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A POSTMODERNIST STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONVERSION FROM NATURAL TO TECHNOLOGICAL IN NEUROMANCER THROUGH THE LENS OF ECOCIDE

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Abstract

The natural order has also been grossly violated by rapid urbanisation and technological advancement, leading to ecological destruction on an international scale. The effects of climate change, habitat destruction, and environmental degradation continue to threaten both human and non-human life. The increase in publicity about ecological crises has, at least, reinstated the broken harmony between nature and humanity. This crisis is frequently manifested in postmodern literature as the gradual substitution of the natural world with technological systems and artificial environments. Modern cities, filled with steel-and-glass buildings, highways, signal towers, and expansive infrastructure, are becoming a symbol of the artificial, fragmented, and increasingly alienated. One of the iconic cyberpunk novels, Neuromancer by William Gibson (1984), provides an eloquent depiction of this state. The reality and the artifice, the nature and the simulation, the reality and the simulation, the world in the novel portrays a world where the boundary between them is radically misbalanced. This paper suggests that Neuromancer introduces the idea of ecocide not on the destruction of the environment, but on a postmodern state of nature being replaced by technological simulacra. It takes a postmodern approach informed by ecocide to analyse how Gibson, in his novel, visualises ecological collapse, synthetic environments, and the disintegration of human experience. It also highlights the importance of cyberpunk as a postmodern literary genre that reflects the environmental and technological fears of modern society.

Keywords: *Ecocide, Cyberpunk, Postmodernism, Nature, Technology, Simulation*

Introduction and Background

Postmodernism developed in contradiction to the beliefs of modernism and provoked its belief in order, progress, coherence and universal truth. Postmodernism anticipates fragmentation, instability, plurality, and the disintegration of grand narratives rather than affirming stable systems of meaning (Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 1990). According to Appignanesi and Garratt (1995), any type of art can only lead to its annihilation (p. 45). This observation is indicative of the postmodern inclination to question the very frameworks of meaning, identity, and reality as they have been conventionally construed (Hutcheon, 1988).

Postmodernism, originally associated with architecture, expanded its influence to literature, visual culture, philosophy, and other art forms over time. It has become so widespread that not a single modern cultural form has been spared by postmodern thinking. Cyberpunk is one of the most evident literary expressions of postmodernism. Even though cyberpunk is typically viewed as a subgenre of science fiction, it contains numerous highly postmodern elements, such as fragmentation, simulation, urbanism, technology overload, and the blurring of the lines between the real and the artificial (Barry, 2017; McHale, 1987).

Cyberpunk grew out of the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of postmodernism and evolved into a literary mode peculiarly suited to depicting technologically mediated societies (Luckhurst, 2005). Literature of all ages echoes the social, political, and material realities of its moment, and cyberpunk is more than its own age: sensitive to the late-capitalist fears of machines, information systems, urban alienation, and environmental degradation. Neuromancer by William Gibson is widely regarded as one of the canonical works of the cyberpunk genre. The novel, published in 1984, speculates about a future in which technology has infiltrated the real world to such an extent that there are no boundaries between the observed and the artificial reality.

Gibson, in Neuromancer, demonstrates humanity's compulsive nature towards machinery, networks, and technological advancement. The novel is a symbol of a world in which ecological harmony has already been lost to technological and capitalist growth. Human

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

beings are still guilty of innovating compulsively with little regard for the disastrous effects of such innovations. This compulsion towards progress and the refusal to acknowledge the cost it imposes on the environment are two of the novel's main issues.

Neuromancer is set in large, blighted urban areas, which give us a dystopian future where ecocide has already practically occurred. It is a place where the true sky is a poisoned silver sky, horses no longer exist, and once-natural places have been changed into technological simulations (Gibson, 2000, p. 4). Nature will only live on as a memory, an imitation, or an artificial recreation. Cities like Chiba, the Sprawl, and Freeside are portrayed as artificial environments shaped by business, technology, and sensory bombardment. Nature no longer exists in this world as a life-sustaining, stable environment; it has been replaced by hyperreal technological environments. In a deeper sense, the novel suggests that the characters' psychological disorientation is connected to their alienation from the natural world. The world they live in is ecologically fragmented, and their consciousness is the same.

This paper will contend that Neuromancer creates ecocide as a specifically postmodern state of affairs whereby the natural environment is not merely being eliminated, but substituted by technological imitations. The paper will discuss ecological decay, the artificial world, and the replacement of nature with technological systems through a close analysis of Gibson's text. It also claims that cyberpunk, as a postmodern literary genre, offers a particularly useful means of expressing the environmental and existential crises of modern technological society.

To contextualise this argument within the literature on the subject, the next section reviews key critical debates on postmodernism, cyberpunk, simulation, and ecocide.

Literature Review

Postmodernism has often been interpreted as an attempt to interpret the cultural and intellectual realities of the modern world. Powell believes that Postmodernism is an effort to make sense of what is happening at the moment, and that we have a clear picture of the present only by looking backwards (Powell, 2007, p. 27). To Powell and many other critics, postmodernism appeared as a reaction to the constraints of modernism. Modernism tends to take fragmentation as loss, rupture, or crisis, whereas postmodernism tends to do so differently. According to Barry, fragmentation in postmodern thinking is mostly viewed as something exciting and freeing; in this regard, the modernist decry fragmentation, whereas the postmodernist rejoice in it (Barry, 2017, p. 63). This difference is necessary to comprehend the aesthetics of cyberpunk, which is not just a lament of the loss of old certainties but occupies and exacerbates that loss.

As noted by critics such as Eagleton (1996) and Bertens (1995), postmodernism can be viewed not merely as a change in style but also as a radical change in cultural logic, in which meaning becomes unstable, and reality becomes more mediated. This instability is especially evident in the genre of cyberpunk fiction, where technological systems transform perception and experience. According to Sponsler (1992), cyberpunk stories mirror the problems of postmodern life by presenting worlds in which human identity and reality are closely intertwined with technological systems.

Jurgen Habermas, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Fredric Jameson were among the thinkers who shaped the intellectual foundations of postmodernism. The essay titled "Modernity: An Incomplete Project" by Habermas helped set the context for some of the most important arguments surrounding modernity and the post-modern era. Postmodern literary criticism has been shaped by Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Jameson through their critiques of metanarratives, their theory of simulacra and hyperreality, and their analyses of postmodern culture, respectively. Specifically, Baudrillard's concept of the loss of the real is highly applicable to Neuromancer, a novel in which the real is repeatedly displaced by the simulated (Baudrillard, 1994). This postmodern situation is often dramatised in the cyberpunk genre,

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

which portrays a world in which technological systems mediate perception and substitute for direct experience.

The birth of a significant genre of literature was marked by the publication of Gibson's Neuromancer in 1984, which became the leading form of literature in cyberspace. The genre has always been connected by its critics with postmodern aesthetics. Csicsery-Ronay refers to cyberpunk as a specifically illuminated form of postmodernism, noting that it represents the apotheosis of postmodernism and embodies worlds in which everything that used to be natural is simulated and detailed through technical means (Csicsery-Ronay Jr., 1991, p. 2). This fact is paramount when Eco-critically reading Neuromancer, as the novel is not just about environmental destruction; it is a vision of a world in which nature is technically capable of being recreated and thus culturally unnecessary.

One of the significant thematic issues in Neuromancer is the shift from natural habitats to artificial ones. An example is Jameson, who has included Gibson among the authors of the liveliest postmodernist texts, which, in his opinion, convey a sense of the postmodern or technological sublime (Jameson, 1991, as cited in Schweighauser, 2007, p. 228). However, in Gibson's fiction, nature is not a source of sublimity in the traditional sense. It is no longer awe-inspiring, transcendent and powerful. Rather, it has been neutralised, tamed, and eventually replaced by technological settings that simulate the natural experience but destroy the material reality of the same.

Elaborating on the idea of the death of nature can be useful in explaining this change. The work of Carolyn Merchant helped establish the phrase as a critical concept, and subsequent authors built on the argument to incorporate environmental and cultural critiques. McKibben also writes that we have murdered nature- that world that is completely independent of us that existed before we came to this earth and that surrounded and contributed to our human society (McKibben, 1989, p. 2). This assertion is echoed in the fictional world created by Gibson, where the independent nature seems to have been reduced to next to nothing. Jagtenberg also reports that other writers have voiced concerns about the incursion of technology into ecological life, including cyberpunk writers and opponents of technological overreach, such as Jerry Mander (Jagtenberg & McKie, 1997, p. 3).

This discussion is further enhanced by the legal and ethical concept of ecocide. Polly Higgins describes ecocide as the widespread destruction, degradation, or loss of ecosystem(s) of a particular territory, to a point that peaceful enjoyment of that territory by the inhabitants has been or will have been crippled. This definition comes in handy when reading Neuromancer, since Gibson envisions not just ecological destruction but a situation in which even the ability to live in the environment has been undermined. Poisonous skies, polluted air, artificial habitats, and dead animals are all indicative of a world where ecological destruction has become the order of things. According to Garrard (2012) and Buell (1995), from an ecocritical perspective, modern literature is more preoccupied with environmental degradation and the loss of ecological balance. Heise (2008) adds that contemporary storytelling extends beyond local environmental issues to global issues of environmental catastrophes, as evidenced in Gibson's representation of a world saturated with technological advancement and ecologically devastated.

Although the topics of postmodernism and cyberpunk have been researched extensively, it is still possible to analyse Neuromancer in terms of ecocide. Technology, cyberspace, posthuman identity, and simulation have received a lot of critique, but little has been done to explore ecological destruction as a structural condition of the novel's world. This paper thus attempts to connect postmodern literary theory and ecocritical discourse by examining the novel as an act of ecological destruction, technological replacement, and the loss of the natural.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Though such critical approaches offer clarifying insights into postmodernism and cyberpunk, less attention has been paid to the ecological consequences of technological simulation in Neuromancer. This paper fills that gap by integrating postmodern literary theory with ecocritical discourse to interpret the novel as an expression of ecological decline and technological replacement.

Having identified the key critical discussions pertinent to the study, the discussion now shifts to the methodological approach by which these concepts are applied to Neuromancer.

Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative approach of close textual analysis. It uses postmodern literary theory, specifically the ideas of fragmentation, simulacra, and hyperreality, as well as ecocritical ideas of ecocide, to explore how Neuromancer portrays environmental degradation and technological substitution of nature.

The text is analysed through a close reading of the chosen passages from Neuromancer, with a special focus on the description of urban space, artificial nature, toxic landscapes, the use of extinct or simulated animals, and technologically mediated environments. The interpretations of these textual features are explained with reference to the critical discussions made by Baudrillard, Jameson, Barry, Powell, McKibben and Higgins. This approach aims not merely at summarising the novel but at examining how Gibson's language use creates a post-ecological world in which the natural has been replaced by the artificial.

The research questions are the following:

1. What ecocide does Neuromancer, a postmodern text, portray?
2. How does technological advancement substitute ecological reality and turn the planet into a technological net?

The conceptual framework upon which the chosen passages in the novel are explained is the following theoretical framework:

Theoretical Framework

The present research is based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework encompassing postmodern theory, Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and simulacra, and ecocritical ideas of ecocide. Collectively, these views help to better understand how Neuromancer symbolises the metamorphosis of nature into technological simulation. This framework also resonates with broader postmodern critiques of reality and perception, as theorists such as Žižek (2002) and Virilio (1994) argue that contemporary societies are increasingly defined by mediated experiences and technological acceleration, which reshape both space and human consciousness.

Postmodernism, as defined by Lyotard, is a state in which the grand narrative breaks down and reality fragments (Lyotard, 1984). Truth in this situation becomes precarious, and reality is no longer perceived as a whole and coherent. This fragmentation is pivotal in cyberpunk literature, in which spaces are fragmented, and identities are fluid.

Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality is especially important in this analysis. Baudrillard believes that simulations in postmodern societies do not replicate reality, but take its place completely (Baudrillard, 1994). Consequently, people live in a hyperreal world in which the boundaries between the real and the artificial are obliterated. This is clearly reflected in *Neuromancer,* where natural environments are substituted with technologically created simulations, including artificial skies and digitally mediated experiences.

Another critical approach is ecocriticism, especially ecocide. Ecocide is the large-scale destruction of ecosystems to a level at which the natural environment is unable to support life (Higgins, 2010). But this paper goes further, arguing that Neuromancer is a symbol not only of ecological destruction but also of ecological substitution, a process in which nature is methodically erased by artificial constructions.

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

The concept of the postmodern or technological sublime, as articulated by Fredric Jameson, lends credence to this framework as well. According to Jameson, modern technological systems are creating an awe that used to be created by nature (Jameson, 1991). As we can see in Neuromancer, this change is manifested in the excessive popularity of cyberspace and artificial environments, which have taken the place of natural landscapes as sites of human experience.

By combining these theoretical insights into argumentation, this paper contends that ecocide in Neuromancer is not just an act of environmental disruption but a postmodern condition in which nature is swept away by simulation, with serious psychological and existential ramifications.

Having laid these conceptual groundworks, one may now turn to a more textual analysis of Neuromancer to discuss how Gibson builds ecological collapse as a postmodern state of simulation and technological replacement.

Analysis and Discussion

In the analysis below, the loss of nature and its replacement with artificial systems are explored through key scenes in Neuromancer. Using images of polluted skies, artificial habitats, genetic engineering, and cyberspace, Gibson creates a world where ecological annihilation cannot be discussed outside the postmodern simulation.

Ecocide as Erasure: The Death of the Natural World

Neuromancer by Gibson does not portray ecocide as a slow demise of the environment; it creates a world where nature has already been wiped out. The very first line in which the sky is referred to as the colour of television, turned on to a dead channel, means more than pollution: it means the total replacement of nature by the image of technology. The sky, traditionally associated with openness and vitality, has become a dead screen, implying that even reality has been mediated and stripped of meaning. This transformation reflects what Buell (1995) describes as the diminishing presence of nature in modern cultural narratives, where the environment is no longer experienced directly but through representation and abstraction.

Using the Baudrillardian approach, the image is a perfect example of hyperreality: the real sky no longer exists as an original, and all that remains is the simulation, which lacks authenticity (Baudrillard, 1994). The ecocide in Neuromancer is therefore not the destruction of a place but the destruction of a being, a being that no longer exists as a category of experience.

Such obliteration of the natural world does not merely pertain to figurative language; it is also made concrete in the novel's recurring scenes of unhealthy atmosphere and inhospitable weather.

Toxic Atmosphere and the Inversion of Nature

The novel also continues to stress the unhealthy state of the surroundings, with the air described as hazardous and the characters having to wear filtering masks. Gibson says the air was unfriendly and smothering, and that it had worsened. and half the crowd wore filtration masks (Gibson, 2000, p. 11). This reversal of the natural order, in which air, the basis of life, becomes deadly, depicts the complete breakdown of ecological systems.

Yet, this condition, in addition to its environmental connotations, is a symptom of a more profound postmodern crisis. The fact that one cannot breathe normally represents the loss of unmediated experience. Reality is likewise mediated through layers of technology, just as air has to be filtered. This is in line with postmodern fragmentation (Lyotard, 1984), in which physical interaction with the world is replaced by artificial interfaces.

But the ecological downfall as envisioned by Gibson is not limited to pollution and toxicity. Radically, the novel envisions a world where damaged nature has been completely replaced by artificial spaces meant to simulate what has already been lost.

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Simulation and the Hyperreal Environment

The presence of artificial settings, including the Sprawl and Freeside, is among the most noticeable in Neuromancer. They are created to imitate the natural environments using the latest technological innovations, such as artificial sunlight and artificial skies. This condition aligns with Virilio's (1994) argument that technological systems accelerate perception to the point that reality itself becomes secondary to its representation.

An example of the paradox of simulation is the Lado-Acheson system that produces artificial sunlight. Although it resembles natural light, it lacks its naturalness, creating a familiar yet alien atmosphere. The fact that umbrellas are used to shield people from fake sunlight further underscores how ridiculous the simulated world is: mankind is trying to recreate nature to safeguard itself against its unnatural counterpart.

This shows that Baudrillard believed simulations would eventually become more dominant than actual reality (Baudrillard, 1994). In Neuromancer, the artificial world does not mimic nature; it replaces it entirely, rendering the original unnecessary.

This paradigm of simulation extends beyond landscapes and architectural space to living beings themselves, exposing how even biological life can be reproduced technologically.

Artificial Nature and Genetic Manipulation

The concept of ecological substitution is further developed in the novel through the depiction of genetically modified plants and man-made scenery. In another scene, Case looks at what seems to be a natural setting, but soon realises it is man-made, noting an unnatural number of trees and that they are too. treelike (Gibson, 2000, p. 84). This illustration demonstrates the artificially created environment, in which nature is no longer organic but created and managed. The unnatural perfection of these trees indicates that they are not real images but images that replicate the look of nature without its realness. This is in line with Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, where copies are not allusions to a real world but rather complete representations (Baudrillard, 1994). Instead of conserving nature, these imaginary forms rebrand it as a technological commodity, reinforcing the notion that ecocide in Neuromancer is not just about annihilation but about the substitution of the natural with the hyperreal.

Cyberspace and the Displacement of Reality

The relegation of the natural world culminates in its extreme in the cyberspace depicted in the novel. Gibson notoriously calls cyberspace a consensual hallucination shared by billions every day (Gibson, 2000, p. 51) and makes it clear that it is immersive and collective. The implication of this term is that cyberspace is not an instrument but an alternate reality that substitutes the physical world as the main centre of human activity. The hallucination term denotes that this reality is not actual but constructed, and it is acceptable and normal to its users. Cyberspace is a technological sublime that provides the feeling of greatness and immersion once found in nature, as viewed through a Jamesonian lens. In this sense, cyberspace can also be understood through Žižek's (2002) notion of the "desert of the real," in which mediated realities replace direct experience, rendering the physical world increasingly obsolete. Meanwhile, Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality can be used to understand why this online space replaces the real world, making nature increasingly irrelevant. What is meant by ecocide, in this case, is the destruction of the environment as well as cultural desertion of reality in the name of simulation.

Psychological Fragmentation and Existential Crisis

The ecological and technological realities of the Neuromancer have serious psychological effects, especially on Case's character. At the beginning of the novel, Case considers himself to be outside cyberspace, believing he was exiled to the matrix (Gibson, 2000, p. 6). This feeling of exile shows how much his identity is connected not to this world

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CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
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but to a virtual one. The loss of connection with cyberspace brings about a crisis of the self, implying that human awareness is now subject to technological mechanisms. This dislocation of identity is reflected by the dislocation of the external body, in which nature has already been ousted by artificial buildings. Postmodernly, this is a sign of the instability of subjectivity in a hyperreal world. When reality, as such, is mediated and simulated, the person loses a stable point of reference, leading to psychological disorientation. In this way, ecocide in Neuromancer is not limited to the act of destroying the environment, but also the loss of human identity and meaning. This psychological confusion indicates what Harvey (1990) describes as the fractured subject of postmodernity, in which identity is defined by unstable, mediated realities.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Neuromancer is an ecocide not only as the destruction of nature, but also as a highly postmodern state of the environment in which nature is gradually being replaced by technological simulation. The novel creates a world where the natural world is no longer a reality, but exists as an imitation, a memory, or spectacle through its presentation of toxic atmospheres, artificial environments, genetically engineered life forms, and immersive cyberspace. Following the initial research question, the analysis reveals that ecocide in Neuromancer is expressed through both the degradation of ecological systems and the normalisation of synthetic environments. In response to the second, it notes that advances in technology are transforming ecological reality into a hyperreal matrix in which simulation replaces lived life.

Using the idea of hyperreality as defined by Baudrillard, the idea of fragmentation as formulated by Lyotard, and the technological sublime as explained by Jameson, this paper has postulated that the novel addressed by Gibson not only represents a dystopian future, but reveals a paradigm shift in the manner in which reality itself is constructed and consumed (Baudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1984; Jameson, 1991). The substitution of nature by simulation not only augurs doom in ecological terms but also creates psychological disintegration and existential confusion, whereby people are becoming more detached not only from nature but also from their own sense of identity.

Finally, Neuromancer envisions a cultural state where humanity colludes with itself in its alienation from reality and has embraced technological systems that perpetuate and obscure ecological destruction. In this regard, the novel is a warning to contemporary society, offering a critical commentary on how the ecocide issue could have the greatest implications not in the disappearance of nature, but in the inability to see its disappearance as such.

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CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

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