

Alternative Consciousnesses : a "Case" Study

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The desire for jacking in, taking dex, simstims, microsofts and the like can be seen as a desire for self-exploration, and perhaps a method for self-actualization. The lengths to which people go in *Neuromancer* to stimulate themselves and reinvigorate their reality are incredible, and it seems much of the technological advance that Gibson describes falls into two categories : extending life, or making it more interesting. The first is obvious; there are constant operations and transplants going on through the novel, Case being the prime example. One can go on and on about being a cyborg in *Neuromancer* and the technology involved.

However, the second is more interesting to me, but less talked about. Case seems to me a futuristic Timothy Leary, somebody who's looking to expand his mind with all the means he can find. The technologies that Case is best at - the matrix, simstim, etc. - are involved in entering alternative consciousnesses, to the point that he abandons one self for the other self with ease and delight. During the break-in to capture the construct, Case spends hours on end jacked in and forgets to eat, doesn't bother showering or having breakfast when he wakes, and just generally immerses himself completely in this expansive project. His entrance into Molly's head is an exhilarating experience for him. And when his ability to enter into the matrix had been taken from him, he abuses dex to return to some other states of consciousness that he remembers the matrix bringing him (he'd forgotten what "real fear" felt like).

I can go on and on about what I think this implies, and all the issues it touches on, but here's at least a quick summary :

- The desire to experience so many alternative consciousnesses implies a dissatisfaction with the current world, and one's current reality. What leads Case to be so dissatisfied with this world he's in ? I feel like positing that the chaotic, yet highly commodified dystopia envisioned in *Neuromancer* drives Case to find other spaces where he can find peace, or perhaps spirituality ? The matrix is always talked about highly ephemerally, as it's own being, as something larger than us all, almost like a collective consciousness that recreates the mind of God.
- These alternative states, whether it's Case, simstimers, Panther Moderns, etc., imply that one is not a fixed identity, but a recreateable/remanageable personality depending on biology, experiences, and, especially, one's relation to everyone and everything else. What really gets me is thinking about this and *Ghost in the Shell*, a recent cyberpunk Japanese animated film, where cyborgs and humans alike, with varying ratios of robotics and wetware, question who and what they are, and why. Molly implies the same to Case when she tells him that she knows who he is because she knows how he's wired, what he's made of. Nature/nurture, decentralized subject, all these themes come up here.
- Lastly, one gets the sense that with more and more constriction and busy-ness going on in external space, people in *Neuromancer* seek to find escape in the internal, within themselves, in avatars, in alternative experience. It's like the world is a big bully, and all the characters are geeks who won't leave their room anymore but would rather play video games and write angsty poetry. But after all, it's SF, right ?

The point : I think it's fascinating to see what the psychology of the characters in escaping into cyberspace tells us about what they are escaping from [Jaron Lanier](#) talks about the simulation of virtual reality as somewhere where we can create all those dreams that we could never communicate, and have other human beings experience totally what we experience; it's "cuttlefish envy". Well, maybe Case is doing just that, having

become disillusioned with what one reality can offer, seeks to make that connection with himself and others - namely Molly - through the virtual spaces he can.