

The Shape of Things to Come

Daniel Parke
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"Some of them tell me things. Stories. Once, there was nothing there, nothing moving on its own, just data and people shuffling it around. Then something happened, and it... it knew itself. There's a whole other story about that, a girl with mirrors over her eyes and a man who was scared to care about anything. Something the man did helped the whole thing know itself... And after that, it sort of split off into different parts of itself, and I think the parts are the others, the bright ones. But it's hard to tell, because they don't tell it with words, exactly..." [*Count Zero* 159]

An abstraction, or perhaps a summation. Take "once, there was nothing there, nothing moving on its own... Then something happened, and it... it knew itself", with "...after that, it sort of split off into different parts of itself", and it starts to sound familiar.

Evolution. Or **creation** ?

"Something the man did helped the whole thing know itself". Case could be seen as the ultimate creator of the matrix's apparent disparate sentience. Not that he has anything approaching omniscience, omnipotence, or even comprehension of his creation. **Is Gibson making an assertion here ?** A comparable parallel might be the big bang, as corny as that sounds. Some being connects one piece of something very big with another piece of something else and an explosion, a merger, an integration and subsequent dispersion occurs. They have no control over what form, what **shape** the mass will eventually become, nor any implicit comprehension of that eventual form either.

In David Brin's Uplift saga there is the age old tradition in the univerese of sponsoring or **uplifting** lower species to greater knowledge, awareness, etc. Yet with humanity, their sponsors are in question... the other sentient races are unclear of who or what brought about humanity's uplifting. As a result they distrust, fear, or are awed by their uniqueness.

As it was with Dr. Frankenstein, [creating a life](#) (or reanimating an old one) does not give you dominion over it. At this point computers are not self-aware (to our knowledge) but if that spark does occur, by our hand or on its own, Gibson suggests that their growth will no longer be under our control. We, as humans with different faculties of mobility, cognition, interaction than the faculties of computers today now possess may hope to contain, perhaps guide the path that computer intelligence may take. But if we wish to control it absolutely the only solution is not to allow it to occur at all.

And with Gibson there is even a sense of inevitability. That it had to happen sooner or later. Whether or not his world was constructed around a plot or characters he wanted to write, or the story evolved out of a vision he held for the future is too digital a question. Whether the chain of events that freed the AI's Wintermute and Neuromancer to conjoin could have been halted by a single link being severed is similarly too linear, too digital.

Like many evolutionary theorists who suggest that human evolution has always been a **feedback loop** -- that the ability to stand upright was reinforced by the increased ability to vocalize more complex sounds was further

reinforced by the ability to use tools and move at the same time which reinforced the ability to stand up right... Gibson's world seems to ring true because its shape seems to resemble, **in abstraction**, possibilities of our own, and that the processes that brought him to the novel, the process that pushed the plot along its path seems to have some goal in mind.

Perhaps it is dialectic the way a particularly adaptive virus is, absorbing and synthesizing. Maybe it is merely an entropic inevitability. The latter seems appealing in the chaotic, beyond comprehension feeling his world radiates; that Gibson's characters never know what's going on. It seems, perhaps, that Gibson is trying to figure out what's going on in his world.

Perhaps Gibson is trying, like his character Gentry -- like so many of his characters -- to see the shape of things... to control, guide, apprehend the creation, the spark grown beyond its maker's comprehension.

More quotes along this line of thought... (and others)

"There are worlds within worlds", he said. "Macrocosm, microcosm. We carried an entire universe across a bridge tonight, and that which is above is like that below... It was obvious, of course, that such things must exist, but I'd not dared to hope...". He glanced coyly back at them over a black-beaded shoulder. "And now", he said, "we'll see the shape of the little universe out guest's gone voyaging in. And in that form, Slick Henry, I'll see...".

He touched the power stud at the edge of the holo table. And screamed. [*Mona Lisa Overdrive*, 108]

"He's got this house in there, like a castle, and grass and trees and sky..."

"He's got a lot more than that. he's got a universe more than that. That was just a construct worked up from a commercial stim. What he's got is an *abstract* of the sum total of data constituting cyberspace. Still, it's closer than I've gotten before..." [*Mona Lisa Overdrive*, 210]

These quotes seem to outline the *principle* that Gentry works by. That in each one is the essence of the whole. It could also be Gibson's own principle.

"Slick had once stumbed a Net/Knowledge sequence about what shape the universe was; Slick figured the universe was everything there was, so how could it have a shape ? If it had a shape, then there was something around it for it to have a shape *in*, wasn't there ? And if that something was something, then wasn't *that* part of the universe too ? This was exactly the kind of thing you didn't want to get into with Gentry, because Gentry could tie your head in knots. But Slick didn't think cyberspace was anything like the universe anyway; it was just a way of representing data. The Fission Authority had always looked like a big red Aztec pyramid, but it didn't *have* to; if the FA wanted it to, they could have it look like anything. Big companies had copyrights on how thier stuff looked. So how could you figure the whole matrix had particular shape ? And why should it mean anything if it did ?"

[grin] The second part of this quote made me think of Mitchell and his "Cities of Bits". What the cities, buildings, architecture, etc... of "infobahn" will look like. Along that line I think about Mitchell's vision of **the net** and Gibson's vision of **cyberspace**. With Mitchell there is human interaction, community... all models of the

real world. For Gibson cyberspace is a surreal, fully realized universe; it can kill you when you buy into the "consensual hallucination". Also, there seems to be little interaction with other humans. True, most browsing on the net today is a solitary practice of iconographic navigation and information retrieval... but the only interaction that seems to occur in the matrix is between cowboys and computers. If you want interaction, you must share the same space in the realworld and jack-in together. Still, the limits or rules of Gibson's cyberspace are far from clearly defined.

The first part made me think about something I had read about space-time being bent, warped... that it could be infinite by **looping** back upon itself. It would have a shape, but only a conceptual one because it's boundaries would be the edges of existence. It also made me wonder how cyberspace was bounded... if it was conceived of like the earth, a sphere and that to travel far enough in a straight line brought you all the way back to where you started.