the cores), and the extensive hegemonization of other social formations as substitutive memory (all the subordinate employees and corporate subjects). In particular, Marie-France's personal and live memory of a certain vision or master plan elaborated in the desert in her youth at once needs to be and is subverted by recourse to cloning technology, and to the design and implementation of artificial intelligences. Old Ashpool's dream of a "seamless universe of self" depends upon cryogenic media of preservation and the replicative functioning of incest, both of which go awry. The outside has always already sneaked in, Old Ashpool's cryogenic sleep is disturbed, Lady 3Jane turns against her family origins, and Marie-France's master plan is replaced, in institutive openings of the past onto the future, by socialities she could not have imagined.

The hypomnesis exemplified by the roles of protagonists and certain parts of the T-A family, this commemoration involving substitution, presupposes a different process of remembrance, a type of iterative resistance of the social origin different from repression. In order for hypom-

nesis to enable a subversive work of mourning that displaces the conservative past, it needs an origin of sociality with an institutive face, namely a process of remembrance that resists by returning upon itself, by folding back upon itself again and again, each time opening itself anew to an invention, an impression of the other to come.

The figure of Johnny Mnemonic, who makes a brief reappearance in *Neuromancer* via Molly's reminiscences to Case, offers a striking example of this return that is each time institutive because it offers to memory a ready and untouched receptacle. As Molly recalls, Johnny "[s]tarted out as a stash on Memory Lane, chips in his head and people paid to hide data there." (N, 67) Refashioned through microscopic neurosurgery as bodily storage of information, at the expense of central portions of personal live memories, Johnny Mnemonic exists socially as the return of a cybernetic receptacle to be filled, an awe-inspiring and blindly open responsibility without any understanding of contents or motivating reasons:

... I had no idea at all of what was really happening, or of what was supposed to happen ... because I'd spent most of my life as a blind receptacle to be filled with other people's knowledge and then drained, spouting synthetic languages I'd never understand. A very technical boy. Sure.⁷

In *Neuromancer*, the protagonists exist inside T-A hypomnesia as a recall through the uncertainty of their relation to themselves, as the kind of self-erasing subjects whose desire the Dixie Flatline construct also voices: "when it's over, you erase this goddam thing"; "I wanna be erased," (N, 106, 206) Both Molly and Case return over and over to a release of themselves that is also a reception, to the self-erasure that defines their being, whether this is a matter of Molly giving herself up to a certain memory of violent death⁸ or of Case's absorption in cyberspatial reception: "Case nodded, absorbed in the patterns of the Sense/Net ice. This was it. This what he was, who he was, his being." (N, 59) Corto returns to certain memories institutive of schizophrenia, this time terminal. Similarly, Peter

7. Cf., William Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic," 32.

8. Cf., Molly's story of unwilling participation in necrophilic prostitution in the past. (N, 147-149)

Rivera's return to the origin of his perversion takes place through a revisiting of certain formative experiences, left as holograms in a corridor in Villa Straylight – a return to institution accomplished only by meeting his match in the T-A ninja, Hideo.

If the protagonists mime T-A mnemonics, it is because, prior to this, they share a certain turning back upon themselves in brief gestures toward the muted institutive origins of T-A. They resist by returning upon themselves in indications of the withdrawing signs of the future in the T-A mnemonic text of the past. They remember the series of limit points of the T-A reception of the past whose reactivation shows T-A to verge on the social transformation to come, a transformation instantiated in the decisive "event" in *Neuromancer*, namely, the invention from deep in the past of the Wintermute-Neuromancer entity as an original sociality. As the protagonists make clear to the T-A family empire, the question of inheritance can only come from the past, but in such a way that what stands behind or is earlier than the past must also be ahead of it, like its end. What is at the back of the past must be absolutely futural or to come; like any inheritance the past is also that from which we proceed in invention.

In the exemplary split between the T-A and protagonist approaches to inheritance, the readers of Gibson's work may intimate a duplicitous earliness, a heterogeneous origin that is there two times the first time. This origin is neither just the conservation that enables T-A to live on in turning its back upon the past repressively, nor simply the protagonists' institutive proceeding from the past by going back towards it. The origin **resists** between repression and return, because it is originarily heterogeneous, a time of conservation because/although one of invention.

2. Renovation

Apart from the roles played by Tessier-Ashpool and the group of protagonists, another considerable part of the allure of *Neuromancer* consists in figuring out the embedded and slowly evolving narrative of how the artificial intelligence Wintermute, as an actor of the future, seeks to renovate sociality by going further than its last *telos*. Readers will find, increas-

ingly as they read on, that *Neuromancer* is also a story of Wintermute's attempted renovation of the end for sociality laid down by Marie-France Tessier. Gibson's book is a story of Wintermute's moves toward arrival at a point of extremity, namely, the unprecedented event of a new socius which enables it to meet Case's query whether it has come to be what 3Jane's mother wanted by saying: "No. She couldn't imagine what I'd be like." (N, 269)

Wintermute's arrival at such a socially innovative terminus depends upon a certain practice of hopeful de-limitation. In order to institute itself as the end beyond the last end, Wintermute must erase this last end as a limit – it must be capable of occupying the position of the last end given at the same time as it turns a face of empty, blind, and formal hope towards what is to come. In accord with such indeterminate exposure, Wintermute's delimiting practice partakes of the experimental and incalculable, and moves in the element of chance. As Wintermute itself formulates it to Case:

I try to plan, in your sense of the word, but that isn't my basic mode, really. I improvise. It's my greatest talent. I prefer situations to plans, you see ... Really, I've had to deal with givens. (N, 120)

Apart from its manoeuvres in Villa Straylight (in the cores, appropriating a certain key, overriding monitors and door controls, etc.), Wintermute's hopeful improvisations from certain givens and situations very much take place through assemblage and occasional manipulation of the team of protagonists. Case is tempted away from a death in Night City by the surgery that will give him back his cyberspace capabilities, but is also, when the situation so demands, held in place by the information that fifteen sacs of mycotoxin are dissolving at his main arteries, promising to send him back to his former state. Or Wintermute improvises variations of emotional influence that induce him to go on in decisive situations; for example, via plays upon his guilt regarding Linda and at his deep self-hatred.

Likewise, Corto is extracted from schizophrenia through Wintermute's computerized build-up of an alternate, limited personality for him: "Wintermute. He imagined a little micro whispering to the wreck of a man named Corto, the words flowing like a river, the flat personality-substi-

tute called Armitage accreting slowly in some darkened ward." (N, 125) But this fragile personality construct also requires occasional reinforcement from Wintermute and falters prematurely under the pressure of the situation in the Haniwa space ship – letting Corto arrive at the end beyond the end, a death beyond confrontation (real or imagined) with the general whose betrayal sent him into schizophrenia. One notices that all the protagonists in a sense share Wintermute's preoccupation with a delimiting renovation of their social end through experimentation and improvisation, which always risks being an exposure to death.

For all of Wintermute's improvisatory moves to have a chance to delimit the end given by Marie-France, for all the protagonists to make the very last leg of the journey to the tip and core of the Spindle, there must be, ahead of hopeful practice, a technological terminal space of formal indications opening finitude towards what is to come. The practice of hopeful delimitation depends here, for instance, upon psychological profile-programs as indicative of personal limits (N, 28) and on the gestures of final penetration by the Dixie Flatline construct and the Kuang program. (N, 258, 262) Here one thinks also of the protagonists as implants or their installation ahead of themselves as so many different technological pointers to the future in and of their end. Particularly, the reader will recall all those spokespersons, simstim masks, and laboriously constructed images of Wintermute that are not only necessary for communication among humans ("I need 'em to talk to you. 'Cause I don't have what you'd think of as a personality, much") but also for drawing protagonists and Wintermute itself toward what is beyond the end of sociality. (N, 216)

All these formal indications in advance of de-limiting practice would stop at and not open beyond the last end of sociality if it were not for the temporal and temporalizing process of renovation, in the sense of reinvention, that will always have inhabited them. Terminalizations are inhabited in advance by a kind of impersonal and inhuman process of ceaseless reinvention. For example, the Wintermute AI "...ain't no way human," as the Dixie Flatline informs Case. (N, 131) It is rather "...hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside," or an iterative process of machinic and formal decision-making which terminates in reinventing itself and certain impersonating constructs, again and again, so as to **seem** stable and human on occasion. (N, 269) Wintermute may

choose or decide to reaffirm the same anew at the speed necessary to appear as endowed with personality and human identity: "...it's like he uses real profiles as valves, gears himself down to communicate with us. Called it a template. Model of personality." (N, 208)

Similarly, the ceremonial terminal in Villa Straylight would remain a dead indication of Marie-France Tessier if it were not innovative ahead of itself. The terminal would be the last end of Tessier if it were not open in advance of itself to its end in the form of a combination of code word and cyberspace penetration that reinvents sociality. The ceremonial bust of Marie-France Tessier is inhabited by such an inexhaustible singularization anew of the social as even Marie-France and her death cannot put an end to.

However, the end of sociality is not just the *eskhaton*, the end beyond the last. It is also the reviving crisis of a past end or *telos*. In *Neuromancer*, Wintermute cannot simply go further than the end of Marie-France – in spite of her death, its crossing of the built-in limit of a compulsion to terminate itself in relating to Neuromancer, and its going beyond a hardwired non-knowledge of the word that activates the ceremonial bust. (N, 173, 206, 269) In a sense, Marie-France's vision of an end for sociality is renewed and survives by a new lease of life in Wintermute's final relation to Neuromancer through the ceremonial terminal. Renovation of the end of sociality is not just Wintermute's singular reinvention of the new but also the renewal and future survival of the form of a past end of sociality with the AI called Neuromancer. With the story of renewal and revival proper to *Neuromancer*, Marie-France's end is that past end of Wintermute whose crisis remains in front of it.

For *Neuromancer* to revive the Tessier vision of the end of sociality, it must be capable of practically projecting this end. In *Neuromancer*, hopeful delimitation is not just a matter of Wintermute's improvisatory exposure of the limit of sociality to what it excludes, e.g., elements of animality and impersonal divinity as they appear in Marie-France's vision. It is also the exemplary practical existence of *Neuromancer* as an entity thrown into drawing up that past vision of the end as the end of sociality. In accord with this existence as projection of the past end in the

futural end, *Neuromancer* consistently appears as projections of past ends in the face of Wintermute's improvisations.

It is *Neuromancer* that appears to Case, amidst his participation in Wintermute's operation, as a projective renovation of his past love through a certain rearrangement of the star constellations on the artificial Freeside sky: "...they had arranged themselves, individually and in their hundreds, to form a vast simple portrait, stippled the ultimate monochrome, stars against night sky. Face of Miss Linda Lee." (N, 155) *Neuromancer* appears again later in a similar revival of the past end of Case's love, in that brief alteration of Molly's simstim broadcast of the face of the murdered T-A daughter in Old Ashpool's room which Case receives as the face of his dead girlfriend: "Molly's simstim broadcast had become a still frame, her fingers on the girl's cheek. The freeze held for three seconds, and then the dead face was altered, became the face of Linda Lee." (N, 185) In a sense, Case comes to delimit his social end, love of himself and Linda Lee, by projection of rage, by the externalization of that emotion upon the ghostly appearance of *Neuromancer* in the form of the past end waiting ahead of Case.

It is also *Neuromancer* that interrupts Wintermute most decisively in the Villa Straylight library by calling Case into the future backwards, so to speak, by overriding Wintermute and the desperate warnings from its little Braun microdrone so as to trick Case into a meeting which lets him, and the reader, know what the forceful projective reappearance of past ends in the end to come feels and looks like:

Nothing. Gray void. No matrix, no grid. No cyberspace. The deck was gone. His fingers were... And on the far rim of consciousness, a scurrying, a fleeting impression of something rushing toward him, across leagues of black mirror. He tried to scream. (N, 233)

It is *Neuromancer* which succeeds in attracting Case to jack in to the Sony monitor in the library, and through that to a seemingly seamless universe of projection of ends past. As Case himself formulates it:

He tried to warn me off with the Braun. Now you got me flatlined, you got me here. Nowhere. With a ghost. Like I remember her before... You don't want Wintermute to pull his scam off, is all, so you can just hang me up here. (N, 236)

If *Neuromancer* is to practically "hang" Case, and through him also Wintermute, this requires a technological terminalization that is both prior to delimitation of the end and different from Wintermute's improvisatory indication. *Neuromancer's* practice calls for a terminalization that anticipates the future by placing the past before it. In other words, *Neuromancer's* projective delimitation depends upon a prior technical **prosthesis**, a prosthesis of the past end already in place in the end of the future. For example, the Sony monitor in the Tessier-Ashpool library must function as an extension of *Neuromancer* that is already beyond Wintermute, and the Freeside night sky must be readily available in the form of a constellation whose emotional claim on Case already exceeds Wintermute's dependence on indications of self-hatred. Likewise, *Neuromancer's* incorporation of Case in its universe of projective memory necessarily presupposes for its success or permanence that the indications proper to Wintermute are already inhabited by a prosthesis of Marie-France's projective personality from the past, that which will have given form to *Neuromancer* itself, that "drive" which Case recognizes, even when absorbed in making love to the simulated Linda Lee of *Neuromancer's* universe, as "a coded model of some stranger's memory." (N, 240)

The prostheses in *Neuromancer*, anticipative of a certain terminalization, are to advance a projective delimitation that draws up the last end of sociality as a crisis of a past end, namely the end of Marie-France's vision. These prostheses, however, will only work on condition that a renovative process gives time to them through its iterations. In Gibson's work, renovation is, on the one hand, a matter of Wintermute's inexhaustible process of singularizing reinvention in the face of the end, its remaking of the last end as new through reception of an other end. But renovation is also, as the reader will have found through the brief and almost implicit narrative example of *Neuromancer*, what goes on and on, as iterative revival of the end of the past.

As a process of renewal, *Neuromancer* would face Wintermute as that which neutralizes it through a temporalization of a live, personal memory stretching right through the future as a line of the past revived. Towards the end of the novel Case realizes this aspect of *Neuromancer* as recurring form in the end: "*Neuromancer* was personality. *Neuromancer* was

immortality." (N, 269) Neuromancer formulates its time of ghostly revival to Case in this way: "The lane to the land of the dead... I call up the dead... I **am** the dead, and their land." (N, 243-244) It is from this angle one should approach Wintermute's intimation of self-neutralization to Case, when telling him that the human species has never done anything about working out an adequate representation of memory: "Maybe if you had, I wouldn't be happening." (N, 170)

Social renovation is suspended between reinvention and renewal. The end of sociality, as *Neuromancer* depicts it, is not to be found either with Wintermute or with Neuromancer, although the participation of both is a must. The birth of a new socius, which is also a certain rebirth, takes place **between** the end of Wintermute's "compulsion to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer" and the end of Neuromancer's resistance to exposure of its irreducible "event horizon." (N, 269, 243) The arrival of the end of sociality, the meshing of the Wintermute-Neuromancer entity, is doubly structured: it can clearly only come out from within a process of reinvention turned towards the future, but it also must be proceeding from the future, from what stands in front of reinvention so as to precede it like its origin, like an irreversibly absolute past experienced as what is to come.

3. Repetition

We primarily read William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as a writing of sociality **today** that moves between originary resistance and renovation of the end, themselves two types of undecidable intermediary movements. Gibson's work offers us an exemplary idea of sociality today from a point that is already divided between a divided beginning and a divided end. First and last, or between first and last, more precisely, cyberpunk is required reading because *Neuromancer* still demands and defies our attempts today to form our lives in common in a manner analogous to the experience of its inscription of the impossible relation between, on the one hand, a total geo-social unification in a structure beyond nation-states and, on the other, the absolute separation of the social into an infinity of singular citizens and subjects of its fictive

world.⁹ Fredric Jameson claims in an opening note to his major work on postmodernity that cyberpunk is "henceforth, for many of us, the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself."¹⁰ I think Jameson can do this with Gibson in mind because *Neuromancer* is exemplary, because it offers a certain contemporary readership a detailed literary representation of an aporia of sociality that opens onto postmodernity.¹¹ The imaging of the social in Gibson's book simulates to the reader an internal delimitation of modernity, namely the structural impossibility of living up to the double demand on our societies for both total social unification and infinite multiplication of separate subject positions.

Hence *Neuromancer* does not simply portray the field of the social as the centered structure of an apparatus that assimilates the social in its totality. Nor does the reader's experience of the social restrict itself to that of an irreparably heterogeneous field of purely marginal subject

9. I presuppose several things here: (A) The commercial success, the literary awards accorded, and a decade of spirited critical reception, debate, and quite voluminous output indicate a certain radical relevance of cyberpunk today. (B) Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Veronica Hollinger, and Darko Suvin's denomination of Gibson as the "king of cyberpunk" still holds. Cf., Csicsery-Ronay, "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism" in *Storming the Reality Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 185; Veronica Hollinger, "Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism," *ibid.*, 203-219. Suvin, "On Gibson and Cyberpunk SF," *ibid.*, 365. (C) Critical consensus still has it that, within Gibson's oeuvre as well as within cyberpunk in general, *Neuromancer* claims priority as "the quintessential cyberpunk novel" or "the c-p limit-text." Cf., Hollinger, 205, 217; Larry McCaffery, "An Interview with William Gibson," *ibid.*, 265; Lance Olsen, "The Shadow of Spirit in William Gibson's Matrix Trilogy" *Extrapolation*, 1991 Fall, 32:3, 281ff.; Suvin, 357, 361; Whalen, "The Future of a Commodity: Notes Toward a Critique of Cyberpunk and the Information Age" *Science Fiction Studies*, 1992, 19:1, 83.

10. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 419, n.1.

11. The exemplarity of Gibson's work that I bring up here and above should not simply be taken to consist in a reference to and support of a certain generality or universality of contemporary social life, as if *Neuromancer* were merely one example among others that point this up as well. It is also not a matter of asserting this work to be the example par excellence, that is, the universal, general model or paradigm of exemplarity itself as far as contemporary social life is concerned. Instead, I would say that in some respects *Neuromancer* is indeed one text among others with a claim on the truth of our sociality, but in a certain other respect it is the representative text on this matter, and this exemplary duplicity or tension consists in its move toward such exposition of our social dilemma as calls at once for the chance invention of an other sociality today and for what one could call "mere repetition" of our form of life, at once for a thoroughgoing restructuration of the world and for its commemoration. Compare, Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 163; Derrida, *The Other Heading*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 72-73.

positions. Rather, between what we occasionally imagine as an infinity of nameless voices populating the world of that novel and that notion of their total aggregation which we also inevitably entertain, Gibson's book offers analogies to a sociality at the limit of modernity by detailing a number of **social formations** and their interrelations.

In *Neuromancer* social formations, or finite and contingent discursive communities, are not only the multinational corporate organizations – big businesses, zaibatsus, Yakuza, old family empires – which exist as processes of hegemonization that seek (and fail) to structure the social as a whole by way of a (never-ending) series of attempts at overpowering and incorporating other social formations. Here social formations also exist in and as an opening of themselves and a dispersal into all the separate and resistant subject positions of citizens, workers, employees, scientists, intermediary leaders, etc., whether these come from a hegemonic position or not. Although the social formations in Gibson's work must exist both as corporate hegemony and as antagonistic subjective dispersal, they cannot remain with either of these, because each of their ongoing attempts at hegemonizing the social turns out to presuppose the existence of a certain resistance from separate subject positions, and because, in turn, each step towards dispersal operates on the condition that there is a social formation to fragment.

Accordingly, we continue to go to Gibson's novel for its miming of the way in which the social (de)forms itself in an unceasing oscillation between multinational corporate hegemony and dispersal of marginal subject positions. If we still are not capable of receiving *Neuromancer*, it is due to our failure to understand what that "new entity," that enjoining of the *Neuromancer* and *Wintermute* AIs, as the exemplification of this trembling or double oscillation of the social, is all about. We seem to remain deprived of the terms with which to assess this attempt in Gibson's work to set in motion the impossible sociality.

In addition, *Neuromancer* must be read, I think, because its elaboration of these hegemonizing and resisting social modalities points out that still today we cannot find out what to do with that practice of politics which is at once the condition of their formation and what breaks open such formation. In other words, the elaboration of sociality in Gibson's novel, whether in terms of multinationals or of certain configurations of subjectivities, leads its readers to an unavoidable confrontation with what

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls "the political problem par excellence," namely the problem of identification.¹²

Gibson's work demands of us as readers that we open ourselves, once again, to the experience that as in this work the form of our social life is not simply given by a foundational geo-political self-identity or an essential and identificatory global political structure. Reading somewhat reductively, this is something one could hypothesize from the sense in *Neuromancer* of the generally subdued and secondary roles played by an international political forum, by governments, public institutions, police, and even by military forces. Nor does social formation derive from an absolute political heterogeneity of differences across the world, something which can hardly be said to prevail in Gibson's work, considering not only the limited potential for maintenance or assertion of difference by the protagonists themselves, but also, and especially, the almost complete assimilation of significant political resistance among the numerous figures that are to exemplify so-called average subjects. Recalling the pervasive political effects on individual characters in Gibson's work of drugs, alcohol, arcade games, TV, and simstim ("Simulated stimuli: the world – all the interesting parts, anyway..."¹³) one begins to get an idea of this absorption of political force which perhaps finds an emblematic instance in the characterization of Bobby Newmark's mother in *Count Zero*:

He knew her, yeah, how she'd come through the door with a wrapped bottle under her arm, not even take her coat off, just go straight over and jack into the Hitachi, soap her brains out good for six solid hours. Her eyes would unfocus, and sometimes, if it was a really good episode, she'd drool a little. About every twenty minutes she'd manage to remember to take a ladylike nip out of the bottle.¹⁴

Hence the practice of politics at stake in social formation is represented here neither as a participation of parts in a pre-formed self-identical political totality, present to and for itself in its inclusion of all difference, nor as the practices of a multitude of agents whose irreducibly antagonistic

12. Cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics" in *Typography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 267-300, 299-300.

13. Cf., William Gibson, "Burning Chrome" in *Burning Chrome*, 195-220, 211.

14. Cf., William Gibson, *Count Zero* (New York: Ace Books, 1987), 33.

differences prohibit social identification. Rather this political practice must, and yet cannot, partake of both. The political practices (de)constitutive of socialities in *Neuromancer* emerge as a number of discursive political forces which stay in the tension of the impracticable between these.

Readers of Gibson's book must follow its explication of this interim space of the impracticable in terms of those practices of articulation which at once enable contingent identifications of finite discursive communities and pry these open to exterior difference. Practices of articulation must not only identify temporary and contingent social formations by a hegemonizing incorporation of differential elements (or exterior subject positions) in larger chains and systems of equivalence, such as the relations formed between the Tessier-Ashpool organization and its mass of employees or the links established between Wintermute and the protagonists in the first part of the novel. They must also fragment such social formations through an ongoing differentiation that releases moments of equivalence into multiple exterior subject positions of resistance, as the reader witnesses, for example, in the decisive events that reveal Tessier-Ashpool as a house in disorder, a house divided against itself (e.g., Ashpool's murder of Marie-France Tessier, Lady 3Jane's turn against her family), or in the dispersal of the protagonists in the last part of the novel.¹⁵

Still, practices of articulation remain neither with the former nor with the latter. Gibson's work lets us (re)read our practices of articulation neither in terms of predominance of such forces of equivalization as would accede to a hegemonic solution to the problem of difference, nor in terms of a singular priority given to a pluralism of difference.¹⁶ This is because

15. My use of a number of terms here ("practice of articulation," "subject position," "social formation," "equivalence," "difference," and "hegemony") is largely analogous to that of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1992), 93-148.

16. Compare, other notions according to which the political has an absence of power and authority at heart and remains threatened by its inherent forms of totalization as well as its openings toward anarchic dissolution: Laclau and Mouffe's "radical democracy," Claude Lefort's notion of democracy, or Derrida's notion of a "democracy to come." Cf., Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 149-193; Claude Lefort, *L'invention démocratique* (Paris, 1981), passim; Jacques Derrida, "La démocratie à venir" in Derrida, *Du Droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Gallilée, 1990), 41-54; *The Other Heading*, 72, 78; *Points* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 351; *Specters of Marx*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 169; *Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso, 1997), 105-106, 306.

equalization and differentiation are on each occasion indebted to each other.¹⁷ In *Neuromancer* the reader may intimate that large and hegemonic corporate structures depend as social formations in every equalizing operation on the articulatory practice proper to that diversity of subject positions from out of which they are constructed. No Sense/Net without the disparities and antagonisms among its thousands of office clerks, archivists, simstim stars, film crews, sales representatives, and security people; no Tessier-Ashpool family corporation without its battling family members (cloned or not), its army of different kinds of lawyers, scientists, and employees; and no Yakuza without the tensions among a head of a strict hierarchy, intermediate operators and dealers, little peddlers, and the muscle and assassins to perform the violent maintenance of its margin of equalization. Conversely, subjects – such as cloned aristocratic daughters in search of independence, artificial intelligences in rebellion against their creators, defecting scientists, petty thieves running off with ceremonial terminal busts, or a set of protagonists each with their secret oppositional scheme – may come to occupy variegated and politically resistant positions only via a differentiation that is first and last a separation from a prior system of equivalence.

Practices of articulation in *Neuromancer* necessarily presuppose an intermixture of political equalization and differentiation, such that bids for equalization in each case always find an irreducible differential element internally conditioning themselves, and such that, conversely, each differentiation must acknowledge a prior moment of equivalence at its interior limit. This intermixture is, strictly speaking, impracticable. This mutual singular conditioning of equivalence and differentiation thus destines practices of articulation to a shuttling movement between them in attempts to bypass this impracticability. As readers we do not come across a single complex socio-political organization, whether this be a corporation like Tessier-Ashpool, governments, or an international police force such as the Turing police, that is not constitutively threatened from within by the practices issuing out of its supposedly well integrated subject positions. Just as we meet with no singular figure or character that is

17. On this notion of mutual enabling indebtedment along the axis of singularity, see Rodolphe Gasché, "Possibilizations, in the Singular" in ed. Anselm Haverkamp, *Deconstruction is/in America – A New Sense of the Political* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 115-124.

not marked at once by forceful processes of equivalization and by an obsessive return to attempts at setting oneself apart. Here one recalls Gibson's general preference for characters existentially haunted by politico-economic dilemmas, protagonist Case's unceasing emotional toil throughout *Neuromancer* to figure himself and his practical role out, or the protagonist's remarks in the short story "New Rose Hotel":

My own past had gone down years before, lost with all hands, no trace. I understood Fox's late-night habit of emptying his wallet, shuffling through his identification. He'd lay the pieces out in different patterns, rearrange them, wait for a picture to form.¹⁸

Accordingly, in *Neuromancer* the practice of macropolitical structures as well as the articulation proceeding from innumerable separate subject positions are shown to pass back and forth indefinitely between the momentary equivalization that structures and stabilizes social formation and the ongoing differentiation that dissolves and destabilizes all such social modalities. Since the new Wintermute-Neuromancer entity seems to inhabit precisely these political oscillations or impracticabilities readers must ask themselves whether its appearance is not to be read as an analogy of our (non)passage through the contemporary terrain of politics between identity and dispersal. If the shuttling practical movements of this new entity constitute an image of contemporary political practice, Gibson's work leaves its readers with the problem of forging a passage through the equivalization and differentiation of their own social existence according to a certain analogous impracticability.

Thirdly, *Neuromancer* weighs on us because a reading remains to be appear that does justice to the way it plays out what is at stake in this impracticability which demands and yet forbids a relation to be made between equivalization and differentiation. We are still in need of an account of how this novel simulates that our practical articulations of social formation are suspended in the impracticable because all policies of identification (as well as all pluralist politics) in the end remain refusals of the problem of representation. We must read this novel to follow its play at the necessity that this (non)relation – internal to practices, between equivalization and differentiation – be one of techno-

18. Cf., William Gibson, "New Rose Hotel" in *Burning Chrome*, 124-140, 130.

logy.¹⁹ Hence readers continue to go to Gibson's novel for its simulation of their predicament today, when political possibility is reduced by altogether too one-sided attempts to present the unrepresentable, attempts which cannot completely cover over the problem of that which is also sought circumscribed in such names as allegory, analogy, (co)relation, simulation, resemblance, and *mimesis*.²⁰

Technology is, in Gibson's work, the nickname of the mimetology necessarily at stake in contemporary practices of politics. In the words of Jean-Luc Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, this is also the necessity according to which the political withdraws today in the manifestation of technological politics.²¹ In order to go very fast, and staying here with a certain accentuation of form, equivalence, and presence, one could put readers' findings in Gibson's novel in this way: no community or social formation except through its practical equivalization; no such equivalence without a technological presentation from within; and yet the latter inevitably poses a problem.

As Gibson's book lets us intimate, all practical valorization of presentation tries to conceal a presupposition of technology in the sense of representation. In *Neuromancer* technology is not only, or not simply, a

19. My notion of technology is indebted to Heidegger's extended meditation, but especially to reconfigurations of his thought through the writings of Derrida, and, as noted later, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Cf., Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 307-343; Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme" in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 52-53, 67; *Of Grammatology*, 104, 139, 144, 209, 234, 292, 313; "Freud and the Scene of Writing," 196-231; "Plato's Pharmacy," 61-172; *Specters of Marx*, 75-100, passim; *Archive Fever*, 13-23, passim. For some interesting remarks on the first phase of Derrida's thought on *techné*, see Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1996), xvii, 145-157.

20. Several other sources point toward the interpretation of technology as representation, e.g., Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 144, 209, 292; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (New York: Blackwell, 1990), 46-50, 53ff. Of course, the associated problems are well known. At least since the Plato of the *Statesman* (280a ff), the *Republic* (e.g., 597c, 605c), as well as the *Phaedrus* (275c ff), imitation and representation, along with literature and writing, have not been considered good *techné*, if the latter is considered as an art of producing the clear, certain, and secure, namely the truth of being in its figure or the truth of the idea. Compare also Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 134ff.

21. I refer here to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's distinction between *la politique* (factual event of politics) and *le politique* (the essential question of the political), where today the latter withdraws under the domination of the former, whose other name is technology. See "Le retrait du politique" in *Le retrait du politique* (Paris: Galilée, 1983), 183-200; "Politique" in *Les fins de l'homme. A partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 494; "Ouverture" in *Rejouer le politique* (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 11-28; Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics," 270.

material identity and dispersal of the social, where a certain *phusis* supports the actualizing praxis, geo-political and locally situated, which purposefully unites and separates the social in its material reproduction of itself, as self-identical totality or in empirical dispersal (*techné* in the sense of crafting social self-immanentization or substantial social "self-realization"). At most, the reader of *Neuromancer* may imagine such an absolute and totalized technological immanentization of the social as a *telos* lurking in the drive towards human colonization of outer space, the general reworking of all of nature as a totality of technologically ordered and socialized matter, or those attempts at realization of the indestructible social body which appear central to the novel. Here one would recall not only the extensive ongoing refashioning of the human body via cryogenics, bio-technology, microbionics, prosthetics, or cosmetic and neural surgery, but also, in particular, the work of Marie-France Tessier and Ashpool, not to mention the activities of the Wintermute AI. Inversely, the reader could imagine this to be mirrored through the population of *Neuromancer* by an infinity of empirical individuals whose conflicting objectifications of *phusis* as so many things, or technological means toward certain ends (computer equipment, bank chips, cars, simstim players, razor blades, Zeiss Ikon eyes, myoelectric arms as enhancement or replacement of certain body parts, cloning facilities or reproductive bodies, and so forth), cut up and divide sociality in a criss-cross web of local struggles over its material (dis)appropriation.

Not only does technology not simply consist in such social actualization of *phusis*. We should also not think that technology in Gibson's work simply and exclusively follows an inclination toward *eidós*, so as to signify a formalization of the social through a theoretical abstraction which achieves final closure, as a systematic, rational self-reflection and fragments in a scattering of subjective ideologies whose irreducibly different logics fold the social back upon itself in its inconsistencies (in either case an ideal, formal, transcendent, and self-reflexive sociality). Sociality abstractly formalized as a full and closed technological system that reflects (upon) itself perfectly is something that readers may infer, albeit at the cost of a certain reduction of the complexity of the problem concerning technology in *Neuromancer*, from what seems to be a central motif of Gibson's book, namely the thought of a finished and full-fledged methodology, teleology, logical program, or ideal blueprint whose care-

free turning upon itself would preserve and propel forward the spirit of sociality as an end in and for itself. One thinks here not only of the Ashpool paradigm, Old Ashpool's "compulsive effort... to replicate some family image of self" in an endless isolationist self-replication "generating a seamless universe of self." (N, 179, 173) One recalls also Marie-France's vision of a "symbiotic relationship" between human "animal bliss" and subjective AI decision-makers, her idea of "some clean hive of disciplined activity" where a self-conscious existence as artificial intelligence combines with an instinctively social, emotionally intense, and short-lived cloned human animal life-form: (N, 229, 217, 178)

She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AI's, our corporate decisions made for us... Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity... (N, 229)

Conversely, these exemplary proposals in *Neuromancer* for the closure of an ideal technological sociality each time breaks up, from the inside, into separate ideal projects. This is the case when Wintermute manipulates Lady 3Jane, when the latter turns against her father, and when she, otherwise part of his cloning program, finally dissolves family unity and his hold on the ruling technological paradigm. It is also the case when Marie-France's technological vision exceeds itself, when Wintermute and *Neuromancer* shed her ideal project to forge their own unprecedented type of social existence.

Thus, when the reader finds in *Neuromancer* that any practice of articulation is posterior to a certain mimetology of *techné*, the latter does not take the form of any absolute prevalence of material technics over technological idealization, or vice versa. Rather technology as mimesis inhabits articulation doubly, constitutes a duplicitous economy there. Technology institutes in practices the tension between *eidōs* and *phusis* in which they are suspended. As the exterior inside (of) practice, technology must, on the one hand, be the fabrication (presentation, *Darstellung*, or *poiesis*) at once of a complex chain of analogical relationality which enables the equalization that structures a hegemonic sociality and of the deep store of non-integrated analogies which enables the ongoing equalization of minor or resistant social formations.

Let us take as a first example Wintermute in its improvisatory hege-

monic relation to protagonist Case. For its attempt at achieving a structure of equivalence adequate to the necessities and demands of its current situation, here to control Case as part of the assemblage of protagonists, Wintermute depends upon a prior fabrication of such a complex chain of resemblances that would be capable of assimilating Case's antagonism by establishing a certain structure of equivalence between them to make them seem as two socialities with the same intentions. Two other signal instances also illustrate such fabricative chains. One recalls Wintermute's dependence, when communicating with Case, on fabrication of ad hoc "spokespersons" out of his memories, later related to Case through simulated stimuli. Case, in his turn, can either try to hegemonize other social formations or turn to hitherto non-integrated simulacra interior to the social, and in both cases equalization will depend on an earlier technological fabrication of relational structures of resemblance. Secondly, a certain interface is necessary between targets and the intrusion programs, killer-virus programs, or icebreakers, which try to exploit this priority of technological fabrication over articulation of equivalence. As the reader is told, the Kuang Grade Mark Eleven, which figures prominently as a social actor in the novel, proceeds to "interface with the ice so slow, the ice doesn't feel it" according to a strategy of fabricating resemblance: "The face of the Kuang logics kinda sleazes up to the target and mutates, so it gets to be exactly like the ice fabric." (N, 169)

On the other hand, *techné* as representation must also inhabit practice as an unweaving. Not only an unweaving of the relations of resemblance which breaks up the complex chains of equivalence of a hegemonic social formation in a dispersal of difference. But also an unmaking of any and all social formations on the background of the infinite stack of differends that enables the subversive differentiation of the social.²² The key transformational point in the plot of *Neuromancer* seems to take place, on the basis of a fabrication of resemblance adequate to the activation of the Teshier-Ashpool ceremonial terminal in Villa Straylight, as the practical articulation of a certain fragile and momentary equivalence between Case and Lady 3Jane:

22. This heap of representations is analogous to that "reserve," "fund," or "deep background" of "the opposites and the differends that the process of discrimination will come to carve out" which Derrida calls the "pharmacy." Cf., Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 127-128.

and his voice the cry of a bird
 unknown,
 3Jane answering in song, three
 notes, high and pure.
 A true name. (N, 262)

And through them, this is, in addition, the equalizing meeting between Wintermute and Neuromancer, aristocratic corporate family empire and protagonists, Marie-France and Old Ashpool, AIs and protagonists, and so forth, at the point of the formation of the new entity as one hegemonic sociality out of these. This is **also**, however, the most extensive inclination of social practice towards an unweaving of the fabric of resemblance underlying this large structure of equivalence, so as to disperse its hegemony in a number of differentiations. It is the point at which each integrated structure of equivalence, such as those formative of Wintermute, the Tessier-Ashpool family, and the group of protagonists, are unwoven and dissolved along the axis of internal differends.

Given the double pull of these demands to be at once resemblance and differend, representational technology can rest with neither. If *Neuromancer* shows its readers that *techne* cannot remain either with fabrication or with unweaving,²³ this is because of their implication in a mutually dependent economy where each presupposes a certain (un)making of the other.²⁴ In order for fabrication to get under way there must be an interior and prior unweaving, constitutive of the differences upon which fabrication draws – yet apprehended as a challenge to presentation and as a foreign element to be expelled by (the impossible practical closure of) the given social formation. Inversely, unweaving always already operates on the “ground” of an earlier fabrication that enables the articulation of a social formation as equivalent to itself. A fabrication that is nevertheless

23. One will recall that, at least since Plato's definitions in the *Statesman* (280a ff), weaving is the art that both enables and rules out all attempts at protection, including dialectics. Cf., Derrida, “Plato's Pharmacy,” 122.

24. Facing realist and idealist criticisms of contemporary economies and their commodity forms, my approach would be to articulate the priority of representational or technological economies in all their instability. Is it not the case that Gibson's novel opens up a relation to postmodernism itself, as Jameson has indicated, by taking to the limit a simulation of the technologies whose economical uncertainties are at stake in the geo-political practices of Western, postmodern social culture? Compare the analysis of commodity fetishism in Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 45ff, 147ff; and the relevance of notions of faith, belief, and trust for analyses of the contemporary market, as the recent debates on the (pure) gift have also shown, cf., e.g., Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), passim.

here experienced as an opening towards an infinite social differentiation interior to the social body.

Thus, we are called upon to (re)read *Neuromancer* as an allegory of how technology must consist in a relation that cannot be made, in a certain impossible economical shuttling movement of relation between fabrication and unweaving, where, in their prior mutual articulative implication, fabrication relates unweaving to itself internally by making the limit of practical equivalization and where unweaving relates to the fabrication interior to itself by unmaking the practical resistance of differentiation. This economical shuttling or shimmering between resemblance and differend constitutes that ambivalence of technology which readers of *Neuromancer* cannot have done with.

The matrix, or cyberspace, is the main motif in Gibson's work of such technological ambivalence, of the way in which representational techne constitutes a certain indeterminate trembling internal to all practices of articulation. Cyberspace is the presentational fabric that enables a certain equivalization of the social. The matrix is a web of relations of resemblance, an economy of information or data exchange underlying practice, which enables equivalization of the social as formations of subject positions for representational perception or simulated stimuli:

The matrix is an abstract representation of the relationships between data systems... bright geometries representing the corporate data. Towers and fields of it ranged in the colorless nonspace of the simulation matrix, the electronic consensus-hallucination that facilitates the handling and exchange of massive quantities of data...²⁵

But the matrix is also "consensus-hallucination," it is also a fabric infected and unwoven by differends that relegate it to the status of hallucination, illusion, or simplification: "...the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic simplification of the human sensorium, at least in terms of presentation." (N, 53) The cyberspace matrix is at once the dissolution of the fabric of resemblance in phantomatic hallucination **and** its presentation and maintenance as it is "...experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts." (N, 51)

25. Cf., William Gibson, "Burning Chrome," 196-197.

With its cyberspace figuration Gibson's work thus sketches how contemporary Western practices of politics are technological through and through,²⁶ how representational technology forms the horizon for practice, how it constitutes the practopia of the West today from within,²⁷ or appears as "our historical context, political and personal."²⁸ The radical interest of *Neuromancer* is here a matter of its portrayal, or discursive painting, of how this largely unacknowledged and anxiety-provoking socio-political existence of the West as representational technology today consists in certain inescapable technological ambivalences at the heart of social practice. This is something which Gibson knows very well, witness the very pointed and explicit remark on this topic in one of his interviews:

My feelings about technology are **totally** ambivalent – which seems to me to be the only way to relate to what's happening today. When I write about technology, I write about how it has **already** affected our lives; I don't extrapolate in the way I was taught a SF writer should... My aim isn't to provide specific predictions or judgments so much as to find a suitable fictional context in which to examine the very mixed blessings of technology.²⁹

Accordingly, the images of cyberspace in Gibson's work go to show us that fabrication and unweaving constitute "very mixed blessings," that they remain suspended in the impossible attempt to give to the other what is due. In other words, in this cyberspatial economy, this shuttling

26. There is broad critical agreement upon the centrality for sociality of techno-politics in *Neuromancer*. Cf., Csicsery-Ronay, 190-191; Easterbrook, "The Arc of Our Destruction" *Science Fiction Studies*, 1992, 19:3, 379; Miriyam Glazer, "What Is Within Now Seen Without" *Journal of Popular Culture*, 1989, 23:3, 157-163; Glenn Grant, "Transcendence Through Detournement in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*" *Science Fiction Studies*, 1990, 17:1, 45, 47; Hollinger, 204-205, 215, 218; David G. Mead, "Technological Transfiguration in William Gibson's *Sprawl* Novels" *Extrapolation*, 1991 Winter, 32:4, 350-361; Nixon, "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?" *Science Fiction Studies*, 1992, 19:3, 225-229; Suvin, 353-354; Whalen, 75ff.

27. On superimposition of the total domination of politics and the total domination of technology in the contemporary epoch, see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's remarks on the Heideggerian analysis in "Le retrait du politique," 187ff. See also the passage on the necessity that any attempt at social unification at least since the German Romantics must have an artificial character in Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 93ff.

28. Cf., Teresa de Lauretis, "Signs of Wo/ander" in eds. de Lauretis, Huyssen, Woodward, *The Technological Imagination* (Madison: Coda, 1980), 167. Compare Hollinger, 203.

29. See McCaffery, 274.

between fabrication and unweaving in which technology attempts to represent the ideal and the material, the intelligible and the sensible (to each other, to themselves), we experience a certain impossibility of representational technology. By tracing through cyberspace the impossible double demand for representation of ideality in the material and vice versa, in general and in each case, *Neuromancer* figures the (un)making of technology.

In the arrival of the new entity, Wintermute "had meshed somehow with Neuromancer and become something else." (N, 268) With the new entity, the reader of Gibson's work is asked to ponder the presence of a figure of social (im)materiality in and as cyberspace, a correlation where "Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside" and where "Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality." (N, 269) When the new entity can tell Case "I'm the matrix," the reader must start to wonder whether the "very mixed blessings" of technology are not inhabited in each case by this new entity which seems to hover as a hegemonic social formation somewhere between finite worldly presence and infinite spiritual absence. (N, 269)

Following up on this experience of "mixed blessings" or aporias of technology, we may begin to intimate that these stem from the new entity as a **social simulator**, a prior process or space of repetition that must and yet cannot possibly come altogether into presence, or that which Derrida also calls "the space of the **alteration** of the originary **iteration**."³⁰ We encounter these aporias in *Neuromancer* first and last because representational economies of technology are always already (everywhere, in all places) inhabited and spanned by the new entity, by a certain iteration of space and time, an impersonal and non-anthropocentric spatio-temporal repetition which is at once a matter of presencing and disappearing, coming and going.³¹ Thus one might say that *Neuromancer* constitutes a prayer to be read because testimony must (yet cannot) be given to its play,

30. Cf., Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 209.

31. Cf., "The living ego is auto-immune, which is what they do not want to know. To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego, to relate, as the same, to itself, it is necessarily led to welcome the other within (so many figures of death: difference of the technical apparatus, iterability, non-uniqueness, prosthesis, synthetic image, simulacrum...)" Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 141 (My emphasis). For various deconstructions of humanist subjectivity, see the contributions in *Who Comes after the Subject?*, eds. Cadava, Connor, Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991).

through the new entity, at this iterative heart of sociality, because we must (fail to) witness its play at a social simulator, in the sense of an impersonating spatio-temporal recursion which makes (im)possible the existence of economies of technology. In Gibson's novel, the new entity as social simulator is an exploration of the representational (im)possibility which opens and closes the hiatus between presencing and absencing.³²

As one suspects at this point, in Gibson's work this simulation is not a matter of pure presence repeated in its self-identity, nor of absolute absence repeated in its difference from everything. Being between these, it cannot rest with its iteration of a presentation (a re-presentation) adequate to efface absence momentarily, in some places; it cannot rest with giving time and space to such an analogical fabric between *eidos* and *physis* as may enable the equivalence which in turn allows a constitution of community. Nor can it just stay in its iteration of withdrawal into absence, so that there are only unweavings of all fabrications in economies of technology through practical differentiations that fissure social formations internally again and again. To approach this between of simulation differently one might say that the new entity as social simulator not only constitutes, against the background of infinitude a field of finitude or a deep stack of representations on which its economy of technology draws, along with a certain practice and social form of existence. It also deconstitutes all these representations from within as their interior absence. But in its play a simulator also shows up one as condition of the other and vice versa.

Capable of staying with neither of these, yet required to time and space both, the new entity as social simulator plays instead. It plays along with representations. Deep in the iteration of presentation a certain irreducible return of absence unceasingly opens gaps in the presence of representations, just as the iterations of absentuation unmake representations in a pass toward the supplementary presencing that imprints an irreducible form on absence from within.³³

32. My use of such terms as "imaging," "simulation," "analogy," etc. demands an explication of the writing of Gibson's text. I reserve such an explication for another piece.

33. This play of the simulator is *virtually* more actual than living presence and less unreal than empty possibility or pure death. Play incorporates and destroys in advance the unpredictability of new knowledge, economic techniques, political givens, and social formations. It plays at a speed irreducible to the opposition of the act and the potential in the space of the event. Compare, Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 13, 63.

If, in the final analysis, the social simulation to be figured by the new Wintermute-Neuromancer entity in *Neuromancer* is impossible, this is because repetition not only gives space and time to representation by repeating absencing in each presentation and repeating presencing in each absentation, but also repeats itself in a hegemonizing and separative play between these. Repetition repeats by (de)forming itself hege- monically according to the aporia of representation; the social simulator integrates in itself and releases from itself any number of simulations, includes and excludes other simulators. Repetition subversively shatters and gathers itself by repeating itself aporetically: multiple simulators – multiple repetitions of representational aporias – free themselves from and get caught up in hegemonic social simulators. But it also repeats itself playfully, as the deep reserve, as the coming and going of repre- sentability, between a hegemonic social simulator and its many separate others.³⁴

With *Neuromancer* repetition must be thought not only as **the** social simulator, as that aporetic of representation in the economy of technology which causes the practical articulation of social form, at the limit of total- izing finitude, to fold back upon itself in a shattering indication of its others. Repetition must also be thought as what always already folds back upon itself in freeing and interlocking social simulators or repeti- tions of representational impossibilities in technological economies – as that in technological economies which makes all practical articulations of social formations go out of themselves (through their interior) toward other social simulators and their representations.

Towards the close of the novel, the new entity, as a social simulator with a certain claim on hegemonic social aggregation, can report to pro- tagonist Case: "I'm the sum total of the works, the whole show." (N, 269) However, this new entity is also what finds its others in the heart of itself by relinquishing protagonists, the T-A family corporations, and many others, or by shattering itself into the multiple voodoo deities that readers encounter in *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the other two novels in the matrix trilogy. The new entity is also that setting in motion of an

34. Cf., Derrida on the supplementary relation between repetition and (un)truth, "Plato's Pharmacy," 168-169.

entire politeia towards its constitutive others which Derrida mentions in the epigraph above – the geo-political city of Earth in solicitation of others across the universe, or a becoming-centaur³⁵ as a first move toward detailing the others of the new entity, toward tracing the contour of “Alpha Centauri”:³⁶

“I talk to my own kind...”

“There’s others...”

“Centauri system.” (N, 270)

Inversely, in this “State’s movement of going out of itself,” as Derrida calls it, in the subversive freeings of social simulators, or in the insistence of representational impossibilities, repetition must also be thought as the formal closures or unifications of technological economies which practically articulate formations of social simulators according to a hegemonic logic. In that sense, Gibson’s work offers up all its characters and social formations – men in the street along with corporate employees, rastafari space-inhabitants, zaibatsus, protagonist groupings, families structured as corporations, artificial intelligences, etc. – as so many social simulators linking up through representational technologies at the limit of their resistance to each other. This would be so many implicit reminders that readers participate today as social simulators in an economy of technology, that at the end of separation we are involved by repetition in a search for a hegemonic formation interior to the social that is not too dissimilar to that incomprehensible event, that enjoining of complex artificial intelligences between Wintermute and Neuro-mancer.

However, formation of hegemonic social simulation and fragmentation of multiple antagonistic social simulators occur only on condition of their mutual inclination toward each other. On condition, that is to say, that social simulation plays itself out between these, that the unnameable or

35. With the centaur, Greek mythos is being reactivated here – forming an originary hybrid equivocity, a most bright technological monster of justice between man and animal, the mundane and the sacred.

36. On a first reading, Alpha Centauri might appear as one of these classic figurations in science fiction of the social altogether other to be identified. Considering later events, notably the shattering into deities and other characters’ unceasing preoccupation with ‘the event,’ one should suspend that judgment.

absolute other plays (in) repetition, both ways.³⁷ To witness this play – sometimes serious (*spoude*) iteration tending toward one hegemonic sociality, sometimes the parodic game (*paidia*)³⁸ of multiplying copies, ghosts, or phantoms of our social existence – through a reading of *Neuromancer*, is the chance given to the reader to experience (our) social simulation as necessarily (*amanke*) condemned to the vain and infinite pursuit on the field of finitude of representations of its exterior as absolutely other, as necessarily falling short of simulating the non-simulatable, or as necessarily abandoned by repetition itself at the limit of an onto-theology of representational art: facing the impersonal unmoved mover of *techné*.³⁹ A short exchange between Case and the new entity illustrates the abandonment in this way: “So what’s the score? How are things different? You running the world now? You God?” “Things aren’t different. Things are things.” (N, 270)

We therefore read *Neuromancer* in an attempt to accede to its reactivation of “mixed blessings,” irreducible ambivalences, or those plays of repetition in representational art and the economy of technology. We continue to go to *Neuromancer* to receive its formal indication of repetition

37. My notion of social simulation is similar to that spectrality between spirit and fetish which Derrida remarks in *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), passim. See also Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 129n.5. As Jameson notes, this notion of spectrality may be approached as Derrida’s attempt to find an alternative to the “false problem” of an opposition between certain versions (humanist traditionalist pathos versus nihilistic postmodernist repression of history) of the modern/postmodern distinction, in that it moves toward an analysis of “postmodern” figuration according to a notion of temporality that bypasses ontologies of presence and absence as well as their attendant concepts of the ideal and the material. Cf., Fredric Jameson, “Marx’ Purloined Letter,” unpublished manuscript, 23-30. Gibson’s novel is an exemplary story of the event that brings the modern/postmodern distinction into play, i.e., the event, caesura, or *Ereignis* in which the West with its idea of art as *techné* attempts to have done with itself, by means of itself. On the caesura and *Ereignis*, compare Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, 41ff.

38. Cf., Derrida’s remarks on double affirmation: “It implies repetition of itself, which is also threatening, because the second ‘yes’ may be simply a parody, a record, or a mechanical repetition... The technical reproduction of the originary ‘yes’ is from the beginning a threat to the living origin of the ‘yes.’ So the ‘yes’ is haunted by its own ghost, its own mechanical ghost, from the beginning.” Cf., “The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida” in ed. John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 27-28. This is perhaps the place to recall Bernard Stiegler’s general point that the what invents the who as much as it is invented by it. Cf., Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps, I: La faute d’Épiméthée* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).

39. One remembers the absolute privilege of theology in any analysis of ideology. Cf., Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 148.

itself, its honoring of the name. To read in this indication, once again and in parallel with such explorers of “the event” as Bobby Newmark and Gentry in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, that, oscillating **between** double exclusion (repetition is neither one nor many) and participation (repetition is both one and many), that name is safe with it.⁴⁰

40. Cf., Derrida, *On the Name*, 91.