

## **Postmodern Approach to Stephenson's *Snow Crash*: Does Technology help to overcome Real-World illness?**

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### **Abstract**

Technology is inextricable from our daily lives. Since the Renaissance until the Post-modern Era technology is progressing rapidly. At present anything can be accessible with Networks and the internet. Gradually, Invention and Technology begin to occupy the human mind thereby giving birth to diseases, Physical, Psychological and Mental illness. The invention of Technology to its extremity is dreamt by the science fiction authors and also many such dreams came true today. In the present era, one such dream is the creation of a virtual world. Real-world illness is the main objective of this article which means common problems faced by everyone in their day to day life. One of the contemporary science fiction author Neal Stephenson in his work *Snow crash* picturizes the dystopic society where technology reaches its peak and create more problems in human life. As a result, he creates a parallel universe known as metaverse where people can forget worries and fulfil their desire. Do they live a very happy life in the substitute world is the big Question mark? The main objective of this paper is whether the advancements in technology really help people to overcome their real-world illnesses or creates many more problems.

### **Keywords**

Survival, Technology, Postmodern, Posthuman World, Snow Crash.

### **Introduction**

Post Modernism emerges after the evolution of modernism. Modernism is the sequence of social developments occurred in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. During this period, experiences from the past era make Individuals think consistently and bring

up issues over the truth. In the postmodern period objective reality, logical or verifiable truth did not exist. Science and innovation are not vehicles of human advancement but rather speculative instruments of built up power. People believe that Reasoning and rationale are not given much importance and there is no such belief as human instinct or conduct, everything is socially decided or constructed. Postmodernism is both art and philosophical movement which put forth many changes not only in art & literature but also in the way of thinking, culture, tradition, etc. Literature covers very broad aspects. science fiction is one of the most popular independent genres in literature. Science fiction employs all the aspects of cyberpunk theory which emerges during the postmodern period.

Cyber criticism emerged during the late twentieth century. The key concern of cyber criticism is to understand the culture which has developed from the advancement of technology associated with computers and the networks facilitated by the internet. Cyberpunk theory recognizes the rapidly changing environment and the dynamic interaction between human beings and machines. Cyberpunk attributes three different qualities such as post-industrialism, post-nationalism, and posthumanism. Some of the famous cyberpunk writers are William Gibson, pat cardigan, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, Neal Stephenson, and Philip. K. Dick. Snow Crash is a cyberpunk science fiction written by Neal Stephenson.

Real world illness is the significant aspect in this article, For instance, work-life stress for the young and middle adults, Problems between husband and wife, parents and children, teacher and student irrespective of all the ages which cannot be tackled easily. There must be more passion to spend time and solve all the problems. Thus, In today's life, it becomes more difficult to live a happy life because of the responsibilities everyone possesses which leads to stress and misunderstanding and further leads to psychological and mental illness. The problem is of many and different types but the one-minute solution is mobile phones i.e. technologically advanced elements such as android mobile which gives much pleasure to everyone from the children to the old adults by making them access whatever they need and completely divert them from their current problems. In short, it projects a small version of the whole world. Attractive elements like YouTube Facebook, messenger, games take you into a different world from the real world. Laptops and videogames also play a vital role. Mobile phone is a basic need and so its usage is to build communication only. Other than this in today's life, we are using it for many things more than need which leads to more problems and again it creates illness in life by alienating the users from the other important works. In this context, though we know the root cause of the problem, no one is ready to leave the habit of over usage of mobile

phones because we get addicted to it and so it becomes a regular habit i.e. part and parcel of our life.

Both the problems we are facing in life and advancements and innovations in technology reaching its peak parallelly.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Science Fiction and Cyberpunk**

In the current scenario, science and technology has been notoriously grown to the great extent which cannot be defined. In the field of literature science fiction has proved its eminence and variously explained as a combination of romance, science, technology, prophecy that is „realistic speculation about future events“ in an interesting and attractive manner. The main cause and reason for this sort of development in technology is specifically improved standard of education especially in developed countries like America. Through this improved standard began to develop their creativity and thinking ability. This creates vibrant change in their mind and due to that creativity and unpredictable intelligence leads to birth of Science Fiction.

The term “Cyberpunk” was coined by combining the phrases “cyber” and “punk”. The term “cyber” comes from the Greek word “cybernetics”, which refers to the study of communications and automatic control systems in machines and living things. Also connected to “cyber space,” which is a fictional environment in which information technology, the internet, and virtual reality are used to communicate over a computer network. A loud, quick kind of rock music with aggressive lyrics and behaviour (or) useless person or a criminal is referred to as “punk.” Science fiction is itself the advanced genre of literature which differs from other type of fictions with employing advanced information technology and computer which shrunk the world within a small device. This cyber punk genre of literature explores the relationship between computers i.e machines and human beings equipped with advanced technology and predicts the innovation and invention of future events in an extraordinary unpredictable manner. In his 1983 short novel of the same name, American author Bruce Bethke originally invented the word "cyber punk," proposing it as the title for a new generation of punk inspired by many of the preconceptions that come with the postmodern information age. William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Philip K. Dick, Pat Cadigan, John Shirley, Rudy Recker, Michel Swanwick, Lewis Shiner, Richard Cadrey, and others were among the first to use the word. “Classic cyberpunk characters were a group of loners who live as an unnoticed person in generally dystopian futures where daily life was impacted by rapid

technological change, a ubiquitous data sphere of computerised information, and invasive modification of the human body,” wrote science fiction author Lawrence Person in defining post cyberpunk. Cyber punk is a type of science fiction that combines or attributes three distinct traits, such as post humanism, post industrialism, and Post Nationalism. Erich Schneider says in an article that

“In general, cyberpunk fiction is about disenfranchised people living in technologically enhanced cultural “systems.” A “system” frequently governs the lives of most ordinary people in cyberpunk fiction, whether it is a repressive government, a consortium of huge, paternalistic corporations, or a fanatical church. Certain technologies (which are currently evolving at a rate that most people find perplexing), particularly “information technology” (computers, the mass media), improve the system's ability to keep those within it within it. Through brain implants, artificial limbs, cloned or genetically altered organs, and other means, this technology system frequently extends into its human “components.” Humans are assimilated into “the machine.” The "cyber" part of cyberpunk is this. However, there are always people who live on the "fringe" of any cultural system: criminals, outcasts, visionaries, or those who simply want independence for its own reason. The focus of cyberpunk literature is on these individuals, and how they use the system's technological instruments for their own objectives. This is cyberpunk's "punk" characteristic or attitude.” (Balsamo, 1995)

"You tasted it before, possibly many times: "in rock video, in the hacker underground, in the startling street tech of hip-hop and scratch music, in the synthesiser rock of London and Tokyo," says Balsamo of the cyberpunk literature style. (Balsamo,1995)

"The cyberpunks did not invent their vision; instead, they gathered bits and pieces of what was actually happening and fed it back to the readers who were already living in Gibson's *Sprawl*, whether they realised it or not." (Balsamo,1995)

Thus Cyberpunk science fiction projects its own and unique style in all the works.

## **2. Post Modernism**

'The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,' by Francois Lyotard, was commissioned by the Quebec government's council of universities. The position of science and technology has become something of a bible of postmodernism, according to this research, which is based on a poll on science and technology. According to Lyotard, science has been increasingly studying language, linguistic theories, communications, cybernetics, informatics, computers and computer languages, information storage, data

banks, and challenges of translation from one computer language to another over the last few decades. He predicted that technological advancements will have a significant impact on knowledge. As a result, he prophesied in 1974 that no knowledge will survive that cannot be turned into information, and that information will be produced and sold by computers rather than by persons. Nations will struggle for knowledge in the same way they fought for territory in the past. Information will zip around the globe at the speed of electricity and people will try to steal it. The role of the state will grow weaker taking the place of states, huge multinational corporations will dominate. But having said all this about the direction of scientific knowledge, Lyotard adds that scientific knowledge is not the only kind of knowledge. His interest, it turns out, is not so much in scientific knowledge and the scientific method, per se, but in how scientific knowledge and method legitimize themselves how they make themselves believable and trustworthy. And at this point Lyotard makes a distinction between scientific talk and narrative talk. Of course, he doesn't use the word 'talk'. He uses scientific 'discourse' and 'narrative discourse'”

Thus, today's society reflects the Lyotard's view about the post-modern condition. Computer technology, internet and information have become dominant aspects which lead the present society.

### **Research Questions**

This article tries to address following Research Questions

- Does Technology helps to overcome the Real world illness?
- Does Futuristic technology is Hazardous to humankind?

### **Method**

The textual analysis method is used to explore the novel's contents that allude to the Post Modernism

### **Snow Crash: An Analysis**

In the book “Snow crash” Hiro is the protagonist, an independent programmer and the best sword warrior in the metaverse joined with Y.T, a fifteen-year-old, world female messenger to dwell in the secretive world which comprise of Sumerian mythology with virtual reality in a dystopic cyberpunk setting. Hiro, Y.T, and Juanita who is Hiro's ex intend to plot against talented businessperson who is progressively religious, monopolist indoctrinates the enormous group of independent programmers.

Hiro is a freelance hacker who works as a reporter for the central intelligence corporation in his free time. Hiro regularly collects and uploads information for the CIC (Central Intelligence Corporation) database and if anyone purchases it then he gets paid. Hiro and Y.T meet accidentally. Y.T is a skater who owns the technologically advanced metapoon i.e. skating vehicle in which one can skate up, down and dive, etc. Y.T and Hiro are working as a pizza deliverer in the nova Cecelia organization which owns a pizza company. Pizza has to be delivered within twenty minutes. If it even exceeds one minute, the merciless company kills the pizza deliverer. Once in an accident, Y.T helps Hiro to deliver pizza at the right time. Later when Y.T is attacked by the meta cops; she seeks help from the hiro and committed as an intelligent partner.

From the job carried out by the protagonist Hiro and Y.T, it is evident that the complete society is not in the control of the government. Industrialization occurs which occupies the whole world with the private organizations and meta corporations. Stephenson picturizes snow crash in the city Los angel during the late twenty-first century. In this period the economical industry has been collapsed as a result united states government surrendered its power and potentials to the private organization. Everything in the country gets collapse security of the nation is also guarded by the individual companies. This ruins the peace all over the world especially in America which firstly advocates the advancements in technology as well as the impact of it. There is no peace for people to live. They must face many threat and dangers in their day to day life to survive. The basic need is a must for every humankind to live but the Complete economic collapse leads to unemployment which further creates more complexity to lead a life. As a result, to overcome this kind of real-world illness, the virtual world becomes a fine solution to live months and years together.

The "Metaverse", is a Computer produced virtual reality world. In that world, individuals are bits of programming called symbols. They are the broad media bodies that individuals used to speak with one another. The place is known as "BLACK SUN" in which hiro and da5id are the two hackers who wrote the black sun. Then after entering into that place they were introduced to a black and white guy, who takes them inside, questions them whether to try "snow crash". hiro little bit confused about the term and he began to think about it maybe a drug. But in fact "snow crash is computer lingo. It means a system crash- a bug- at such a fundamental level that it frags the part of a computer that controls the electron beam in the monitor, making it spray wildly across the screen, turning the perfect gridwork of pixels into a gyrating blizzard." (Stephenson, 1992).

HyperCard is a small chip in which a large amount of data can be stored in any form. Also, through that card one can log in into the metaverse. The creator of the “Black Sun” is hiro. Juanita, black and white avatar and hiro reflect themselves into the avatars to show the real emotions. They are like Adam and Eve of the black sun. later Juanita provides hiro the library of information. She also insists hiro that his friend Da5id is disabled by a virus known as a snow crash which is given to him by a man named raven. The virus causes his avatar to break apart and also disable him from real life.

Metaverse is a different world of virtual reality where a human can take another form known as an avatar. But he can exist only in the form of avatar inside metaverse in the place called the black sun, avatars are very much fascinated with sword fighting. Hiro is the person who composed the black sun’s sword battling algorithm similar to Metaverse. In any case, the general purpose of sword battling is to slice anyone who involves infighting and make them tumble down. So, one who loses in sword battling in Metaverse should be dismantled from the general public. The nearest incitement of the demise that Metaverse can offer is that it can just detach the specific symbol from the worldwide system of Metaverse. The client finds that they cannot get once more into the metaverse for a couple of minutes until it gets arranged.

Deceased avatars are disposed of by the daemons by transferring it to the center of the black sun and set fire. Then it is qualified to respawn its new life in the metaverse. From the internet culture and the metaverse, it is evident that human beings are mortal and unable to sustain their life for many long years. It is limited depends on their physical strength. But as a result of the technological evolution human can transfer themselves into cyberspace where he can forget his real-world worries and entertain himself with the task of the game inside the virtual world. He can live immortal life i.e. regenerate once he died.

Snow crash is a drug- a chemically processed blood serum taken from people who are infected with the Metavirus in order to spread the infection. The conversation between Y. T. And hiro began. First of all one can be in the metaverse or else in reality. No one can be in both places at the same time, yet Y.T is able to do so here. She is in a plusbound monorail train in the metaverse, having just passed through port 35. In actuality, she is in a public terminal across the street from the pearly gates of an 89-year-old reverend Wayne. Hiro inquires about some information with the librarian. He doesn't have a self-contained recollection. The library is his memory, which he only uses in small chunks at a time. He discusses speaking in tongues. "Glossolalia" is the technical term for speaking.

It's the vast amount of technical material available on the subject. It's a neurological phenomenon that's only used for religious purposes.

"Pentacoastal Christians think so, but they're delusory," the author says. It was done by pagan Greeks, and Plato coined the term "Theomania" to describe it. Eastern cults of the Roman Empire were to blame. Eskimos from Hudson Bay, Chukshi Shamans, Lapps, Yakuts, Semang Pygmies, North Borneo cults, and Ghana's Thri-speaking priests The Zulu amandiki cult and the shang-ti-hui Chinese religious sect. Tonga's spirit mediums and the Brazilian umbanda cult According to the tungus tribesmen of Siberia, when a shaman enters a trance and yells incomprehensible phrases, he learns the complete language of nature." (Stephenson, 1992)

Glossolalia, according to some magicians, is caused by structures buried deep within the brain that are universal to all people. The Los Angeles renaissance of 1906 was noticed by C.W. Shumway, who noted six key signs, including

- Complete loss of rational control.
- Dominance of emotion that leads to hysteria.
- Absence of thought or will.
- Automatic functioning of the speech organs.
- Amnesia.
- Occasional sporadic physical manifestations such as jerking or twitching.

In the pursuit of the virus snow crash, hiro becomes more acquainted with the Lagos. Lagos is a shrewd specialist who wears PC and other hardware all over his body. he finds that a snow crash is a medication an artificially handled blood serum taken from individuals who are contaminated with the meta infection so as to spread the disease. This drug affects brain cells and prevents people from communicating with each other. They believe that God is the one, who constructs "tower of babel" to connect earth and heaven. Thus, making the whole world one and also people speak only one language unitedly. Later for the good cause god split it into many pieces creating different languages.

According to Sumerian mythology, women are the ones who spread the virus through breastfeeding. It is symbolically compared with the Asherah, the Sumerian goddess.

Hiro says that spreading of the virus can be through mother breastfeeding to many children. This is the myth as told in Akkadian. She is the goddess of sensuality and fertility, according to the Akkadians. She also has a nefarious or malevolent side to her. In



one narrative, Asherah makes kirta, a human lord, intolerably sick. Only EL, Lord of Divine Beings, has the power to restore him. Certain humans can nurse at Asherah's breasts thanks to EL. EL and Asherah frequently adopt human newborns and feed them on Asherah, who is described as a wet nurse to seventy heavenly sons in one scripture. There's also the legend that Asherah made Enki sick. (Stephenson, 1992)

The Enki resides in an area named Dilmun, according to legend. Dilmun is pure, bright, and free of disease; people do not age, and predatory creatures do not hunt. However, there isn't any water. As a result, Ninhursag begs Enki, the deity of water, to deliver water to Dilmun. He accomplishes this by masturbating among the ditch reeds and letting his life-giving semen—the water of the heart—flow. Simultaneously, he pronounces the nam-shub, which forbids anyone from entering this region. No one is allowed to enter his sperm. Dilmun is now superior than what it was previously. Enki is soon in charge of the fields, which produce copious crops. According to legend, the water of the heart is used to irrigate the garden. Enki is the god of water. Ninhursag and Asherah, on the other hand, break the law by taking Enki's sperm and impregnating herself. She effortlessly conceives an offspring, a young girl named Nimmu, after nine days of pregnancy. Enki notices Nimmu becoming mesmerised while strolling down the riverbank and crosses the creek to have intercourse with her, his very own lady. In nine days, she has another tiny girl named ninkurra, and the process is repeated with a small girl named uttu. Ninhursag, on the other hand, has noticed a pattern in Enki's conduct and has asked her to stay with her. Enki re-fills the ditches with the heart's water, which causes things to grow. Enki is embraced by the gardener, who is overjoyed. Enki then dresses up as a gardener and goes to uttu to seduce her. Ninhursag, on the other hand, is able to collect a sample of Enki's sperm from uttu's thighs this time. Ninhursag scatters the sperm across the ground, resulting in the emergence of eight plants. Enki consumes all of the plants. Enki is cursed by Ninhursag and becomes terribly ill as a result. Each plant causes eight of his organs to get very sick. Ninhursag is finally persuaded to return, and she summons eight gods, one for each piece of Enki's flesh that is wiped off, and Enki is cured. These divinities are the Dilmun pantheon; that is, this demonstration breaks the cycle of interbreeding and creates a new race of male and female divine beings capable of delivering on a regular basis.

Neal Stephenson portrays how the world has originated with human beings especially with both genders with reference to Sumerian mythology. But in contemporary society human also become as a creator and proved him by creating cyborgs which can exist immortal. This creates a lot of chaos in the society which is unnecessary growth supersedes god. Humans are the one who gives power in the hands of artificially intelligent beings which cannot be trusted any time. Later realizes when it supersedes his

capacity and intelligence. Tower of Babel show case how people all over the world were united and lead life by taking it as a primary objective of life because being united gives them strength. The story of Enki showcases the birth of gender and it's important but with the advancement of technology, the objective reality of this concept of culture which everyone follows traditionally is broken. Followingly, taking the new life path that each and every individual, not as a family or not as a society practiced to live. There is no interpersonal relationship. Individually everyone as hiro and Y.T start to live their own life to their wish without any other's help leads to many disasters. In an extreme, they are supposed to lose their life in a sugar-coated file of virus-like snow crash.

Later Y.T, Hiro, L. Bob rife and uncle Enzo made a struggle to capture the raven who is the creator of the poisonous virus "snow crash" kill him and destroy the virus. Here, finally, the virus is dead but before that, it takes the lives of many people which is very much valuable than any other thing in the world. In this context, technology first provides benefit to mankind by projecting the alternative world but later by hiding the virus in a file it takes the life of many people and puts everyone in chaos.

### **The Post-modern Approach**

"Snow crash" depicts the newly emerged modern society where the government is collapsed, leaving only information collecting agencies. There is no proper form of structure that prevails in society. Everyone is free to take an independent stance and live their life in the way they wish to. This is the sign of beginning for the world's complete devastation.

Technology also plays a predominant role. HyperCard is a small chip with which one can transform himself from one world to another world known as black sun or metaverse. In the virtual world people can cherish immortal life and able to take any number of life or any form of avatar which is not possible in the real world. It is possible to immerse oneself in the virtual world permanently. In metaverse one can live life to their wish. They are free to acquire or possess things of their will. So, this free will is the benefit of freedom given to everyone to live in the virtual world. Thus, this creates "No Need" for the earth and the real-world created by nature/ god. This, in turn, leads to the 'technological warfare' and creation of a drug known as 'snow crash' to completely devastate the human form of the world. People adapt themselves to all the technological advancements which are not safe. Living life in the postmodern world is very easy because it redefined the traditional culture, morals, way of living, etc but it ruins the peace and happiness of the people by threatening them with the weapon known as technology.

Outwardly it looks like heaven but it really sucks the life of people. It only gives temporary happiness unknowingly it occupies and kills everyone.

## **Conclusion**

Daemons are the form of computer created avatars that always supersedes human intelligence and try to overpower the common man. In snow crash Neal Stephenson projects, the techno-cultural society where slowly humans become as a victim for the machine intelligence. Stephenson gives traditional interpretation about the ‘tower of babel’ and ‘Sumerian mythology’ which reminds us that how ancestors are religious and follows the traditional beliefs. Communication is a significant aspect of human life which makes us live and think. But technology with its undiminishing power tries to destroy the basic traits of humans to survive cunningly. Thus, any form of development of technology in an unimaginable extent after the fulfillment of our basic need is unnecessary and its extremity cannot be trusted. Hence ‘snow crash’ is the fine example that how machine plays intellectually against human makes survival as a great quest also creates a threat in the post-human world. “Technologies can be created for the betterment of life, not for the devastation of humankind”. Thus, technology temporarily heals real-world illness by creating the solution later that solution creates more direct and indirect hazards which questions the human life.

A well-known proverb says, “Too much of anything is good for nothing”

Humankind should be aware of and restrict themselves in the usage of technology to live a happy life. Tradition and culture followed by an ancestor are more precious than technology which is to be followed and pass on to the future generation for a peaceful life.

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